

Interview with Tom Birarelli, Tim Birarelli, and Robbie Budds, commercial fishermen

Occupation: lobsterman/scalloper, lobsterman/scalloper, and lobsterman/scalloper

Port Community: Beverly, Massachusetts

Interviewer: Sarah Schumann

Date and year: April 26, 2019

Location: Beverly, 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]: The recording is starting. My name is Sarah Schumann. Today is April 26th, 2019. I'm in Beverly, Massachusetts. Could each of you please state your full name and your occupation?

Robbie Budds [RB]: Robert Budds, twenty-one, lobsterman and scalloper.

SS: Could you spell your last name?

RB: B-U-D-D-S.

Tom Birarelli [Tom B]: Tom Birarelli, eighteen, commercial lobsterman and scalloper.

SS: Could you spell your last name as well?

Tom B: B-I-R-A-R-E-L-L-I.

Tim Birarelli [Tim B]: Tim Birarelli, twenty-one, lobsterman and scalloper.

SS: Do each of you fish time or do you do something else as well?

RB: Fulltime.

Tim B: Fulltime.

Tom B: Fulltime.

SS: Fulltime, all of you. And your homeport is right here in Beverly?

Tom B: Yes

SS: What are the names of your vessel or vessels?

RB: Hat Trick.

Tom B: I got the F/V Legacy.

Tim B: The Shooting Star.

SS: I'm going to have a hard time, when I'm listening to this, knowing who's talking. We can try to do this, but maybe before you say anything, could you say who you are first? [editor's note: self-identifications are not recorded in the transcript]

Tom B: Right. That's fine.

SS: One more question. Could I ask each of you your educational background?

RB: I currently go to Endicott College in Beverly.

SS: What are you studying?

RB: History and education.

SS: What year are you?

RB: Senior.

Tom B: I graduated from Essex Technical High School in 2018. I didn't go to college, just to go fishing.

SS: Did you study a particular field there?

Tom B: I studied electrical.

Tim B: I just have my high school diploma from Loomis Chaffee in Connecticut.

[02:02]

SS: Great. That wraps up the initial questions I wanted to ask about your basic biographical info. Where should we start? Do you want to talk about how you got into this business and how you connected with each other?

Tom B: Me and him [Tim] are the same. We've known him [Robbie] for a while, probably back ten years ago. About four years ago when he started college, he came down. My mother owns a restaurant that we bring all our seafood to. He came down, and he was like, "I go fishing up in Maine." Obviously, he can tell you. We took him in and he started fishing with us. We got him rigged up with his own boat. He can tell you the rest, obviously. I don't need to speak for him. Me and Tim, we're fourth generation fishermen. This is what we grew up on. Ever since we were three years old, we grew up on the boat. When I was nine and Tim was eleven, we had our little lobster boat and we'd go fishing by ourselves. Our father was just like, "Here's the boat. Get the hell out of here. Go fishing." That's kind of how we

started with our own boat. After our father died in 2014, Tim took my father's boat and I had the Hat Trick, which now Robbie has. My last year in high school, I went out and bought the Legacy. That's pretty much our backgrounds. Anything else to add?

Tim B: No. I'm just thinking we should stay on lobstering to start and then we can get into other—

Tom B: Other stuff after that?

Tim B: We got into lobstering—

[interruption while a visitor stops by to pick up lobsters]

SS: [to RB] Do you want to tell your story a little bit while they're doing that?

RB: I started working at a boatyard when I was thirteen, because my parents have a house up in Maine. I spent my summers up there. That's where I kind of fell in love with fishing as a job. I used to work up in Maine, lobstering and groundfishing and all that. Like they said, I've known them for a long time. Me and Timmy used to play hockey together. When I came to college here, I had the plan of being a teacher, in the long run, after retiring or possibly as a backup plan in case something happens with the fishing industry. But once I graduate, I plan to still go commercial fishing and lobstering as long as I can.

SS: Did you grow up around here?

RB: I'm from Haverhill. We used to play hockey together when we were like thirteen or fourteen on a travel hockey team. That's how we kind of met.

SS: But your initial exposure to fishing was up in Maine, rather than here?

RB: Up in Maine. Then when I came down here four or five years ago, that's when I started with these guys. They kind of took me in. You know what I mean? They're fourth generation, and I'm like the fifth generation. You know what I mean? They took me under their wing and it's been going good.

SS: So you're not from a fishing family at all?

RB: No.

SS: What kind of background?

RB: My mom's a nurse and my dad's a run-of-the-mill salesman.

SS: What was it about fishing that hooked you when you were first exposed to it in Maine?

RB: I just like being outside and getting up early and getting done relatively early. Just a good time. I love boats and just love the culture around it.

Tim B: I think it's pretty addicting.

RB: Yeah, it's addicting.

Tom B: It's wicked addicting.

Tim B: You wake up, you go out, and there you are. No one's bothering you. There's a really good friendship between the guys you work with, because you're stuck in the same boat, literally, so you better get along with everyone. When you do, and you catch something, it's great. I'm trying to think about the perfect way to describe it.

Tom B: It's like an adrenaline rush.

[06:43]

Tim B: Yeah, pretty much. Every older guy will tell you, when they first come down. One guy we talk to from Maine, his first trip ever was in the Blizzard of '78. They were out for thirteen days. They only got to fish four of them because of weather. They were just jogging in the weather for nine of those thirteen days. He said it was addicting. You'd go up on one wave that's thirty feet and you'd come down on another wave. He said he was hooked. He was like, "I was hooked then. I had to go back out." And of course they came in loaded, even though they only fished four days. Then his itch starts. Our itch obviously starts. Money obviously plays a factor. No one's ever going to get around that. The money that can be made is ridiculous. Some of these guys make more—like look at Carlos. He makes more than a lot of people, and he's an immigrant.

SS: Carlos Rafael?

Tim B: Yeah. No that he's someone you want to emulate. But I'm just saying that his money is ridiculous.

SS: Yeah. That's a particular case. Not everyone can or should be Carlos [laughter].

Tim B: But there's plenty of other guys. Look at the guys like Monty at Intershell. He starts digging clams out of the back of his car, and selling them out of the back of his car, and he's a multi-millionaire.

SS: Is that a local company?

Tim B: Yeah. Or Vince Mortillaro starts that place years ago. Complete millionaire. I think it was in one of the Gloucester papers. He makes thirty million dollars a year or something like that.

SS: Is that part of the dream at the back of your head, to achieve that kind of success?

Tim B: Oh, yeah. I don't know of anyone that doesn't want to achieve that kind of success. There's guys like our grandfather. He bought his first boat with his last naval check, when he left the Navy. He owns his own dock, now. His three kids went fishing and made money and all bought houses, only fishing. They achieved the American Dream just strictly going fishing. I think that's part of it. And like I said, you're your own boss. You go hard for six months around here lobstering, six, seven months, and then that's it. You get to go enjoy your life.

