

Interview with Alex Brown, commercial fisherman

Occupation: Commercial fisherman

Port Community: Point Judith, Rhode Island

Interviewer: Sarah Schumann

Date: December 31, 2018

Location: Point Judith, Rhode Island

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

Transcriber: Sarah Schumann

[00:00]

[beginning of interview]

Sarah Schumann [SS]: I might have to check the recorder every now and then, just to make sure it's still on. To start, I'm just going to state my name, Sarah Schumann. Today is December 31, 2018 and we're in Point Judith, Rhode Island, and I'm sitting here with Alex Brown.

Alex Brown [AB]: Yup.

SS: Who is a commercial fisherman?

AB: Yup.

SS: Full-time or part-time?

AB: Full-time.

SS: Full-time commercial fisherman. Alex, what's your homeport?

AB: Point Judith.

SS: Point Judith, Rhode Island. What is the vessel that you're on?

AB: Fishing vessel Linda Marie.

SS: What's your age?

AB: Twenty-two.

SS: Twenty-two years old. And just briefly, your educational background?

AB: I graduated from North Kingstown High School in 2014.

SS: Have you done anything other than fishing?

AB: No. I've fished my whole life.

SS: Your whole life. When did you start?

AB: Since I was about eleven years old, I started fishing. I worked on a lobster boat out of Wickford. I fished there for a few years. I moved down to Point Judith when I was sixteen years old. I fished on another lobster boat called the Erica Knight, with Mark Sweitzer. I was with him for five years. Then I went lobstering offshore on the fishing vessel Lady Clare. Now I switched over to dragging, and I work on the Linda Marie.

SS: You've been fishing continuously since graduating high school?

AB: Yup. Yup. Full-time. When I was in high school, I used to have a student shellfish license, so I would go after school every day and dig clams when I was in high school, from like tenth grade until senior year. I was lobstering in the summer before my senior year. I fished with Mark. That was my first summer with him. Then after I graduated, I fished with him for five years.

[01:41]

SS: Now, how did you first get into fishing? What drew you to it?

AB: My uncles fished for a long time. They used to lobster and drag. They did it for a long time. The guy my uncle was fishing with out of Wickford, he asked me if I wanted to go one day. I was eleven years old. I was like "Sure, I'll go!" Because I've been on boats my whole life, but I had never been commercial fishing until then. I tried it, and I just fell in love with it. I've been doing it ever since.

SS: So you had a few uncles—

AB: Yeah. I knew that I wanted to fish the day that I went, I knew that I wanted to do that.

SS: Your parents don't fish?

AB: No. No. They know a lot of fisherman and a lot of family friends of fishermen, but they don't fish.

SS: Do you have any siblings?

AB: I have a sister. She goes to college for drug counseling. She doesn't fish or anything.

SS: Ok, so you were in Wickford and then you chose to move down here and start fishing in Point Judith?

AB: Yeah, down in the Point. I got an opportunity to fish with Mark, so I did that because he needed somebody for the summer. He told me that he didn't want to hire a high school kid, but he liked my work ethic and all that I knew about it, so he kept me on the boat.

SS: Did you find that you had to prove yourself to him a bit?

AB: Yeah, I did. I had a lot of trial and error. I learned a lot of stuff. I made a lot of mistakes. It took me quite a while to get pretty good at it, but I'm a pretty good lobsterman. I switched over to dragging. I'm still kind of getting the hang of it. I'm still working on mending nets and stuff, but I can haul and set pretty good. I'm pretty good at picking deck. I've still got a lot of learning curves, but overall, I'm pretty good. I went gillnetting too, a few winters, so I've been in a few fisheries.

[03:36]

SS: How do the different fisheries compare? What are the pros and cons of each one?

AB: I like dragging a lot better. I think it's a lot easier. I went monking and skate fishing when we went gillnetting, and that was just a lot of work. I feel like dragging's just a lot easier and a lot more basic. You make quite a bit more money than the other fisheries—especially the squid fishery.

SS: As a young fisherman looking ahead, you have quite a long career ahead of you if you choose to stick in this industry. Do you see different trajectories for those different fisheries? Is dragging the best one to be in, do you think?

