

**Interview with Jared Bennett, commercial fisherman**

**Occupation:** commercial fisherman

**Port Community:** Chatham, Massachusetts

**Interviewer:** Sarah Schumann

**Date and year:** May 20, 2019

**Location:** Harwichport, Massachusetts

**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]: Alright, the recorder is going. My name is Sarah Schumann. Today is May 20th, 2019. I'm in Harwichport, Massachusetts. I'm with Jared Bennett. Jared, could you please state your occupation?

Jared Bennett [JB]: I'm a commercial fisherman.

SS: What's your vessel name and homeport?

JB: It's the White Cap, and I'm out of Chatham, Massachusetts.

SS: What age are you?

JB: I'm twenty-nine.

SS: Twenty-nine. And just briefly, what is your educational background?

JB: High school and one year of voc training. It was a boat building school.

SS: Boat building school? Where was that?

JB: It was in Maine, in Kennebunk. It was the Landing School.

SS: Was it just a one-year program?

JB: Yeah, it was just a one-year boatbuilding program.

SS: That sounds fun. Ok, that covers the basic questions I wanted to get from you. Where would you like to begin to tell you story?

JB: I guess I can start where it began.

SS: Sounds good.

[01:04]

JB: I was twenty-two or twenty-three and this is not my original boat that I've had. I bought this boat three years ago. Beforehand, we had—when I say we, it was me and my dad—we had a forty-foot JC, that was a gillnetter from town. My dad bought it as a way to go tuna fishing and just kind of have fun. He used to be a commercial fisherman, but he got out of the business probably in the mid-nineties, I think. He got out. He had us, the family and everything, and it was just too hard to make a living, so he quit. He bought this first boat, just to get out on the water, essentially. It was already rigged as a gillnetter. It was from Chatham. We were just like, "Hey, why don't we try to make it a gillnetter again?" It already had the lifter on and it was pretty much ready to go. We found a multispecies permit and joined the fixed gear sector. My younger brother, who's twenty-five or twenty-six, he was fishing on another boat beforehand, so he had a little experience as a crew. He jumped on and we just went for it. We put the boat in the water, put some gear on, had no idea what we were doing, and just went.

[02:43]

SS: That was you and your brother? Your dad wasn't involved?

JB: It was. He was still working fulltime. He just kind of gave us the boat and was like, "Good luck."

SS: But he had some previous experience gillnetting?

JB: They mostly did tub trawling. But he did gillnet. He sea scalloped. He did everything. That was when everybody did everything and it was so easy to get into. He did all of it, and then he got out of it. We just put the boat in the water, and let her rip. Just tried to figure it out and go from there.

SS: How did it go at first?

JB: It was good. We were just going for skates and dogfish. That's pretty much what we go for, still. Skates are pretty easy to catch, so we got them. Learning how to haul gear was interesting. Nobody came with us. We just kind of set the gear one day, and the next day we went back. We were trying to figure out how to haul the gear. I have no idea what I'm doing. I'm trying to figure it out. We were fishing down to the southeast, so the tide runs really hard down there. We're into the tide at a two- to three-knot current. Trying to figure it all out. We got it in, but it wasn't pretty. But we got it, and we got our skate limit that day, and kind of just kept on going from there. My brother stopped going with me and went back to doing his own thing.

SS: Still fishing?

JB: Yeah, still fishing. He actually fishes with me now, in the winter, this time of the year, and then he has a thirty-two-foot dog boat. He goes tub trawling for dogfish in the summertime. He went and did his own thing, and I kept doing my own thing, and kind of realized that the only way to make it a year-round thing was to buy a bigger boat and buy a monkfish permit and make it more about to go year-round. That boat was kind of limiting. I'd really only usually fish until November and then call it a season. I figured that to really step up and call this a fulltime thing, that's what I had to do. That's what I did, three or four years ago.

SS: The other boat, you said your dad had bought it?

JB: Yeah.

SS: Does he still have it?

JB: No. We sold it. It went to Gloucester. It's a lobster boat now. Shortly after I bought this. Then I had to buy a monkfish permit. Well, I didn't have to, but I wanted to. I bought a monkfish permit, and now we go year-round. Monkfish, skates, dogfish, a little bit of everything.

