

Interview with Gus Lovgren, commercial fisherman

Occupation: Commercial fisherman

Port Community: Point Pleasant, New Jersey

Interviewer: Sarah Schumann

Date and year: January 29, 2019

Location: Brick Township, New Jersey

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]: My name is Sarah Schumann. Today is January 29, 2019. I'm in Brick Township, New Jersey. I'm here with Gus Lovgren. Could you please state your occupation.

Gus Lovgren [GL]: I'm a commercial fisherman.

SS: Is that fulltime or part-time?

GL: Fulltime and a half, basically.

SS: [laughter] What's your homeport, Gus?

GL: I'm out of the Fishermen's Dock Cooperative in Point Pleasant, New Jersey.

SS: What's your vessel name, if you have one?

GL: Kailey Ann

SS: Are you the owner or the captain or—?

GL: Captain sometimes. First mate sometimes. Future owner.

SS: Who's the owner?

GL: My father, Dennis Lovgren, who is semi-retired, working his way into selling it.

SS: What's your age?

GL: I am thirty-three years old.

SS: And your educational background?

GL: I actually have a bachelor's degree in architecture.

SS: Ok, interesting. That wraps up the couple of biographical questions I wanted to ask you, so now, if you would like to start telling me your story as a commercial fisherman, you can start, wherever you want to.

GL: Alright, well, I'm a fourth-generation commercial fisherman. My father, his father, and his father's father, since my family immigrated here from Sweden in—I believe it was the 1920s. Prior to that, we were fishermen dating back to the days of Vikings, as far as I know from my family. I know my great-grandfather moved and fished out of Wanchese, North Carolina for years, and I believe it was my grandfather who, after World War II, moved up to Point Pleasant, New Jersey, here, and started fishing. It was a little different back then. I think my grandfather had retired around the age of fifty and had my father running his—they only had two boats at one point. I believe one of them sank. My father and his brothers, basically all my uncles, were fishermen as well. My father had his [father's] boat until—I think I was two years old when my father bought his [own] first boat. I've been going out fishing with my father since I believe I was four years old. I would spend summers going out with him. They had a little kick going where I would get to keep one or two lobsters, and my aunt ran the fish market at the time, and I would sell them to her. Being six years old and making ten dollars, I thought I was on top of the world. Early on, I was steered by my father that I needed to get an education, that I was going to break the cycle, that I could not become a fisherman, because with overregulation and everything, that there was just going to be no way to make a living in the industry anymore. My two passions when I was a kid were fishing—I loved fishing with him—and Legos. So I was kind of steered towards the idea of becoming an architect. I liked the idea of it. I did go to college. I did graduate college. I have a bachelor's degree in architecture. I think I started school in the fall of 2003. They told me when I started that the job success rate within the first year of graduation was ninety-eight percent. It was a five-year program and I graduated in 2008. When I left, the economy was in shambles, and the last thing anybody was hiring as an architect. I believe the job success rate at that point had fallen to five percent. Now, throughout college, I think my first year home, one of the guys on my father's boat—I can't remember if he was taking time off for a medical issue or he had something to do—and I was offered my first opportunity to actually work on the boat and not just be a spectator. I fell in love. There was something so beautiful about it. I think we had this random run of squid, where the money was impressive. I made more money than I had ever made in my life, in a short amount of time. I'm not going to say that didn't influence my attitude toward architecture, but it definitely changed what I wanted to do with my life a little bit. Again, I was told, "Don't even think about it. Get the education. Go to school. Be the architect. Just because you had a lucky couple of months on the boat doesn't mean it's going to be like that forever." I stuck with it. I would come home on summers, on breaks, whenever anyone needed off, I would jump on the boat. Now, I'm going to backtrack a little bit. When I was a kid growing up, I would read all the catalogs my dad would get sent to him, with all fishing gear, and I had these fantasies, where I saved every dollar I made as a kid and I had my piggy bank, and I'm looking and I'm going to buy an inflatable raft and a net and I'm going to fish just like him. I wanted to do that. I think I got my first commercial fishing permit when I was twelve or thirteen years old.

