

Interview with Jake Griffin, commercial fisherman

Occupation: Commercial fisherman

Port Community: Wilmington and other ports, North Carolina

Interviewer: Sarah Schumann

Date and year: January 11, 2019

Location: Wanchese, North Carolina

Project: The Graying of the Fleet Part II: How and Why Young Fishermen Choose to Fish?

Transcriber: Sarah Schumann

[Start of interview]

[00:00]

Sarah Schumann [SS]: Today is Friday, January 11, 2019. I'm Sarah Schumann, and I'm sitting here with Jake Griffin in Wanchese, North Carolina. Jake, could you just briefly state your occupation?

Jake Griffin [JG]: I'm a third-generation commercial fisherman here in the Outer Banks of North Carolina. I fish anywhere from the Virginia line all the way to the South Carolina line. I'm very active in the shark fisheries, and longlining, and some offshore fisheries as well.

SS: Is fishing a full-time or a part-time endeavor for you?

JG: I've been a full-time commercial fishermen since I was fourteen years old. It's what I grew up doing. Briefly went to a trade school just so I could have a backup plan, if you will.

SS: What kind of trade school?

JG: Welding. I went to Ohio and spent three months learning how to weld, and then went right back to fishing.

SS: Ok.

JG: Do something to make my mom happy.

SS: Do you own your own boat?

JG: Yes, ma'am.

SS: And what's the name of that boat?

JG: I own a twenty-eight foot gillnet boat, the Setback. It's a bowpicker. Along with a couple other smaller boats we use for flounder gillnet fishery on the inland waters, and a surf dory as well for haul seining on the beach.

SS: Wow, there's a lot of—

JG: Diversity.

SS: —diversity there. Really interesting. But before I get to that, first, you move around a bit, it sounds like? Do you have a single homeport or do you move around with your boats?

JG: Now so more based out of Wilmington, North Carolina. But we're traveling around, especially with the sharks. Sharks are more of a water temp-driven fishery. So it varies. A couple degrees is the difference between fifteen cents or a dollar fifty. So you're kind of chasing the water. Wintertime, I spend the winter up around Morehead, Beaufort area, and then in the summertime I can come back to Wilmington and fish out of there. I spend the spring up here in the north beaches of the Outer Banks doing the haul seining, a more traditional fishery.

SS: Ok, and I don't know if you mentioned your age before. How old are you?

JG: Twenty-seven years.

SS: Twenty-seven years old. That seasonal cycle is really interesting, and all that diversity—different boats, different gear types, different species that you're following. Could you just start in January and walk through the year with me, so I have a better idea of how that works?

JG: My year cycle. January to March, I'll be targeting Atlantic sharpnose along with spinners and a handful of various other sharks. March, end of March, April, I'll go back to Wilmington and target threshers and sea mullets. April, May, and the first half of June I'll return back to the north beaches of the Outer Banks and do the haul seining fishery for star butters.

SS: What is haul seining, for those of us who don't know?

JG: Haul seining was the old fishery that kind of built up the Outer Banks. They used to load a net in a dory and set it out in the surf. They used to pull it back by hand, but we retrieve it back with trucks now. They do it up north for the striped bass and the sea bass in New York. But it's an old fishery here. It was the way that everybody used to fish around here, before we have the equipment that we do now. There used to be forty or fifty rigs going up and down the beach at any given time. Now I think, if I were to say, there would be fifteen active rigs, it would be the whole statewide stretch. There's nobody. It's a dying industry. That fishery is a dying industry. But it's one fishery for me where I can take and actually educate the public. You know, where your seafood's coming from. It's a hands-on activity. Beach fishing becomes a hands-on activity for public to get involved. They see it hands-on. They get in it hands-on. At first they might want to start off arguing about, like, "We've rented this house, this five-thousand dollar beach house for the week." They come down and they're upset with every penny that they've spent. They come down heated. You go ahead and let them vent. "Alright, we're allowed to do this by law. It's the way we fish. Everything is legal

here.” You let them go ahead and vent. You say, “Alright, in three hours we’re going to haul this back.” You pull the net back to the beach and tell them, “The only thing we ask is that you stand up by the beach because we’ve got trucks moving so we can work our gear back, and you’re not interrupting our fishery.” Get it up on the beach, and they come down, and they’ve got the kids and they see all the different fish. They’re asking a bunch of questions. You get to answer all these questions. When it’s all said and done, you tell them to go back to their house and get a bucket. They bring a bucket down there, you fill it up with bluefish that, in the springtime, are worth twenty-five cents. So you give them three dollars worth of your fish, and they come down, “When are you doing this again? We really enjoyed this.” It’s all about the way the situation’s handled, but for me, I really enjoy that fishery. Keeping it alive and being able to educate the public on how commercial fisheries really are, and now just what they read and see.

SS: Yeah. Put a face to it.

JG: Right. You can’t take people on a scallop boat and go dragging. You can’t take people on a gillnet boat and go gillnetting. But that beach fishing, they can walk down the beach. They can come down, you know, throw fish in a basket. They can ask what this is, and at the end of the day, say, “Yeah, take whatever you want.” And that goes a long way. For me, I feel like I’m doing more for the fishery being able to show people. Our area’s such a highly sought after for tourism. You got people coming from Ohio, Pennsylvania, New York, Delaware, all over the place, to come here and sit on the beach. They want to know what’s going on. You can’t talk everybody out of their opinion on commercial fishing, but the people who don’t know, you can inform them in a good manner. It’s awesome opportunity to do so.

[07:21]

SS: What kind of species are you catching that way?

JG: We target star butterfish in the springtime and spot in the fall. They’re small pan fish.

SS: You said that the number of people participating in the haul seine fishery has gone down dramatically.

JG: Yes.

SS: Can you explain why?

JG: I think the biggest thing is that we used to have a lot of rigs that did it. A lot of people did it with the striped bass, and the striped bass rules got so tightened down that a lot of people got out of it. A lot of people got out of it because of how developed our area has become, and dealing with those interactions, like I said. People coming down heated, upset that, “You’re doing this in my backyard.” They think that they’ve rented the whole ocean. A lot of people get fed up with it, and they might get hot, and they got in trouble. It’s just, for most people it’s more of a hassle. So a lot of people got out of it. But the biggest thing was a couple of years ago, a law was put into place that we couldn’t use monofilament within a hundred yards of the beach. So everybody had to make a transition, and modify their gear. Which, to modify their gear is about two thousand dollars worth of webbing. Just to meet, to

accommodate that law that had been put in place. A hundred yards of polyethelene webbing is seventeen-hundred dollars.

SS: So a lot of people just didn't bother?

JG: A lot of people got out of it. And people can't find help. That's another big factor. It died out. Haul seining on the beach is an art. I've come to learn real quick. It cost me a truck this spring. I lost a truck in the ocean this spring.

SS: Oh my gosh!

JG: It's a lot of things. Luckily I had an older crowd who had been doing it, and they kind of took me by the hand and were like, "Alright." They watched me struggle for about a week, to see how far and how quick I was going downhill, and then a lot of them were going to go save me. They came and they helped me out. I learned a lot.

SS: Have you just gotten into that fishery recently, the haul seining?

JG: Yes, ma'am. I've been part of it my whole life, but I've never had a rig of my own. So this past spring was kind of my chance to grab the bull by the horns and see how, try to make it on my own. It's one thing to work as a crew. But when you're hauling the gear, you're pulling it to the beach with the trucks. The way that everything has to, the movements, everything, the two trucks have to be in tune. It's a systematic thing. If it's off, it can cost you. Cost you big time. Like I told everybody, it's a learning curve. The name of the dory is the Curve [laughter]. Learning.