SS: For the audio, I think you mentioned that it's a gillnetter, but if not, I should state that the White Cap is a gillnetter.

JB: Yeah. It's a gillnetter.

SS: So monkfish, skates, and dogfish?

JB: Yeah, pretty much.

[05:45]

SS: Is that all federal or state as well?

JB: All federal. That's the basis of the story.

SS: Did all that happen after you did the boat-building program in Maine?

JB: It is. I did that right after high school. I built boats for a few years. I did that all through high school too. I just wasn't really into it as much. I like the thrill of being my own boss. It was a lot nicer working for somebody in the wintertime, and then I'd fish all summer. Fishing was over, and then I'd go back and work for a boatbuilding company in the winter. Being my own boss was a lot better. I enjoyed it a lot more.

SS: What is it that you enjoy so much about being your own boss?

JB: Just not having to answer to anybody. Just being in control. I'm not like a control freak, but it's nice to decide when I want to work and how hard I want to work. Just to control everything about it is a lot more appealing. That's what drew me to it fulltime.

SS: Was it pretty much what you expected it to be, or were there any surprises or bumps in the road?

JB: There haven't really been any major bumps in the road. When I first started, I was living at home. I didn't really have any responsibilities. Now, I have a lot more responsibilities. I wouldn't say that they're the bump in the road, but I have a lot more responsibilities now, and I have to just take it more seriously.

SS: Are you married? Do you have a family?

JB: I have a daughter. We're not married, but we're together.

SS: How old is your daughter?

JB: She is about fifteen months old.

SS: Is that what you're referring to when you talk about added responsibilities?

JB: Yeah. I didn't really have to take the fishing as seriously when I first started. It was kind of more of a fun thing to do. But now with all of this, I take it a lot more serious. Now it's actually like my livelihood.

SS: Does that change how you feel about it at all?

JB: Not really. No. I just take it a little more seriously, push it a little more, go out a little bit more than I would have, run a little bit more gear when I have to. Just on that aspect of it. In terms of other bumps in the road of the fishery, I haven't seen any yet. Obviously, there's the wind farm potential that could screw us up a little bit. Other than that, I haven't really. Not too much, anyway. Bad monk prices. The market seemed to tank right as I bought my monk permit. We can still go, at least. It's just not how it was five or six years ago.

SS: What caused that?

JB: You get so many different answers from buyers. I've heard that in China, they're bringing in a ton of really small monkfish. Most of the monkfish go to Korea. They don't want our small monkfish, and a lot of our monkfish are considered small. Ten pounds or up is considered a large fish, which is a pretty big monkfish. A lot of our fish are six to eight pounds, so they're small. They don't want them, so we just have to tail them. The tail market is just flooded. Kind of hurts, but it is what it is. Hopefully, someday, it will bounce back and return to what it was. Now, it's kind of more of a volume fishery now. I think when I first started working on boats in the winter, we didn't have to do volume in the winter to make a decent check. Now, it's like how much can you actually catch. Now, it's all about research days and going down and loading up on a big trip and making a normal check out of it.

SS: So you have to compensate for lower value with more volume?

[10:25]

JB: Yeah, which we kind of do in the summertime. That's what skates and dogfish are. They're high volume, low price. It's nothing new. It just hurts a little bit, that's all.

SS: Are you doing day trips or multi-day trips?

JB: Right now, they're like thirty-six hours. Right now, we usually leave in the evening. It's about a twelve-hour steam down to the fishing gear. Then it's anywhere from ten to seventeen hours of hauling and cutting and another twelve hours back.

SS: Who do you have for crew?

JB: I have my younger brother with me and his friend. He actually got a job on here. He's even younger than my brother. I think he's twenty-two or twenty-three. We're the young guys.

SS: All under thirty.

JB: Yeah. It's just the three of us right now. My brother leaves in probably the middle of June, and I got to find a replacement. I guess that's my hurdle. Trying to find a replacement is very tricky. That's what I'm working on right now.

SS: Do you see other people in your generation around here involved in fisheries? Is that common, or is this boat kind of an anomaly?

