NATIONAL OCEANIC ATMOSPHERIC ADMINISTRATION

AN INTERVIEW WITH VITO GIACALONE
FOR THE
VOICES ORAL HISTORY ARCHIVES

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY
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Molly Graham: This is an oral history interview with Vito Giacalone. The interview is taking place on August 23rd, 2019, in Gloucester, Massachusetts. The interviewer is Molly Graham. If you could just start at the beginning and say when and where you were born.

Vito Giacalone: Yes. I was born right here in Gloucester, Massachusetts, September 15th, 1959.

MG: Did you grow up here?

VG: Born and raised, yes. Spent my whole [life] – I'd never lived – actually, I lived almost a year in Cape May, New Jersey, because of fishing.

MG: Maybe we could trace the family history a little bit starting on your mother's side, how they came to this area.

VG: My mom's dad, when they immigrated to the United States – my grandfather was born in the U.S., but his parents were born in the old country. They called the old country Sicily. A lot of the main places that people ended up, especially Sicilians, was Michigan, St. Louis, or California, like San Francisco, St. Petersburg. My folks chose New England. It's just the way it worked out. But my grandfather was born and raised in St. Louis, Missouri. They were fruit peddlers. But when they got old enough, my grandfather – they were a family of nineteen children. So the two brothers wanted to be getting a better life than peddling fruit, and the mafia was pretty intense there. They lost one brother for not giving into them. They actually executed the guy.

MG: Was this your uncle or your mother's uncle?

VG: Would have been my great uncle, my mother's uncle. Yes. But [with] nineteen children, there were adults having children, and my mother was still having children. You know what I mean? So they were quite removed from that. But they wanted to leave. They came to Gloucester and became fishermen. That's what my grandfather on my mother's side did. Let's see. My grandmother, her parents, they grew up right in – actually, she was born in Boston, [Massachusetts], and her father was a fisherman. So they came to Gloucester because there was a community down what we call, "The Fort," which is Commercial Street. So they settled there, and they were there for – my grandmother spent her whole childhood on the Fort. That's how she met my grandfather. Both of their fathers were fishermen. Then, on my father's side, my grandfather Vito Giacalone immigrated here early 20th century, 1905 or something like that, when he came here. He was a Sicilian fisherman, came here and fished until he was seventy in Gloucester. My father's the only son of eight children – seven daughters. He fished his whole life, his whole career. My father is still with us. He sold the boat, *Saint Peter*. So he had a full history of mostly fishing offshore. Growing up, my father was home, out of every ten days, maybe one or two, and then he'd be gone again. That was what we saw. Then he wanted to be closer to family and ended up buying a vessel with a close friend of his whose dad was retiring. The close friend really didn't want to be a captain. That was something my father did. So they went [into a] joint venture, and that was the fishing vessel, *St. Peter*. They bought that in 1975. So it was really the tail end of my father's career, but actually, he fished all the way until – I

think it was,'88 or '89 when they sold the boat, before the buyback. So my father fished his whole life.

MG: What is your father's name?

VG: Joseph.

MG: How old is he now?

VG: Eighty-five. So when I get to my – you'll see how my father's career ended earlier because of me. So I graduated high school in '77, and that's what I wanted to do was, was fish. My father didn't want me to fish at all. He felt it wasn't a life because he saw how he lived, and if you really wanted to make a good living, you really couldn't do it dayboat fishing; you had to get outside. We called it "fish outside." So this was pre-Hague Line. The Hague Line is the World Court decision that cost us all of Browns [Bank], half of Georges Bank; some of the greatest pieces of bottom that we used to fish were eliminated all at once when that court decision was implemented.

MG: When was that?

VG: I fished up to '86, and it was already in place. So I believe it was '84 or '85. I think the decision was in '84. It was implemented in '85 is my recollection.

MG: I don't know a lot about that case. Could you tell me more about it?

VG: So if you think of the geography of Nova Scotia and the U.S. Northeast coast of Maine to Massachusetts, they share Bay of Fundy, down into the Gulf of Maine, and then onto Georges bank. So those are really overlapping, non-defined territorial waters in a way. So they shared those bottoms for years, or actually, competed with those bottoms. Then the U.S. implemented the two-hundred-mile limit to keep the foreign fleet from fishing twelve miles from shore, which is what happened. That really ramped up in the '60s, is when the – they called them the Russians, but it was East Germans, Russians, Spanish – there were a lot of countries that had offshore factory trawler sized vessels. The local fishermen felt that that was depleting the stocks, and it did. They were using really small mesh and just huge catches. So that put a real hurting on the stocks in those days. There was really no regulation. Nobody was really watching anything. So whatever they put aboard, it is what it is – Wild West in those days. So finally, after years of complaining and fighting about that, there was Magnuson-Stevens Act that they got implemented. I think it was approved to finalize in '76, fully implemented in '77, right when I started fishing. So when I first started fishing, the foreign fleet had just stopped being able to fish in our waters. That was a real watershed moment. The problem is: that initiated this issue where [the] U.S. is claiming two-hundred miles from our coast, which puts us almost to the coast of Nova Scotia. [laughter] So that's not going to work. So is it really our EEZ, exclusive economic zone, to be fishing right off the shore of Nova Scotia? They declared, I think, two-hundred as well, so that now you get this monstrous overlapping dispute that needs to be settled. So it had to get settled. That's why it's called the Hague Line. I don't know, Hague, what country that's in, but that's where the World Court is held. [Editor's Note: The Hague is a city in

the Netherlands.] Both countries had to make their cases. I'm not sure what the U.S – the U.S., I think, was more interested in the fisheries, believe it or not, at the time. Canadians were more interested in the shelf because they had already started oil and gas leasing. I think the Canadian government saw that as being lucrative, and that their fishing fleet wasn't like ours, put it that way. We were a much, much bigger fishing fleet than what Canada had. So each country took what they felt were priorities. But unfortunately, this decision by the World Court just split the baby and cost us huge pieces of Georges Bank that we lived on, basically, for fishing. So that was probably the biggest blow to U.S. domestic, Northeast groundfish fishery, the fishery I love – was that decision.

MG: Was that the first big blow?

VG: Yeah, I'm going to say that was. The other blows were, I would say, a combination of fishing effort because of the foreign fleet, our own fishing effort was – we ramped it up right after the Magnuson went into place. The U.S. fishermen saw that this is now fertile ground for us. With the foreigners gone, we have nowhere near the capacity to harvest what used to be getting harvested when the foreigners were here. So they created all these incentive programs to capitalize on new investment, and they made it attractive for people with money. We used to call it doctors and lawyers. That was the only people who had money in our brains. But it made it attractive for them to get tax credits, and they could write them off really quickly, and then whatever profits they were making, it was all depreciated. It was high-end tax code stuff that promoted investment in the fishery. So a lot of new vessels were built in the U.S. fishery. I feel like probably fishermen are as guilty as any scientist who, for lack of a better term, continues to have their head in the wrong place, [laughter] and believe that when they say thou shalt not rain, that when it stops raining that they actually accomplished that, that it's because of them. Then when it pours like a son-of-a-bitch the next day, they're trying to accuse somebody of dumping water. There's no way. We had it licked. We had it figured. So they don't. Neither do fishermen. What fishermen have for a better vantage point is rather than give an opinion of the cause, let's talk about the effects that you see on the water and nothing more because nobody has a better viewpoint than people who are spending two-hundred and eighty out of 365 twenty-four-hour days on the ocean, towing nets, trying to catch fish. Who has a better –? The granularity of that data and that perspective is phenomenal. The problem is there's always been a lack of trust and faith in whether it's a bias. To say a fisherman's not capable of giving biased testimony is like saying a scientist isn't capable of it. The only difference between the fisherman and the PhD is the polished way that they sell their bias. [laughter] I live it every day and watch it, and there's no question. But, back then, it was still the wild West. When you say what were the biggest blows, I still believe today that the over-capitalization of the fleet was not the cause of what caused me to get out of fishing in. I didn't exit the fishery to say, "I can't do this anymore. I quit." I said, "Obviously, it's cyclical. It sucks right now. It sucked for two years, and it seems like it's going to get a little worse." So my brother, who was basically born a carpenter – when we were little, playing, I played fisherman and he played carpenter. He was already at a young age, in his twenties – he graduated high school and went into the trade. So he was already partnered with another Italian fellow that was a really talented craftsman, and they had a nice remodeling business. One of the people they were working for had a big chunk of land right behind the addition that they were doing and said, My father's getting old. We're thinking about selling the property. Would you guys be interested in it?" The partner said, "I'm looking to get