[10:35]

SS: Let's go back to your annual cycle. What do you do in the summer?

JG: Summer months? Summer months, warm water shark fishing. The same thing. I kind of go back to doing the blacktips, spinners, hangers, sharpnoses, all inside of three miles. I don't hold a federal permit, so I can't go outside of three. I've got to stay tight along the beach. The past eight years, I've gone up to Alaska and participated in the Bristol Bay salmon fishery.

SS: Oh, no kidding! I do that too.

JG: I really enjoy that. You meet so many people up there. So many opportunities. If you come from a place like we do here, where we gillnet ten months out of the year. Help from areas that gillnet is highly sought after up there, as you know. You see some of the crew that come up there. People hire soccer players and think that since they're athletes, they're going to do good on a boat. You put them out there and they don't know how to tie a bowline. I'll participate in the Bristol Bay salmon fishery, and do that until middle, end of July, then return back, go straight back into shark fishing. The end of August, September, I'll do a little bit of Spanish mackerel gillnetting along with shark fishing. I don't ever really stop shark fishing. In our area there's a few species of sea mullet. They call them whiting. Spots are highly sought after in our area. So of course, when those runs are coming through, I focus on that.

SS: Is that also with a gillnet?

JG: Yes, ma'am. In September, I do some Spanish fishing, shark fishing. October comes around, that's when we start our big run of spot. That'll go into the middle of November. Then November and December, we do the sea mullet fishery. We go back to gillnetting sea mullets.

SS: Is the spot also with gillnet?

JG: Yes, ma'am. Threshers, we'll catch threshers in November, December. Then it just goes back.

SS: That is an incredible diversity. How do you keep track of it all and remember where you're supposed to be at any point in time? [laughter] It sounds like a lot.

JG: It is. You know, you got options. You give yourself so many options. It's kind of hard to focus in on some.

SS: Yeah, because you've got to choose, right?

JG: Yeah. And we're fortunate enough to do that in North Carolina, because we have a stock of fish that comes down from the north that migrates down. Then in the springtime, we've got fish that migrate up. North Carolina gets both migrations of fish. We're really fortunate because it gives us so many options. But at the same time, you give yourself so many options you get spread thin. You don't really put a hundred percent into one thing. You kind of got to lock it down on where you're going to benefit, what you enjoy doing the most.

[14:05]

SS: So there's a sort of tradeoff between on the one hand having diversity but on the other, sort of spreading yourself thin?

JG: Right.

SS: Across a lot of different fisheries.

JG: Yes.

SS: Where are these fisheries taking place? Is it in the ocean or the sounds, or both?

JG: Most of my fisheries take place in the ocean. I will sporadically do some flounder gillnetting on the inside. That starts in like, I'll start that in June and do that until the end of September. I focus primarily more on my shark fishing, and building that market, but I'll do some inside gillnet fisheries as well.

SS: So you have state permits?

JG: Yes, ma'am.

SS: How many different permits or endorsements do you have to have for all those?

JG: Inside of three miles, I don't have to have a federal shark permit, because I'm inside state waters. State waters, you don't have to have, you know, species permits. But I'm a fish dealer as well, so that's where then I've got to have my federal permits, my state permits, to be able to sell my own fish.

SS: Alright. With the fishing permit, do you have one permit that covers everything?

JG: A North Carolina standard commercial fishing license.

SS: Ok. So the North Carolina commercial fishing license really gives you a lot of freedom.

JG: It's more sort of a blanket, when you're fishing inside of three miles. Now, when you step outside of three miles, you need a federal permit.

SS: Different story.

[JG]: It gets real costly real quick. Hatteras is kind of an exempted area in the king mackerel fishery. Where you got to have a king mackerel permit to sell kings. But if you gillnet, you can sell kings out of a gillnet inside three miles. But it's only a small area. But there's areas there that were fortunate. To a lot of people, if we didn't have those sections like that, and have those rules that are in place like that, they wouldn't make a living.

[16:32]

SS: Wow.

JG: Very dependent.

SS: So those little exemptions are making the difference between staying in the industry and not, for those people?

JG: Yes, ma'am. Especially Hatteras. Hatteras is very dependent on those small areas.

SS: Ok. Interesting. Now, how did you get your permit?

JG: North Carolina has an eligibility pool, where they have a certain amount of standard commercial fishing licenses available. But you have to go through an application process. When I was thirteen, fourteen years old, we started going to the fish house. I'd been selling under my dad. He had signed me his commercial license. I started gillnetting in the sound when I was eleven. I guess when I was about fifteen is when I got my own boat. We started going to the fish house and I got letters of recommendations. I had landings showing what I caught on his assigned license. So, I presented all that to the eligibility pool, or to that committee. It's a lottery thing. They'll go through and assess every packet each person's application. Luckily, I was fortunate enough to get one.

SS: How competitive is that? How many people apply and how many people get it? Do you know?

JG: I'm not sure how many people. I recently tried to help somebody get one, this past year, and they weren't granted one. They had been in the shellfish fishery for the past two years, and they were trying to get their own license. It was not up to what the state deemed qualified. They're not just handing them out like free tickets, by any means. If you want to buy one, you can find one quick for a few thousand dollars.

SS: Oh, from another fishermen?

JG: Yes, ma'am.

[18:41]

SS: It sounds like that's not an insurmountable barrier, really. The licensing.

JG: Yeah. It's not like a federal permit or an Alaska permit, where a salmon permit's a hundred thousand dollars or to lease one is twenty-five thousand dollars for a summer. A statewide permit, with the flexibility and the options it gives you—we're very fortunate when you look at other areas.

SS: Sounds like it. So, you said you started gillnetting when you were eleven. When did you start with the sharks?

JG: I started gillnetting in the sound. And I gillnetted for flounders, the majority. That was my main fishery, the flounder gillnet fishery, until I was about eighteen. We had to get Section 10 permits so that we could be compliant with the sea turtle incidental take permits, the ITP. When I realized that flounder fishing was probably going to be shut down because of turtles, I made my transition and started fishing in the ocean. I started fishing in a twenty-one foot net reel boat, fishing for Spanish mackerel. And then shortly got into the shark fishery. That was probably nineteen or twenty, was when I really made my transition into the shark fishery.

SS: Did your dad do that as well?

JG: No, ma'am. My dad, he mostly does hook and line. King mackerel fishing, tuna fishing, longlining for dolphin. He wasn't much on the gillnetting. He was more of a troller.

SS: So you're doing different fisheries altogether than what your dad does.

[20:40]

JG: Yes, ma'am. I mean, he would put a net reel on and we'd do the croaker gillnetting and the dogs, the spiny dogfish, but that was about the extent of it. He didn't much care for it. I remember him telling me when I was little, "You'll make a check every week gillnetting, but there's nothing glamorous about it. You will make a check. It's something consistent. You put your time in. But it's not like your trolling fisheries, your king mackerel fisheries, where you're going to see the glory of it." You know? I had the mentality that it's good enough for me. I'll put my head down. I'll sign the dotted line for seventy-five cent on cut shark, and go to work. There ain't nothing that bothers me about that.

SS: How many people participate in the shark fisheries? Is that a big fishery or sort of a niche?