AB: I'd say probably the best fishery is probably the squid fishery. We do groundfish. We actually switched over not that long ago. We have the electronic monitoring, and we bring observers, and there's a lot of factors in groundfishing versus squid fishing. I mean, the way groundfishing's going, all the quotas and stuff, I'm not really sure how that's going to play out in the future. But squid fishing, it's a pretty consistent fishery. It's very well managed, from what I've seen. So I think there's a good future with the squid fishing industry, and that's what the port's known for. Hopefully when I'm older, it'll still be around and my kids can fish hopefully, and maybe theirs—but we'll see how things play out. You never know. Everyone's so negative about it. Everyone tells me that the way fishing's going, that I probably won't be able to do it. But I love what I do, so I'm going to hold onto this way of life as long as I can, because there are not a whole lot of people left who want to.

SS: Now when you say people are telling you that you won't be able to do it for your whole life, who are those people? Is it other fishermen?

AB: Older fishermen.

SS: That's what they believe?

AB: From the things that they've seen, that's what they believe. But you never know. I mean, everything's come back. I've had a lot of guys tell me stories about how when there were no regulations, how poor fishing was then. Like, my captain Jon told me that when he

was younger, when he was around my age, there were really no fish to catch, and the regulations helped. I'm not sure about over-regulations, if that's going to kill the industry or not. That's what a lot of people talk about. So we'll see.

SS: That must give you some pause.

AB: Yeah, I mean it does. I've never done anything else. I wouldn't want to do anything else. I love what I do. It's just kind of a little sad to think that one day I'd have to go do something else.

SS: You must really love it, even though you're hearing these negative things.

AB: I love it. When I wake up every day, I love it.

SS: What is it that draws you so much to this industry and this way of life?

AB: It's just freedom. You get to do so many other things that most other professions can never do. Like I get to wake up, I get to be on a boat. I get to be away from people. I get to see a beautiful view every morning. Sometimes not so nice, but you got to take the good with the bad. I just love everything about it. There's not one thing I hate about fishing.

SS: Nothing?

AB: Not one thing I hate about it.

SS: Wow. Have there been any times during your fishing career when you thought about doing something else?

AB: No.

SS: Not at all?

AB: No, none whatsoever. I couldn't picture myself doing something else. If I worked at an office, I'd probably be fired the first day. I can't see myself doing anything else.

[07:21]

SS: You said something about how the older fishermen who've been doing it for a long time have a negative viewpoint about it. How about some of the other younger fishermen in the fleet?

AB: There are not too many in Point Judith. I mean, I'm friends with the ones that there are. They kind of feel the same way. I mean, I'm kind of optimistic about it. I kind of feel like there is a future for it, and a lot of the younger fishermen I know kind of feel the same way. But, like I said, you never know, with the way things have been going. Hopefully it all turns out well. But a lot of younger guys, they kind of have the same attitude as me. Well, most of them. I feel like some of them just do it because it's a job, but to me, it's more of like a lifestyle, more than anything. It's not just a regular job. You work long hours. Like, I'm

committed to the boat. I'm committed to everything that we have to do. So it's more than just a job for me.

[8:15]

SS: Do you feel that the boat you're on now is one you plan to be on for a long time?

AB: I plan on staying on it. His old deckhand was on the boat for almost twenty years. He's a nice guy to fish with. It's a good site. So I plan on staying on there. It's a good boat to be on.

SS: Yeah. You do squid and some groundfish on the boat that you're currently on right now?

AB: Yeah. Well, we're not squid fishing right now. We're doing a lot of bait skates right now, and the wings. We catch a few cod, some haddock. We do the fluke. We do the fluke aggregate in the wintertime. Last year it was every two weeks was fifteen hundred pounds. That kind of got us through the winter. It was a slow year groundfishing, because the water was so cold. There weren't that many bait skates around. There weren't that many flats around. Hopefully, we're seeing a little bit more, but my captain went on vacation so I haven't been out in a week and a half or two weeks. I heard the fishing's been a little bit slow—slower than the last time I went out. I don't know what the trajectory is for this year, but we'll see. Maybe it will be better.

SS: So are you guys always doing day trips?

AB: When we go fluking offshore, it's two or three days, so it's not bad. I've been out for like eight or nine days. So it's not bad at all.

[09:49]

SS: You mentioned that Jon is really great to work with. What makes you think so highly of him?