out of buying things. I want to just start to relax." So my brother mentioned it to me while I was still fishing – "You want to go partners in it?" We looked at it. Then, we asked an engineering firm and said, "What do you think? Can this be developed?" They said, "Absolutely." So we paid probably five times more than we needed to pay for engineering back then. But we looked at it as, "We don't know anything about this. So if we're going to learn, I want to learn by paying for our education. Let's have somebody guide us through the whole thing and just keep paying them." That's what we did. I went to meetings, but I would be missing things because I'm fishing. My brother said, "You guys aren't making money right now. You're way too valuable to this whole thing. If we succeed in the subdivision, it's a whole new life for us. So I just landed a house to build. I've never built a house before. I need somebody that I trust with a pair of eyes. I'll pay you five-hundred bucks a week. Stop fishing." This is '87. "Stop fishing and just go buy the coffee, go run and get materials, keep an eye on things while these guys are framing the house." I said, "All right." "In the meantime, never miss a meeting. Go to the engineering department. Do what needs to be done to get the subdivision done." So that's what I did. But I really paid attention to this framing crew, building at the same time. It's just such a fisherman's mentality. I love fishermen. You have no choice when you're at sea; when something goes wrong, [you have] to look to yourself to fix it. There is no help. You know what I mean? That independence – because otherwise, you quit. If you're a captain that doesn't have that in him, then you better get out because you're going be scared shit every day. Something's going to happen that's going to make you just have a panic attack. Instead of just saying, "I got this. We're all going to be okay." That was the mentality that I had after I was eleven years fishing and running boats and going through those panic attacks, and plowing through them. It wasn't easy, but that's what creates who you are. So I watched the framing crew, and then we succeeded in the subdivision. We hired people to build a road and all that. The people I was unloading fish with were looking to build a house. So we sold our first house, and we hired that same framing crew. The framing crew was having some difficulties staff-wise. I won't go any further than that. We didn't like what we saw. So now, I'm in the St. Peter's Club, which was the place that we always went to – [this gets] into the culture of my poor wife and all the rest of the wives. You'd be fishing for seven, eight days, and then you come to the dock and get home at eight o'clock at night. At 5:00 AM or 4:00 AM, you got to be down the boats to unload fish. Once the fish is offloaded and cleaned up – "Guys, we'll see you tomorrow morning," the captain would say. "So, we can pull the net out and rebuild the net for the next trip." So now we had time off. "Let's stop at the St. Peter club, which, for me, was on the way walking home. I didn't even need a car where we worked. We stayed too long at the St. Peter's Club, and too often. [laughter] Anyway, I got off-topic. Some of the great things we do remember, though, because it wasn't a couple of drunks; it was everyone. It was the community. That's what you did. All six guys from the *Vito C.* – for example, to talk about some of the highliners – they were in the club after and talking about the trip or not talking about the trip because they had a really good trip and they're not going to slip up any secrets. I get the chills thinking about it. It was awesome in those days. The club was filled with fishermen. So even though I was just recently out of fishing and doing this five-hundred dollars – just being a watchdog and go get coffee, I'm talking with one of the guys I used to fish with, and they had a little lot next door to their house and said, "We're going to build a house, and we hear you guys are doing it." "Yeah, we are." So basically, over drinks and a napkin, sketched out what a house might look like. I gave him an idea of what it might cost based on a couple of houses I just saw. He said, "When can you start?" I said, "Well, we'll get somebody in there to dig it out." When I

told my brother about it, he goes, "How the hell are we going to –? We can't use that framing crew anymore. There's nobody else that we trust. We still got this huge house to finish." He's the finish work guy. "Who are we going to get to frame it? That's the big thing." I said, "I'll do it." "Brother, how the hell are you going to do it?" So I hired a couple of guys that had never framed before but could hold a hammer, and we built my first house. I was less than a year out of fishing. It came out awesome. So we built another one. So I ended up being – I always thought of myself as a fisherman building houses for fifteen years of us – actually, my brother went through a divorce in '95, but up to that point, we used to say if there were forty houses built on Cape Ann, we built six in a year. If there were eight houses built in Cape Ann, we built six. You know what I mean? People wanted us. We just took on what we could take. So I was proud of that, and I was proud of what I became as a framer, but I still thought of fishing as what I was – as a fisherman that was doing that. I followed it for a while, and then totally fell off the radar screen. From, I would say, 1990 all the way until '99 – so it was about eight, nine years there where I literally didn't even look. I didn't care who was fishing, who wasn't, who the highliners were anymore. I never paid attention to regulation. I don't mean that I disregarded the laws. What I'm saying is I never participated in the policy. When I read *National Fishermen* or *Commercial Fishing News*, it was to learn about boats and trips of fish and stuff like that. I didn't really get into the policy. In '99, I heard that it was already limited access; this fishery went limited access in 1995. Permits were still free. It's still free to renew a permit, but the rights – once it went limited access, the rights are with whoever happened to own the permit at the day that it went limited access when it got implemented. So that person has the ability to sell their exclusive rights to renew the permit. That's what you're transferring, basically, is the right to renew. It's not like you're paying the government for the permit, as we speak. So in '95, that permits were still somewhat free. Fishing did another one of its cycles, where it went from – they had the big buyout, and everybody thought the fish would be back, and that didn't change anything, but then fish come back anyway like they always do. It's not a matter of abundance. It's a matter of fish behavior and environmental issues. We'll get into climate change when you want to, but that's why I've got a pretty strong opinion, not on climate change, but on how the effects of climate change are being sold as the reasons for what we see in the groundfish fishery. And I've [got] all kinds of information why – again, as an observer, not as an opinion – as an observer, why you could say that, but that's not what's happening. Doesn't mean climate isn't changing. It just means don't make believe that these effects are occurring by selectively mining the data to try to prove something that I can show you twenty years ago the same things were happening. Thirty years ago, the same things were happening. It's all a big cycle – Northwest oscillation, the Gulf Stream. The way those things collide and divert warm or cold water into the Gulf of Maine dictates what happens. Just in recent years, we've seen those cycles completely change, and have exceptionally cold water in the Gulf of Maine than even historically. On average, they're higher. There's no question about that. So are there bigger cycles that happen with small cycles in between? Is it a long term trend? That all could be because that's just speculation. What you don't have to speculate on is what you're seeing every day, and that's in the data if someone really wanted to look at it. Climate change people who are attached to that from a financial/grant/academic standpoint, do not want to see something that may not be another justification for claiming that it's happening. You know what I mean? It's just not fair to feel like you've got to show that everything is being affected by that. What if it isn't? The data shows it isn't. All right. I went off on the climate change thing.

MG: Is your point that even if the waters are warming, the fish will adapt eventually?

VG: Yeah.

MG: Or that the water will not stay so warm forever?