JG: In Wilmington, when I was nineteen, when I first went down there, I was told, "Don't bring the sharks in. Nobody wants them. We can't do nothing with them. We can't move them." Back when the sandbar [shark] fishery was thriving, back in the nineties, they did move a lot of sharks out of Wilmington, out of Wrightsville Beach. I went to those fish houses, and their dealer permits had expired after they stopped that fishery. When they cut back from a forty-box limit, they said, "We're done. Can't make any money selling just a handful of sharks." A lot of people let their dealer permits go. So trying to find a market for my sharks is a really hard problem. Trying to find a place to move them. I had one person who had a federal dealer's permit and I had to work through him. It kind of cornered me down. You know, twenty years old and I'm going out there and cutting the sharks, processing them, bringing them back in, and I'm being told that he's shipping my fish and returning fifty cent. When I talk to my friends here in Wanchese and Hatteras, and they're getting eighty cent to a dollar. I'm getting half of what they are. The person that I was dealing with, he would never put his hands on the fish but he was writing the trip ticket. At the end of it, he was getting more money than I was. So I went and got a state dealer's permit and a federal dealer's permit. I'm making a living out of the shark fishery, but to maintain it and keep up with it has been hard. You got to report on the week and you got to be compliant with what's going on, how they manage that fishery: reducing it, your trip limits, kind of sitting away waiting on a proclamation to come out, an email. "How many are we allowed to catch this week?"

SS: Where are you selling or sending your shark catch now? Who's taking that?

JG: The majority of my fish gets sold on routes that are coming out of Wilmington. There's a dealer down there that has routes. My fish will go anywhere from Florida up to D.C. It's not a very large volume, but I'm working with it now. I've got hopes and dreams of having a fish house of my own and being able to sell my own fish along with others', but everybody I've talked to about it [says], "You can't fish and sell fish. You can't do it. You can't do it all." That's what everybody's said to me the whole time. I'm not ready to let go of fishing, so I'm not going full bore into dealing fish yet. I got some people like Kelsey Aiken who I've worked with. If I go catch a bunch of sharks, he'll take what I have leftover and he'll move them for me and send them to New York, because New York is one of our big hubs for shark. He'll help me. He'll say, "Alright, send them to Suffolk and I'll pick them up from there and I'll sell them for you." You know, and I'll get a price that's better than what I would have done if I'd tried doing it on my own.

SS: What about the other fish that you catch? Do you just deliver those to a dealer? Or are you involved in marketing them yourself?

JG: I try to market it myself, sell to some restaurants. Keep stuff as local as I can, you know? The majority, like I said, goes through one dealer. They disperse a lot of our seafood down there, but I would like to try to sell more of my own fish and maybe more volume. It's just it's hard to do both of it. For somebody who's twenty-seven, living in North Carolina, I've never been to Fulton's. I've never been up there and shook the hand of the people who I'd be selling fish to, and it's hard to sit on the phone and say, "Hey, would you like some shark this week?" never knowing these people and not knowing anything. New York, they've been

dealing with the same people, with the same families. The Daniels here at Wanchese Fish, they've dealt with them since they've started. They've been dealing with the same people for thirty-four years, and [when] they've got younger people trying to pop up in it, they're not as accepting to those younger people coming into the industry. Because they know the people they've been dealing with.

SS: Right, those long-standing relationships.

JG: Yes, ma'am. It's hard to wedge in there. You can't do it over a phone. It's something I'm going to have to go up there and meet the people and ask them and go up there with a pen and a paper and write down, you know, so-and-so uses twenty- to thirty-pound sharks, or they like star butters. Write everything down and keep it at home so when I catch those fish, I can kind of dial in on who wants what. But logistics for us, I think it's like fourteen or fifteen cent to get our fish from Wanchese to New York, and it's twenty-one cent from Wilmington. So by the time you do that, trying to factor in logistics, for me it's hard to figure all that out. With money expense, I've tried shipping fish north on a couple of occasions and got burned terrible bad. It's not the dealer that's buying them from me. It's the facilities that I'm packing my fish through to ship them up north. I'm having a hard time. We're off to a rocky start. But we'll work something out and get it going.

[28:10]

SS: Why do you feel that marketing your catch yourself would be a good thing for you?

JG: I think today is more so trending into, "How fresh is my fish? Where did this fish come from?" People nowadays are more looking into a story where it comes from. There's a couple outfits—fish dealers—who are using small tags on their fish and they're stamping it right to the product. People can scan it with a smartphone. People can track that fish back to the boat, to the day, to the location where it was caught. They can sit there on their phone while they're waiting for their fish, and they can read the story about the guy who's running the boat. They know what the boat looks like. They're looking at pictures of the boat. There's outfits that are doing things that like that are kind of tracking back, where people are more interested in finding, you know, "Is this a sustainable fishery? Are these fish that I'm eating, are they overfished? Should I be eating another one?" They're concerned about what they're eating. That's a good thing. People should be. You shouldn't be, you know, eating fish that are overfished or imported from fisheries that might be less regulated. I think that's a good thing that some outfits, some fish dealers are doing, is trying to provide that story to the people where they can see exactly what they're eating and where it's coming from. That's more so trending, where it used to be just volume: "Send it to New York. Send it to Canada. Move everything up there. Let it hit the market. They'll separate it out from there." But I think my biggest concern is where I'm so active in the shark fishery. Shark fishery is probably one of the most controversial fisheries we have. Each year, we got to deal with Shark Week. Shark Week is kind of one of those things where people go out and they'll buy some shark to eat. But there are a lot of people who look at the same video of some people in foreign countries cutting the wings off blue dogs and rolling them back out the door. It's the same video they've played since 1984. They keep showing the same things over and over and over again. There's nothing that fights that media. Everybody's get this mentality sharks are overfished. You know? "Sharks are overfished. They're too full of mercury. Don't eat them. Don't touch sharks. Let them be. Sharks are terrible eating. Don't eat them." When in

fact, we've got the dog fishery that, the dogs, the spiny dogfish, for a restaurant is probably one of the best fish that they could buy. They can get it dirt cheap. It's a decent product. They can turn it and make a lot of profit. But there's nothing, there's no media, there's no bulletins put out, there's nothing that alerts the public about what the truth behind the shark fishery is. You know, we're managed by a certain group who determines whether a shark species is overfished, viable, sustainable. You know, this same group that allows us to go to work is the same group that determines the assessment of a stock. But they never back the fishermen up about trying to defy what the media says. If we could just have a little bit of help with that, just to say, "Hey look, shark! These stocks are decent. This is why we let people fish these. You see blacktip on the market? They're not overfished." A list of the top five, ten sharks to eat would help our market out a lot. I believe it would take the stress off some other fisheries as well. If people were shown how viable the fishery actually is. Due to such a discrepancy on the shark fishery itself, it's cost a lot of effort. Not as many people are participating in the shark fishery anymore, because people read about it. You get so much grief about it. People think that you're out there doing something terrible, when you're probably doing one of the better fisheries that we have. It's a hard thing for me because, like I said, I do shark fisheries at least seventy percent of my income. That's a stout chunk. When you look at it, you've got such as diverse area, a diversity of fisheries around here, you know, it's not like I'm just a dragger or I'm just a hard-crabber, where ninety percent of my income comes from blue crabs, or I'm invested all in blue crabs. I've got all of these options. But I focus in on this one fishery, and I really would like to see it do well. But we do need some help with it.

[34:09]

SS: In terms of public education?

JG: Public education. That would be the example. The biggest thing we have, and like I said Shark Week, is shark finning. There's nothing ever posted, nothing ever put out, there's nothing that backs that finning does not occur in the United States. Now, it may in a foreign country. But within the United States, with fish, the sharks that you're seeing on a local menu countrywide, those sharks are not being finned.

SS: Yeah, you're right, there's no messaging about that. I didn't know.

JG: They can't be, because obviously we're selling the meat. Fins have to be naturally attached to the shark to be landed.