JB: There's one other kid who's my brother's age who has a boat this size that goes monk-ing. Aside from that, we're the only two young gillnetters. My brother has a thirty-two foot Novi that he tub trawls with. He fishes on a lobster boat with his friend, who is the same age. He has a lobster permit, so they go out lobstering together. Other than that, there's not a lot of young people in it. It's kind of sad. It's just really expensive.

SS: Do you think that's the reason there aren't more young people?

[12:33]

JB: Well, that, and you always hear, "Nobody likes to work. Nobody likes to work." But I'm finding it true. I haven't had to put a Craigslist ad up in a few years. I got lucky with crew that would stick around. But I had to put one up four years ago, and I would get calls and emails like crazy. I just put one up a week ago, and I've had two responses.

SS: You've seen a big change in that time?

JB: I have, yeah. I don't know if that's just people don't use Craigslist anymore or what.

SS: The economy's doing really well right now, too. People have options.

JB: Yeah, so you really need to find someone who wants to do it. That's what it boils down to, is they want to be on the water. A lot of people say they want to, but they don't really understand the lifestyle of it and the long days. There's such a high turnover rate. It's pretty bad. I went through thirty people one summer. It was two or three days and then they'd leave. It's tough. There's not a lot of young people around here, either. The Town of Chatham is trying to figure out how to keep young people around, because housing prices are insane. It's almost impossible to afford to live here. That doesn't help either. The people that you do get responses from, they're from different states or wherever. It's hard to tell

people, “Move your whole life down here,” and then for them to not make it or not like it. It’s hard for me to tell people to do that, so usually, I just tell them, “No, it’s not worth it.” It’s tough, for sure.

SS: You mentioned housing prices around here. How about dock space? Is it expensive to keep a boat here?

JB: I only keep my boat around here in the wintertime. I fish out of Chatham Harbor in the summer. The hard part about there is it’s very tidal. I draw six feet of water. We have to play the tides over there. We didn’t used to, but we’re in a bad time of the bar. It’s really sandy and disorganized and kind of a mess. Over here, we can come over here in the winter. We never have a problem here, because all of these boats you see here aren’t here in the winter. They actually all came in here in the last week—all the recreational [boats]. All the commercial guys have been here. The town of Harwich lets us come in November 1st and we have to be out by June 1st. June 1st, if we’re still fishing down in Southern New England, I’ll jump over to Stage Harbor and just jump on a Town of Chatham mooring and fish out of there for a week or two. As soon as we get done down here, I’ll move to the fish pier in Chatham, where I have a mooring of my own. It’s not too hard to get a boat. We made a rule in Chatham that if you’re a Chatham resident and you have a boat, then you can get an offload permit to make it more appealing to young people and everybody in the town. As long as you’re a resident and you’re ready to go, you can get an offload permit. I think there’s only a hundred of them issued, and maybe ninety-six or ninety-seven of them are actually used. There is a wait list. If you’re not a Chatham resident, get on the list. If you are a resident, it’s easy to get a mooring and a permit.

SS: Ok, so that’s easy enough to figure out?

JB: It’s not too bad. It’s not bad. The pier’s not bad. They can pretty much handle the volume. Have you been down there before?

SS: A long time ago.

JB: There’s two bulkheads on the front. There’s two different buyers. There’s Marder and Red’s Best down there. They do a pretty good job of making sure we get out of there fairly quick. There are times when we’ve been waiting for two to three hours after we get in. Sometimes that can happen, just sitting there waiting. You kind of go crazy, after a day out there. It’s a little frustrating. But that’s anywhere, anywhere that you have a hundred boats going out of and coming in fairly close on the tide. We’re all tidal. We’re all coming in around the same time. It is what it is. We all help each other out.

[18:00]

SS: You said you’re part of a sector? The fixed gear sector?

JB: Yeah, the fixed gear sector.

SS: Can you talk about that a bit?

JB: What do you want me to talk about?

SS: What's that experience like?