VG: Well, both, but I'm sure there's a tipping point on a fish species where – because, obviously, if you look way up North with the Grand Banks and the big fjords that they have up off of Norway and stuff like that, they pull fish out of the deep there that should be frozen. The core temperature of those fish are twenty-eight degrees, and saltwater freezes at twenty-eight degrees. Right? Then we catch cod when seawater temperatures at the surface is seventy, and at the bottom is low fifties. So that range of tolerance for the species is huge. So if there's a one-degree change over the last twenty years in average bottom temperature, you can't dispute data. If it's being measured, it is what it is. Okay. How does a species that has thrived in temperatures anywhere from twenty-eight degrees Fahrenheit to fifty-five degrees Fahrenheit suffer from or decide to scoot because we went from average forty to forty-one? Just common sense tells you it's not likely. But, let's look and see. Freaking codfish are everywhere, and beautiful, healthy fish. So the proof is in the fish. The denial part is really what I'm seeing, from a groundfish perspective, is on the climate change believers. We can all believe in climate change and disagree on the symptoms, the effects that we're seeing on this fishery. Then, how to settle the disagreement is to go look. I got plenty I can give you on that. So I ended up in '99 – I skipped over what my fishing career really was. Then in '99, I started looking because the permits that were free, people were now getting twenty-five, thirty-thousand dollars for the right to transfer that privilege over. Okay, Molly. I've had this permit forever, and you can get it renewed for nothing, but they won't accept you. That's got to be me. So if you want to take me out, then give me twenty-five thousand dollars, and now the permit's yours to go renew. So when I saw that happening, being a fisherman building houses or developing land – I built this place – I started looking a little bit. Then this boat in Rhode Island became available. It was an older wooden boat, but it used to fish out of Boston, so I knew what the boat was. It was all set up right for dragging. It was my opportunity to have my hobby because I had committed to my family and myself that I'll never go back fishing [unless] I have to go back, if I have to earn a living doing it. Because I learned that after the fifteen years and then seeing the volatility that these guys lived. I was so head and shoulders into it. When I got to step back and look – [I] need more stability for my family than that. I still want to do it. I just don't want to rely on it. So I went down and looked at this boat, and it was actually perfect. He only wanted sixty-one-thousand, I think, for the boat and the permit. So I looked at it with the owner and the broker and everything, and he says, "Make me an offer." I go, "I think this is well worth what you're asking for it. So you basically called my bluff. I guess I'm starting to think maybe I'm not ready to do this." "No, make me an offer." I said, "You're going to sell this easy, I'm sure." So I'd regretted walking away. But it was an old guy; he needed to retire. It seemed like his health was failing. The last thing I was going to do was throw an offer at the guy and steal his retirement. So I left, and then I hear somebody from Gloucester or somebody was going to go down and look at it. I'm like, "Son-of-a-bitch. He's going to get that boat. I should have done it, and he's probably going to low ball it." So I never thought any more of it. Months and months went by. I was in the street, digging this sewer and water lines for this building, and I get a phone call from (Bill Daniels?), the broker. He said, "Vito, are you ready to hear this?" "Yeah." But I'm

at a machine in the middle of the street. He says, "(Tommy Gilbert?) just called me and he said, 'Tell that kid from Gloucester.'" So that's how old this guy was. "'Tell that kid from Gloucester, he's the only guy that didn't try to steal the boat from me.' He said, 'I'm ready to give it away, practically.'" He was more a man of principle, and the money didn't matter to him like I thought it should have. He says, "I'm sick, and I want to go to Florida, and I can't leave this boat. If it sinks at the dock, I'm screwed." It's an old wood boat, needs to be pumped out, and needs to be babysat. I think it was thirty-thousand dollars. He said, "If he wants it for thirty-thousand, he's the only guy that can have it." So I backed the machine up, back-filled the street. I went to the bank while it was still open. I got the thirty-thousand. Called my brother. I says, "I need a ride to Point Judith, Rhode Island tonight." Went down there, handed everything over. I told the broker, "You have all the paperwork ready," and we did the bill of sale. I still didn't transfer the permit yet because that takes time. But a bill of sale happens instant because he didn't owe anything on the boat. He didn't need a release. So I just went down there with a check, and now I'm in a fifty-eight-foot dragger by myself in middle of the night in February, and I'm heading out of Point Judith, Rhode Island, which I've never been out of in my life with paper charts because I was old-school. I didn't have any plotters or anything like that. Now I'm in Buzzards Bay, heading for Cape Cod Canal, and my poor wife still knows next to nothing about the whole thing. [laughter] So I'm calling her while I still got cell phone service. "I'll tell you when I get home, but I bought a boat." That's how that went. Went over real well. Then, in the morning, I got into Cape Cod Bay, got through the canal. Sun comes up, and I get close enough to the land to get cell phone service again. Those cell phones were analog. They actually had better range than the new ones do out there. I called Tom Testaverde. Have you interviewed him?

MG: No, but his name is familiar to me.

VG: *Midnight Sun* is the name of the book. Great history. Yeah, great history. Probably nobody better that's left. He's rough around the edges, but he's awesome. He's awesome. Anyway, I called Tom because I knew Fisherman's Wharf. He was one of the directors at the Fisherman's Wharf. They had a fire in '98, had to tear the whole place down. It was a disaster. Then they started putting new pilings in, and it was just a limped up, dangerous Wharf that was left. They just had the pilings. They were still working on it. But they still had a bunch of boats tied there. I called Tom. I said, "Any chance there'd be any dockage down there for me just overnight or a couple of days?" "You're getting back in it?" "Yeah." He goes, "I won't even have to ask anybody. You just tie up. I'm sure everybody will be thrilled. "Wow. Thank you. That's awesome." So I tied the boat up there. For the two years I fished it out of there, I watched them just fumble at trying to build this building. They kept running out of money and trying to get new loans. There's sixty-nine shareholders holding ninety-nine shares. It was a mess, ownership-wise. So there were literally four people owning one share; it was split up so bad. So there's no way they could make a decision to borrow more money. They decided to sell at the last minute. So I had this stuff and everything, but I had partners with this, and I said, "Oh my God, I can't let Fisherman's Wharf be sold." There was a developer that wanted to buy it. There was one other person interested. So I put my hat in the ring, and said, "I'll keep it as a fish wharf." Everybody knows my passion for the industry. This is not a real estate investment. This is something I think I can swing, and I want to do it. It almost bankrupted me. It was bad, but they sold it to me. I still remember going fishing the night that they were having the big

meeting at the Sawyer Free Library – it was the only place they could house all the people for the meeting. There was a group of people, a lot of guys, that were lobbying for me to have it. There was a handful of folks that were out of the industry, who were talking to the developer and felt like they don't give a shit whether it stays fishing or not. They just want it sold and get their money. But the vote went almost unanimous and in my favor. So I went fishing. I was so nervous. So me and one guy that was a long-time fisherman went out, and I got the call just as we were getting out of range. I turned the boat around, [in the] middle of the night, and came in close enough so I could hear it. It was a good day. It still almost bankrupted me. [laughter]

MG: I know your sons are working down there.