It was just for bait—seine net, spearing, killies. I never really figured out how to be successful with it, but I had fun. Coming back now, I'm filling in on winter breaks, on summer breaks, making whatever I could whenever I could jump on the boat. I did finish my education. I went to school in Philly and I tried to stay out there because I thought I had a better chance of finding a job. After a while, I think I was working in kitchens just to pay the rent, basically, and I gave up. I decided to move home. It just wasn't working out. I talked to my dad every week. "Is there any boat looking for someone? Does anybody need somebody?" But nobody was looking at the time. I wound up working at a Shop Rite for a little while, again to pay the bills, and I think I worked in a pizzeria for a year or so. At the time, the pizzeria was owned by a man who was straight off the boat from Italy. Whenever my dad had the opportunity that someone needed or to fill in, his rule was just, "Bring me back some fish and you're good to go." I was there at the pizzeria for at least two years. The crew my father ran with, he didn't have a turnaround crew. The shortest guy was there for probably ten years. He was finally retiring, and I was given my opportunity, and I jumped on it and I did not look back. I guess I've been fulltime on the boat now for eight or nine years maybe. It's just an endless cycle. I love it. It's not something everyone could do. I hate dealing with customers. I don't have to deal with too many people out there. I'm probably closer to God than I am with anybody else out there. I get to see things everyday that nobody gets to see. I made a living, I met my wife, I started my family in this industry. I completely, at this point in my life, understand why my father tried to steer me away from it. I had interviewed him once. It was like a job day in sixth grade, and I interviewed with him about the fishing industry. I remember him telling me, "Once of the most important things about the industry is however much money you want to make, you can make it, but you've got to put in the work. Some days, you're going to burn your bridges, you're going to take every last bit of energy you have in you to make a paycheck, but you can be successful. And every year is different. Some years are great. Some years are rough. When the years are good, you got to fish hard. When the years are bad, you got to fish even harder." It does take a toll on us, especially my family. My wife is a trooper. She is more or less raising our two daughters as a single parent, with this industry. We are at a point now where it's not like it used to be. When I was raised, my father worked, my mom stayed home, and we lived comfortably. Now, I am working all the time, my wife works fulltime, and at times, we are worried about paying the mortgage. This is not a day in age for a single earner family income anymore. But we make it work. My wife knows that I don't think I could do anything else. If I ever went into architecture, I think I would drive myself nuts. I don't think I could sit behind a desk and be happy. I've always been a manual labor kind of person. I see what my father says with the regulations. It's insane to me how this industry can be regulated. It's become such a pay-to-play industry, and every year it seems to be catered more towards corporations than it does the small family enterprises anymore.

[12:12]

GL: I've had my shot behind the wheel of the boat now. I think I'm going on three years of having an opportunity to run the boat. My father retired about three years ago. He doesn't fish anymore. My uncle runs the boat. I'm second in command. If he goes away, then I'm at the wheel. When I started in this industry, I never dreamed of the idea of me running a boat. Trust me, the thought was there, but I didn't think I could ever do it. As my dad was retiring, he started teaching me. We were fishing offshore at the time, and I had one opportunity. It wasn't really an opportunity. It was just an event that happened. I think, at the time, we

were allowed three trips of sea bass a week at a thousand pounds. It took us about seven or eight hours to steam out to where they were, so we were running in and out, all week long, trying to get these trips in. The money was there. On our way in from the second trip, and I think we had about twenty-eight hours to get our next landing in, my uncle's wife called and told him that his mother-in-law had had a stroke and she didn't have long to live. I saw him and I just said, "I'll take this opportunity, if you allow me to run the boat." The first response was, "No way. You're not ready for this. We want to start you in the summer, fishing inshore, not in the winter, fishing eighty miles out, with one other person on the boat." I talked to a couple other captains at the boat that morning who were all getting ready to leave, and I said, "I want my dad to let me run the boat, but he doesn't think I'm ready. Can one of you talk him into it?" One of the other captains actually went and said, "What are you waiting for? Your son's ready." He came back, and he said, "You think you can do this?" I said, "I can do this. I know I can." We went out. We caught our fish. Actually got into a little mess of porgies as well. It was super exciting for me. I think I had landed the second most amount of fish out of all the boats at the dock that day. I was super excited. From that moment on, to this day, I am probably on Athearn Marine every week, looking for boats for sale. I know that eventually, the boat I'm on is going to come up for sale, but I want that instant gratification. I want to be an owner now, but I got to sit back and wait.

[15:20]

SS: Most of the time, you're still not running the boat? It's just occasional times like that?

GL: In the summer months, we run what we call our two-handed rotation. We only go out two people at a time in the summer. We do a rotation. Basically, every day someone gets off. I'll run the boat every third day. Or if my uncle has something to do, goes on vacation, then I run the boat. I still get my shots. I got my first porgie trip in last year—my first time looking for porgies, and I obliterated the entire fleet. It wasn't a massive trip, but I was the only one to catch fish. We had, I think, just shy of fourteen thousand pounds. Of course, I was walking around with my chest puffed out for a week. Got to remain humble sometimes, but it's hard being young.

[16:26]

SS: You've mentioned a few species. You said lobster back when you were a kid. Sea bass, I think you said squid, you said porgy. What kind of boat is it? What gear type and what fisheries?

GL: We're a trawler.

SS: A trawler. Is that how you were catching lobsters too, when you were a kid?