AB: He's a good fisherman. He's been doing it for forty-something years. He's been doing it since, I think he said, fifteen years old. He helps me on the deck. He'll come out and work with me. He doesn't just sit inside and watch me do everything. He's taught me a lot of stuff. He's really good at mending nets. He doesn't yell. He's not a screamer. He has a really good attitude and he's really family-oriented. If I need to do something with my daughter and I tell him I need a day off, usually we have a transit guy who goes with us. He was going third person with us this summer. He's pretty good about that stuff. He's pretty family-oriented, unlike a lot of guys, who are, "Go-go-go! You got to go." He's not like that. He's very calm. He's very relaxed. He takes the time to explain stuff to you and teach you stuff. I appreciate that about him a lot.

SS: Was it like that on the other boats you worked on as well?

AB: No. No. I've been on boats where you just get called an idiot and screamed at and all this stuff, when you really don't know what you're doing. But most of the guys I've fished with are really good guys. I've only fished with a couple guys that were kind of iffy. But all in

all, all the fishermen I've worked with are all good guys. They're all really good at what they do and they all love what they do, so you kind of want to be with somebody like that.

SS: In terms of learning the skills that you've acquired in your time as a fisherman, did most of that come from the captains or did you have to figure out a lot of stuff or did your uncles help teach you that kind of thing?

AB: Well, I kind of learned a lot of it like people showed me how to do stuff, and they showed me a few times, and I kind of practiced. So when I learned how to splice rope, my old captain Mark taught me how to do it and then I just practiced a lot, because we did it all the time. We spliced rope all the time. I kind of learned from just doing it all the time, kind of like practice makes perfect, so I kind of got better at it. Mending nets, I need some more practice on it. Like we rimracked the net. It's kind of, like, I have a hard time finding where to start, you know? Once he shows me where to start, I'm ok at it. But I'm not the greatest mender yet, but I've still got a lot of time to learn. I've got a whole lifetime ahead of me.

[12:29]

SS: When you dream about what the future holds for you, you said you see yourself staying on that boat for a long time. Would you consider ever owning a boat or captaining one yourself?

AB: I would like to. I would like to, or maybe captain somebody else's boat one day. But, like I said, I want to get more experience dragging, because I lobstered for so long. I kind of have that down, but there's really no future in it, here in Southern New England. So once I get more experience, being on deck and being in the chair, I'd like to [captain or own a boat] one day. But the cost is so great to start out. That's one of the factors. Because I thought about buying my own lobster boat and stuff before, like a skiff and licenses. But it costs so much and the amount that you make—I mean, the IRS takes, like a regular job, takes a good portion of it—and all your bills and kids and stuff, it's just—I'd have a really hard time trying to save up money to buy a boat when I have to pay everything else too. It's been kind of a struggle with that. But hopefully, one day, I'll get a good opportunity to.

SS: Do you know about any opportunities for loans that could help you, if that was of interest?

AB: I don't have any credit. I've paid for a lot of stuff in cash. I actually got a credit card not that long ago, so I'm hoping to build up credit. I'd like to get a house first, before I do anything. Because I've been renting a house, and I'd rather have my own place to live first, then worry about a boat second.

SS: Makes sense.

[14:28]

SS: Do you think that your experience as a young fisherman is sort of the typical young fisherman experience for other young fishermen in this area, or different in some way?

AB: I would say so. I mean, everybody is a little different. Everybody has a different story. I'd say a lot of guys started off fishing offshore. I've always really fished inshore. It's kind of different from person to person, but there's quite a few guys who started off like I did. I mean not directly with family being in it, but that program that Chrissy Brown does [editors note: the Commercial Fisheries Center of RI apprenticeship program], I know a few of the guys and girls that did it. They started out different, but they kind of have the same view as me, like they want to do what I want to do. They just started out differently. Not everybody has family that's in it. I kind of feel lucky that I did, because I got the opportunity to [fish] when I was young, versus a few of the guys who got into it, they're like eighteen, nineteen years old. I've been doing it since I was a kid.

SS: Do you think that makes a difference?

AB: I think so. It kind of makes an attitude difference, you could say. Because I've been doing it for most of my young life so far, so I kind of have a different attitude about it, versus guys who just got into it two years ago. Because I've always been around it, my whole life. I've always appreciated it more than other people, I guess you could say.