SS: [laughter]. Good point. If you've got a plate of shark in front of you—

JG: Yeah, we didn't just cut the fins off and roll it back overboard and then magically it showed back up on your plate. [laughter] It doesn't make sense! This is the kind of logic that we fight so much. When you put your whole life into a fishery and it's something that you're so fascinated about. I started shark fishing when I was twenty years old. I'm twenty-seven years old. When I was twenty, I did not think I'd ever take this path, but it's something you learn so much about: different species and how they act different, different water temperatures. A couple degrees makes those differences of what species will be around. Being I've done it now seven years, I know, like we've got a couple species—sandbars and duskies—that when they're migrating, we don't fish. Beause we don't want to kill those fish.

We're trying to rebuild those stocks. It's not worth going and fishing, if you know that you're going to be having interactions with something that you shouldn't. So we quit fishing, take a break, we'll make a transition and do something else, like flounder fishing or, you know. Shark fishery is something I'm really passionate about. I really enjoy it. It's something that I want to see be a striving fishery, because our area, like I was telling you, the king mackerel fishery, in those small areas—the thing is, if we didn't have some of the fisheries, we wouldn't have anything at all. We're kind of dependent on it.

[36:46]

SS: In the shark fishery and the other fisheries that you do, what are the other fishermen like, in terms of their age? Are there other young fishermen like you, or are you one of the younger ones?

JG: I grew up in Wanchese, I grew up with the equipment, the conveyors, the ice vats, the wash vats to dunk your fish in. This has always been a year round fisheries hub. I mean, there's always something going on up here. Whether I go to Cedar Island or I go to Wilmington, I'm always reminded, "Well, this ain't Wanchese. That ain't how we do it around here." They're all mind set in different areas. A lot of the fishermen are older in age. They're starting to get out of it. They just can't physically do it anymore, for health reasons or financial reasons. They just can't do it anymore. They fought as hard as they can and they can't do it. You know, a big contributing factor in that is where you're not seeing many young fishermen in the fisheries anymore, is they've listened to their fathers and their grandfathers [say], "They're going to take this from us. They're going to take that from us." They've watched their parents fight. You watch your family fight so hard for what they do. A lot of people will just fight and fight and fight, until they can't fight no more, and just give up. You see a younger crowd, they've listened to their family, just say, "Oh, yup. They ain't going to let us do this no more. They're going to take this from us." And they've watched their family struggle to the point where they lose their boat and they lose their whole operation. It's like, "Well, why would I want to be part of this? My dad couldn't do it. *He raised me.*" You know? My family, they started the family based on fishing. Families are so much of it. You see it down on the sound. You see it all over. But people upcoming, they see their families struggle and lose everything they have. And there's no encouragement to keep going. There's no encouragement to keep pushing for a livelihood that their dad couldn't even do. When your dad's supposed to be the strongest. Your family's supposed to be the strongest force that you look up to. You look at, I call them pillars in the community. We're lucky to have Jimmy Ruhle. You won't find somebody better for the fishing industry that Jimmy Ruhle or James Craddock. For me, I just realized the other day, James Craddock has his boat for sale. This is a man who's been a dragger. Him and Jimmy Ruhle are about nose for nose for being one of the top draggers in our area, probably part of the East Coast. To see them getting out of it, what kind of encouragement is that? Both of them are getting up there in age and have family that they want to spend time with. But James, he gets to go catch a hundred boxes of flounder. That's all he gets to go catch for his whole winter. It's like, where's the encouragement? You don't see a lot of people who are about it, really full time, and see a future in the fishery. You see more people who are like, "Oh, yup, they're going to take that from us," and just back out instead of fighting for it.

[40:40]

SS: Yeah, but you must think differently.

JG: I think I do have a different mentality, when it comes to fisheries. But it's still one of those things where, for me. I'm a young kid. I didn't see all the cycles. I hear about the cycles, and there's proof that cycles do occur.

SS: You mean in abundance of different species?

JG: Abundance of fisheries, species coming and going. I've never seen that, so for me to speak on a topic, "You just young. You haven't seen it yet. You didn't live it. You didn't see it." You know? So it's hard. I can't go and talk about fisheries the same as Jimmy Ruhle can, or James or somebody who's done it for seventy years. I don't have that knowledge. But I do have a different mindset where a lot of people just want to fight. "Don't let them. They're going to take this from us. They're going to take that from us. They're going to take this. Don't back down an inch." But, you know, you see those same people hitting a brick wall. They fight and they just ram that brick wall as hard as they can go. I'm in that crowd because I want it to keep going. But I also see the end of the wall. You can go around that wall. Work with science, prove science is wrong. Now, Jimmy Ruhle, like I say, I look at him, I idolize him in the seafood industry. He's worked with science. He's designed nets. He's done so much for the fishery that a lot of people won't ever recognize. They won't ever understand. They won't ever pick up on. But he's done so much to try to help us. He's seen the end of the wall. He went around that wall. He helped science and he's worked with stuff. He's gone around that wall and he's kept right on going. He's made a living and he's tried to better the fishing industry. But your force is hitting the wall. They're going straight ahead. They're not turning and trying to find a way to go around that wall. Where we've hit that "this is the end" mentality. "If we let them take anything, this is the end." I know how much they've taken. I don't know quite to the extent as most. But I've seen the fisheries taken from the fishermen. I know up north it's a lot worse than what it is here. But, you know, my mindset that varies from others is: work with science. Find a solution that's best for the resource. It's not a discrepancy on which user gets to access that resource. Make the best interest for the resource itself. If you have a healthy resource, then there's something for both user groups to have. If you focus on who gets what, you focus on who gets what of what's left. Then eventually you won't have nothing. You first and foremost have to worry about the resource, and then you can battle it out from there. But you got to focus on what's best for the resource and for the fisheries first, and then you can worry about trip limits, things of that nature, recreational versus commercial. I used to participate in the croaker gillnet fishery, I did it my whole life. Where I first did it, probably twelve, fourteen years ago, we were using four-and-a-quarter stretch gillnet, catching a very solid class of croakers. We were only getting, when the volume would hit, seventy-five cent. They'd drop to thirty-five cent, for a four-and-a-quarter-inch croaker. Now, we're down to fishing three-inch stretch, but we're getting two dollars. Two and a quarter for what they would consider junk twelve years ago. They wouldn't even want it to come across their dock. Now, fish prices are steadily increasing. But you're dealing with stocks that are dealing with some stress. You're dealing with fish, like I said, the croaker, this is my primary example: that fish, we fished them down a quarter to an eighth inch every year. It's dwindled down that much every year. It might be just an eighth inch. I've seen it where we started out, and I've heard people talk about cycles where it used to be just small croakers. Then the grey trout come in, the croakers got bigger, start catching the croakers and the grey trout, and how everybody kind of made that transition. Grey trout disappeared and they went croaker fishing. When they went croaker

fishing, it started to be five inch, now like I say we're down to three inch. But my biggest concern is, you know, as a young fisherman who plans on fishing the rest of my life, if we fish those croakers down, and I've heard the term L-100, where a size limit where each fish is hitting its length to reproduce. So if you keep dropping that mesh size catching smaller and smaller fish each year, eventually you're going to go past that threshold of L-100, and catching fish that haven't even reproduced once. Where is the logic to do such to a resource?