GL: Yeah, we were small mesh mix. It was mostly a lot of whiting and ling back then. The last few years, our focus has mostly been on porgies through the winter months, late fall, sea bass as well, fluke—we fluke year round—the summer flounder, I don't know if they call it different names in different regions—squid, that's kind of our summer thing. We have a little bit of scallop quota, not much.

SS: What's the length of the vessel?

GL: It's a seventy-seven-foot boat.

SS: So in summertime, you're making day trips, and in wintertime, you're going offshore?

GL: Typically, we're making day trips. The last few years, we've seen major reductions in our summer flounder quota and our season. New Jersey has it set up so that we have six fluke seasons. Basically, every two months, they open up. Usually, our July and August season remains open for two weeks, maybe three if you're lucky. There's not much to do in the summer around here, so the last couple of years, we've been going to Nantucket to squid fish. You're talking about a twenty-two-hour steam there and a twenty-two-hour steam home, and we'll typically fish for five days. Now, that's where my wife wants to kill me, because I'm gone for seven days, I could be back at the house for six hours, and then I'm leaving again. Our kids are about to be three and five, so a very rough age to leave her along with two of them. I will say, I wish we had more of a fluke quota in the summer. This summer was the first time I brought my oldest daughter out fishing. She absolutely loves it. Unlike my father, I want this industry to thrive, because if she wants to do this, I want her to be able to. I want her to run a boat one day, if she wants. As of right now, that's what she wants to do with her life.

SS: That's amazing. How did she let you know that?

[19:00]

GL: She says it to me all the time. When we talk about, "I want to go buy toys," I say, "You should do chores." "What kind of chores can I do?" "You can clean up your toys. You can sweep the floor." "I don't want to do that." "Well, what do you want to do?" "I want to go to work with you." On the last trip, when I was leaving Sunday night, she says, "You need to bring me fishing again." "I wish I could, but I'm not bringing you a hundred miles offshore in the winter."

SS: That is so cool. I love that!

GL: This summer, my wife came out. It was her first time too. My daughter was four at the time. She did great. I needed my wife there to make sure she listens. If I'm running the boat, I'm going back and forth doing a million things. I can't keep my eyes on her and everything else. It's dangerous. She did great. I know, this year, I'll be able to bring her again. She's got her slickers, her boots. She loves it. She's super excited about it. I'll be excited to bring her. I'm sure my wife will be happy to have one less kid in the house, certain days. I lived on the boat with my father when I was younger. I was so fascinated with everything that could come out of that ocean.

[20:30]

SS: At what point did your father come around, after all those years of telling you, "Don't do this. Get an education"? At what point did it finally sink in for him that you were a fisherman?

GL: I'll let you know when it happens [laughter]. I think he likes it. He's good with it now. I think he sees it's my calling. He's happy with me. I think, quite honestly, I don't know how I'll ever be able to support our living situation, with two kids, a wife, a mortgage, if I were to get into architecture at this point. Honestly, at this point, I graduated from college over ten years ago. Technology has advanced so much. I don't think I would ever be able to figure it out at this point.

SS: Yeah, it's kind of a hard resume to explain if you're going to look for architecture jobs.

GL: Even then, my options at the time—once you graduate, before you even become an architect, you have to intern for three years, and most internships don't pay. Working on my wife's salary, trying to make our family succeed, that would be rough.

SS: What does your wife do?

GL: She is a recovery specialist right now, helping people with drug addiction.

SS: Unfortunately, that seems like a growth field.

GL: Yes. We're both actually in recovery ourselves. One thing about the fishing industry that I hear a lot of is the dark side of it. In this day in age, I don't think it's the case so much anymore. I think it's so rampant everywhere. For us on our boat, we don't tolerate it. I had to get over it pretty quick before I was able to keep this job. There's no room for error on the boats anymore, especially on our boat. We do that two-handed rotation. There's only two guys on the boat. If one of them's not there mentally, it's no good. We've been struggling with a lot of battles in recent years, with, I'll say, social media. It used to be a great place to post a picture of, say, one of our great catches or something. It's now completely being used against us. Porgy fishing, for example, this is our bread and butter this time of year. Our trip limits are fifty thousand pounds a day, and we can catch that sometimes when we get into them. Last year, one of our boats at the dock, they did have their fifty thousand pound limit in a single tow. When you're porgy fishing, that could be it. You could catch fifty thousand pounds in twenty minutes. They posted a video of it online. They're still receiving death threats from angered recreational fishermen who say the boat should sink. The science behind it. Every fucking year, there's a new form of data coming out on how there's not going to be a fish left in the ocean in the year 2048. I think that people don't realize that, number one, ninety percent of the fish in the ocean have not been explored. U.S. commercial fishing is the most sustainable source of commercial fishing in the world. We're the seventh most regulated industry in America. We're more regulated than the pharmaceutical industry. I think we're right behind commercial airlines. We are the last commercial source of wild, sustainable proteins, and we have the smallest carbon footprint of any protein. I get really frustrated sometimes with some people about it. I get really heated. I see stuff on social media and I have to take a breath and walk away, because I could be there for hours arguing with a wall. We're fighting a battle right now. I'm sure as you get closer to Rhode Island, you'll hear all about the windmills. The more research I do into these things, the more frustrating it gets, knowing that it seems to be a money grab, that nobody's going to benefit except the people building them. When I went to school for architecture, my strong point was green design and sustainable design, and I'm all about