SS: I'm curious about this attitude difference. Are you referring to that you have sort of more confidence, or you know what you're getting into a little more?

AB: Yeah, I know what I'm getting into, because like I said, I've been doing it for most of my life so far. Maybe I was like just raised with a different work ethic than other young people, because I was always taught to work for what you want and not have people hand it to you. A lot of older guys have the same mentality. I've worked with a lot of older guys, more than younger guys, so I kind of have that mentality from just hanging out around the older generation of fishermen. It's just kind of like, "Put your nose to the grindstone and get it done"—that kind of attitude.

SS: Do you think that that attitude is not quite so typical of some of the younger people who don't have the family history of fishing?

AB: Yeah, I mean for the most part I would say. I would just say, I've been around a lot of older guys, so I kind of got that from the older generation of fishermen.

[17:19]

SS: Do you see more young people getting into fisheries around here, especially with that [Commercial Fisheries Center of RI apprenticeship] program?

AB: A few. Not a lot.

SS: Do you think it's enough to keep the industry going?

AB: I hate to say it, but probably not. Maybe not here, but maybe in Maine there's a lot of younger people getting into it. Two people I graduated with still fish. And that was it. It was just me and two other people in my class that decided to do this. I mean, they're both

captains. They're both my age and they both captain boats. But I don't think that there's enough young people getting into the industry to keep it full fledged like it is now.

SS: Why do you think that is?

AB: Once all the older fishermen retire, I don't think there's going to be enough people to replenish the amount of people that were down here. So I feel that once the older generation retires and gets out of fishing, I'll probably be one of the last few guys down here. I hate to say it.

SS: That's a sobering thought.

AB: Yeah.

[18:37]

SS: What's the obstacle? What's the barrier? Why don't we see more young people getting into this career?

AB: I feel like a lot of the older guys, when they teach younger people how to do this, they don't have like the patience for it. Because I've worked with a lot of guys who don't have any patience at all, and it's kind of like, I feel like it would be difficult for other people who aren't used to it to adjust to that kind of attitude. I feel like the cost of everything is a big factor, because it's not like before when you could get a boat really cheap. Now, the permits are almost half a million dollars, some of them. It's like very difficult for people my age or a little older than me or even younger than me to get into it, because we don't have enough money. We're just starting out in life pretty much. So I feel like that's probably the biggest factor, is just the cost of everything.

[19:41]

SS: You said earlier that lobstering doesn't have a future around here. Is that because of the resource changing, or—?

AB: I feel like it's because of the water temperature and other environmental factors, like black sea bass especially. They've made a big population boom recently. I kind of feel like that's one of the main reasons, is water temperature and other species that traditionally weren't really that abundant here, driving them out and moving them up north to colder water. It's not completely dead, but it's getting to the point where I kind of realized that if I was going to fish, then I probably shouldn't stay in that fishery.

SS: As a long-term investment strategy?

AB: Yeah. That's the way I kind of thought. It's because I said, "Ok, I'm not making a million dollars lobstering. Well, not really a million dollars. I'm not making that much lobstering compared to these guys on draggers that are making five times what I make." So that's why I decided to get out of it, because there was just no money in it. There was no future. I feel like I would have been stuck in the same place.

[21:07]

SS: You have a young daughter. One year old, just now?

AB: One year old.

SS: That must have changed your life in a lot of ways.

AB: That's one of the reasons I got out of lobstering, because I couldn't pay my bills lobstering. Kids are expensive. There's no doubt about that. Being like a single parent, basically, it's extra difficult, so dragging and being on the boat I'm on, it's made a big difference.

SS: It still must be difficult, with a job that keeps you away from home a lot, and unusual hours.

AB: Yeah, I'm just lucky that I have family to help out a lot. I have a lot of family support with that.

SS: That's nice.

AB: It all works out good. I like day fishing a lot better than trip fishing, just for that reason. You want to be there for your kids to grow up. That's what I've had a lot of guys teach me. I know a lot of guys who fished offshore their whole lives, and they missed their kids growing up. Going to school and father-daughter dances and proms. I don't want to be like that. You know? Maybe when she's a little older, I'll do a little bit of trip fishing, but it's not my main priority right now, if you know what I'm saying.