VG: Yeah. So it couldn't have worked out better in the long run, but, oh my God, it was a tough – I bought it in 2003. We got a bank loan, but we hemorrhaged cash because it was just a blank sheet. There was no floor. The pilings were in, and the reinforcements were there, but the whole structural slab – no plumbing, no electrical, no nothing. So my sons were still in high school, but then they started in the business in 2008 against my wishes because I sold my boat, bought another one, a better big steel boat because I was only going to do it part-time, but I wanted to do it right when I went. So I got a nice boat. Then, just as I got it ready to fish, one of my sons was fishing with me, we put the boat together, had it all ready to go – two men. We just started fishing it, and then this opportunity came up for them to start a fish business, and they decided they wanted to do that. So I had to tie the boat up and help them get started because they didn't know anything about the fish business. I didn't either. I mean, just what I knew [tangentially], but not directly involved. But the whole understanding, how to deal with fishermen, and culling fish, and weights and all that stuff – so I dedicated several months to keep them from getting in trouble and doing it right. Now they got the biggest unloading facility. They've done great. So they started out at a place down the end of the Fort. There was a real rat hole that's literally a rat hole. So the Board of Health, the state agent came looking for me and said, "Your sons are in a place where they're running a great business. They're great kids." Everybody calls them kids; they men. "But I'm going to have to shut them down because the place is a rat hole. That landlord's not going to fix it, so they shouldn't have to do it. You own this freaking property. What are you waiting for to put those guys over here?" I go, "Honestly, John, it's going to be hundreds and hundreds of thousands of dollars that I don't have to do that. If they decide to get out of the business, then what have I got?" So I talked to the boys. "Dad, this is what we want to do." So I warned them this is going to be hell. It's a lot to do. So we wrote a business plan for them, and they got an SBA [small business administration] guaranteed loan, but the promise had to be that I became the contractor. Otherwise, to do $600,000 worth of work with two-fifty and maybe another hundred we were willing to put in collectively as a family, it had to be done by us. So that's what we did. They got the loan, and we built out the place. He held off on shutting them down, knowing that I made a promise to him that we would have it ready, and we did. They moved in in 2011. So they've been just growing all the time. But it stinks. There's only a handful of boats left. Even though they're doing tremendous volume, it's very delicate. The guy that owns three of the boats that brings in most of the volume, he's retiring, sold to a large company down in New Bedford. So all three boats, eventually in the near term, will end up leaving. So they'll be back fighting for more business. That's the volatility of – all businesses can be like that, but I think fishing is probably more so than most.

MG: What's the name of their business?

VG: Fisherman's Wharf Gloucester.

MG: What happened with the fire in 1998?

VG: No one still knows. They have suspicion. There was one fellow that tied there that used to live on his boat. So the suspicion is that – because they got destroyed, the corporation. They didn't have enough insurance to even rebuild the wharf, let alone put a viable building back on it. So it killed them. It basically bankrupted that. Fishermen's Wharf Gloucester was the name of the [corporation], and my sons just did an LLC [limited liability company], Fisherman's Wharf Gloucester because when they dissolved that the name was available again. We didn't want to lose using Fisherman's Wharf. So when that burned down, that was '98. Then they started with what little they had for insurance money on the rebuild in '99, and that's when I was shopping for a boat. I called one of the directors of the old corporation that was still governing at the time, but they didn't decide to sell until 2003, to me.

MG: What was the extent of the damage? Did a lot of people lose a lot of boats?

VG: No boats. No. It was wood, old wood. It was actually a pretty cool, authentic-looking, old-school wharf building. But the building is built all the way out to the edges of the wharf, so they really couldn't fight the fire, except from the wharf. So, luckily, it was seen early enough. Everybody got the phone calls. I think some of the dock lines burnt let actually released the boats. So, luckily, nobody lost their boats, but it was a lousy situation. People crying, the history – because all their stuff was – the safe was there. They said there was no cash. I ended up with the safe. We blew it open. There was nothing in it, except old useless records that were all singed.

MG: How long had the wharf been there before the fire?

VG: God knows. Had to be a hundred-year-old building, I would think. But these owners bought it in 1951, and it was a group of Sicilian – and Tom Testaverde's dad was one of the originals. It was a group of Sicilian fishermen that wanted to have more vertical integration, more control of what they did with their catch. A lot of them were more dayboat fishermen, who used to box their fish and ship it to Fulton Market in New York. So they had to deal directly with those buyers anyway, and they just wanted the ability to have their own ice, have their own offloading staff. I don't know the exact number, but the number that sticks in my head is – they always say there were fourteen immigrant fishermen, mostly small boat fishermen. Small boats then were fifty to sixty-five foot Eastern rig wood trawlers, draggers. They would fish no more than two days. That was considered small boat then. They pulled their resources and bought the wharf in 1951. They operated successfully until attrition – just like attrition is eating up this next generation of fishermen, it ate up that generation of fishermen. So that's what was really the demise of Fisherman's Wharf. Nobody quit; they just aged out or died, and got out of the business. So the next generation that inherited the shares or adopted the shares had no vested interest in the fishing industry. So as soon as you lose that – so it was down to Tommy Testaverde and Carlo Moceri – there were a couple of guys still fishing that owned boats that

were tied there, that were really vested in it, but they ended up taking all the responsibility, all the blame, all the work.

MG: I'm curious about the kind of fishing your grandparents did in Sicily and then when they came here.

VG: So, I don't know what kind of fishing they did in Sicily, but they were in Terrasini and Mazara. Mazara is the biggest fishing port in Italy and Sicily combined. It's a worldwide type of fishing port – large boats and small boats. Giacalone is one of the primary names. But my grandfather was – the type of fishing they did was a lot of rowing. We're talking 1905. So they would row out and set little drift nets and stuff like that. Octopus, there was a lot of octopus. We call it [inaudible] fishing. It was more subsistence fishing. Is that the right?

MG: Yes.

VG: There's a term for that. Catch what you need to eat and to sell at the market to feed your family – the kind of fishing that existed then. When he came here, he went right on – the nickname for them was Guinea trawlers. Anybody that talks about it – so they were double-ended boats that had one little donkey engine, small engine, two-cylinder that would put, put, put, put, and you would move the boat. Mostly driven by coal, believe it or not. So they would shovel coal into these little put-put engines, and go out and set long lines, for the most part, is what they did. So when they said Guinea trawler, not like we say – trawler is a dragger, an auto-trawl vessel – they were setting hooks. That's what he did when he first got here. Then where the money was, was in two different fisheries with the Italians basically being the premier seineers. Purse seineing. That was something that they were adept at, and so they built some bigger boats and did some big-time mackerel – mostly mackerel is what they focused on. So my grandfather was a notorious doryman. So every boat had probably twenty guys on it because they used to haul the seines by hand. So they had two small boats involved, in addition to the mother boat. The mother boat mostly just put the fish aboard and carried the fish, carried the crew, towed the seine boat, which was between thirty-five and forty-foot, double-ended boat, like we race in now for the Fiesta. I don't know if you've ever –?

MG: I read about how your family competes together in the seine boat races. You'll have to tell me about that.

VG: That's where seine boats first came from because the net, the big purse seine, was stowed in that vessel. It was the seine boat because it carried the seine. Then, what they would do is with the big boat, they would find a school of fish – somebody, a mass headman up in the crow's nest, watching for a school of fish – and when they would see it, they would deploy men into the seine boat, which must have been a little bit treacherous. So now they're in the seine boat, and they would start to – if they'd say, "Time to set," they would start deploying net. So the net would be spinning out the secondary boat as the main boat's towing it around. When they go to close it, to bring the two together, they would launch a dory with a hurdy-gurdy little thing off the side of the boat. One man would get in the dory and have to row and get to the float and bring that float line over to the men in the seine boat, where they would put that line on another little donkey engine that they'd have that would just turn a winch head. They would pull the two

ends of the seine together and close the zipper of the whole thing. So the doryman was basically important for passing the baton between the mother boat and the seine boat, so they could close the seine. My grandfather, that was his deal. He was the doryman. There's a book that Tom Testaverde's dad wrote. His father was (Salvatore?); "Salve" was his nickname. He had the *Linda B.*, and he wrote a book. [Editor's Note: Mr. Giacalone is referring to *Memoirs of a Gloucester Fisherman* written by R. Salve Testaverde, published in 2004.] In the book, he talked about when he was a young boy, that [inaudible] – my grandfather – took me under his wing. He was the doryman on the boat, and he showed me the ropes of being a doryman. I'll never forget [inaudible], the guy that showed me how to do that.

MG: Did he teach his children to fish too?

VG: Yes, Salve's sons. Tommy still fishes. Tommy's son is now one of only two young generation fishermen that we have in the whole fleet, is Tom. Tom's the youngest brother of Salve's sons. You had Johnny, who died. Joe, who died. So three brothers of the four – can't think of any other brothers. So must've had four brothers total – four sons total. Three of them were lifelong fishermen.

MG: What about your grandfather? Did he teach his own sons as well?

VG: My grandfather on my father's side, Vito Giacalone, only had one son. That was my father, and he fished his whole life.