sustainability and environmentally friendly things. I don't see windmills in that aspect in any way. Talk about the misconceptions of the industry, people talk about the bycatch that we have. They think that we're killing five pounds of seafood for every one pound that we catch, and that's a lie. The major advancements in technology—like for example, our rope net—is the most economical fishing you will ever see in your life. We even had an observer out a few months ago. It was one of her first trips. We were fishing for porgies in the fall. It was just me and one other guy on the boat. We pulled in a haul with eleven thousand pounds of scup. She was just sitting there with her mouth open, looking at it like, "I've never seen this much fish in my life."

SS: She's probably like, "I have to count all those? I have to measure all those fish?"

[27:51]

GL: She's like, "Can you just give me whatever discards there are?" In the whole pile—eleven thousand pounds—there were about fifteen pounds in the basket that I handed her: a couple sea robins, maybe a couple small porgies. I said, "Here. I want you to think about where you went to school, and every teacher that ever told you about we're destroying the ocean with our bycatch. I want you to remember this day, because this is what it is." These rope nets have a ten-foot mesh on the bottom, so everything goes through. If we catch one fluke, that's a big day. How they built these nets is just mindboggling—that some uneducated fisherman can figure these things out. Another misconception is that we're not that smart, and it's a lie. We are engineers. We are physicists. We are mechanics. We are figuring everything out there. And we have to do it on the drop of a hat, because sometimes your life can depend on it. We have to be our own doctors at times. I know that in the majority of the world, a lot of people appreciate us, but it's always that one-in-ten person that you hear louder than everyone else.

SS: How does that bad image actually affect things? Does it affect you economically or in terms of regulations, or where you're allowed to fish or keep your boats? Or is it just an aggravation?

[29:50]

GL: In terms of regulations, I believe it definitely affects us, because NOAA and the National Marine Fisheries Service, when they set out to take on new regulations and rules, they do have forums for open public comments, and I know some of those diehard recreational guys will come in and say we're destroying everything in their path and that we're cleaning up. I'd say to them, Point Pleasant fleet in the summer, six or seven boats fish for fluke. We're allowed five hundred pounds a day, three days a week for two weeks. So you're talking about three thousand pounds for two weeks, six or seven boats, let's say there's twenty thousand pounds for the entire summer. How many recreationally harvested fluke are being caught in those two months by thousands and thousands of people on them, each allowed to keep three fish? I know the party boats are coming in with more than five hundred pounds every day. That's every day. As I said, I want this industry to be around for my kids when they're ready to take the reins if they want to. The last thing I want to do is catch the last fish in that ocean. We always make sure there's something for tomorrow. I think the regulations might be a little too much at times. I know they send the Bigelow out to set their

harvest, and they basically have designated tows they make. But half the time, the boat's broken. Half the time, they don't get to the tow when they're supposed to get there. If they get there late and they don't catch nothing, they say that it's all been caught already, when really, they've just got to move. And the fish aren't in the same spot at the same time every year. You got to find them. There's been such a lack of collaboration between the scientists working on the Bigelow and the fishermen themselves. I've seen years, for example, when they've shut down squid on us based on the butterfish bycatch, saying that they were in danger of being overfished, so they're worried about us catching squid because they're worried about us killing too many butterfish. And then the next year, coming back, and saying, "We're sorry, we were wrong." Well, that doesn't pay my bills from last year. The fishermen were saying, "You're fishing over there for butterfish, and you're not catching them because they're over here." The scientists were saying to the fishermen, "We got this. We know what we're doing. We went to college for how many years. We figured this out." Sometimes, an education is worth shit.

[33:34]

SS: Have you participated with scientists in any kind of collaborative work?