[47:06]

JG: If you dwindle down a resource to where the fish that you catch and you sell and you make profit off of does not reproduce one time to replace the fish that you caught, there's no logic in it. You will not have a future fishery for that stock. So I bowed out of it. I got out of it. A lot of people will participate. But for me, for someone who's young in the fishery, I'm not going to take part of that. I don't see where anything good will come of that. For me to get up at a meeting and say that, I would be shunned out of town for saying something like that. But that is something that needs to be understood. I told my dad. He said, "Why don't you bring your boat up here croaker fishing?" It took four different times trying to explain that to him, and he finally realized what I was saying. It's just hard, because you got to make money in the winter. I understand it. But you got to also think about the future of the fisheries, the stocks, what will be left. That's my prime example. The resource comes first. The user groups come second. You got to do whatever it takes to maintain a healthy stock. It's hard because, like I fish down there off of Wilmington. They don't allow trawl boats to drag south of the shoals, so there's an area where the trawl boats work up here, and they find fish. And the gillnet fishermen, they work well together. But at the same time, you hear stories of people who were fishing off of Morehead, which is south of that line that the draggers can be working, and they talk about catching two-pound croakers. So we've shut down this whole area to not allow anybody to work, to go in and harvest out of a resource. So you've put all your stress on the resource in one area.

SS: Oh, it concentrated the effort?

JG: Concentrated effort in one area, where off of Wilmington and Morehead, we could have a very viable resource to access that would possibly be that four-inch croaker. If we could access those now, with the prices we're getting, it could be an amazing fishery, and we would take the stress off of those fish that are smaller and that might be struggling right now, and give those fish time to reboot, and have a couple years to rebuild that stock. You know? I'm not sure if they even do any kind of sampling south to just check on stocks down there. Because we have croakers that come in from the ocean in the springtime and throughout the summer that are big fish that I'd call three-and-a-half, three-and-three-quarter stuff that's obsolete up here, now. So there is a viable fishery somewhere off the southern part of North Carolina's coast, but we're just not allowed to access it. [unintelligible] keep it where we can access it.

[50:46]

SS: You've obviously given a lot of thought to this stuff. Do you go to meetings, or are you involved in science?

JG: I sit on the North Carolina finfish advisory panel. As I said like, the mentality I have, I'm certainly more about the resource being first, but if I was to go and speak up at a meeting, it's hard to say things without being shunned out of town. Like I said, if the speech I just gave you about the croakers, if I were to go sit in front of a meeting in front of the whole drop net fleet, and stand up, I'd be scorned. I'd be shunned right out. But it is a voice that needs to be heard. And it's hard to do that as a young person who hasn't seen those cycles.

SS: It's hard to speak up?

JG: It's hard to have a voice like that. You know, Jimmy Ruhle, I heard him at a meeting one time. He said, "Work with science. Don't be afraid to challenge science. But if you challenge science and don't get the results you want, you got to understand that that was a choice you made to challenge that science." Like, "I'm going to prove the scientist wrong." If you go out there and you give everything you got, and you don't come up with the results that you thought you were going to get, you got to take it upon yourself to be willing to accept that those are the results. You got to take that upon yourself. It's a different time and era now. I think we're seeing a clash with different fisheries, different gear types, different mentalities. It's a hard transition, and a lot of people, you know, the younger people who want to stand behind what their families always said, and the mentality that they've always had. But it also takes an open mind to be able to participate in the fisheries and be able to see a future for the fisheries. Do I think that I'll have children who'll be able to participate in a shark fishery in twenty years, thirty years? I would love to. I am basing my whole livelihood and a future of building a fish house based primarily on the shark fishery. But with social media and propaganda, will there be a fishery in fifteen years? You know, the route that they continue to take and the factors that trickle down to what people think about seafood, what they hear, what they read about, we just need a little bit of clarity. But do I think there will be a fishery in fifteen years? Probably not. When in fact, it is probably one of the most viable fisheries that we have. Like I was saying, in our area, to keep us going year round. I can shark fish year-round. It's something I can do year-round. You can't year-round fish for Spanish mackerel here. You can't do it for croakers. You can't do it for a lot of fish. But shark fishery, you can do it year-round in North Carolina.

SS: So that's your bread and butter.

JG: Very viable. Our area, very viable. Like I was saying, it takes an open mind. Like the other day, I was targeting sharpnoses, caught a couple smooth dogs. I know that this [time of] year, they're full of pups. Smooth dogs are big sow females full of pups. So instead of killing that shark, it takes a little bit to say, "Oh, there's seven dollars. But the six pups that she's carrying, down the road, might see them or maybe somebody else will make money on them." It takes a little bit of open mind and understanding to keep everything going forward in a healthy manner for the future of the fishery.

[55:11]

SS: I just heard you say that you have aspirations of building up in the shark fishery, having your own fish house, getting into a more vertically integrated business model. But I also heard you say you didn't know if there would be a shark fishery in fifteen years. So that's a lot to sort of balance, in terms of your own thoughts and dreams and plans for the future. How does that feel?

JG: You know, you try to balance these things out, and what it's worth. What it costs to buy into a facility in my area, I'm looking at a quarter to a half a million dollars, to build a facility. And that's just your base, to have the facility and pack your seafood. Then you've got to have the time invested in finding your markets. You've got to find help. If I can't go fishing and catch these fish because I've got to sell them, who am I going to get to run my boats? To keep the operation going? How many people are willing to go participate in a fishery and to invest their all into something that they don't know that might last or not. You can find help—well, I'll get back to that. For me, I'm still going at it hard bore. I do want to make a future out of the shark fishery. Because I think, my personal opinion is that it's going to come to a point where we've protected certain species enough that eventually science will show itself that there is an abundance, or that there is enough to let people go to work. Our biggest factor is social media propaganda. The negativity, the mentality of the people who think shark is a bad product, or it's being harvested in a bad manner. Where the United States is one of the cleanest fisheries for shark there is. We're not importing any shark that's being finned. Like I said, you can't have meats in the finning process. People cutting fins off them and throwing them overboard, it just doesn't make sense. The United States handles our shark fishery in the cleanest and the best manner. The heaviest fines imposed for finning violations. There's a lot of media that says there's over two hundred violations of finning acts, when in fact we haven't had but seven. I believe it's seven. Because I do sell shark fins. I'm not an exporter, but I do sell my fins and they go overseas and I do collect income from fins. Fins are also a portion of my income. So it's not just like a Spanish mackerel or any other finfish, you're selling one product and it's going. You also have another product. You got to make sure that both parts are being sold, because for us, to throw the fins away, that's income that I could be having but you can't because someone thinks that's wrong. It's a byproduct. It's just like a spiny dogfish. They use the belly flaps when they're cutting. They sell the meats. They sell the belly flaps, the head, the guts. Every part of the dogfish is used. I try to explain that to people. Like myself, I'm selling the meats, the fins, and I'll save the heads and cut the jaws out and sell the jaws for teeth. I've got a couple of people who are buying them for jewelry. So there's not a lot of waste involved in it. Trying to keep that going. I'm going with the mentality that I'll be able to shark fish in fifteen or twenty years, but in my mind I'm conscious that there's a possibility that I can't.

SS: Right. So you have backup plans just in case?

JG: You can't just say, "Oh yeah, this is great. I'm living the dream. It's going to take off and everything will be fine." You got to be conscious enough to know fisheries change. Rules come in place overnight. There's all these factors that may keep you from reaching that end goal. So you got to have a plan to go around that, to bypass that and keep going. I see a big part now in big industries, like big fish houses—some in our area—who have a fleet of boats. It's another thing I'd probably be shunned about, but a company's main objective is to make money. It's about the dollar. But a small fisherman like myself, money's a big part of it, but also to have a future of doing something to pass on to somebody else. A company wants to make that money right now. They got to make money right now. Their family, we're living now, the company's got to make money now. They are concerned about keeping something going, but their main objective is that dollar now. They put people behind the wheels of those boats, the helm, who—it's the money. The workforce in the commercial fishing industry now, I remember my dad telling me, when captains would show up to go on boats, they would have a suit, they would have a jacket. They took pride in what they did. Now, it's

like, "Who can we find to run this boat? Who can we find to go to work with me?" Commercial fishing people used to take a lot of pride in what they did. Now, it's just like, "You're replaceable. We'll fill your void."