You live a better life than most people do. I think it's still possible, because we live pretty good for eighteen and twenty-year-olds. You've fished before. The people you've probably worked for live a pretty decent life, too.

[Tom B re-enters the room after finishing with customer]

SS: Tom, we were just talking about the draw and the allure of fishing and what you love about it. Do you have anything to say about that?

Tom B: I don't know. Just grew up fishing. Ever since I was a kid, I've always wanted to go fishing. He played hockey. Ever since I was a kid, I just loved fishing.

Tim B: It's like an addiction.

Tom B: Yeah, there's just nothing better, in my eyes. Wintertime comes. Stuff slows down. We get shit weather. I can't spend more than two days on land without going nuts. I just always loved fishing, ever since I was a kid. Always something different every day. That's what I love about it.

[10:12]

SS: Do you guys have other siblings too?

Tom B: We have a little brother.

SS: Is he still too young, or is he fishing too?

Tom B: [to Tim B] How old is Trey?

Tim B: Fifteen.

Tom B: Fifteen. I should probably know that.

SS: Does he feel the same way?

Tom B: The problem that happened with him is our father died five years ago, so he was only ten years old. He didn't really get to go with my father like me and him [Tim] did. So he feels like he didn't really get to experience that like me and him did.

Tim B: I still think it's possible at any age. We see weekend warriors going out on their pleasure boats. They go on a groundfish trip one time, on like a Yankee Fleet thing, and they jig up one or two haddock. That's it! [claps hands] They have to have a boat. They have to go do it themselves. I think it's fishing itself. It doesn't matter if it's recreational or commercial. It's addicting, period. As for if it's too late for him? I don't think it's ever too late.

Tom B: Yeah, no.

Tim B: You see these rich people with really good jobs in corporate America. They have million-dollar sport fishing boats. Look at Henry [last name unintelligible]. He spent a million and a half dollars to try to catch a tuna fish. All he wants to do is spend his money. For us, it's

the same thing. We just benefit financially from it. The addiction's the same. Some people don't benefit financially and some people do. We got the double whammy where we have the itch and we make a living from it.

[11:52]

SS: I don't want to ask you to discuss things that are too personal, so stop me if you don't want to, but you mentioned that your father passed away five years ago. Can you talk a little bit about how that affected you as fishermen?

Tom B: Yeah. It definitely puts a screeching halt. Like he's your guy that's supposed to teach you everything. Fishing, you got to learn from someone. It's not someone you just read a book and you can go do, or go take classes at a school and go do. It's definitely a bump in the road. Between shit we got to pay for and Mom, we got to help Mom out. Here me and him are. I'm fourteen and he's seventeen. We're trying to pay the twenty thousand dollar a year health insurance bill, bills at the house, help Mom out. It puts a damper on everything. I look at it as you have two options. You either kind of balls up and go to work, or you can lose everything and never have it again. That's the way I look at it.

SS: At that point, did you have the same boats you have now, or were you still in the skiff?

Tom B: I was fishing on the little boat right here, and he had the blue boat, my father's old boat. After school, we'd go to work. We'd go out fishing. I never even looked at it as like a chore. I just always loved fishing, so I didn't mind it. Get home from school, get on the boat, go haul up the traps. On the weekends, you go haul more. Haul and haul and haul. Not only because you love it, but we had bills to pay at fourteen and seventeen, because my father was gone.

SS: Did you still have other older relatives, like uncles or a grandfather, that could mentor you in fishing?

Tom B: Yes. Yes. Our grandfather is eighty-two. Our uncle Mike is fifty-six. Our uncle Jim is fifty-two.

SS: They all fish?

Tom B: They've all been fishing their entire lives.

Tim B: I think that adds to the itch, too. Like you said, we're able to be mentored, but those guys all really learned themselves. Even though they're mentoring us, we still learn, at the same time. It's part of the itch. Everyone's always learning different things. I think that's what keeps people into it. You always get better, whether you catch a ton or you catch nothing. You always get something out of that day. I think that's what drives people the next day. "Ok, I caught a ton here. This is why."

SS: The curiosity and the learning is part of it?

Tim B: Exactly. I think that's part of it. It's every day, no matter whether you've been doing it for forty years or you've done it for four days. It's the curiosity. I think that's what draws a lot of people to it. That's why we're still here. We still have a lot to learn. That's part of it.

[15:18]

[beeping sound outside]

Tom B: Dumpster truck turning around.

SS: Do you want to talk about the business model that you're operating under? You've got the wharf, you've got the boats, and you said your mom has a restaurant. Is that all tied in?

Tim B: That's her business. We feed her product for a cheap price and we get paid for it too. I guess it's just cool, with this whole local seafood kick, that everyone wants to know where their food comes from now. No matter what they're putting in their body, they want to know where it comes from. I think for her, the business model works because it's her kids that are doing it, and it's basically from trap to plate. Two people touch it. It's cool.

SS: Yeah, that's cool. She must be so proud to tell people who caught it.

Tim B: Yeah, she loves to tell people the story. The stuff that they're eating. She just opened today for the season, for this year. All the stuff that she's putting out there, besides a few things that we don't catch, like the clams and the fish, is from us. The scallops and the lobsters are from her kids.

SS: Is it a seafood restaurant, specifically?

Tim B: Yes.

Tom B: It's more of a take-out thing.

Tim B: It's like a quick bit to eat.

Tom B: She does lobster rolls, fried scallops, fried clams, fried shrimp. She keeps it all seafood. People love it. If we don't catch it, we get it somewhere that's a reliable source. It's not shit from overseas.

Tim B: Like the clams are a local digger that she knows from her restaurant experience. She met Julian, the clam digger, when she worked at Beverly House of Pizza a couple nights a week, which is literally right at the end of the street here. The fish is from a guy that my father met in the mid-nineties, who's been cutting fish and running fish places in Boston for years.

[17:37]

SS: So you guys, or your family, own the wharf?

Tim B: Yes. Our grandfather owns the wharf.

SS: Your grandfather owns the wharf, ok. Are there other boats besides the three of your boats that tie up here?

Tim B: Grandfather's, uncle, us three, and one renter.

Tom B: One other guy.

Tim B: But that was a guy who our grandfather took under his wing when he was in high school.

Tom B: It's pretty tight.

Tim B: Our grandfather has basically been the pioneer of this whole—

Tom B: He bought this back in 1973.

Tim B: No, '76.

Tom B: Oh, '76.

SS: The stuff that you catch that doesn't go to your mom's restaurant—

Tim B: Is sold to dealers.

Tom B: We sell to the public, as well. People come down the dock.

SS: Robbie, do you own the boat that you run?

RB: Yeah.

SS: You do. Can you talk about that a little bit, how you acquired that?

RB: Well, they [Tom B and Tim B] gave me a good deal on it and allowed me to pay over time. They kind of just set me up real good and got me on my feet. I was really appreciative of that. They're like my family. They really take care of me and they've taught me a lot.