GL: We have our observers on the boat pretty consistently. Some of them are great. Some of them, they work with us, they make their presence known, they are respectful, and I am willing to help them out in any way. But I'm going to say, three times out of five, they're a problem. The last observer we had didn't get out of the bunk the whole trip. That happens fairly often. They falsify their reports, very consistently. I've gotten in arguments with quite a few of them for numerous reasons. One tried to fill out a log report saying that—we got into a patch of bunker, and they wanted to write it down as herring. I tried to explain to them, "It's not herring, and if you write it down as herring, they're going to close down this fishery on us." "I went to school for this." "Well, I've been living this my entire life, and I know the difference between a bunker and a herring." By the end of the trip, they said, "Oh, I looked it up in the book, and you were right." We had a kid who came on the boat over the summer—it was one of our weeklong trips to Nantucket—who got in quite a few arguments with me. We caught a small porbeagle shark, and I had it back towards the ramp of the boat. It was quite lively. He said, "I need to measure that." I said, "Ok, we'll get the net over and we'll kick it down the ramp." "No, I want to bring it over here." "No. Don't bring it over there, because they we have to lift it up over the gunwale, and someone could get hurt." So we had to lift it up over the gunwale, and we had three of us lift this thing up, while it was kicking. It's like, "I don't give a shit about your measurements. The most important thing on this boat to anybody is their safety. Take a fucking picture for all I care." It gets discouraging sometimes, when that's what we're given. We don't have much of a choice whether we want to take them or not. We've had observers come on the boat, that I've said, "Oh. I'm going to sit up here for a little while, if you want to take my bunk, take a nap or something. Be my guest," and refused to give my bunk back. It's, again, discouraging.

SS: That's too bad that people have that kind of attitude towards their work and your work.

[36:23]

GL: I said, "I don't know what you're doing when you're going home, but I've got two toddlers to take care of. I need whatever sleep I can get out here, because I get more on the boat than I do at home anymore." I will say, in the previous few years, it's been known for the consumer to look for wild, American-caught seafood. We face a lot of competition with foreign seafood and farm-raised seafood and it's not very good. There's a lot of chemicals put into it, and there's very little regulation with the foreign seafood. As much as I can't stand the regulations, I do understand their place. I would love to see a more collaborative effort between the scientists and the fishermen. I would love to see that in the future. I understand, and I'm halfway there, as some of the people who were commenting on your [Facebook] post, but I understand why they're so jaded. There's still a living to be made out there, but it's not easy. Every year, I got to work more and more. I got to spend more and more time away from my family. It's so frustrating. What Captain Dave said was, "Years and years and years now, I've been throwing over big money fish to assure that they live, so that one day I can catch them again, and every year, that goal gets farther and farther and farther away." I can tell you a story about the boat I'm on now, my father's boat. He bought it in 2006, the current one. His first boat that he owned was the Leah. I believe it was a seventy-two-foot wooden hull trawler. In the early 2000s, prior to that, the scallop fishery was a fishery that people were into, they were making some money, everybody was happy. Something happened. Something boomed. I guess the demand for scallops went through the roof. Everybody and their mom was fishing for scallops. The price was there. People were making a killing. Now my father, fishing his wooden boat, always had a scallop permit but never bothered. They were easy to catch, they were worth a lot of money, so they could go out and drag them up with nets. Some people were using nets, but most people were using dredges. The boat was getting old, and it's not very good to put dredges on an old wooden boat. At the time, I think the price of diesel fuel was skyrocketing, and basically sinking the shrimp industry in the Gulf of Mexico. So basically, boats were going up for sale. They were selling them dirt cheap down there. So my dad and quite a few of the other people at the co-op dock saw an opportunity. They all went down south. They bought shrimp boats. My dad personally, I think he spent a quarter of a million dollars and another half million dollars to convert it to fish as a dragger and scalloper up here. The first year he had it, he fished strictly scallops on that boat. He had a crew on that boat, fishing scallops, and I think me and my uncle were working the wooden boat, just dragging still. Within that year, he phased out the Leah. It got sold. We converted all the permits. Everything got converted over to the new boat. Then the regulations stepped in again. I don't know who controls scallops, but they said, "There's way too many scallop boats now. Everybody's catching scallops. It's going to be dangerous." So they basically set up these qualifying years and they were going to designate how much scallop quota you got. Well, my dad had this scallop permit for twenty-something years, and really only had landings for one. So after spending three quarters of a million dollars on a boat to fish for scallops, they told him he was going to be allowed like 2,400 pounds a year. That's like four trips, four days. They said, "We'll give you an opportunity. We can either give you more scallops or more days at sea to go groundfishing." At the time, the flounder fishing—the winter flounder—was a profitable industry around here, so he said, "I'll take the days at sea." The next year, they closed down the flounder, indefinitely. So we lost our days at sea, and we had no scallop quota. We got nothing. But we were still whiting fishing in the spring, and I remember every time we would haul back, before we even set the net back out, we would stop and we would throw over hundreds and hundreds of pounds of flounder, so they would survive, so that when this indefinite closure was reopened, we'd be able to catch them again. After five years, they finally reopened it,

and the flounder were gone. We could not catch them. They'd moved north, as with the biomass of fluke. Everything seemed to shift north. I don't know if global warming did it. I know fish like a certain temperature and they'll follow it wherever it goes. I know they're catching plenty of flounder off Block Island now.