MG: I read you had seven uncles who were fishermen, too. Was that on your mother's side?

VG: No. My father has seven sisters, and six of them were – one was a nun; she married God. So I don't think he was a fisherman. It was St. Joseph, the stepfather, the proxy dad, was a carpenter. St. Peter was the fisherman. I don't know. God himself, never – he just sent his son down.

MG: So the seven uncles that fished –

VG: It was six uncles that fished, so it would have been my father, and then, his sisters married fishermen. They all fished their whole [lives]. So, my family, there was nothing but [fishermen]. My grandfather on my mother's side had two sons, and neither of them went fishing. My grandfather persuaded them to go elsewhere. So they actually worked – I don't even think they worked in the fish plants. If you were a Gloucester person, you might remember the Mighty Mac; they made clothing, really good, heavy-duty stuff. My mother worked there. Both my uncles were there until the plant closed. That's how loyal they were. Then, one went off and did plant maintenance at the high tech companies. The other, I forget what he did after Mighty Mac, but that was a big employer in town. That's what they did. But on my Grandfather Giacalone's side, all his sons-in-law and his son were fishermen.

MG: Talk about the era that your father fished in and what it was like for him.

VG: So when my dad fished, it was a big offshore fleet. A big offshore fleet. That's really what Gloucester was. All Eastern rig vessels. An Eastern rig has the pilothouse in the stern. The gear in those days, even when I fished, it hadn't really improved to the point where it was less maintenance – no such thing as maintenance-free gear. But the gear was notoriously ripped up every tow, and the amount of fish that they caught in short tows when my dad fished was an order of magnitude over what I saw. The era that I fished in is the era where they talk about as the heyday of the modern era of fishing. But our offshore trips were seventy-five to ninety-thousand pound trips. Must've been a lot of fish around for us to do that with side trawlers and short ground gear. Our herding capacity was minimal compared to what it is now with the better gear technology, and they still catch in one-hour tows, one-and-a-half-hour tows. So knowing what fishing is like and fishing all those years, and I imagine hauling back every hour and a half, they were machines, those guys. They were machines. They were my heroes. As a young fisherman, I was not the only one who felt that way and had the work ethic that I have to be the best on this boat, not just from a skill standpoint, but from a physical standpoint because I'm the young guy. You know what I mean? I want to show these guys that, "Yeah, you may have been around in the heyday, but you're forty, which is ancient, and so I'm going to show you. I'm going to pick this rock up and fire it overboard. I don't need help pulling in the (aft wing?)." That work ethic was not just me; it was my generation of guys. We were so proud of the work. You did it for the money, but that was secondary. I was proud of that era. So I was always trying to show my dad's generation – and a lot of us were –that you guys definitely got to experience what we wished we could have, but I would have been up to the task had it happened.

MG: What made it the heyday?

VG: Yeah, I think because they built a bunch of new boats, because of the capitalization that happened after the Magnuson kicked in, in '76. So we had a bunch of stern trawlers. We still weren't pulling long ground cables. So I would say the nets weren't any better, really, at catching fish, but a stern trawler is more efficient because the trawl warp starts out the width of the vessel. So it's a big head stop. Whereas side trawlers, we pinch the wires to one towing point; you're starting literally from zero. And a stern trawler can turn port or starboard, which is really helpful as a captain when you're trying to hold an edge. With side trawlers, we always made sure that we were in a situation where the bad bottom was on our port side because we can easily turn to starboard. We can't turn very well to port. So you try to keep your bad bottom on your port side. So there were a lot of advantages to a stern trawler, and I think that contributed to big trips happening. And just the volume of sheer landings were – if you look at the landings. Once you get out of the early '60s, you don't see landings like we had in the late '70s, early '80s. That was the heyday – monstrous landings of cod.

MG: In the '70s and '80s?

VG: Late '70s and early '80s, up to, I would say, '84.

MG: I don't think I understand why the Hague decision hindered the fisheries. It sounds like it eliminated your foreign competition.

VG: No. So the Hague decision had nothing to do with foreign competition. The Magnuson Act did. We established a two-hundred-mile limit. We declared, as a sovereign country, you stay out of two-hundred miles from [the] U.S., but Canada did the same thing, and the overlap was about a hundred-and-eighty miles. So you can't have that. So someone needs to figure out where you split Canadian and American waters, not the other foreign fleets because Canada – they weren't putting much pressure on U.S. waters. They didn't have much of a fleet, really, at that point in time. So we weren't worried about Canadian competition. It probably would have been good for us to just share everything and stop disputing over that, but have an EEZ, exclusive economic zone, that is U.S./Canada. In hindsight, maybe that would have been – I've never studied it, so maybe what I'm saying just couldn't happen. So the Hague decision was, okay, now that the foreign fleets are gone from both U.S. and Canadian exclusive waters, the waters that overlap between U.S. and Canada declarations need to be resolved and split into two, exclusively U.S. [and] exclusively Canada. That was the Hague decision, and that's the one that killed us because the bottom that we used to work when I fished offshore in '81, '82, '83, was everywhere. We had the whole Northeast peak of Georges in the wintertime. That's the winter fishing grounds. If you look at the chart, the best part, where we spent the most time, we lost it to Canada. Then if you wanted to go – I never had to fish Brown's Bank. The boat I was on, it did in the previous decade, but we didn't. Most of the Gloucester boats never had to go back to Brown's, but we fished in the gully, which is the deep water between the U.S. continental shelf and the Brown's Bank, which is another piece of the shelf. The big gully in-between, there's a lot of bottom in there that we'd spend time in. That was all gone. So the loss of that and the ability to fish Bay of Fundy, which I didn't, but boats previous to us that were successful did – when that went away, the ability to sustain a groundfish fleet – we had hundred-and-thirty-eight trawlers in Gloucester in 1981. I'm going to say a hundred of them were full range that could fish the winter anywhere. That might be exaggerated by no more than twenty. Still, eighty offshore trawlers. We got five right now. To give you a perspective. So when the Hague Line went in, that was devastating. The fish stocks still were not – we beat them up pretty good, I think, ourselves. But with the foreign fleet gone, [I] think it's another example – a lot like climate change – that we only can blame anthropologic – you know what I mean? – people and their activity. No question we contribute to everything, but let's be scientific about it and understand to what level. I think it was the same thing that I think the downturn was happening anyway cyclically in the environment. Plus, we built a bunch of new boats, but the foreigners were gone. So with the foreign fleet gone, one of those boats was probably catching what twenty Gloucester trawlers could catch. So with them completely gone, people attributed it to a combination of the fish stocks being beat down so badly by the foreigners that they weren't even close to recovery, and we just slowed or halted or reversed even what little recovery could have happened by picking up all the slack through increasing our own capacity too quickly, and subsidized capacity. So it's pointed to as a big failure of U.S. management. Again, I was a victim to it, but I wasn't a party to any of the politics. I don't know what really happened. I don't even know what science contributed to any of it. I wasn't paying attention.

MG: Did your father or grandfather shared any stories that stand out to you from their time fishing?

VG: Not my grandfather because he spoke purely Sicilian. Never even attempted to speak English. He was much older. He died when he was eighty, and I was in third or fourth grade.

Nope. Sister Kathleen – fifth grade. I was at St. Ann's [School]. So I was in fifth grade when he died. He died in 1970.

MG: What about your father? Did he tell you stories about what it was like for him? It sounds like he had a lot of pride in what he did.

VG: Oh, yes. My dad was just [full of] endless stories. I don't want to miss [talking about] my father in law. So I married. My wife, Jenny, her dad fished from fourteen years old to – he didn't get married until, I think, he was twenty-nine. So he fished all the way up to the point where he got married and then decided after a couple of years that fishing is not the life to raise a family. He had six children. So I'm not sure at what point – if all six were born before he made the decision, but just like his brothers who were fishermen, they converted to peddling fish. They would go down to the docks and purchase fish, and they would be able to fillet it right there at the dock, and put it in fillet tubs, put it in their trucks, and ice it down. There was no refrigeration. Ice it down. Then they would have customers out of town and in town, and do deliveries. He made a very lucrative living for himself right up to – he was well into his seventies when he stopped, my father in law. But he was a fisherman, also, and talk about a storyteller. He passed away. It'll be a year in November. [laughter] I miss Papa.