Tom B: Our grandfather, as soon he [RB] started working with us, he'd go around telling people, "This is my grandson. This is my grandson."

RB: Yeah, I went out to dinner with their grandfather like five days a week.

SS: Oh, that's so sweet!

Tom B: Yeah, he's like our brother.

SS: That's really sweet. When did you get the boat?

RB: Last year.

SS: How have your parents reacted?

RB: They just want me to do whatever makes me happy, as long as I can support myself. But they wanted me to get the piece of paper, so that's why I'm still in school.

SS: Your college degree?

RB: Right. After that, they'll be happy.

Tim B: I don't want to toot Tom and my horn, but what I'm about to say is for the people up at the fucking building in Gloucester. Unfortunately, it wouldn't be possible for you [RB] to get into this, without someone taking you under their wing. The point that you're [SS] coming down here for is that he [RB] wouldn't be standing here if it weren't for people already existing in this industry.

RB: Right, because you need for someone to take you under their wing. I think it's two years experience—

Tim B: Oh yeah, just to qualify for a license.

RB: Just to even qualify for the lobster license. Then you got to pay for it, unless you're family, because the only way you can get a license is if you're family or if you have experience. Then you have to pay out the nose. Basically, it seems like the Division of Marine Fisheries is holding onto these permits and letting them expire, and they just blow off into thin air. Do you know how many permits we lose every year?

Tim B: A lot. That's just state licenses. The state license, in order to get it, you need two years of 1099s just to qualify for it. After you're able to qualify, if you didn't know us, you would have to save up enough money. In two years of working on the back of a boat, two years in just about any job, you're not going to have enough money to get into the industry. Then, you start with, "I don't know a god damn thing about where to go or anything." Now you have a monthly loan payment, because you're going to need a loan, and you have no idea what you're doing.

RB: And then the cost to turn the key every day.

Tim B: Yeah, just to go every day. God forbid—

RB: Something breaks down.

Tim B: Yeah. That's why there's no Robbies, unfortunately. And even part-time guys, you can't even do it part-time. You can have the guys that go out a few days a week or only fish a few hundred traps, because it's too expensive. It's really financially challenging to get in. The part-time thing, there is no part-time, because it's so expensive to get a license, that if you do actually have the money to get one, you have to go every day. You can't be a part-time guy. The existing part-time guys are people who had to leave the industry and get a real job, in order to support—

RB: Or they've got a pension, and now they can go.

Tim B: Yeah, you see people that leave and get union jobs or jobs that have planned retirement, and then they come back to fishing. So I don't mean it to toot our own horns, but that's one of the big challenges and why there's only three of us, instead of –

RB: Why there's no other young people.

[22:31]

SS: Let me just make sure that I got everything you were saying. There's obviously the knowledge aspect, where you guys [Tom B and Tim B] helped mentor Robbie, and show him the ropes when you [RB] were new to it. Financially, you made it sound like a—

Tim B: It's a pay-as-you-go type process. [editor's note: Tom B and Tim B are letting RB pay them in installments for the boat he purchased from them]

SS: Pay-as-you-go. So that's a huge way that Tom and Tim helped you. And then regulatory-wise, in terms of getting the license, is there something there some way they helped you that I might have missed?

Tim B: In the State of Massachusetts, which is different from—

RB: Maine—

Tim B: Maine, Rhode Island. I can't speak for them. I know a little bit about the Maine apprenticeship—

RB: Maine, you're an apprentice from the time you're like sixteen to twenty-three, and you got to get a thousand hours on someone else's boat. Then you qualify for an apprentice license—never mind, that's a student thing. Then you get a hundred and fifty traps, three hundred traps, five hundred traps, and then you get your full eight hundred license. Or you get your apprenticeship, where you're in the lottery. In Mass, you can either get a permit if you're family or if there's qualifying permit and it has eligibility and they sell it to you.

SS: The state sells it to you or an individual sells it?

RB: The permit holder, if it's an active permit.

SS: Ok. But in order to be eligible, you have to have the two years.

RB: On the buyer's end. On the seller's end, it has to be active for four years.

Tim B: It has to be a permit that was fished four out of the last five years, in order to be eligible to sell. We know people that are older that have lobster licenses, but they're no good, because they haven't been fished.

SS: So those are the ones that are phasing out, because they're not active?

Tim B: Correct. They renew it every year with the state. They spend their two to three hundred dollars or whatever it is to renew it, and it's worthless. People are just holding onto them because it's a lobster license, but they can't do anything with it. The only people who

can use it are their kids, but their kids can't use it, because they never went fishing. These licenses—this is just for Massachusetts—are falling off the face of the Earth. For what reason? I don't know.

Tom B: It goes back to something we were saying before we started the interview. All we see is, "Take, take, take." I've yet to hear one instance of giving back. That's what sucks. Like today, I saw on Facebook, the whole whale thing. In ten years, they want to see a ropeless fishery. Well, you're better just saying, "No more lobstering," because you can't have a ropeless fishery and go lobstering. I think NOAA lacks a lot of common sense when it comes to things. NOAA is a government agency that should be for the fishermen, because that's why they're employed. It just seems that they're against us. As much as they say they're for us, it just seems like they're always, every year, just, "What can we do to fuck these guys up?" That's just what it seems to be like, every single year. We go to meetings. It just seems like it doesn't matter what you do, because they're just going to do what they want anyways. They just say, "Oh, we want your input," to make it sound like they care. They don't give a shit. That's what sucks about it all. Eventually, by the time that anyone's going to stand up and say, "No more regulations," and go against the government, there's not going to be enough people to do so. It takes an army to go against a force like that, but they're whittling us so thin that there's going to be nothing left. It's going to be, basically, "Get out. Get out of the fishery," because it's not going to be feasibly possible to stay in it. It sucks. Like I said, we're fourth generation fishermen. I don't know any other way of life. Yet, here they are, just coming up with the dumbest rules, with flawed science, and with all these environmental groups going against us with the whales. The government should stand up and say, "There is no science to back up your claim that these big environmental groups want." It doesn't matter. They can file suits, whatever they want. But there's really no scientific data saying that Massachusetts lobstermen, New Hampshire lobstermen, Maine lobstermen kill the whales. We were at the meeting a couple weeks ago where they said that within the last twenty years, there's been two Massachusetts whale entanglements.

Tim B: Entanglements, but not deaths.

Tom B: Right. And the biggest thing I get a kick out of is when they say the Gulf of Maine's changing faster than anywhere else on the planet. It's like, "Well, they don't factor that in. If that's true, why don't you factor that in?" Why do we get the brunt of all of this that's on flawed science anyways? That's what aggravates me, especially being young. Some of these guys that are seventy, they're like, "We don't care, because we're going to be done. We're done. Our time's over." But guys like us, it's almost scary to think about that NOAA's against the fishermen that employ them people. We're the reasons that they have a job. Yet, every year, it's like, "Let's get rid of some more of them." They're going to get what they want in the end. They're all going to be out of a job. That's all I got to say about that.