SS: Which flounder are you talking about there?

[43:15]

GL: Blackback. Winter flounder. Same thing with yellowtail, too. It never became worth it for us to use a day at sea, because on top of that, if we got stuck with an observer, that's \$750 we would have to pay, and we wouldn't even make that in a day. After fuel and expenses and an observer, we'd come home. Everybody works a twenty-four-hour day and owes the boat money. I don't know if I mentioned—this is probably something that would go back toward the beginning of the interview—I'm a member of the Fishermen's Dock Cooperative. I'm the youngest member there right now. I'm relatively new. I think I've been a part of it for seven months now. I also sit on the board of trustees with them, and I believe we are the last fishermen-run dock on the East Coast.

SS: I'd love to hear more about that, because it does sound very unique.

[44:23]

GL: I can't tell you when it was originally founded, but I believe it was in the fifties. But it could be a lot older than that. It was set up to guarantee that it's a dock run by fishermen, owned by fishermen, to guarantee that fishermen get a fair price for their catch. Every fisherman that's a member comes in. Whatever fish that's packed on that day, everyone gets the same price, based on size, type of fish, all that stuff. We have presidents, we have treasurers, and they're all fishermen.

SS: How many members are there?

[45:09]

GL: I believe there are twelve now.

SS: Only twelve people?

GL: Might be more.

SS: Do you have to buy in?

GL: Yes.

SS: How much does it cost to buy in?

GL: It's a \$25,000 buy-in.

SS: Ok. No wonder it's only twelve. You have to be committed.

GL: Yes. It's a limit. It's twelve boats. It might be thirteen or fourteen. Basically with that buy-in, when you're in, you're in, and if you sell your shares, you get your money back.

SS: Does the co-op just box the fish and send it, or is there actually processing or retail?

GL: We box it and sell it whole. Originally, there was a fish market. It's been closed for fifteen years. It's owned by another guy now. Shore Fresh, it's called. But originally, it was owned by the fishermen. The fish would come straight from the boats and go to the market and be sold right there. But the guy that runs it now, really the only thing that he sells now that comes direct from the boat is the scallops. Back when it was fisherman-owned, they had to hire filleters, they had to hire people that would set the fish up. You could basically go in the market and pick up dinner, and you'd be eating a fish that was swimming around twelve hours prior. It was a shame it never really took off. Everybody was all about making the price right, but in the end, nobody was making enough product.

SS: The numbers didn't add up in the right way?

GL: Yeah.

[46:49]

SS: That's too bad. Such a cool concept.

GL: I wish they would bring it back. Maybe they will. We'll see. The guy that's there now, he's doing good. All the fishermen, as long as he pays rent, they're happy.

SS: What else does the co-op do? It owns the dock, right? Where you tie up?

GL: The dock is owned, yup.

SS: And it deals with your fish for you?

GL: Yeah. We have a head guy there. He takes care of sales. He's been doing it for at least fifteen or twenty years. He's a former fisherman himself. He owned a boat. Actually, he had owned it, but some sort of back injury he had, he wasn't fishing on it. Quite a few years ago, maybe six or seven year ago, maybe a little longer ago than that, as they were going out the inlet, one of their hydraulic hoses popped and they lost steering. In an unfortunate sequence of events, while waiting for the Coast Guard to assist them, a few waves picked the boat up, put them on the jetty, and rolled the boat over. Everyone survived, but the boat was a total loss. He has always been a part of the co-op, and he takes care of our fish for us. He seems to know how to follow the markets. A lot of our fish, some of it goes to Canada, some of it goes to our markets in New York, some goes to Massachusetts, some goes to the South. He seems to be able to anticipate who's going to give us the better price, with some exceptions. Everyone stays happy. Everyone gets a fair price. Non-member boats can also pack at the dock, but they're not guaranteed the same price as member boats. I think at the end of the year, whatever profits are made get shared between members. Basically, whatever check

they give you is just enough. They give you like a third of what you need to cover what you pay in taxes. The other two thirds gets put into some kind of account, where when you do retire and trade in your shares, you get all that money at once.

SS: So it's like a retirement account?

[49:25]

GL: Yes. It's like an IRA.

SS: Is that why you decided to buy into it?

GL: I wanted to be a member. My father had retired and basically sold his shares to me. I have an uncle who's still a member there and runs another boat. I don't think my grandfather was one of the founding members of the co-op, but he definitely was one of the early ones. Most of the fishermen there are generational. Their fathers were fishermen. It's a handed-down business. There's not too many young people eager to get into the industry. There's a few. But I'll be honest. Some of them burn out pretty quickly.

SS: Why do you think that is?