SS: Yeah. It sounds like you see the way you're fishing right now as totally compatible with having a young child.

AB: Oh yeah, it works out good. It's a perfect schedule, especially this time of year. You get a lot of days off, so I get a lot of quality time. It all works out good.

SS: Cool.

[22:42]

SS: Who are the people that you're closest with in the industry?

AB: I know a lot of guys in the Point, just from being down here for seven years now. I met a lot of people down here—a lot of crew, a lot of captains. My captain, Jon Dougherty, I'm close with him. Chrissy Brown. Stevie Arnold. Niles Pearsall. A lot of guys. A lot of lobsterman. Mike Foley. Mark Sweitzer. Jay Swoboda. Peter Brodeur. Joe Baker. I know a lot of guys down here. I'm pretty close with most of them. I know quite a few. The Duckworths. I became pretty good friends with everybody down here, just from walking up and down the docks and talking to people and just like being social. It's been pretty good. I'd rather hang

out down here, with the guys down here, than hang out with people my age, because I like to hear the stories and talk about fishing and stuff. I always have a good time down here.

SS: All those people you mentioned are all captain boat-owners and they're all a bit older, right?

AB: Yeah.

SS: At least a bit if not several decades.

AB: Yeah. I mean there are a few younger guys down here. I hang out with them and stuff, but it's like, I'm out fishing a lot so I don't spend that much time with them. Just from going around the docks, and like I said, there aren't that many young people down here. I know most of them. There's not that many. That's why I know a lot more captains—because there's a lot more older people in it still.

SS: I see.

[24:37]

SS: What do you think it takes to succeed in the fishing industry here in Point Judith?

AB: A lot of perseverance. Self-control, I guess. You got to have a good work ethic. You've got to put in your time. You've got to acquire the skills that it takes. You got to practice a lot. You've got to have a lot of patience. I feel like a lot of younger people my age don't have that. I kind of feel lucky that I got to work with very good older fishermen, because they kind of taught me that. They kind of engraved that in me. You've got to have patience, and work hard, and basically prove yourself to make it down here, and that's what I've been trying to do. That's what I've done pretty good, so far. I feel like I have a pretty good reputation down here. My recommendation for younger people would be that you just have to work hard, and you got to prove that you can do it. Because if not, you won't make it down here. A lot of hard work.

SS: Do you see young people try to get into it—or they think they're interested—and then it's not for them? Or it doesn't work out?

AB: I've had people who don't fish come up to me and ask me to get them a job. I've done it a few times and it just didn't really work out that well. It kind of made me look bad, so I'm kind of weary about that now, because I kind of did it for a few people and it just turned out really bad. I mean, if somebody was really into it and had a good work ethic, I'd just tell them to walk down the docks and go around and ask guys, go talk to people, kind of show that you're interested instead of having someone say, "Oh, can you get me a job?" They don't know what it's about. I feel like if they go walk up and down the docks and talk to guys, and get to know guys, I feel like people look for that, more than guys who get referred by a phone call.

[27:01]

SS: If they get a job, what tips would you give them for starting off as a young fisherman?

AB: Be on time [laughter]. Prove that you want to do it if you want to do it. Work hard. I don't really complain that much on deck. I sort of feel like if you prove to the older guys that you want to do it, then you have to work hard and do everything you can to become a good fisherman. Pay attention to everything that they show you. Try to learn as much as you can. I feel like that kind of stuff would be a good direction for young people to get into the fisheries.

[27:46]

SS: A lot of it is attitude?

AB: Yeah. A lot of it. I'd say the majority of it. A lot of guys want people with good attitudes on boats. That's another reason that I've fished with a bunch of good guys, because I try to have a good attitude on deck and show them that I want to be there, and learn, and do my job. That's kind of what guys look for: guys that want to be motivated and do their job good and do it safely, and just care about it.

SS: Ok. You mentioned about some changes in, ecological changes—

AB: Yup.

SS: —and regulatory aspects. You mentioned a little bit before about economic changes such as cost of permits and vessel ownership going up. Are there any other changes of that nature or others on the horizon, that are of concern to you as a young fisherman, or that you've already had to grapple with?