Tim B: I just want to touch on the whole getting a license thing. We're not at the whole having children stage yet, but there are guys in this industry that have children, and if they want to be fishermen—there are other generational fishermen around us that are a few years older, that are still under the age of thirty-five that have children, and if they ever wanted to get them into it, they'd have to pay to get their kid into it.

Tom B: Right. If I had a kid, I don't know how the hell they're going to go fishing. By then, who knows? We're going to be the last three in Massachusetts with a fucking lobster license. You know what I mean?

Tim B: Right. Just in Massachusetts, they're taking away state licenses. We're going to have to go out and buy a license, if there are any left—

Tom B: For God knows how much money—

Tim B: For God knows how much money, for our kids to go fishing.

Tom B: To do what we've been doing for generations. Over a hundred years. On a public resource. Just sad. That's all I got to say.

[29:49]

Tim B: You touched on the whale thing. That's, like you said, flawed science.

Tom B: Just disgusting. It's disgusting what NOAA does. It's absolutely, positively disgusting.

Tim B: These rules work temporarily, but they're not worried about—

Tom B: As I said, they lack common sense.

Tim B: Right.

Tom B: It sounds good on paper, but you go to also think about what happens when you put it out into the real world. It doesn't work. Everything can sound good on paper, but it doesn't mean shit. It's got to work in the real world. Just about everything they come up with doesn't work in the real world. It sounds unbelievable on paper, though. Just in my short eighteen years, that's my understanding of National Marine Fisheries Service. They don't have any common sense and they do not care about any of us, and we are the reason they are employed. That's what I think's funny about it. It's not the environmental groups that employ them people. It's us, the fishermen. And yet, they side with them every single time.

[31:18]

SS: You said something earlier about going to a meeting. Do all of you guys get pretty involved in policy stuff?

Tom B: I try to.

Tim B: I would say that we definitely don't do as much as we should. But now that rules are happening so fast and so violently against us, I think that we're going to have to start really advocating for ourselves. A few years ago, it was, "Ah, whatever. It will get better. Ah, whatever." But it's only getting worse. I think for us, that we're really starting to understand and go to meetings and stuff now. Also, I think that a couple of years ago, we didn't have the brains in order to understand what was going on. When you've only been fishing on your own for two, three, five years, I don't think that you can really go to a meeting and have an

input. But I think, now that we're twenty-one, people have kids by the time they're twenty-eight, thirty. If you think, five or six years away really isn't that long. If you think about just even having a kid, even if he doesn't want to go fishing, just to support the kid on fishing, and a family and a house and all this stuff, you have to be involved in rules and understanding where you're industry's going, in order to plan for the future.

[32:49]

SS: Do you belong to any groups?

RB, Tim B, and Tom B: We belong to the Massachusetts Lobstermen's Association.

Tom B: Basically, all the groups on Facebook.

Tim B: Facebook doesn't really do much. Facebook's more of a—

Tom B: A place to complain?

Tim B: Yeah, basically.

Tom B: But I think the only way I could see any of this being overcome is if everybody were to just stand up and say, "It ain't happening." Because they don't have the manpower to overthrow every single fisherman on the East Coast. If everybody just went, "No." If they said, "This is what we're doing, and every single fisherman on the East Coast said, "No," what are they going to do? They don't have the boats to get the lobster gear back. It's physically impossible. It's physically impossible to do it. What are you going to do? Throw every single fisherman from the top of Maine down to North Carolina in jail? You're going to need a big jail. That's the only way to really stop this rule making. It's just ridiculous. Like I said, it's year after year after year after year, it's just more and more rules. It's like, when are we going to see something change? There's got to be a change. Within the next ten years, it's going to shift, because there's going to be more people sitting in the office up in Gloucester than there are people fishing in Gloucester, if they want to keep going the way they're going.

Tim B: I wouldn't be surprised to say that how many people work at that building might actually be pretty close to how many—

Tom B: Fishermen are fishing out of Gloucester right now.

Tim B: Yeah. That's pretty sad, that you have just about as many people regulating as you do working.

[34:57]

SS: Who do you have for crew? Are they also young?

Tom B: My guy's twenty-four.

RB: My guy's twenty-four.

Tim B: My guy is forty-three, something like that.

SS: Which is still young in the fishing industry [laughter].

Tim B: Yeah, considering the average age. [Editor's note: before the interview, the group discussed a rumored statistic that the average age of fishermen is in the fifties]. Is that average age captains or owners?

SS: It must be. I don't know where that number comes from. I just hear that flung around. But no one tracks the age of crew.

Tim B: There's some older guys with younger crew. I would say that the crew age is definitely younger. You're seeing less and less guys. This is just from hanging around and talking to older people. It seems like a lot of the people we know started working for someone, and then got themselves to that point of being able to own their own boat. It's kind of a thing. You fish with a guy, become friends, and then, when you do go out on your own, he helps you out.

SS: That's a typical pattern?

Tim B: Just from talking to people.

Tom B: That's how just about every person got into it. They're not teaching commercial fishing up at Endicott College. That's how it's got to work. That's how it should work. If you're a fisherman, you don't want to see it just die out after you're dead. It puts a smile on their face to from saying, "Oh, I got to teach them." Our grandfather loves it. He's like, "Those are my grandkids. They're fishermen. I taught them just about everything they know, or enough so they could get started and go figure out more on their own."

Tim B: It's almost like the whole point is laying the foundation, and you become the fisherman that you want to become. But everyone gets a foundation somewhere, whether it's working for another guy, or most of the time, it's working for your parents. Just like farms.

[37:10]

SS: You said earlier you were going to lobstering and then scalloping. In terms of lobstering, are you all day boat lobstering?

Tim B: Yes.

SS: Do you want to talk about the scalloping?

Tom B: We used to go gillnetting, so I had the bigger boat. I was like, "There's got to be something else we can do so we can make more money, fish almost year round." Looking at all the regulations and stuff, looking at stuff to do, "Well, this scallop gig doesn't seem bad."

Tim B: It's the least worst thing that we could possibly do. Because there's no way we're going to go groundfishing.

Tom B: There's no way we're going to jump back into gillnetting.

SS: Why did you get out of gillnetting?

Tom B: Regulations.

Tom B: Well, we never actually gillnetted. We went as kids, and we have enough memory to say that we've been there and we've done it. Our grandfather and our father went gillnetting for twenty-five years, and then back in 2008, that was it. It was just too many regulations.

SS: Was there a specific regulation that put them out of it?

Tom B: Actually, look right behind you. Read that, behind you. [Editor's note: there was a plaque on the wall containing a letter to the editor in a local paper about groundfish regulations]

Tim B: This is from—

Tom B: Our uncle.

Tim B: This is at the start of those regulations.

RB: 2002.

Tim B: Yeah.

SS: Ok. I'll read it. Ok, so they cut back the days at sea to eighty-eight per year in 2002, I guess.

Tom B: Now it's at twenty-four.