[50:31]

GL: Personally, I believe I was raised and conditioned and built for a job like this. Not everyone can handle working an eighteen-hour shift and sleeping for two hours and doing it all over again. Some people get seasick. I don't want to put down the younger generation, but they don't make them like they used to, like my father and his father's generation. I did comment on your post. The one kid was saying how he was a younger guy and we have it so hard these days. When my father was my age, they didn't even have net drums. Everything was done by strength. You're talking about brute strength. Everyone has conveyors on their boat now. I mean, on our boat, we still pick on our hands and knees, but these guys. You have no clue what these guys had to do back then.

SS: It was hard in different ways back then. Now the technology is there but there's all these regulations, marketplace stuff, all kinds of other things that they didn't have to deal with back then.

GL: It's the legal aspect. It's the fine print stuff nowadays. It really is a shame. I look at our sea bass industry right now. We have such small quotas, compared to what's out there. The idea was that once the stocks were rebuilt, they would loosen up the restrictions on it. Well, the sea bass are currently at 240 percent of their projected biomass that they wanted to reach. Two-hundred and forty percent, and they reduced our quota. I mean, we're towing for twenty minutes, and we're kicking fish back, because we caught more than we're allowed. A twenty-minute tow! I mean, you're talking about the net hitting the bottom and then pulling it back up. And we're catching more than we're allowed. That's how thick they are out there, and this has been going on for the last four years now. It's insane. I don't get it.

SS: Back to where you were talking about how they “don’t make them like they used to”—the younger generation—without putting them down, what makes you different? What separates the fishermen your age and younger who are succeeding, from other people of that age who don’t succeed in fishing or wouldn’t even dream of fishing?

[53:24]

GL: I see it out there. We’ve had some greenhorns that have come and gone. You either got the fight inside you, and the determination to make it happen, or you don’t. Some people are lazy. Some people don’t have it. You can reach down, and you know you got nothing left, and you can reach down inside you and pull out whatever you need to, to get through the rest of the day. We’ve got a new kid on the boat that’s been with us for a month right now, and I see it in him. We threw him in a pile. Last trip out was probably the most amount of scup we’ve had on the deck at one time. It was a ten-hour ride in, and we were on our hands and knees the whole ride. I think we finished about a half hour before the inlet. He slowed down towards the end—I mean, we all were hurting—but he never stopped. The kid that we had before him, he just wasn’t there. He never made it. He never progressed. He never tried, and he never put in the extra effort. We could make good money on our boat if we work hard enough for it. It drives me crazy that someone wouldn’t want it. You’ve got a twenty-something kid on the back deck not putting in his work. And listen, I’m not old, but you’re getting the same paycheck as me, living at your mom’s house while I’m trying to support a family. I expect you to put in the amount of work I’m putting in as well, or at least try. I know I can be a little ruthless out there. Some people take the criticism, and they try to improve and get better, and some people just shut down. I know I could probably be a little less crass with the way I present it to them.

[55:46]

SS: You mentioned earlier that you spend some time looking at boats to buy. Where do you see yourself going in the future? Or where would you like to go?

GL: I’d love to be a boat owner. I’d love to be a captain. There is a little relief with me being second in charge right now. I know I get to sleep. I know I get to relax. When I run the boat, I don’t sleep. We’ll be out there for three days, and even if we lay over for the night or something, like the slightest little rap on the side of the hull and I’m up. You know when you’re running the boat, you’re responsible for everybody and everything on it, and it can be rough sometimes. I’ve gotten more gray hairs in the last few years, and I don’t know whether it’s because of my opportunity at running the boat or my two kids at home or my wife. But I love it. I love going out there and being able to make a name for myself. My wife gets real crazy with me. She gets mad at me. I’m a very competitive spirit. I make a competition out of everything that’s there. If I’m out there, I want to catch more than everyone. I want to be in before everyone. I want to be the best of the best. Some people aren’t like that. Some people are. But in my opinion, that’s what makes the best captains. It is a competition to me. If I’m not in the top three, I’m not happy with myself.

SS: What do you predict things will be like in ten, fifteen, twenty years for you and for other fishermen around here?