AB: I would say probably the biggest factor is cost. It seems like every year the price of permits and licenses and boats kind of goes up, along with everything else, like the price of fuel. Everything. Like I said, I feel like that's the biggest factor: just the cost of everything, because I don't have half a million dollars to buy a boat. I would say that's the biggest factor. In my case, I've thought about going into it—like a partnership with somebody—before. But the cost of it is so great, especially lobstering. It would take me a good ten years, fifteen years to pay that back, and that's just barely getting by. I kind of want to live comfortably and be able to do it. The way things have been, I don't think that that's really an option at this point. If I wanted to be a captain, I'd either have to save up everything I make, or run somebody else's boat—which I'm kind of feeling like that's what it's leaning towards at this point, before I ever go buy a boat, because when you captain somebody else's boat, you can walk away from it. If you own a boat, you can't walk away from it. That's what everyone tells me. You can't leave. You can't walk away from it.

SS: Right, and it could take over your life completely.

AB: Yeah. If you want to get out of the fishing industry tomorrow and you own a boat, you can't. You can't walk away from it. That's kind of another thing that kind of worries me a bit, because if it does go downhill and I did own a boat and I wanted to get out in the future, then it would take a long time to do that. That's kind of another worry that I have.

[30:56]

SS: Do you talk with young fishermen in other ports?

AB: I know quite a few guys all over the place. I have friends—young fishermen who fish in Newport, Stonington, Wickford. I met a couple guys that came down from Maine before, down to the Point. I've met a few guys on social media and stuff. I've been a part of a few groups on that kind of stuff. But all around there's not that many young guys in this area that fish. I know a few—well, a few men and women that fish. But it's not nearly as many as I would like to see. It's kind of depressing almost, seeing the lack of young people in the industry. It kind of makes me a little sad that there's not a whole lot of people left in this world that enjoy what I do.

SS: Do you think that's it, that it's by choice for them, that they're just not interested in it? Or are there—?

AB: I feel like that's a big chunk of it, because there are a lot of jobs out there where you can make a lot more money than doing this, and you can work inside. But this is kind of like a labor of love type of deal. You have to enjoy this to want to do it. You have to enjoy working hard to be on a boat, and being in crappy weather, and that kind of stuff. I feel like a lot of younger people want to take—not the easy way out, but they don't want to do this because it just takes up so much time.

[32:39]

SS: If it makes you sad when you think about that there aren't that many young people who want to do this, are there things that you think could be done to try to reverse that trend?

AB: Yeah. I would say a better image of the fishing industry, because a lot of the environmental groups bash us for what we do. I hear a lot about bycatch and discards and stuff. People don't realize that it's not what everybody says it is, because I see it everyday. I see bycatch and stuff. It's not nearly as much as people think. I mean, environmental groups, they try to portray it like its sixty times more bycatch than it is. A lot of it goes to market. A lot of whiting we catch goes to market. It's not much discards, especially during the squid fishery. There aren't really any discards at all. So, I feel like a better image of it. The program that we have now that Chrissy Brown does and a few of the guys do, that's a good program, but I feel like there's just a lack of funding for it, and there's not enough people.

SS: Not enough people applying to it?

AB: That, and getting accepted, because I feel like there's a lot of people applying for it. They only pick a handful because that's all the funding can do. It's like twelve people or something like that, and I feel like that's not enough. They used to have the fisheries class at URI, that one of my uncles went to back in the late seventies, early eighties [editors note: the associates degree in fisheries technology that used to be offered at the University of

Rhode Island]. That was good. That got a lot of young people into it, but they weeded that class out, like twenty-five, thirty years ago. I feel like something like that would be good. I know Chariho High School has a marine program that kind of does a little bit about fishing. I think that's good. I think that a lot more schools should do that kind of stuff. I wish my high school did that, because I would have liked school more [laughter]. Stuff like that, programs like that—I feel like that would get a lot more people into it.

SS: Right, just the exposure that takes place through that?

AB: Yeah, just expose it to younger people more. I had the exposure at a young age. Not a lot of people have that luxury to do that. I feel like if people were exposed more to it, and given an opportunity to try it and see if they like it or not, I feel like that would be very good. I feel like that would attract more young people to the industry.