MG: Yeah. Do any of those stories stand out to you?

VG: His stories were amazing. I'm going to be like my dad, right? We tell a story, and it goes on way too fucking long. We don't get to the point. I used to be so frustrated listening to my dad. It's like, "Dad, what the fuck? Get to the point." [laughter] But I would never do that because I wouldn't want to hurt his feelings. Now I embrace it because I know that's where I'm going to be. [laughter] My stories are going to get worse and worse. I keep losing it. But his memory blows mine away. He remembers shit like: "It was Thursday and we were in Bay of Fundy, and it forecasted northwest, and we ended up getting southeast. Then, do you know [inaudible]? It would be his grandmother's brother's …" It's like, "Are you shitting me?" And it's not half-assed. He'll tell the story again, and it's dead-on. I don't have that. Maybe because I've always had multiple things going on that my defense mechanism is, I keep what needs to be in there, and allow shit to get pushed out. Because it was vivid what he remembers. Thank God he has all his faculties completely. He still works. Every day, he comes here, and checks out the – that's the ice maker getting fed water because I emptied it the other day. [laughter]

MG: He sounds like a great guy.

VG: Yeah, my dad's awesome. He remembers things vividly. My father in law was completely the opposite. He was succinct, colorful, short on words, but told a whole story, and you would see the humor in it; you'd see the message in it. He didn't try to be that. A lot of people want to act like they're a philosopher or whatever, and, "You're going to listen to my story, and I'm going to make it colorful." He didn't do anything on purpose like that. It's just the way things came in his head, and he was just one of those very matter-of-fact people. If he thought you were lazy or he thought you were stupid or he thought you were fat – "Why don't you stop eating, for Christ's sake? Don't you know people die with that shit?" [laughter] He wouldn't even think twice about it, and it was factual. [laughter] That was my father-in-law.

MG: [laughter] The first time you went fishing, was it with your father?

VG: Well, yes. Eight, nine – probably younger. Every chance I could get on vacation from school, I would beg him to take me fishing, and he took me a lot. I was so proud. My father tells those stories all the time. I don't remember it, but I wore boots and [was] standing in the fish. I couldn't wait to show that I got scales on my boots, that kind of thing. So I just loved it then, but he didn't want me to go. So I worked at the docks when I was fourteen. I started at Ocean Crest [in the] summers. And Sicilians mature early, so I had the strength of an adult man at fourteen. So one of the tough jobs down the docks was lifting the wood boxes. They'd be a hundred-and-fifty-two pounds gross weight, but they always stole five pounds from the fisherman – not Ocean Crest. That was the way the trade was. The old balance scales, and when the beam went up, you threw another fish on for good luck. It's just the way it was. So probably three to five pounds on every – so [the boxes weighed] probably one-hundred-and-fifty-seven, and then they shovel ice on top. So when you're loading the truck and peeling them off the pallet, now you're dealing with a hundred-and-sixty-something pounds. Not one man – two, but the two men lifting was a team. You wanted to lift with the guy that lifted like you, and it became almost weightless. One, you had that testosterone power. Two, if two guys had that same idea about the acceleration – not too much because the bottom would blow right out. They were just nailed together with thin nails – wooden boxes. That would mess up your timing if you had to deal with a broken box and fish all over, while the pallet's coming again. So I loved the industry, just all of those macho things about it. So at fourteen years old, I got a job down there, and they thought it'd be shoveling ice and doing stuff like that, but I used to help my father unload his boats since literally nine years old. They'd come in, and I'd go down with one of the fishermen and help. So I always wanted to be a part of it. So lifting a box was something I was ready for. So I got to start lifting, and they're like, "Let the kid go lift over there." So the guy that was the master on the scale said, "I want the kid," and then he nicknamed me "The Animal." "I want the Animal." Stupid shit like that. I was working for $2.50 an hour, and I didn't care about the money because it wasn't what it was about. It was like, I get men respecting what I'm doing. You know what I mean? I felt good about it. I did that for three summers. Then, one of the fishermen, this Carlo Moceri that I told you about, who's still alive – probably another guy that could tell some great stories, but he lives in Florida. I just saw him the other day. He was down the dock getting some fish from the boys, and I haven't seen him in a long time. But he was going to build during the buildup. He was going to build a brand new boat. So a lot of the boats were being planned in '78 as soon as that Magnuson thing kicked in, and a lot of fishing families were thinking about now's the time to build a new boat and take advantage of this. So he came in the – he says, "We're thinking about building. This new law is going in, and I want a new crew. I want young bucks that I can train my way, and I want you if you want to go fishing." He says, "But you got to ask your father." That's how he put it. I said, "You got it. I'm in." So in February, I show up down Fisherman's Wharf and *St. Rosalie*. I get on the boat and go fishing. My father didn't know. [laughter] I've done a lot of things like that. He was so upset with me that I went and took a full time [job]. So I fished that whole winter. He thought I would leave. Then, a site – we called it a site; that's a job on a fishing boat. In those days, the crews stayed the same. If you were a productive vessel, and they were notorious – so the dayboat fleet, the midrange fleet, and the offshore fleet all had their list of top dogs. And if you got a chance to get on the *St. Mary*, if you want to be fishing dayboat-type fishing, they make offshore money inshore; nobody tops them. My dad's boat, the *St. Peter*, was like the *St. Mary*,

and there were four or five of them. *St. Rosalie* wasn't quite what the *St. Peter* or the *St. Mary* was, but it was up there, and that's the site I started with. So I didn't start with my father. My father had five men on his boat. They were there forever. Within a year of me fishing on the *St. Rosalie*, one of the guys took a job to go fishing out of Virginia. My father says, "If you're going to stay fishing, you're coming aboard the family boat." "Okay." So that's how he got stuck with me. [laughter]

MG: When would that have been? Had you graduated high school by that point?

VG: Yeah. I graduated high school in '77, and Carlo recruited me to go on the *St. Rosalie* while they were going to begin building the new *Morningstar*. I was supposed to be a crew member on the new boat, which took them two years to build. It wasn't ready until '79. So by, I think, February of '78, almost one exact year, I ended up on the *St. Peter* with my dad.

MG: Who else was on that boat with you guys?

VG: So, on the *St. Peter* was my dad; his partner, Sebastian Scola – (Bikey?) for some reason that's his name. Everybody had a nickname. The cook was another guy I love to death. He actually taught me a lot. He taught me to mend and stuff. He was the cook on the boat, (Chico Marino?). I don't even know if his real first name was Frank. I wouldn't know. It was (Chico Marino?), was the cook. The engineer was (Sammy-Nicu?). "Nicu" in Sicilian means small. So he was "Small Sam" in his family. Even though he wasn't a very small guy, he wasn't a big guy either. But his last name is Scola. So Sam Scola, Sammy "Nicu" Scola, Sebastian "Bikey" Scola – that's an uncle and nephew – myself, my dad, and Chico. We were the five.

MG: Are you guys all Sicilian?

VG: Yeah. Everybody I just mentioned, they're all first-removed from the old country; none of them born in the old country, and I was twice removed. So there was no speaking Italian really on the boat. When I left and went offshore, I fished with the Santa Maria mostly, and that boat had a mix. My uncle, one of the uncles that I told you about, he was Sicilian-born and liked to speak his language more than English. He struggled with it, and a lot of people – the thing about fishing is it held people back on their language because they generally fished with each other. So the talk on the boat was also – if you fished on an all-Sicilian boat – if I did, I'd know Sicilian a lot more than I do because then you'd have no choice. I actually didn't really have to start saying some of the important things in Sicilian until I started captaining boats because then I was dealing with a fleet that was full of those guys. If something was an emergency or I needed to talk to them about which way are we passing or how much wire you have out, so I don't tow over your gear, you had to be able to say that in Sicilian so they would get it right off the bat. Otherwise, they'd struggle.