[57:43]

GL: I think the most important thing about surviving in this industry is adaptability. Basically, my father paved the way for me. The boat's already got all the permits you need on there. A lot of the boats, over the last few years, have been successful because they've either been able to purchase new permits—again, that pay to play thing—but a lot of boats—Rhode Island boats, New Jersey boats—they're purchasing permits for other states. Summer flounder and sea bass permits for North Carolina, for Virginia. That type of adaptability allows them to survive in times, like I said, in the summer months here, trying to make ends meet by catching squid in Nantucket, where boats can go out. And there's big trip limits for North Carolina and Virginia. They got to go somewhere up north to get the limit, and then they go cruising back down there, and that type of adaptability makes them stay. Things are changing, and you got to roll with the changes. I keep saying to my father that we need to invest in a shrimp permit now for New Jersey, because if there is some global warming happening, if the waters are warming, everything seems to be shifted. I think they created three experimental shrimp permits for Virginia this year. The guys that got them are making a killing. There was never shrimp there before, and there is now. I'm thinking in the next ten years, they'll be here, and we should probably work on getting the permit now while it's cheap. If you're able to adapt to new ways and just not get stuck, you might have a chance. Otherwise, I'm going to have to go to Massachusetts to catch what we're catching here now. I don't want to leave. I like my state, despite how expensive it is to live in. I know this is one of the most expensive pay-to-play states. A sea bass permit alone's \$180,000. Fluke is another ninety.

SS: Those are federal permits?

GL: Those are state.

SS: State permits for that kind of money?

GL: Yes. New Jersey doesn't set up their regulations like everybody else. North Carolina, for example, for fluke, I think they have four seasons, maybe three. But their trip limits are something like 7,500 pounds. Ten thousand pounds. Twelve thousand pounds. That's it. You get one trip for every three or four months. You just get that big landing in and you take it down. New Jersey, we have six seasons set up. Sometimes we'll do, "Ok, you can land fifteen-hundred pounds every two weeks." Currently, right now, that's what it is. Every two weeks, you can land fifteen-hundred pounds of fluke. Next month, it will probably be similar. Then in May it will be, "Ok, you're allowed to land five hundred pounds of fluke three or four times a week. Same thing July, August—five hundred pounds three or four times a week. Then in September, it will go to like a thousand pounds once a week. Then, whatever's left over come November, December, they usually up our quota a little. It'll start at a thousand, fifteen hundred pounds once a week. Towards the end, they were allowing us 2,500 pounds a week. It's set up in such a way that there's not too much pressure put on any part of the fishery at any time. There's not a dozen boats going out to catch ten thousand pounds all in the same week and flooding the market. The price will go from six dollars to two dollars. There's not too much pressure put on the market at any given time. Everyone's making money. Everyone's sustainably fishing. On top of that, when North Carolina has those open quotas like that, they're typically coming up here to catch them. They're usually catching

them off of New Jersey. In the heavier summer months, like August, late July, they're catching them off of Nantucket and Block Island. I don't think that they're going up there to catch them because they caught all the ones off North Carolina. I think everything just shifted. The new regulations they're trying to set up right now, because your northern states from Long Island, Rhode Island, Connecticut, they have such small fluke quotas. They have such a small piece of the pie, and now all the fluke are sitting there. The last meeting I was at, they were talking about basically drawing a new Mason Dixon line. Instead of drawing it between Maryland and Virginia, they want to draw it between New Jersey and New York. They want to take quota from all the southern states and give it to the northern states. And the problem we're having with that is, our fluke never left. We're still catching the same fluke that my grandfather was catching, in the same spots my grandfather was catching them, fifty years ago. So why do we have to give up our quota for them? Our biomass never shifted. Then again, I see North Carolina's rules and regulations, and I feel like a dozen boats catching ten thousand pounds puts a little too much pressure on the stock biomass at any given time. I try to do my effort to get to every open forum meeting I can get to.

SS: Do you have any official positions, or are you part of any advocacy associations, other than the co-op? Are you on any councils or anything?

GL: Not currently.

SS: Ok, you're just going as yourself.

GL: We are associated with the Garden State Seafood Association. All the co-op members are. The Kailey Ann is a member of it. My uncle Jimmy, he is like the fishermen's politician, and I've been basically riding his coattails and going with him to these places.

SS: I bet there's a lot to learn from him. I'm met him and I know a little bit about how respected he is as a fisheries politician.

GL: You don't want to be on his bad side. I see there is a need for young blood, and not too many people stepping to the plate, so I try to.

SS: That's great. That's really important.

GL: The ones that remain. Because without anyone stepping in, it's going to be Walmart boats out there. It's going to be corporate boats.

SS: Do you see that happening locally, in New Jersey or in Point Pleasant?

GL: I see a few people who have a sizable amount of money, who are able to buy more and more boats, create a fleet, but not fish. Sit at home and let the boats fish.

SS: So that's happening around here?

GL: A little bit. I grew up admiring my father and looking at how hard he worked, and I just wouldn't feel like I can live in his shadow if I owned a boat and sat at home and let someone

else fish it. My father is known up and down the East Coast for his work ethic. I just want to live up to that.

SS: Well, that's a nice thought to conclude the interview on. Unless there's anything else you'd like to add before we end?

GL: I can't think of anything.

SS: Alright. Well, thank you very much. It's been really nice to have some insights into fishing and what it means to you, and what you're doing to keep it going—your family's legacy.

[end of interview]

[67:22]