JB: I don't really know, because I haven't been in any other ones. I'm a board member of the fixed gear sector. I've been a board member for the past two years. This is my third year, now. I got on it just to be involved in the policies that we make. Going forward, I figured it was beneficial to get on there. I would say over all, it's been a good experience. We're working pretty hard right now, because we are the lowest compliance sector in the United States. It's not all our fault, but we've had some issues. We're working on getting all that fixed and making sure our sector doesn't get shut down. It's been ok. It's definitely interesting. We've had to kind of form little committees and plans and stuff, because if one fisherman doesn't want to do—like our Boat Tracks, where we have to call in every day on the computer, if they don't do that, it hurts all of us. We're working on that kind of thing. Some people just don't take it seriously. We're working on it and making sure we don't get shut down, because that wouldn't be good. But no, it's fine. I don't know what else to say about the sector.

SS: Ok. It's working.

JB: Yeah, it's ok. I don't know. Pretty much everybody in it does the same thing. We're all skate and dog boats.

SS: So you're all like-minded for the most part?

JB: Pretty much. There's a handful of tub trawl guys and a couple draggers.

SS: Now, I thought sectors were for groundfish.

JB: They are.

SS: But you guys aren't targeting groundfish. Do you still interact with them? Is that why you're in a sector?

JB: No, it's because we go for skates.

SS: Oh, they count as part of that?

JB: Yeah, they're part of the multispecies. One of the reasons our compliance was so low was we went to NOAA and we were like, "We're getting jammed with observers. You guys have seen with the skates, we don't see any groundfish. The mesh size is twelve-inch. They swim right through it. The dogfish gear that we set, which is six and a half, so it could catch groundfish, we don't soak it overnight. We soak it for like twenty minutes. We cut out skates and we throw the skate bodies in the nets to kind of get them crazy. We're not catching groundfish in that either, so we get an exemption where we get a lower observer coverage rate, just an extra large mesh exemption. But it's confusing on the boat tracks, trying to figure out how to check all the boxes. Some people don't check the boxes. Some people do, and they still report that it's wrong.

SS: It's complicated.

JB: Yeah. It's kind of a pain.

[21:31]

SS: Are you involved in any other management or science activities?

JB: Not in terms of fisheries. Actually, I think I'm on the harbor porpoise take reduction team, but I think I'm going to get off it, because it's just too much. I am also a board member of the Aunt Lydia's Cove Committee.

SS: What committee?

JB: Aunt Lydia's Cove. That's the fish pier.

SS: Aunt Lydia's Cove?

JB: Yeah, that's the pier. I jumped on that one too, just to kind of help oversee. We just had a massive renovation down there for tourists. They put in new fuel tanks, new fuel lines. Once again, if that's the place I'm going to be fishing out of, I'd like to help shape it to how it would be beneficial to the younger guys and not just the older generation that are going to be out soon.

SS: Do you see there being a difference in terms of what they need?

[22:33]

JB: Not necessarily in terms of the pier. More so on the sector side of things. A lot of the older guys in the sector, they stopped fishing for groundfish probably twenty years ago, when I was like nine years old. They switched over to skate fishing. Back then, skate fishing was unregulated. They could just bring in whatever they wanted. These guys all have massive history on their skate permits, and now they're all pushing to go to limited access, like a quota program, for skates. That's something that I see. That's not necessarily on the board. But that's an opinion that they all want, that could potentially push me out and make me have to buy another permit. There's just stuff like that that you kind of have to stay involved in, make sure we don't get screwed out of it, because that wouldn't be good. I'd have to go buy another permit, if you can even find one. Hopefully it doesn't come down to that.

SS: What kind of permit do you have right now?

JB: A multispecies permit.

SS: That covers everything?

JB: That covers everything.

SS: The monkfish, dogs, and skate are all covered by that?



JB: The monkfish is a monkfish D permit. There's A, B, C, and D. The D permits coincide with a multispecies permit. As and Bs, some of them go on scallop boats. Then there's guys, maybe down where you are in Point Judith, maybe they have the B—the one where you don't have a multispecies permit. They don't have the tracking devices and stuff like that. There's different things. I have a multispecies permit and a monkfish D permit.

SS: Did you have to get them separately?

JB: No, it's a package deal. And then I have another multispecies permit that's just in CPH.

SS: What's that?

JB: Confirmation of permit history. I don't even know how to describe it. It's not on a boat. It's in the cloud, basically. It gets renewed every year, but I don't have it on a boat. If I want to put it on a boat, I could.