MG: Where there still a lot of Portuguese guys fishing back then?

VG: Yeah, there were, but not a lot. Not like there used to be. So when I got in, it had already – so the transition of the fleet was – say the '40s, where Sicilians were primarily seineers and some seasonal dragging, and the Portuguese were the offshore trawl fleet. By the '50s, I think the

offshore fleet was fifty/fifty, Sicilian and Portuguese. By the '60s, I would say it was seventy-five/twenty-five Sicilian [and Portuguese]. So it was phasing out. By the time I got in, maybe five or ten percent of the fleet was Portuguese. I remember the *Lady of Fatima, Our Lady of the Sea* – a lot of "ladies." *Lady in Blue* had a lot of Portuguese on it, even though it was Sicilian-owned. So there was still a lot of good Portuguese crewman, but they were older guys. So I think their generational drop-off was one full generation before the Sicilians. We had an all-new immigrant wave of Sicilians during that buildup period. So when these new boats were built, there were guys that didn't speak a word [of English] that came from – family [said], "Hey, come over here. We're building a new boat." He's got a house to live in. So those guys are still here and raise their families here. But they came here because of the opportunity that was created by their relatives that were already here for a period of time and were building boats.

MG: When you first started, what kind of fishing were you doing?

VG: I always went dragging, bottom trawling. That's all I ever did.

MG: Offshore?

VG: Both. I would say my career was fifty/fifty. No. I would say fifty percent offshore, twenty-five percent inshore, twenty-five percent medium. When I fished with Dave, that was a seventy-two foot. So when we weren't dogfishing, which was June to October – that was a hell of a fishery, the dogfish fishery. That was a day fishery, but it was insane. We used to bring in anywhere between forty and ninety-thousand pounds of dogfish every day. [We] handled them, one by one by hand. That was awesome work for a young guy that wanted to be in shape. That's what we did. So Dave was captain. But as soon as the dogfish season ended, usually around Columbus Day, we would put the dragging gear on, and then we'd be fishing anywhere between twenty-four and, at the most, seventy-two hours. So that's more the middle. So we weren't fishing inside. We were fishing out, but not on Georges. So I'd say fifty, twenty-five, twenty-five.

MG: Okay. Can you talk a little bit more about that first chunk of your fishing career before you left to do construction? What stands out to you?

VG: I was feeling like there was an opportunity to build a new boat, but not necessarily a big offshore boat; something that could be in the middle. There was a tremendous fleet in Gloucester that I admired, like the *Ida and Joseph*. He wasn't the only one. There were a handful of boats that were more Gulf of Maine type of boats but had full range. There were big boats – eighty, ninety- footers – and opportunities to fish haddock and redfish and cod in the Gulf of Maine, and flounder were there, and you just had to have the right boat. The *St. Peter* was old. My father's boat was built in 1927, and they kept it in beautiful shape. If we got caught in a 30-knot breeze, seaworthiness was there, but we beat the shit out of her. You know what I mean? So pumping constantly and water coming in from everywhere – so, they were very cautious about that, and played the weather, and they knew, "Look, if it's going to blow in the afternoon, but it's going to be a tailwind, we don't care." They'll go. But if they're going to bucket all the way home, and they got fish that they got to get to New York, they don't want to be in that situation. So they would plan their day by fishing south or north or east of the port

based on the wind that was going to take them home, instead of bucking it. So I hated that. I hated being restricted by the boat. It just seemed so dumb. So I had my father and his partner convinced that we were going to – so I spent – I can't even tell you. In those days, it was all just rotary dial phones, and we went and visited vessels, had purchase and sale agreements. I was dying to get into something that we could just not worry about the weather and just go hard. So I remember that being opportunities lost because we had several boats under [the] agreement, and then, they fell through for inspections or whatever; never for financing. I always thought a lot of it was just the – in hindsight, and actually, even then, I felt like my dad and his partner were just pacifying me. [laughter] You know what I mean? They didn't want to get into a new boat and debt, and so that's when my father realized, "I got to let you loose." Just offshore and go with the big boats and do what you got to do. So I did that for quite a while. Then always, whenever I had an opportunity to fish just the summer with Dave for the dogfish, I did that. It also selfishly got me home for rowing season because I always rowed competitively in the two-man dories, and then in the seine boat races since 1974. So my crew – Dave was on the crew. I grew up with Dave. We went through high school and drank together. We were seventeen guys in my crew. Twelve of us were a seine boat crew, the twelve that made the starting lineup. So we rode together. The name of the crew was "The Kids." I was seventeen years old when I won my first seine boat championship, which is not supposed to happen. I was the youngest. Dave was eighteen. We had a few guys that were nineteen, but mostly we were seventeen, eighteen, nineteen, which was unheard of. We got nicknamed "The Kids," so we just carried it. It's like, "How the fuck did those kids do that?" Anyway, selfishly, I wanted to try to be home for seine boat practice and stuff. So dogfishing was perfect because we were making offshore money. They had a contract. So as long as we produced and we were bringing in that forty to eighty-thousand, we were making a nice paycheck every week. I was staying fit. I didn't even have to row to be in that kind of shape. Then, when it was time to row the seine boats, we still had to fish, but Dave was the captain, and we left early, and we made sure we'd be at the dock and unloaded by 5:00 PM, so we wouldn't be late for seine boat practice. It's the one week, is all it is. Fiesta is only one week. So I tried to be fishing inshore and basically with Dave because of the dogfish in summers, but then, in the winter, is when I would go back on the Santa Maria or try to go do even more.

MG: Was that the last boat you were fishing on?

VG: When I quit fishing?

MG: Yes.

MG: No. Because I got married in '81. It was actually the *Acme* when I quit fishing. Dave's father-in-law, who just passed away, too, this year, John Cusumano, he owned the *Acme*, the *Acme II*, which he [Dave] ran his father-in-law's boat, and the *Cathy C* – those three boats. John had a heart attack. I came back from Cape May, New Jersey – I'll get into that. When I came back from Cape May, New Jersey, I took the *St. Peter* out because my father had back surgery, so they needed someone to run the boat. So I ran the boat for a few months while he recouped. Then, John Cusumano had a heart attack and didn't trust anybody else to run the *Acme*, so I ran the *Acme* until he got better. I think that's when I was already – also, I was waiting for John to come back so that I could go ashore and focus on the subdivision.

MG: How did you meet your wife?