[35:31]

SS: Did you have any involvement in that program that Fred and Chris run, other than just knowing some of the graduates?

AB: No, I didn't have any involvement in that. I asked if I could do anything, but I guess it was already pre-planned. I told—I forgot his name—I told him, I saw him down here and I told him that if they wanted me to, I would go and talk to the young people about it, because I've been in it. But I guess that they already had a pre-set schedule, so I couldn't do it. But I would have.

SS: Yeah, so it's important to you to bring other new people into the fold.

AB: Yeah, I try, but it just seems like every time I try, I don't succeed. I want to see more young people into it, because I feel like if we don't, then the port's just going to slowly disappear, and the same with the way of life.

SS: How would you describe the typical profile of a young person who's a good candidate for this kind of career?

AB: Someone who wants to work hard. Someone who has a lot of motivation. Someone who's eager to learn. Someone who likes being around the water, and likes working outside and working with their hands. Someone like that. I feel like a lot of people wouldn't want to do that, because they don't want to like work with their hands and that kind of stuff. But I feel like someone who has that kind of characteristics, I feel like they would succeed down here. But not a whole lot of people have that anymore.

[37:24]

SS: Have you ever personally felt that you were being judged by anyone outside of fishing, who's in your peer group? The reason I'm asking is you mentioned a sort of negative portrayal of fishing by some environmental groups.

AB: Yeah.

SS: Have you ever personally felt people seeing you in a negative light because of that?

AB: Not too much. I mean, I've had people like talk about the negative effects, like on sea mammals and stuff. Not really personally anything against me, but like say what the information that they're fed by environmental groups portraying that fishing's bad. I always butt in and explain to them what we do, and the regulations we have, and the different types of nets we have to reduce bycatch, and all the programs we do with the observers and the electronic monitoring. I kind of try to explain to people the reality of it, because I feel like a lot of the information that those groups feed the public, it's not the reality. They don't see it. Someone who's in an office in Idaho or some place, who doesn't like what we do, they don't come out here and see what we do every day. I don't know. I would say that no, not really. Nobody's ever really said anything negative to me about it, but I never really met an environmental person who opposes the industry. I mean, I try to enlighten people about the industry, and talk about it. I talk about it to a lot of people. I can go on for hours about it [laughter]. I try to enlighten everybody about it, and teach them, and explain to them what we do, and everything we do to try to help the environment, because we're not trying to rape and pillage the oceans. We're like farmers, almost. We're trying to make sure that we have fish to catch for next year. I feel like most guys down here have that mentality. The regulations we have, those definitely help, because if we didn't have regulations, I feel like a lot of guys would just try to catch everything they can out of greed. But there's not a whole lot of people like that, because we do care about the ocean more than most people.

SS: Yeah. Your future kind of depends on it.

AB: Yeah. It does.

[40:14]

AB: But all in all, I feel like a lot of young people don't even know about it.

SS: Just don't even think about it?

AB: Because I tell other people my age that I work on a fishing boat, and they think I go out there with a rod and reel. They think I do that, and it's like, "No." I explain to them what we do, and the process that we do, the long hours that we do. I feel like a lot of younger people, it kind of goes over their heads almost, about the whole industry, unless they've grown up down here and have people that fish in their families and they actually know about it. I feel like a lot of young people aren't really informed about it that much.

SS: Everyone's so plugged in nowadays that something that actually takes place outdoors in the physical world is just hard for them to wrap their heads around.

AB: I know. They can't get off their computers.

SS: Do you think that makes a big difference? Your generation is so technological from day one, and just used to that environment, more than any generation before it. Do you feel like that plays a big role?

AB: Yes. I feel like a lot of younger people want to work with computers and work in offices and do that kind of stuff. I feel like the way of life that we have is almost weeded out by that, because they don't get off their smartphones. I mean, I go on my smartphone a lot, but it doesn't control my life. I still go outside and do that kind of stuff. But I feel like a lot of the technology we have now kind of deters young people from going out and doing this kind of thing.

SS: Yeah, I see what you're saying. It's almost like people of a certain age haven't ever developed the skills or the mentality to be separated from their technology for long enough [laughter].

AB: Yeah, I know. It's like, you go a hundred miles offshore, you don't have cell phone reception.