Tim B: That was permit-specific, though, I think. We only had eighty-eight.

SS: Oh, they cut everyone back by a certain percentage.

Tim B: Yeah, by a certain percentage based off of what you caught and your previous records.

Tom B: And then in 2008, they cut it in half. From 2002 to 2008, they cut it down so thin that we could go out one day and catch all the quota we had. We'd go over if we went out one day. That was it. 2008 was our last year. It was just not financially feasible for us to go.

SS: You guys were pretty young then.

Tom B: Yeah, I was eight and he was eleven.

SS: And you were going out gillnetting at that age?

Tom B: Yeah. It was just, like I said, financially impossible to keep going. Then, 2014, our father died and we started working, working, working. We bought a new boat. I was like, “Well, there’s something else we got to be able to do, just to keep going.” We go lobstering from June up to January. We got to fill that gap. We got the boat. If it’s sitting there, we don’t make any money, so we got to keep it going. We looked into scalloping. We’d never been scalloping, didn’t have a clue how to go scalloping, didn’t know anything about it. We were just shooting from the hip. The boat I bought came with the scallop gear. We went out, bought the permit. We were like, “We’ll just give it hell.” We tried it. We went three times in a row and got nothing, didn’t catch a single scallop. Finally, our cousin’s friend’s friend, who also goes fishing in the Gulf of Maine—wicked nice guy—came down, showed us a few things, and he goes, “When you get out there, come see me.” He kind of took us under his wing and showed us a lot. Last year was our first year scalloping. After the three days of getting nothing and trial and error and this and that, then he helped us out, and we actually started catching stuff. It’s a short season, but it’s good money. We fished that, then went back to lobstering. Back in December, we bought a state scallop permit and we were fishing up in Ipswich Bay. We did alright doing that.

SS: Is that sea scallops as well, or is that bay scallops?

Tom B: Yes, sea scallops. We’re still definitely new to the game. We’re definitely amateurs, because we got one full calendar year into scalloping, so far. It’s a lot of fun. We love doing it. It’s definitely some good money in it. It just sucks that we had to figure a lot of it out for ourselves, because it goes back to regulations and there’s not a lot of guys doing it and there’s not a lot of guys who will show you how to do it. We were just lucky enough to have that other guy from Portland help us out. Then, when we were state scalloping, we met another guy that’s been scalloping his whole life. We just met him five months ago. There are guys out there that definitely want to help you out. That’s been our scallop endeavor. It’s been a lot of fun. We’re looking to get bigger into scalloping, because who the hell knows what’s going to go on with the lobster industry. It’s scary to think about. It’s crazy to think about these lobster permits that people spent money on and invested in. These boats got a hundred grand just in gear. There’s three hundred grand worth in gear sitting right here, another two hundred fifty or three hundred in permits sitting right here. You’re talking almost three quarters of a million dollars, and who knows? With the regulations they make, it could be worth nothing. You got to have options. You got to be diverse, because you don’t know what the hell’s going to happen, because no one’s on our side.

[43:20]

SS: [to RB] Are you involved in scalloping as well?

RB: Yeah.

Tom B: Them guys go with me.

RB: I go with them.

SS: As a team?

Tom B: All three of us, we work as a team. Three minds that don't know what they're doing, I guess, is better than one.

RB: Makes up to one mind that might know what they're doing.

Tom B: Some sort of a clue.

RB: Some sort of a clue.

[43:48]

SS: [laughter] What else would you like to talk about?

RB: Tom's doing a pretty good job being our spokesperson. He's hitting it right on the head.

Tom B: I read up on every single rule. Like I said, it just aggravates the shit out of me how National Marine Fisheries is not on our side. It's just unbelievable to me. I sit there, I read every single rule and regulation, because God forbid you're not in compliance on one of them. If I don't declare out on my VMS, it doesn't matter, I can drive seven hours. If I don't declare, they can tell you to turn right around and go back to the dock. You cannot finish your fishing trip, even if you didn't start it yet. It's ridiculous rules, and I just wish that National Marine Fisheries would at least try. I understand that these environmental groups suck to deal with. But at the end of the day, they have the last say in what goes on, so it would be nice to have them kind of on our side, at least half the time. Even just start being on our side. They wonder why all the fishermen don't like them. "Because you never, ever, ever helped us in any sort of way." I would love to work with National Marine Fisheries Service if they were on our side. No problem. But what's the point of helping a cause that's just going to put you out of business?

[45:33]

SS: Are there specific things you can point to, when you say they're not on the side of the fishermen? Are you just thinking about regulations, or have you interacted with specific individuals who you felt were not on fishermen's side?

Tim B: My only gray area is this whale proposal. Is National Marine Fisheries proposing it? Is that Take Reduction Team a branch of NOAA?

SS: The Marine Mammal Protection Act is under NOAA. It's a different piece of legislation than the one that manages fisheries, but they're both administered by NOAA.

Tim B: So this is the government that's proposing this take act?

SS: They're federally obligated to conserve whales under the Marine Mammal Protection Act. I don't know if it's NOAA or if there are environmental groups that are forcing their hand, but they're obligated to comply with the law.

Tim B: That's my gray area.

Tom B: But at the same time, it goes back to the flawed science that they're using. If you don't have enough evidence—it's like a court case—if you don't have enough evidence, and that person commits a murder, that person is innocent. If you have no evidence, you can assume all you want, but you have no ground to stand on.

[Tom B and Tim B's grandfather enters and some dialogue takes place outside the interview]

[49:05]

Tim B: There's a guy that's seen everything, been there, and done that, just about.

Tom B: He was here when there was no regulations and now he's sitting here with all these regulations.

Tim B: He saw it go from nothing to one glorious job to his worst fucking nightmare.

SS: Robbie, as someone who's not from a fishing family, do you feel the same way or do you see it from a different angle?

RB: I feel the same way. I feel like the whale thing is just unbelievable. I got boarded last year by the environmental police. They made sure that my end lines were whale taped and I had the safe links and I was all good with that. It seemed like that was all they cared about. They went through my lobsters and all that. It just seems like we do all this stuff as precaution for whales, and we've never even killed one. More of them get hit by tanker ships and Canadian snow crab gear. They use float rope and they got no whale-safe links or nothing. I just feel the same way. I feel like we have all this stuff for precaution against whales, and we've never even killed one. I just feel like they're taking another thing away from us that we'll never see.

Tim B: You can touch on the fact that if they are going to put these regulations into place, someone who does have money and time invested into this, if they do regulate it so bad that you were done fishing, now you have to go to work somewhere else to pay back your investment for what you really wanted to do. Now you're stuck with debt fucking up your life and you're doing something that you hate.

[51:02]

RB: The other thing, talking about money, is that you see all the right whale license plates. They got so much fucking money to throw at lawyers and lobbyists and stuff. We got a ninety thousand dollar MLA defense fund. We can't compete.