[61:56]

SS: Is that across the board, or is that certain types of business models?

JG: In a sense, I think it is across the board. I think when you look at companies, you know, when you look at large fish houses with large scale of fleet, you know, "Can he go out there and can he get on the scallops? Can he get on the shrimp? Can somebody take him by the hand and show him where to go so he can make my business money?" He ain't worried about, "Is he conscious of a future fishery? Does he care about the stock, the future of the stock? What is his mentality on the fishery?" It's, "Who can run that boat? Who can put that thing in gear and who can go make that thing money?" I see that happening, and that hurts, because you have to have a future fishery. That's the number one. That should be the number one focus of everybody. Money is a large part of it, but if we don't have fish in ten or fifteen years, then what are we going to do? We're going to have nothing to do.

[63:14]

SS: Do you see more and more of the more concentrated businesses around here, and fewer independent owner-operator businesses?

JG: We do have some large-scales fleets, but it's nothing like up north with large companies. More so down here, it's more small-scale, family-oriented day boats or small trips. It's not a lot of big processing things. It's more so people who are tied directly to the product. It's people who are going and catching their stuff and peddling it. They're contributing back to that local market and becoming more in the trendy way of seafood now, where it's kind of going to Raleigh and "day boat fresh" kind of stuff, instead of volume. Our area here is more so independent. Where I'd say up north and some places, south, are more company-based, you know, kind of take over and will run fisheries.

[64:36]

SS: Who do you have for crew?

JG: I fish by myself the majority of the time. Sometimes throughout the year in heavy runs, like spots and sea mullets, mackerels, I'll take somebody else on. But the majority of the time, I'm shark fishing by myself. I'll take somebody, because the threshers will overlap our sea mullet fishing. That's another thing about in North Carolina where we're diverse, we can fish small mesh for sea mullets, and right there a hundred yards from small mesh, we can have large mesh and catch our sharks as well. Those water temperatures overlap, those fisheries. I'll have one other person working with me. But the majority of the time, it's just by myself.

SS: For the haul seining, if you've got two trucks, it must be at least two people.

JG: The haul seining's a crew. The haul seining's a crew. This is the tricky part, because like I was talking about, trying to find a young generation who wants to go to work. They don't see a lot of hope in it because they hear stories of people fighting it. "We're never going to win! We're never going to win! The CCA is going to take everything we got." A lot of people don't want to participate in the fisheries. They don't see a future in it, so they don't want to invest into it. Haul seining fishery, it takes three. It takes two people managing trucks and one—it takes at least three. I know they done it with two, but that's when men were men. When they used to do it, they used to pull nets by hand. That used to be twenty or thirty people. A crew of twenty to thirty people would go out and work the beach. Now, we've dwindled it down to where if I can find three people, I can go to work. But finding those three people is a struggle.

[66:40]

SS: Is that because it's a short-term thing?

JG: It's just the way that the fishery has faded out. Also, the young fishermen here, with fish prices going as high as they are, they see that you can go out a thousand yards here in the sound, here in the inland waters, and go catch three to four hundred pounds of fish each day, and you do that by yourself. I understand that. I worked with my dad. I've worked with other people. It's got to the point where if you can go make three or four hundred dollars a day by yourself, doing your own thing, being your own boss, independent, you're going to go do that. I understand it. It's a lot of people are doing that. They're seeing where there's money to be made in that day boat, local, day fresh stuff. They're getting so much money for that, that it's drawing the help away from the long liners, the draggers, even like myself. Anyone who needs a crew is struggling. Help is hard to find.

SS: What are the people who would be fishermen—you know, like the children of fishermen who grew up and got out of the family business, what are they doing instead, around here? Or have they left the area?

JG: The Outer Banks area here, we live on an island—Manteo and Wanchese. There's got to be seventy percent of people who live on our island are involved in the seafood industry in one way or another, the marine industry. Whether they're building boats, whether they're working at a seafood facility, whether they're working at a restaurant, whether they're actually on a boat. A large percent of our community is involved in the seafood industry. I went to a school, we had a graduating class of just shy of a hundred. A lot of us stayed here fishing, because that's what we enjoy doing and that's what we grew up doing and that's what we've known. If you don't come back to the seafood industry here, you leave. Whether you sell real estate, whether you go to law school. Either you come back to the island and you work, or you leave and you don't come back. I don't know anybody who went to school, to college for four years and came back and went fishing. Who went to school, spent the money and time, and came back and made a livelihood out of fishing. You won't see that. You see maybe they came back to pay some debt off, and come home and figure out what they were going to do, where they were going to move, what they were going to be. You know, they might fish for a year or two. But then they're gone. You don't see a lot of people returning back into it.

[70:06]

SS: And I take it you don't see people from outside of the area move here and start fishing, either?

JG: No, you don't see a lot of people move into our area to fish. The people that we do have move in and look for jobs in the seafood industry are those who participate in fisheries elsewhere—just whether they're looking to do something new, or their job didn't work out where they were fishing before, or their family moved to this area, maybe a spouse got a job offer in the area and they moved here and they're just picking up what they used to do, what they love doing. Where I go to Alaska every summer, I've always had an open invitation on somebody's long liner. I'll get you a job with somebody crabbing. You know, all these different options. I've probably had about a half a dozen people come out, to introduce them. Because Alaska, a lot of people go up there to fish their two months out of the year, then they'll go back to being a broker or [whatever]. They don't fish the rest of the year, like we do over here. I'll tell them all the time, "Come over. I'll give you a place to stay, if you ever want to come check it out or make a trip. I'll come grab you from the airport and find you a job." I've done that for about a half a dozen people who've come over. They'll spend a week, two weeks, maybe three or four weeks one time. One boy, he made a trip on a long line boat and that's what he's been doing ever since.

SS: He stayed here?

JG: He stayed here.

[71:50]

SS: How did you start going up to Alaska?

JG: I started going up to Alaska when I was eighteen. A fellow from here in North Carolina actually owned a boat up there. I got tied in with a good crowd up there in Bristol Bay, in Dillingham. My work ethic showed that I knew what I was doing. He started me off. I called him and said, "Man, I want a job to go to Bristol Bay. I really want to go see that salmon fishing. Can you help me find some help?" He was like, "Well, I'll try. I'll try." I would call him about every week to see if he'd known anybody yet. He called me back one day and he was like, "Well, go ahead and pack your bags. You'll be leaving out of here like June tenth." I was like, "Awesome." I actually met one of the other captains from up there, Stu McTaggart, had flown over to come hang out with him for a week and we were doing the haul seine fishery on the beach. So when I got up there, Stu already knew who I was and he had already told some of the other captains up there, "This boy, he fishes the rest of the year." It kind of got known that I do fish. I worked with him for a couple years, two years. He wanted me to run the boat. The fishing is pretty simple when you compare it to something here, where we've got so much diversity. You get three hundred yards of net. You're fishing in a square. Fish come through that square. Just keep that net wet. You're going to catch. Now granted, a lot of people want to fish the south boundary line where a lot of fish are coming through. But I respect and honor and idolize the people who are fishing the sloughs and fishing the different areas up there and knew and paid attention to the different migration of those fish and how they act. You know, the people who fish the flats and the people who fish the different areas. They'd step back away from the line—the majority of the two-month people did. They'd step back and they'd do really good in other areas because they knew what they

were doing. So I told Jim, I said, "I don't know, I haven't learned enough yet." Bristol Bay's made up of five different river systems, and I just don't know anything about any of the other river systems. He's like, "Well, I'll get you on with somebody else." At the end of the season when I finished up with him, I jumped on with somebody else and learned another river system. I just kind of jumped around for a couple more years and tried to learn as much as I can about the fisheries up there, the different areas, before just taking somebody's boat and going. I wanted to have an education about the different river systems and options that were available, instead of, like the majority just goes to the boundary line and hammers away and just hammers and hammers. Some of them do really good. But right there, you're just a monkey. You're doing the same thing as everybody else. I really enjoyed that—learning the different areas and seeing what the place had to offer instead of just joining the herd. You can do really well if you take time and learn the area. That pertains to any fishery, any area. Don't just think that you've got it all figured out. Be accepting and learn. Everything is changing in fisheries and you got to be accepting to change. You can't admit that you know it all.