SS: Ok, we'll leave it there. It sounds complicated. If the skate were to go limited access, would you lose access to skate? You'd have to get another permit?

JB: Well, maybe. It depends on how it's shaped. If these guys say, "We want permits with history from 1990 until 2000 or 2010."

SS: And if you didn't have enough history on your permit during those years, then you'd have to get another permit that did, to catch what you're catching now.

JB: Yeah, exactly. It's like penalizing young people. There's only two of us. But we weren't skate fishing when they were. We were nine years old, seven years old. Why should we get punished for it? I'm monitoring that.

SS: Are you just monitoring or are you actively opposing?

JB: It's still in the very early stages, so I'm not sure. I do see where these guys are coming from with the limited access thing. I think that nobody should just be able to go out and get one. Because right now, anyone can just go out and get one. It does hurt the guys who are actively targeting them. I don't even know how we would do it, but just sort of some way that if you want to actively, actually catch skates, you should be able to get a skate permit. But all these people who are just getting them to have them and are maybe doing a thousand pounds here, two thousand here, kind of just not actively targeting them, it hurts us.

SS: Why does it hurt you?

JB: Well, there's an overall quota, so once we hit the overall quota, once it goes to eighty-five percent, the catch drops down to five hundred pounds a trip. Usually, that happens in the wintertime, when we're down in Southern New England. Down there, we try to stay away from skates, but they're always moving around. We could get a set down there where we get jammed with skates, but we can only keep five hundred pounds. You either have to pick them all out or they all die. It's not good for the fishery, that time of the year, to have that much discards. It's a tough one.

[27:38]

SS: In terms of licensing structures that would work for everyone, do you have any ideas?

JB: Not right now [laughter]. I don't know. It's one of those things that I haven't thought about in a while now.

SS: [laughter] I won't put you on the spot if you don't have a speech prepared.

JB: I don't have a speech. But like I said, I did go to a meeting and oppose it. That was in the very early public comments. I wrote a letter to the skate development team or the AP team, stating my concerns and everything. I know there's a ton of people out there who oppose it as well. It sounds like it's still going to, I don't know. It's a tough one.

SS: In the winter, you fish in Southern New England?

JB: I do.

SS: And in the summer, where do you fish?

JB: Right up here off of Chatham. In the summertime, the dogfish are right up around the three-mile line, pretty much. The skates are anywhere from seven to twelve miles offshore. It's a pretty easy day. It's a quick day. We can usually do it in eight hours or something.

[29:04]

SS: You mentioned you have a fifteen-month-old daughter. How does your career interact with your home life and social life and stuff like that?

JB: Not very well [laughter]. I'm always missing stuff or not able to pick her up from daycare or drop her off. I missed mother's day. You got to go when you got to go. Especially when you're fishing so far away, when you get one weather window, you got to go, no matter what's happening. You got to go. It definitely affects that. In terms of a social life, you can't really plan to do things. I have a buddy who's getting married in October, and I'm in the wedding party. We were all talking about when to do a bachelor party, and they all want to do it this summer. I was like, "You can't do it in the summertime. We're doing it now, in the winter, because that's the only time I can go." I can't take a day off in the summer. It's a derby all summer. We go straight, try to do good stretches of twenty, thirty days in a row before taking a break. It definitely affects it. It makes it tough. Most everyone knows. They have to accept it. They don't have to like it. It's a pain in the ass, for sure. But that's the bad times. The good times are in the winter when I don't have to fish all week, and I can hang out with my daughter. We can hang out and just play around, which is awesome.

SS: That's the positive side?

JB: It is, yeah.

[30:58]

SS: Any other upsides and downsides about the life you lead?

JB: Upsides and downsides [laughter].

SS: [laughter] That might be different from a person your age in a land-based career?

JB: I think the downside is we miss summer, pretty much. Like I said, we go every day. After the first seven days, you're pretty tired after that the next day, so you don't want to go to the beach or have fun. The downside is you kind of do miss a summer. The upside is the fall, you get a lot of days off. This time of year, you get a lot of days off. That's kind of a nice part about it. You can enjoy yourself. It's not too crowded here, this time of the year. We kind of have the place to ourselves. I don't have a lot of young friends that are doing it.