Tom B: Like I said earlier, the only chance that fishermen have is if all of them say, "Fuck you. It's not happening." Because as far as I know, NOAA doesn't have the manpower to move every single trap out of Mass Bay alone, never mind the whole from here to Maine. They cannot do it. It ain't going to happen. If they want, they can come down here and put me in cuffs all they want. "You can go and get my gear that's supposedly tangling up all the fucking whales."

RB: Right. Fisherman ain't going to say they want to kill the last whale, catch the last lobster. We just want to keep doing it for generations.

Tim B: There's a very happy medium. I think the grey area for everyone is, NOAA's happy medium is still so restrictive, that they feel like this is their happy medium, that they're going to. You can just tell by looking at the permit holders and the amount of new faces that are reporting every year. Just take the trip reports and put all those names on a list, and see how many new names you get every year. These people, there's no new people, and this is supposed to be sustainable.

Tom B: It's supposed to be a public resource. Don't forget that.

SS: If I'm hearing you correctly, you started out at the beginning talking about how good of a livelihood it is, not only fulfilling psychologically but also financially. But now we're touching on this huge factor of risk, I guess you could say—of financial risk, the idea that all of that could be taken away from you in the blink of an eye by some new regulation. Is that a fair understanding?

Tom B: You go fishing because you love it. Everybody tries not to think about what could happen. But it's here. It's happening.

Tim B: Now, it's here.

Tom B: It's happening. Five years ago, everybody was like, "Yeah, yeah, yeah, whatever. It's a phase. They're going to be on to the next thing." Ten years ago, it was fucking the six hundred pound breakaway swivels. "Got to have them, got to have them, got to have them." Whatever, we put them on. The next year, it's whatever flavor of the week. I don't think National Marine Fisheries would have as many rules if it wasn't for these big environmental groups. What a lot of people don't realize, because they don't see it, is that fishermen almost help the ocean. Like he said, no one's out there to catch every last fish, every last lobster, whatever. No one wants to do that. At the same time, all these lobsters—what do you think feeds all these small lobsters?

Tim B: The millions of pounds of bait that is put on the bottom of the ocean specifically to help these lobsters.

Tom B: Yeah, we put five pounds of bait in each trap and it's like two days, three days, it's gone. It's like, "Yeah, we made money off it," but I've seen cameras in traps. You know how many crabs, lobsters, fish? They all eat all our bait, and we just get a few lobsters out of the deal. That's the tradeoff. You take that away. What's going to happen? I understand that usually nature balances out itself, but we just got way too many factors in the mix to think that could possibly happen, between fishing and stuff like that.

[55:12]

SS: If you think about other young people your age, any non-fishermen that you guys hang out with, do they understand what you do?

Tom B: Not a clue.

Tim B: Not a clue.

RB: Not a clue.

Tom B: Clueless. Absolutely clueless. Everybody's on the whole college thing. You know, "College is the answer, this and that."

Tim B: Well, you hear other fishermen, just a couple of guys we know in Gloucester. They have children. They are successful fishermen, and they don't want them near this industry at all. They don't even want them to touch it. Not even because of financial risk. Just because they don't want them to have to deal with the shit that they're dealing with. Now, if they were having a kid back when they started, they wouldn't want their kid to do anything else.

Tom B: It was the thing to do.

Tim B: It was *the* way of life. There's guys that have the money to get their kids into it, get them all set up, and help them out, and overcome that financial burden, and they still don't even want to do that, because of the risk. They could set them up now and they could have a great three or four years and get their house and a couple of kids, the American dream, and poof, gone!

SS: Because of the regulatory uncertainty?

Tim B: Right. I think that's a factor of why we're not seeing young people. It's all due to regulations. It's not so much the money or the cost to get it. It's the fact that it could be taken away. No parent wants to set their kid up for failure. The only reason we're here is because our parents did it.

Tom B: We weren't pressured into it, though. My father always said, "If you want to go work at McDonald's, as long as you support yourself, I am one hundred percent behind you, if you want to go flip burgers at McDonald's." He said, "If you want to go fishing, I will show you every single thing I know about fishing. Don't feel like you have to. If you want to go to college, I ain't paying for it. Just so you know." That's what he told us.

Tim B: Just because he wasn't a college kid. There's no one who has a last name Birarelli who has ever been to college.

SS: He just didn't see the importance in it?

[57:35]

Tim B: No, because he was brought up on the, "Formal education makes you a living. Self education makes you a fortune." And it worked. Their fortune was enough to satisfy them and they were happy with this way of life. Whether they were sweating their nuts off or freezing them off, they didn't care. That was how they did it. Now, we see other people with kids and they're sending them to school. They don't want them anywhere near it, just because of the uncertainty of the industry. I can confidently say that the guys that we have talked to, it's not like they couldn't get their kids into it. There's no doubt about it.

RB: You hold a valid point. There's definitely plenty of more fishermen who could be in it, but it's just the uncertainty of the industry.

SS: At what point did you guys know? You said your dad said, "You can go flip burgers. I don't care." He didn't pressure you into it.

Tim B: He said that way after.

SS: You were already into it?

Tim B: Yeah. Balls deep in this whole going fishing thing.

SS: At what point did you each decide? Did you always feel you wanted to follow in his steps and be a fisherman?

Tim B: Oh, a hundred percent.

SS: From a small age?

Tim B: Yes, because there was never daycare. There was never babysitters, nothing. There was none of that. It was, "You come on the boat."

Tom B: You know the saying, "If you hang around the barbershop, you're going to get a haircut?" Well, we were here since we were five years old. The last fifteen years of my life, I've been down here. It's not all I know. I'm a hundred and fifty hours away from getting my electrical license, because I went to school for it. You leave there with a bunch of hours. I'm going to get it anyways. But I don't want to do that. I don't want to go sit in houses and run wires and be people's bitch. That's not me. I work for myself. I guess that's the other best part about it, is you work for yourself. There's no one that tells you what to do, other than National Marine Fisheries Service.

SS: If you were to do it all over again, would you still choose this path?

Tom B: A hundred percent.

Tim: Oh, absolutely.

SS: In spite of all this regulatory uncertainty?

Tim B: Yup. Go right again. The only thing I wish I did was go to a vocational high school, if I could do it all over again.

RB: I agree. Me too.

SS: Why is that?

Tim B: Why is that? I just think that there are so many aspects to fishing. Just think of Wally, like you said. He's on a boat. He's not just the cook but he's the engineer, he's the captain, he's the deckhand. He has to play all roles. It's more than just driving the boat and barking

guys to put the gear in the water and pull it back on the boat. I think that there's other things that you could do.

Tom B: On top of that, vocation's the same as fishing. The average age of an electrician is like fifty-five. Even if you wanted to go do it on the side, or even if you wanted to go do it for yourself, you go buy your own house and you go wire it up, you save yourself fifteen grand, twenty grand. That's worth it right here. That's worth having it for your lifetime right there, to do that.

Tim B: You see a lot of guys in the industry that are jacks-of-all-trades. They know a lot. Not just because of the fishing.