[75:49]

SS: If you were to compare Alaska to here—demographically, in terms of young people in the fishery, their attitudes, their backgrounds—what differences do you see?

JG: Bristol Bay is a small window fishery. It's hard to compare Alaska's fisheries to East Coast fisheries, in the sense that Alaska didn't want any help in managing their fishery. Alaska said, "These are our fish. They come back to the same rivers to spawn. We'll manage our own fish. You all take the rest of the United States. We'll deal with our fish and the management we see fit. We can manage our own fish." And they do really well. But the salmon fishery is one unlike any other. I guess they got the alewives up north, the herrings that they can track which river they come to up north. But salmon return to the same river that they were spawned in. Sharks don't come, there's no way of tracking that sharks come back to the same area on a certain run, a certain cycle. We don't know if they come back to a certain exact place. You can't pinpoint an area. Alaska, their salmon run has an escapement. So they say, "We have an escapement that we need a million fish to go up this river. Now, they'll start out the season with short window opens, three-hour openers, and as they get closer to their escapement goal, they'll allow you to fish longer and start fishing more flood tide. It's hard to compare that fishery here, but in the sense of the fishermen, the age group, you do see a lot younger, a lot younger fishermen that are coming into the fishery. But they do want to make sure that the resource is a top priority. No Pebble Mine up there. There's a lot of people who lobby to keep the mine [away], because that will disturb the water quality and foul the runs and the salmon. There's a lot of people, the younger crowd, they're not conservationists but they do put the resource number one. That's a good thing to see. Our area here, I wish that there was more young people getting into it with the mindset of, "Let's keep the fishery alive. Let's do what it takes to make sure that the resource is viable and in good shape." But yeah, Alaska does have a lot of younger people in the fisheries up there. That is good to see. You see people from all over the world up there. There's always an abundance of younger generation who want to keep it alive and want to keep it going.

SS: What do you think it would take around here to get more young people into it? Young people with that kind of mentality?

JG: Around here, to have a younger generation more involved in the fisheries, it's just tricky because the majority of the people have seen and heard the stories of what's been taken and how far their family before them has fallen to keep what they have. So they're already kind of against the grain when it comes to fisheries. "Don't let them take anything else. They've already taken enough." It's hard to try to talk those people into being understanding of mentalities like mine, where, "Let's focus on the stock. Let's make sure that's number one." What we need to do to make sure that there will be a good, viable fishery in the future, and put it all first. I don't know, I honestly don't know what we could do to turn it around to where you would have a younger generation back in the fishery, other than just a ray of hope. You always hear a story, "They cut our quota in half. They closed this fishery. They took this area." When do you ever hear of areas being opened? When do you ever hear of quotas being increased? You hear more stories about what's been taken away than about what's been given to us. I understand that it's hard to give more away when you're trying to manage what's already being dwindled down, but like I was saying, there's an area south of where the draggers—if there was a ray of hope where they would do some sampling or some things to shine a ray of hope, then there would be future fisheries. Because right now, for our area, it just seems gloom and doom. That's what the majority of the people assume it to be. Everybody just accepts that and they're going to take what they can until it's the end of it, and I guess find something else to do when that happens. But there are some research programs and things of the nature like that, that do remind us that hopefully, one day, we will have some fisheries open back up. And I do participate in the sandbar research fishery. I work as a crew on a boat active in that fishery and participated. I just missed the deadline to apply into it.

SS: What is that research program?

JG: Sandbar research fishery is a study done—it's broke up from Florida, North Carolina—no I'm sorry, I think there was somebody doing it in Delaware this year, but they ran into a problem. They couldn't sell them. They couldn't sell the fins because the fins are banned.

SS: These are commercial boats that are collecting data?

JG: Commercial boats that are collecting data that's all going into, I guess, a database on reproduction cycles. They do vert samples, vertebrae samples, fin clippings. It's all going in. From what I've seen, we've had some really good numbers with science. That's what keeps my mentality like, "We will have the fishery in fifteen years. We will have an active fishery." We'll do three hundred hooks for three hours. You set it and let's say three hours and you bring it back up, you fish the long line back up. We've had a two hundred and sixty-six head of sandbars.

SS: Sounds pretty good.

JG: Now granted, that was one of the better ones. We've also had sets where we do the same thing. We'll set three hundred hooks and we'll catch thirty or forty. Everybody remembers the good days and talks about the good days, but they don't talk about the bad days. There is some research fisheries and there's programs that help to keep us involved with fisheries, with science, to keep things going. Our local Sea Grant did a thing called Fish Camp.

SS: Yeah, I wanted to ask you about that.

JG: They got a group of young commercial fishermen, people who are involved in the seafood industry, whether they were working retail or wholesale or transporting fish. They got a roomful of younger generation, all under the age of 35, and they got us all in the room, and they were like, "Now look, if you want to talk about black sea bass, here's a contact." They gave us a list of all these names, people who specifically study those fish and they cover that fishery, that species. They got us in contact with who we could talk to there. "If you want to talk to somebody on a finfish committee or on a shellfish committee, here's who you talk to here. If you want to talk to somebody about buying a bigger boat and who to finance it, your option's there." They had financial advisors who came to that meeting. They're like, "Here's a business card. Talk to these people. If you've got questions about a seafood industry or who you could sell to, here's people who buy fish that you might can link up with, or you can work together on something that will work out for both of you all." It was kind of like a big conference. It just brought together all these options. Like myself, I can't go to New York. I *feel* as if I can't go to New York and start selling fish right out the gate. I haven't done it long enough. I don't know who to talk to. But with programs like the Sea Grant's Fish Camp, it allowed me to, like, "There is people who I can talk to. There is ways that I can move my fish."

[86:34]

SS: So is that just a one-day thing or is it a series of events?

JG: Last year was the first year of it. They broke it up in sections. They did three camps. It was all regional. So they did a northern, a middle, and a southern. They did three two-day camps. Jimmy Ruhle came to the one in the Outer Banks. I attended the one in the Outer Banks and the one in Wilmington, the southern end, to see the mentalities of up here compared to Wilmington, because I fish in both places. They had people at those meetings that I didn't even know. They were claimed commercial fishermen, that I've been fishing down there for eight or nine years, and I didn't even know who they were. Where I come from in the Outer Banks, where we work together so well, we've always worked together. We always help each other out. You go down there, and different mentalities. Up here, everybody tries to help everybody out. Down there, it's all one for me. It was all, "How can I better myself? What can I do to just benefit myself?" That's why I wanted to go to both meetings, to see those differences, the mindsets. Who you can talk to, what group you can talk to that would be more accepting and where some people just think they know it all and they got it all figured out and that's the way it is, or you know, things will never change, that's how it's going to be. But, things like Sea Grant's Fish Camps help out a lot. And research programs. That's where I think a lot of people turn their back on science because science says, "Go to this specific area. Drag this specific gear for this specific time." Somebody who's been doing it for forty or fifty years knows, "That ain't where they are. That's not where they're at this time of year." I think that's why fishermen have a hard time with science. If you would involve fishermen with science more, you would have more compliance out of the fishermen. Like Jimmy Ruhle. Jimmy Ruhle, he's like, "Well, I'll take your scientists. I'll carry the observers. I'll show them. Whatever they want to see. Let's try some different gear types. Let's do this. Let's do that. Do some modifications." He worked together with scientists, and they've achieved a lot. Now he's got confidence in science. He can understand it better than before. If you were to involve more fishermen into sampling