SS: What kinds of careers are your friends around here doing, if they're not fishing? What do people do around here?

[32:08]

JB: Building. Definitely trades. I've got a friend who's a firefighter. Mechanic. Banker. It's pretty mixed up. But a lot of people that I went to school with don't live here anymore. A lot of people leave. It goes back to the whole keeping young people here is pretty tough.

SS: And you said that was in large part due to home prices?

JB: Yeah. I think a lot of it is home prices. I think a lot of it is people just want to get away. I think you have people come back later in life, realizing that it is a nice place. Yeah, I think home prices are very discouraging. I think a cheap home in Chatham is probably three hundred, three fifty, which is a lot as a first-time homebuyer to do. When you're not making huge money, it's tight. I think that's it. There's not really a lot of childcare. That's one thing we found is an issue. There's no real daycares in Chatham. It's really tough. So even when you look at, "Yeah, I do want to stay, but I want to buy a house and raise a family," and you look at those obstacles, it's very challenging.

SS: Do you own a home?

JB: Yeah. We did buy a house like two or three years ago. We were pretty lucky to find the one we did, but it's tough, for sure, especially with the way I make my money. It's so high and low. It's "save, save, save" all summer, and then spend it all winter paying the bills and just go right back to it in the summer.

SS: In terms of the boat and permits, have you gotten any financing for the business?

[34:23]

JB: The permit, I bought from another local fisherman in town who has a few boats. He was cool about it. He owner financed it, so I paid it off in three years.

SS: What does that mean? He let you pay over time?

JB: Yeah. I can say numbers, right? Does it matter?

SS: Sure, if you're comfortable.

JB: I don't really care. We agreed on seventy thousand for the permit. I gave him a down payment of thirty, I think. Then I paid him fifteen over the next three years.

SS: That's nice. That must have helped a lot.

JB: It did. The boat, I was lucky enough that my dad lent me the money for that, or most of it. Then I had some of the money saved. I was pretty lucky there.

SS: If you hadn't had that help from your dad and from the original permit holder, do you think you would have been able to build up as you did?

JB: I don't know. It would have been harder. Before my dad okayed it, I did look into a couple of loans. I could have done it, but it was a lot more money with the interest and all the other stuff, and it was kind of a pain. There's a place in Eastham that's called the CDP. I think it's the Community Development Plan. It's like a bank, but it's not actually a bank that you go to, to do banking. They help a lot of small businesses around here. I think they have scallop quota that they lease out. They do loans. They get money from the federal government to do loans. I did talk to them about doing something, but they wanted me to write a fifteen-page report, which is normal, but when it was either do that or just get it, I just did it.

SS: You had a few options.

JB: I did have a couple. It would have been tough. The permit, I didn't have to explore any other options, but it definitely would have been tough. It's hard to go to a bank and say, "Hey, can I get this money for a fishing permit?" Most of them are going to say, "No." It's such a high-risk thing. It's tough. That goes back to the young people trying to get into it. If they have to look and say, "I have to spend two hundred thousand dollars just to get into it, that's a lot of money."

SS: Is that figure what you estimate it would cost to get the whole package?

JB: Probably.

SS: Boat, permit, gear? Two hundred thousand?

JB: Probably. That's a lot just to go.

SS: And hope you make money and hope you do well—no guarantees.

JB: Yeah, exactly. It's tough. I feel like gillnetting and groundfishing is one of the cheaper ones to get into, compared to like scalloping. That's very pricey.

SS: It sounds like your dad has been supportive of this career choice?

JB: Definitely.

SS: Sometimes I talk to people whose parents weren't supportive, but in your case you felt support from your family?

JB: Yeah, for sure. Definitely. He's done what he can. He likes to come down and help work on the boat. If I'm putting keel pipes on or new zincs or transducers, he likes to come down and mess around. It keeps him busy. He has. He's been very supportive.

SS: What work does he do?

JB: He does not work anymore. He is retired or on disability. I'm not sure which one. He was working for a gas and oil company in Orleans. He did that for fifteen years. Before that, it was just fish.