SS: Right, and for a lot of people that would hard to cope with psychologically, I feel.

AB: Yeah. Like when we go offshore, I don't have cell phone reception. Like I went fishing offshore, we didn't have cell phone reception for a week. We actually had to read books and stuff.

SS: [laughter]. Yeah, and talk to each other.

AB: I feel like a lot of younger people couldn't deal with that.

SS: That's really interesting, because that is a huge generational change since someone like your captain Jon was your age, and now—a really big difference.

AB: I mean when we're fishing along the beach, it's kind of nice. When you don't have anything to do, you can go on your phone and scroll on Facebook or Instagram or whatever. But when you're fishing offshore, we have a DVD player, so we watch movies and stuff. But it's not like we sit there and go on our phones. You're just way too far to even do that. I feel like that would be a big barrier for a lot of people.

SS: Right, so this whole generational lack of outdoor exposure? Which is a much bigger thing that just fisheries, it's everything.

AB: It's everything in this world.

[43:42]

SS: If I had been interviewing you five years ago, or even ten, which was just when you were young, when you were just starting to be exposed to fisheries, do you think that you would have been sharing some similar reflections? Or has the way that you think about your career changed a lot during the career that you've had so far?

AB: I still love it. I still love it more than anything. Five or ten years ago, I probably wouldn't have known as much as I do now, just being young and dumb. I don't feel like it would have been different. I still love what I do. I still feel the same way about it.

SS: Have there been any shocks or surprises or upsets since then that have changed the way you think about things?

AB: No. I still love what I do.

SS: And you always will.

AB: Yeah. I still feel the same way I did when I first started doing this. I still love it. I still almost get butterflies in my stomach when I go on a boat, just because I love it so much. So I nothing's really changed. I still feel the same way. I think I will for a long time, because it's been in my blood. I've been around the water my whole life. I kind of feel like that's a big factor in it too, is just that I've been around it my whole life, and that's really all I know. People say that I'm young and there's so much ahead of you in life. But that's really all I know so far, is being down here, or just fishing in general. Because even when I was younger than that, I would go out on boats my whole life. I'd go rod and reel fishing. I'd spend my summers on the water and stuff. It's just something I was born with. I don't think it's going to change.

SS: So it feels like part of who you are.

AB: Mm-hmm.

SS: A core part of you.

AB: Yup. And my sign is a crab, so—

SS: [laughter] So it's really destiny.

AB: I think so. I just feel like I have more of a connection with the water, more than most people.

SS: Do you think that other lifelong fishermen also have that profound connection?

AB: Oh yeah. They feel the same way. Guys like Rodman Sykes, Chrissy Brown, all those guys. They all feel the same way, I think. I don't really know what they're thinking, but I feel like they all feel the same way. I kind of feel like that's kind of disappearing, almost, with the way of life of this industry. I feel lucky that I still have that, because I don't feel like there's a whole lot of it left.

SS: Well, that's a nice note to end on. Unless there's anything else you'd like to add?

AB: I'd recommend for anybody who wants to, to get into this. You just got to work hard, and you got to enjoy this to actually do it. It's a part of me, and I feel like if you want to do this for a career, it has to be a part of yourself too. I'd recommend for everybody who wants

to do this, is if you love being on the water and working outside, then this is the business for you.

SS: What if they haven't been around the water their whole life like you? Can they still do it?

AB: Yeah, I think they could. It's kind of like a feeling almost inside of you. That's how I feel about it. I feel like if you want to do this and you like working hard, I feel like this would be perfect for anybody that wants to do this. I feel like there's a lot of people in this world that want to do this kind of thing but they don't have the opportunity to. I feel like if more people are given the opportunity to, I feel like it would work out a lot better for the industry. There'd be a lot more young people getting in to it.

SS: There are opportunities out there for those who want them?

AB: Yeah, and hopefully there's more to come.

SS: It's just sort of a matter of connecting the right people with the right opportunities. Is that what I hear you saying?

AB: Yeah. We have some good programs now. So hopefully we have some more that come up in the future.

SS: Yeah. Let's hope.

AB: Hopefully.

SS: Alright, thank you very much. I'll just turn this off.

AB: How long was that?

SS: Forty-eight minutes.

AB: Oh, that's not bad.

[End of interview]

[48:40]