and research, where we're all on board together—instead of just throwing stuff out of fisheries meetings, where we didn't see, "Where was this collected? Who was this collected from? How are you coming up with this?" If everybody worked together, you would see a lot more compliance out of fishermen. When it comes to science and research and things of that nature. Like sandbar research fishery, they could go take their own boat and go do it and go catch the sandbars. But they've turned to the fishermen and asked for help. So now I'm more so on board with knowing catch per unit effort. I'm more in the know in terms of fisheries and science. Just because I've been involved in that, I'm starting to learn more the process of collecting data—where it goes from the boat, who takes it here, what they do there. You hear the different things that they've collected over the years and things that they've observed, and it's stuff that you kind of take and use that and move forward in terms of protecting the future of a fishery. But you've got to have the compliance of fishermen to be accepting of the science, and that's a hard thing, especially with the bycatch. That's another thing, how science and those programs help us. They have a bycatch reduction. They have teams that try to do that. They work with fishermen, especially in a trawl fishery. They work together one on one with the fishermen to try to reduce bycatch. I think that's awesome. More involvement is going to make both sides meet that goal. You work together to achieve that goal. I recently saw something. It was a YouTube video about Australia. "Neville the Net Maker" is the title of the YouTube video. It was a net maker. He built nets his whole life. He's been involved in fisheries his whole life. At one point in the video, he said, "I am fortunate enough to work with a group of people that respects the resource." To me, that speaks volumes on so many levels and so loud, that we're so far behind. He also said, "We understand if a fish is not worth taking, we don't take it. Whether it's too small or it's spawning at the time. We don't kill those fish if they're spawning at the time." They're very conscious to a futuristic view of the fishery. Where here, it's just like, "Take what we got. Take what we go. We're going to get what we can." Australia is just so far ahead. Well, I say Australia—his mentality and the group he was working with. He said, "I'm fortunate enough to work with a group." That shows that they too over there have struggled like we have, where you're not having the compliance and the coexistence of fishermen and science. But they've worked together and they've finally come together on it. For me, him saying that, you can tell that they've had a long route too, but now they're working together towards that goal. That's something that we need here. Scientists and fishermen need to be able to work together. A lot of people don't like the observers. It's an inconvenience. Small boats, especially. For us on small boats, it's hard. People got to have safety equipment. They got to have a Coast Guard safety inspection sticker and all that. But there's a lot of information that I wouldn't obtain about, say, the croaker fishery, if I didn't carry an observer. I'm not going to sit there and measure a basket of fish.

SS: You take observers?

[94:25]

JG: I do take observers. I have no problem taking observers. Because like I said, at any given time, I can text one of those observers when something's coming up, and, "Hey!" —if we're croaker fishing— "What's your average length of fish that are coming out of this size net? What's your average length of fish that are coming out of *this* size net?" You work together, so you're accessing the same science that the scientists are, who are, in the mentality, "using it against us." You know? I don't think a lot of people understand this: you can also access that data. You can have it printed off. You can have your own copies of what the observer

recorded on your trips. If you want to help the fishery out, then pay attention. Get that. Be understanding of it. You got to understand how things are being interpreted and how things are being used, so you grasp the whole idea of it. There's programs that are in place that do help us work together. I see the future of the fishery involving fishermen in science—whether it be in sampling or gear modifications. That's how you're going to have your smoothest, most compliant path to a healthier resource.

SS: And, it sounds like, to reestablishing that ray of hope that can help reestablish young people's faith in fishing as a career.

JG: If everybody works together, it's a ray of hope that, hopefully one day, we can work together and we have confidence in each other.

[96:34]

SS: Is there anything else we haven't covered that you think is important to talk about?

JG: I feel like that's about covered it. We need help defining the public's view on some certain fisheries. A lot of people see something on TV or they read about it in an article. One of our local photographers, he told me, every time he posts a picture, he—Daniel Pullen, he does a project where he goes up and down the coast filming a day in the life of a commercial fisherman. He's a well-known photographer. A lot of surf and coastal photography. He's got a large following of people. In today's world, it's a lot more about social media and what people can read and see, other than what they can learn firsthand. Social media is a tool that can help, and it's one that can hurt. He was telling me—because he's covered our haul seine beach fishery and he's covered other fisheries—he said, "Man, every time that I post a picture of a shark, dead," he said, "I'll lose a good portion of followers and potential business." Just a picture of a dead shark, because they think that they're overfished. You know, "Sharks, they just let the fishermen have at it and there's no regulation at it." And he's, "When I post pictures of gillnet, people get flustered over gillnet, because they read something, something happened on the West Coast, or something got tangled up, or those nets were left for days." What you hear about, that's what you hear about. Those are the things that you read about.

SS: The negatives.

JG: "Were you there? Did you see it?" "I was here. This is what I'm documenting. This is a progression of the day. How it went." He does sequences of a day in the life, where you see the fish getting picked out of the net, thrown on ice, and being offloaded that day or however day or next day. But he said, always, social media is a big factor that's making up the minds of the people on what seafood to purchase or how it's harvested. Farming, aquaculture is becoming a big thing here for oysters. For us, I don't know a whole lot about the aquaculture of oysters. But I see the sustainability. They're producing small oysters. They're putting them in cages. They're putting them in the water column. They're growing them to the harvest size. They're getting good money for them. They're getting good money for them, but they also have a lot of time invested. Aquaculture is not something I'm very interested in. I don't have the money set aside for it. A lot of people are in the same boat I am. But you also hear a lot of people talk about the negativity of aquaculture. A main example is the salmon farms. You hear disease getting into the salmon farms, those fish

going into the wild and mixing into the wild salmon and bringing those diseases and infecting the wild fish. Aquaculture, just like everything else, has got its defects. It could be a little bit cleaner, a little bit safer. Aquaculture is a great temporary solution to build a stock back or to take the pressure off a wild stock, temporarily, but it's not the permanent solution. It's not going to be the source for everything. You're not going to be able to farm-raise spots and croakers to the demand. You're not going to be able to farm-raise all of these species. It is a good temporary solution, but it does also have its negative effects. You know, I think fisheries management is kind of more promoting aquaculture, wanting us to make that transition into aquaculture. "Oh, look how great this is. Look how great these people are doing. Look how awesome this is." But it's not all that awesome. We see what's going on with that, but we also know that it's not all that good. We understand it, from a fisheries point of view. It's easier to maintain something when you can say, "Look, he bought two million spat of oysters, he's going to lose a third of that." You know what I mean? "At the end of the year, how many spat he sold? How many oysters he sold from how many spat?" Everything's recorded about the way. It's something that's contained, just like salmon being in a pond, and farmed. They know exactly how many fish are there. What is it, triploids, diploids, all these different oysters, and the oysters that they're using in the aquaculture are not reproducing, so they're not contributing. They're filtering water and they're eating algae. They're eating nutrients out of the water that wild oysters also need, but they're not contributing anything back into the ecosystem. That's another thing about aquaculture. That's the dark side of it. Aquaculture ain't the answer for everything. I think that's about everything on fisheries I can think of right now.

[SS]: Ok. Well, wonderful. Thanks so much. I'll turn this off.

[end of interview]

[103:35]