[38:35]

SS: When you think about your future, where do you see yourself? Are you right here doing the exact same thing or do you see changes or evolution?

JB: Probably. I like to look at this as what's going to happen within the next six months to a year.

SS: That's your planning horizon?

JB: Yeah. I do like to look. There are certain things that you have to keep an eye out for. Like I said, there's the wind farm. There's the right whale potential closures. So there are certain things that I like to keep an eye on. In terms of the actual fishing, I like to keep it pretty shortsighted, focus on the next season. What am I going to do this summer? Go from there. Figure out my plan for the summer. OK, summer's over. Figure out my plan for the winter. Just kind of keep those other issues in the back of my head, because they are kind of alarming.

SS: Do you want to say more about that?

JB: Well, I don't know if it's happening, but they were talking about closing down our entire area to fixed gear because they saw some right whales down there. I haven't really been following it. I missed the last meeting about that. I was out fishing, I think. I don't know what's going on now, but that's something you kind of have to watch for and keep an eye out for. If they shut us down, that wouldn't be very good. I'd figure out a new plan, but I don't know if that plan would be fishing.

[40:33]

SS: Do you hope to be doing this for the next twenty, thirty years?

JB: Definitely, as long as I don't get sick of it.

SS: [laughter] We talked a little bit about this at the beginning, but what is it about this career and this lifestyle that you love so much?

JB: Just being able to go out. You're on the ocean, for one. That's pretty awesome, just being on the water all day. All the cool stuff you see. Being your own boss, being able to go. It's also enjoyable to catch fish that some people want. It's nice to know that you're feeding people. That's kind of a cool thing that I don't think about too often, but it kind of pops up. Like, "Oh, yeah, this is food." That's cool, too, being able to supply fresh caught fish to people. Kind of ocean farming, sort of.

SS: You said earlier that you don't find too many people—young people or otherwise—who are the right fit for fishing. You said you burnt through thirty people in one summer. When you think about the profile of the kind of person who is the right fit for fishing, how would you describe that?

JB: I don't know, because you get so many people that you think won't make it, but then they do. I don't really see a physical profile, because there are so many different types of people.

SS: Physically?

JB: Or just "the look." If you line up ten people, I wouldn't be able to say, "You, you, and you are going to make it." It's mental. After the first day, you can figure out, "This person's not going to make it," or "They are." I think you need to just have a strong work ethic and be able to put up with a long day of fishing and early hours. It's tough. I feel like nobody can really know until they do it. Give them a day, and go from there. I've had some people who think they're going to make it, and they're just puking all day. It's discouraging.

[43:15]

SS: Do you have any words of advice that you'd give a young person who's thinking about trying a fishing career?

JB: I'd say, "Go for it." I'd say, "Make sure you get on a good boat. Make sure you don't get on a boat that's a bunch of drug addicts and drunks. Do your homework and make sure it's a good one to get on." Yeah, but I'd say, "Definitely go for it. If that's what you're interested in doing, go for it and give it a shot." That's all you can do.

SS: Do you have any advice for someone who's a deckhand now but who's thinking about climbing the ladder into boat ownership? Anything you've learned along the way that you would impart?

JB: "Just don't give up." It's just one of those things. "Just go. Usually, as long as you just go, you're going to catch something. If the weather looks like it's going to be a little bit crappy, just go." That's probably the most important thing that I've learned. That's probably it. When I first started, if it was crappy out or if the bar was crappy, it was kind of intimidating. You don't want to miss a day because it's crappy or you think it's going to be crappy or you get it in your head that you shouldn't go. Just go.

SS: Just go anyway.

JB: Yeah. I got survival suits and life rafts. But nothing's going to happen. It's all in your head. Just don't psych yourself out, I guess.

SS: Be brave. You have never worked as a deckhand? You went straight from no commercial fishing experience to owning the boat?

JB: From nothing. Yes.

SS: That's pretty unique.

JB: It is. I don't think a lot of people liked me for that.

SS: [laughter] Really?