VG: It was a barroom. I'm kidding. [laughter] We actually graduated together in high school, but we don't remember each other. She was very shy and hung around with a very small group of girls, and they did their own thing. I was gregarious, so it was a whole different world. So we never met in high school, but then, after high school, a good friend of mine and I were driving around, like we used to, and we saw Jenny. Now I remember. Her cousin, in the Saint Peter's Club, said, "I got to hook you up with my cousin." "Who's your cousin?" "She's beautiful. I know she'll like you." So I think he was already talking to her. We're in the club, drinking, playing pool. "Yeah, yeah, yeah." "I'm telling you. I'll set you up. We'll go on a date and see if you hit it off." "Sure. All right." So they're older guys. We ended up having a get-together. She didn't say a word. I was pre-gamed. I still remember. I had my grandfather's – well, I bought it from him for five hundred dollars, his old 1968 Ford LTD, which was immaculate, but I had empty beers on the floor – in those days, drinking and driving was okay. So I had empty beers in the thing, went on this date, and I could tell she's not enjoying this at all. So, it got a little out of control with the language and stuff like that, talking with the guys, and I kind of ignored her. So when I brought her home – see? I do have a good memory. When I brought her home to drop her off – oh, I said, "No, I'll drive her home because I got to make up for this. I feel bad." So they drop me off. I go to let her in the car. I open the car, and a bunch of beer bottles fall on the ground. Like, "Oh, this ain't going to go good at all." So I drive her home. I look at her, and she's already opening the door and left. So I go, "That's never going to happen again." So I left it at that. Then, I saw her a couple of times. Little Earl's was the hotspot in Gloucester. It was actually a North Shore hotspot. People came from everywhere to go to Little Earl's nightclub – J. Geils Band, The Fools. I don't know if Aerosmith ever got to play there. It was pretty cool. I used to see her all the time. She is pretty hot, my wife. I saw her walking around one day with her sister. She was in a rush. The guy I was driving with, he goes, "Is that the girl you went out with that one night and spent the pile of money, and she wouldn't even look at you?" We like making fun of each other. "Yeah, that's her," I say, "but I guarantee you if I ask her out right now, she'll go." I was pretty cocky at that time for no good reason, but I was cocky. Sometimes that works. So we ended up pulling [up], "Hey, you guys look like you're in a hurry. You want a ride?" They're like, "All right." So she gets in – "How you been?" – and all this stuff. She had to get her sister home. My father-in-law was fucking so strict. It was summertime. It was like eight o'clock at night. It was still broad daylight, but she had a curfew, and if my wife didn't get her in on time, there was going to be hell to pay. So they took the ride. As we dropped her off, I said, "So how's everything going? We should connect again sometime." "Yeah, we should." No cell phones or anything like that. I say, "I forget your number." She gives me her number, and she left. I said, "I told you I'd get her number." We were together ever since. Called her, and Fiesta – it's always fishing and Fiesta, seine boats. That's been my whole life.

MG: How does she feel about you being a fisherman?

VG: She really didn't know much else. So what happened was – 1985, the *White Dove II* was the premier boat ever to be built in the Northeast – a 132-foot being built in Roanoke – is Roanoke [in] North Carolina? Roanoke Island Boatworks is the name of the company. They were in Wanchese. Wanchese is the island there. I think it's North Carolina. They were

building this gorgeous boat. It was constantly being written up in *National Fishermen*. The people that owned the boat knew my dad, and knew that I was running boats and was always engineer, and stuff like that. Again, they're looking – new boat, they want fresh blood. They used to go tuna seineing for giant tuna with a purse seine. These guys used to make between fifty and eighty-thousand. Now I'm talking the '80s – fifty and eighty-thousand dollars a summer fishing for giant tuna. They had an exclusive license. It was fucking unbelievable.

MG: Do you want to take a break?

VG: Hey.

[TAPE PAUSED]

VG: [They asked if] I would be interested in going as engineer on the new boat.

MG: The *White Dove*?

VG: The *White Dove*. But it would only be for the winter trawl season. They had ammonia systems in that boat, like the West Coast tuna clippers. So I went to the Sawyer Free Library and read as many books as I could on it because they wanted to train me as an engineer. I didn't really know the dangers of ammonia. So I was dumb enough to take the job that way. I went aboard, and we fished that whole winter. So, here I got one son a year old. My wife is pregnant, due in May, and I went down there in January not to come home. I had to live on the boat because we were going to fish. In the wintertime, it's short-notice – go out for three days, come in, unload, possibly go the first time the weather's good. For an 132-foot boat, the weather's always good. So I didn't see home at all. My wife was devastated, pissed at me. I don't blame her. So finally, I got to go home mid-May, and he was born May 24th. So luckily, I was around for that. I was supposed to go tuna seineing with them. I was going to make fifty, eighty-grand. That's three year's pay in those days. They had already told me in the winter – the owner pulled me in the stateroom – this boat was elaborate. He says, "The tuna site's yours. I know that's why you're here. I don't blame you. But I'm just going to throw something at you. The other ninety-six footer, only two people have ever been at the wheel of that boat to run it. It's me and my older brother, Albert. Our intent, one hundred percent, was to tie the boat up for the summer, so we can fish the new boat everybody together. But we're looking at your capacity, and we would trust you to run the boat. There's a joint venture squid fishing opportunity where the foreigners – there's a permit." They come in with these factory ships. The U.S. boats catch the fish. It's an elaborate thing of how to get it transferred to them. You're doing this out on the continental shelf [in the] summertime. He said, "They made some really good money last year. I don't know if they're going to make the money we make, but we don't make the same money all the time either. It's totally up to you. It's either that or we're tying the boat up." I mean, I'm a draggerman. I got to take the opportunity. So I did. They let me pick a Gloucester crew. I got these all-stars from Gloucester, older guys. One just died the other day. One's still fishing. I can't believe it. He's like eighty years old, and he's fishing with his son in Cape May. He stayed down there. Joe (Virelle?) is still alive, but these guys were top dogs. I called them, and they all said, "Yeah." I'm a twenty-something-year-old captain. What an enjoyable experience that was. So, then, we're fishing for squid off of Martha's [Vineyard]. We ended up all the way

up to [Block Island?]. We were from Washington Canyon off of Virginia to Veaches Canyons, which is maybe two-hundred miles from here. That was our season. Then, when the ship would get filled, or the fishing would drop off, people would try to do something different. So we went inshore to try to catch some white squid. We were always having trouble with one of the engines, and the owners called and said, "How close are you guys? You guys fishing anywhere near the Sound?" We said, "Yeah, actually, that's where we're at right now." "How would you like to come home?" I'm like, "Oh my God, yeah." One trip we were out seventeen days because you're transferring the fish all the time. "Absolutely." So we went home that night. Took the boat through the Cape Cod canal, went in, [and] the engine was basically toast, needed to be worked on. The foreign fleet – we were working for the Italians. (*Amoroso Setamo*?) was the boat that we were transferring to. They said, "Is there anything you can transfer? We're not full, and nobody's catching right now. Can you catch us anything that we can process? I've got to keep this boat busy." So the translator was the NOAA observer, a guy [named] Steve. I've always wanted to hunt him down because he's going to have some great photos of me and my crew from a distance, but I never could track him down. So that's what we did. I took the boat home, and I said, "How about dogfish?" With Dave, that's something I know. "Yeah, we'll try it." I said, "Really?" It beats the shit out of the nets. We went out with one engine, met an Italian foreign ship on Middle Bank, Stellwagen, which is twelve miles from Gloucester, and we transferred dogfish for a week and a half. Just kept destroying the net. We said, "We can't fix this net." We're all champs at this, but the mesh is this big. "Just leave us the codend." Because they had a hundred guys, they would fix the net for us, and then we would pick it up in the morning and catch dogfish, give them one set, [and] go home. So we transferred – that's never been done on the East Coast ever. We had an Italian foreign ship picking up dogfish off of a U.S. boat on Middle Bank. That's yesterday. That was 1985. So I missed Fiesta 1985. It was the only Fiesta I didn't get to row because I was running the boat off the canyons. So they told me, "We want you to stay because you're the only guy. We don't want to train another guy for engineer for the winter, and you'll [inaudible] about twenty grand." I think they made fifty and I made thirty, something like that. "We want to make it up to you, but we want to know you're going to stay." I talked to Jenny, and she said, "There's no way I can go through another winter like that." I said, "Let's buy a house down there." I was willing to leave Gloucester because beautiful brick façade, in-ground pool, four-bedroom homes were like a hundred-and-sixty grand, a hundred-and-forty grand. "Let's do it." I was willing to [move].

MG: To Cape May, New Jersey?

VG: Cape May. "There's no way I'm leaving my family," she said. "Okay." I had to tell them, "Keep the twenty grand. I'm going back home." Then, my father needed me anyway. I ran the *St. Peter* and then the *Acme*, and then left fishing.

MG: Maybe that's a good place to stop. We can call Joe Orlando, and figure out our next steps.

VG: Excellent.

----------END OF INTERVIEW----------