Tom B: Because you have to.

Tim B: Yeah, and they appreciate. They get up and go to work everyday, so when they want to do something to their house, it's nothing for them to do that, because they built their own business on the water, so it's nothing for them to go home, and where they hang the old hat at night is nice, because they did it. I feel like there's a lot of pride to the industry, because it's all trial and error and based on how much experience you have. I think that ties into why people love it and why I wish I did go to vocational high school.

[61:50]

SS: What else do you think it takes to be a successful young fisherman?

Tom B: Work ethic.

Tim B: A lot of luck.

Tom B: I don't know if it's a lot of luck. I think it's if you put your head down and go to work, you make money. That's how we grew up. We'd just wake up and go to work. It doesn't matter. Like the last twenty-five days of scalloping, it was, "It don't matter. Don't even look at the weather. Just go. Just go. Doesn't matter. Go to work, you're going to make money." That's how we grew up. That's the same with any self-employed person, but especially fishing. Like right now, the boats aren't making any money. We didn't go out today. I don't think it's as much luck—obviously, I think luck has a little bit to do with it, but I think it's how much time do you want to put in? If you put your time in, you're going to see your reward. Definitely something that a lot of kids that I see today lack is work ethic. That's also the reason I think that a lot of people aren't fishing, because they're a generation of just being lazy. Everybody wants to make a million dollars just sitting on the couch at home, working an hour a week. It doesn't happen like that. You don't get the instant gratification that a lot of people our age want.

Tim B: I think it's another thing that draws people to this industry, too, is the instant gratification.

Tom B: Yeah, but you don't really see—I don't know, I kind of see it differently. I wouldn't say instant gratification in the industry, but I would definitely say that if you put your time in, you're going to see results. A lot of people want to get out of college and go make sixty

grand a year and just go basically piss it all away. Nobody really wants to work hard at something for a few years and know what it is to just get by, to see your bigger reward or to invest in yourself so you can go make even more money. I think that's also the other reason that a lot of kids aren't in this now, is that no one has the work ethic. If you want to talk about work ethic, go ask every single guy that's the average age, and say, "How old's your crew?" They're all about the same age, because them guys work harder than guys that are eighteen years old. A lot of the guys that we know that taught us, they work harder than anyone that's twenty years old. But them guys see the reward. That's the thing.

[64:35]

SS: Tim, you did say luck. Do you want to explain that?

Tim B: I don't know. I feel like there is a portion of luck to it. You're trying to catch something you can't see. I'm not sitting here saying that it's all complete luck, but there's definitely a little bit of luck to it. At the same time, you create your own luck. I definitely would say I believe in that.

SS: When you think about your own experience, what are some of the things that you would consider strokes of luck?

Tim B: I don't know. You go and try a new area, and there it is. Sometimes you get something. Sometimes you don't. But you're always learning. That failure helps you maybe get lucky next time, because you already know that, so the time when you go do something else, you recall that time when you struck out. After a while, over forty years of it, next thing you know, you're just lucky all the time [laughter].

SS: [laughter] Your luck increases, the more control you have over chance, I guess.

Tim B: Having people to mentor you and help you out, basically, that's your luck right there. The guys who will take the time, if they show you one small thing, that can lead to a whole other thing. It's like a building block. You can just scaffold upon that. That one stupid little thing you overheard, or some guys talking somewhere, you're like, "Hmm. I'll try that." Then you adapt it to your way. I think that's another cool thing about the industry. Everyone does something different. But then one can still achieve success. I think that's pretty fucking neat about it, too. There's no standard way to do shit. A few things, there are. But guys do stuff differently and they have their reasons for it and it works for them. Stuff works for them and some stuff doesn't work for them, but it works for me.

[66:35]

SS: Do you have anything to add, Robbie, about what it takes to succeed as a young fisherman?

Tim B: I feel like that question's right up your ass, Rob, because you are new and you aren't from a fishing family.

RB: Basically, what Tom said. Just get up and go to work every day is the main thing. Also, what Tim said about being lucky, because you can learn so much from being on one of their

boats and working on the back of it and seeing what they're doing and having it explained to you, but then, once you go out there on your own, you really have no idea.

Tom B: I told you when we started, I said, "I'm going to teach you as much as I can, but the only way to do it is to get your ass on the boat and go do it." That's the only way.

Tim B: We've had that reiterated to us from older people in the industry as well, about how they can sit here until they're blue in the face and tell you exactly what you need to do, but until you do it, you're never going to get it. You have to go out and do it.

SS: Rob, now that you've been mentored and you run your own boat, have you turned around and offered any advice or mentorship to other young people?

[67:54]

RB: I'm still pretty green. I can't say.

SS: What would you say to someone who was just getting into it?

RB: If you love it and you got the work ethic, then why not? The kid that works for me now, he's real good. I would like to show him a few things, but he's looking to go into the ironworkers union next year. This is my last year with him. We'll see what the future holds after that.

[68:22]

SS: In terms of what the future holds, I'm wondering what the three of you think that the industry and your own lives as fishermen will look like in ten or fifteen years?

Tim B: I don't even know where to begin to comment on that, because five years ago—

Tom B: I'm worried about tomorrow.

RB: I hope it looks like today. That's what I hope. I hope it doesn't change.

Tom B: If it stays status quo, they will see it rebound, and they will see plenty of fish. But if they want to keep going, I just hope they expect to be out of a job. That's all I can comment on that. If they keep it the way it is, we can make money. There's enough regulations to make them happy—should be enough.

Tim B: I think there's more than enough.

Tom B: The sustainability's there, with everything. But there's stuff that we can't control, we can't control. It's just the way of the world.

SS: Nature, you mean?

Tom B: Exactly. That's another thing we get blamed for: nature. Like I said about the Gulf of Maine warming faster than everything else. "It's not my fault. Don't take it out on me!" But they decide to. They decide to take it out on all the fishermen. That's what it seems like. I try

to have an even keel, look at both sides of the story. But what we see and what they see, between dealer reporting and us reporting and then like these guys just going, “Oh, there’s not enough of this.” It’s like, “You got to be shitting me.” It’s like I don’t know what operation they’re running.

Tim B: I feel like their rules and how aggressive they are with their rules has scared some guys to not open up about what’s really there. They don’t want to tell them what’s there, because they might take that away. Guys are very, very hesitant, and walk on eggshells.

Tom B: It’s like there’s no remorse with National Marine Fisheries Service.

Tim B: There’s guys that could prove all of these points that they’re fighting, but they’re not going to go forth and give them that evidence, because there it goes!

Tom B: Gone.

Tim B: There goes their mortgage payment, because God forbid they get a sniff! “Boom! It’s closed.” No. No.

[71:04]

SS: You think that skews the numbers?

Tim B: Yes, their unwillingness to work with people actually hinders their science, and hinders their ability to understand the resource.