JB: Yeah, I don't think so. I didn't hear it on the radio, but the first day, there were people talking about us, saying how we weren't going to do anything or catch anything, how we weren't going to make it. I didn't hear it. This is what somebody told me. Whatever. But yeah, I think a lot of people didn't like that, and I can see why. If some completely random dude just showed up with a boat in your way, yeah, I would be pissed off, too. But people have dealt with it, and nothing bad. Nobody's ever like sabotaged me, at least not that I know of. It's been fun.

SS: That story you told at the beginning of not knowing what you were doing, just going out there and throwing your nets in and catching your limit, to me that's pretty incredible. Do you think you were just incredibly lucky, or is it easier than people think it is?

JB: I did have an area where I was going to.

SS: So you knew where to go?

JB: I think someone was like, "You should try over here." "Ok, we'll just go try this little area." Skate fishing—I'm not going to say it's super easy, but once you figure out that pattern, it's all patterns. Once you figure that kind of stuff out, then you're good. We were partially lucky, partially had some numbers from somebody who said, "Go try this," but I'm pretty sure I set the gear the wrong way. I didn't know what I was doing. Part luck, part somebody else's skill.

SS: And then everything you've learned, for the most part, has been trial and error, self-taught?

JB: Yes. Yeah, pretty much trial and error. I'm still figuring out how to fish down in Southern New England. Like I said, it's all patterns, all depth. It just takes years to figure it out to where you can do well. I'm still learning, for sure. This year, we might try a little groundfishing, go out and poke around and try to find some cod or some haddock or some pollock. We're going to mess around with that in June and try to have some fun.

[47:56]

SS: Is there anything else that we haven't covered that is part of your story?

JB: Not that I can think of right now. It might pop up when I'm on the way home.

SS: Alright. Let me think if there's anything else. Is there anything you would do differently if you knew then what you know now, in terms of the way you've built your business?

JB: I try not to think about that.

SS: Right, I guess it just leads to regret.

JB: Yeah. I mean, I'd say the only bad thing was when I bought my monk permit when I did, but I wouldn't have been able to do it any other way, so it is what it is. Right before I bought it, I'm sure the price on the permit was decent. I don't know what it is now. I'm sure I lost some money on it. But that's kind of whatever. It is what it is. I think it was something that I had to do, either way. That's the only kind of bummer. I don't regret buying it, but in terms of an investment point of view, it probably wasn't the best.

SS: Timing-wise.

JB: Yeah, but it is what it is. Just keep plugging along.

SS: To wrap up, do you have any ideas or suggestions about how we could get young people into this industry and support them better?

JB: I don't know. I got to think. I guess some sort of financing. Like I said, most banks tell you to screw off. If there was somewhere that actually knew what we go through, that would be cool, just in terms of not turning us down. That would probably be pretty helpful.

SS: Do you think if there was something like that, there would be more young fishermen? Are there people you know of that want to be owning a boat but are facing that barrier?

JB: Not really. Not really too much. I just think that it's probably one of those things that when the time comes from somebody to actually get into it and then they realize, like "Oh, I need to jump through all these hoops," and then a lot of places turn them down. There's probably not a lot of young people thinking about it but not doing it because of that reason. I think it's just the cost to get in is a lot. There's not a lot of young people on the back decks. I think if there was some sort of program to get young people interested, on the back decks, that would ultimately lead to young people then buying, as long as they wanted to. Some sort of program like that. Isn't there one in Rhode Island?

SS: Yeah, it's a couple years old. It seems to be working pretty well.

JB: Is it? Nice. We should do one here. That's what they can do. They can do exactly that. I think I saw that. It was on Craigslist. It's like a four-week program or something?

SS: Yeah. They graduate about twelve people every summer. I think most of them stick with fishing.

JB: Are they young? Is there an age requirement?

SS: I don't think there's an age requirement, but they all do tend to be young.



JB: That's cool. That would be nice, if we had something like that. That way, kids know where to start.

SS: Right.

JB: That would be cool.

SS: Anything else? Any closing thoughts?

JB: I don't think so.

SS: You feel ready to wrap up?

JB: I think so, unless I missed anything.

SS: If you think of anything else, you can always get in touch with me.

JB: Yeah.

SS: Well, thank you very much. I'll just shut off the recorder and we can get to that paperwork.

[52:36]

[end of interview]