Tom B: Guys won’t even go to areas, because they know that they’re going to get a bag full of cod. The net’s going to get a bagful of cod. They’re there. Fishermen know they’re there. The government doesn’t know, because they can’t. Fishermen can’t. They can’t go there because they’ll go catch a bagful of codfish and then go pay three-fifty a pound to lease it to sell it for a dollar-eighty. That’s the most ass-backwards kind of business I’ve ever heard of.

Tim B: It’s not even business. It’s just a money pit at that point.

[71:50]

SS: You’re all in, in terms of what you want to be doing, but you’ve also talked about so many things that represent what seems like a stark threat. Are there any things that would make you decide to stop fishing and do something else instead? Could it get to a point where you would make that decision? What would it take?

Tom B: The government.

Tim B: The government.

Tom B: I’ll go fishing. I’ll go anywhere in this ocean, until they regulate us out of that, and hopefully I’m dead by then. I don’t really see myself doing anything else.

SS: How would you feel if you had to?

Tim B: I'd be pissed.

Tom B: I'd be pretty fucking mad.

Tim B: There's really no other way to put it. You'd just be pretty pissed off. I don't see myself doing anything else.

Tom B: There's really nothing else that I would want to do.

Tim B: Plus, after you've put so much time and effort into something, you're pretty much dead set on that. There's no U-turn, I feel like, when you're a fisherman or a farmer or any type of self-employed business. There's never a U-turn in your career, unless it's government-inflicted.

Tom B: I've never heard of a comeback story about someone who midlife, said, "Oh, I switched to this and I still made it." Never heard of it.

Tim B: All the guys that we've heard of who had to do something else was government-caused. There was never a change of mind.

Tom B: Or they're on food stamps because of the government.

Tim B: Yup. Every sob story we've heard is directly correlated with regulations. There's never been, in my own short span of life, a change of heart. There's never a change of heart.

Tom B: I know this is going to be sent to National Marine Fisheries, but I still think that there's absolutely hope in the industry. I don't think it's completely dead. I think there's hope, and in my lifetime, I would like to see them work with us. If it's going to benefit both parties, come right aboard. But it's like, "How am I supposed to be on board with something that's going to put me out of business?"

Tim B: I feel like there needs to be someone or something, some sort of moderation. If they are going to see something, there needs to be something that doesn't let them just completely shut it down.

Tom B: There needs to be a give and take.

Tim B: A lot of people that have a lot more knowledge than us can absolutely show National Marine Fisheries Service what the hell is wrong with the science and the data, but they're not going to destroy their way of life by helping them. So they're more into adapting than they are helping the cause. Do you understand what I'm trying to say?

SS: Not quite.

Tim B: Basically, like Tom said, if there's a little bit of moderation between what they want to do and what we see, and we reach a happy medium where the fish is not being overfished and everyone is still making a good living, I think they would see a change for the better. But guys are hesitant to do certain things, in the fear of, "There it goes. Destroyed. Over." Once

people are out, they're out. Look at Steve. Had to leave fishing to go to the union. That was not a change of heart. He needed to do that.

SS: What regulatory change in particular?

Tom B: That was during the Big Dig, so I was like one year old.

SS: Ok, so not something recent?

Tim B: I can't comment on it, I just know that he would have never left fishing if he didn't have to.

SS: As you pointed out, this will go to the National Marine Fisheries Service. If you could be a bit more specific on the types of regulations or policies that are so detrimental, that would be great. You've talked about right whales.

Tim B: That affects us the most, because we are lobstermen. The scallop thing is a very, very new thought to us, so I would not say that I could confidently help with any sort of scallop regulations. We are not the people to turn to, yet.

[77:02]

SS: It sounds like one thing is specific regulations relating to a drastic cutback in the vertical lines in the water—

Tim B: That affects us, and I feel like we have enough experience as young fishermen to say that that will be extremely detrimental to our future. They need to get on a boat and see that there's no entanglements. What they know from their data is ridiculous. Vertical lines is a very small percentage of these whales' deaths. They're not going to stop the merchant marines, who kill more whales than the fishermen. The government, to take on the merchant marines, first off, it can't happen, because all the goods—

SS: It would hurt the economy.

Tim B: Exactly. They're not going to win there, so it's like, "Let's attack the weakest link." The whale people wouldn't last against Maersk ship line, and they're just one of twenty-five or thirty huge companies. Maersk would be like, "Listen, I'll give you a billion to shut the fuck up and get a new job."

Tom B: The worst part is it comes down to money, not anything to do with actual science. It basically comes down to money. These enviro groups have billions of dollars, and that's the reason why shit's happening. If they had no money, and someone said, "Hey, the poor whales," the National Marine Fisheries would say, "We don't give a shit." But since they got billions of dollars to have all these lobbyists, lawsuits, lawyers, everything you can think of, that's why something's happening.

Tim B: They can attack us. They can't attack the shipping companies. I wasn't at the whale meeting for the MLA, but I'm sure the numbers are out there in terms of how many whales have died from ship strikes and how many have died from natural causes and how many

have died from entanglements. I'm sure that the entanglements have to be the least amount of risk, based on just my small understanding.

[79:32]

RB: Me and Tom went to that MLA meeting when Mass DMF was there talking about it. Like Tim said, the lines in the water are the weakest link of the puzzle. What they want to do is reduce risk. Well, if they really wanted to reduce the most risk, they would shut down shipping, because that's what—

Tim B: But they can't shut down the economy.

RB: They're worried about the whales not being able to reproduce because of the noises of the ships, and then the new windmills that they want to put in. That's another factor that will fuck the whales up even more.

Tom B: But since windmills are eco-friendly bullshit, it's ok.

RB: It really comes down to that we have the least amount of money, so why not just do that and make the enviro people happy.

Tom B: I just wish that we could do what was right and not what was convenient.

RB: Yeah, because we love the ocean. We don't want to see the whales die. We're not the problem, it seems like. We're just the easiest one to kick right over.

Tim B: Easiest target. Like you said, it's the path of easiest resistance to what they want. If they feel like they save the whales by eliminating the vertical ropes, they'll be happy. Then if the whales keep dying, well, it'll be, "Natural causes and it's inevitable."

RB: It's not like we'll get to go back out, either. After the last whale dies, it'll be like, "Well, get Canadian lobsters."

[81:03]

SS: To play devil's advocate and give you an opportunity to put out a pitch for your industry, so what? So what if we don't have any fishermen in New England? What would you say to that? Why does this matter?

Tom B: Have fun eating shit food from Thailand, fed with pig shit.

Tim B: I think they're throwing away one of the greatest resources that dates back to every fucking history book that you read.

Tom B: If it wasn't for New England fishermen, America wouldn't be here. You [to RB] read the book.

RB: It's also the saddest thing that America is the largest seafood importer in the world already, and we have some of the best fisheries in the world on both the East and the West coasts, and some of the most sustainable. I feel like we have some of the best science

behind it, and it's just sad that they're going to take another step to sweep us under the rug. That's how I feel.

Tom B: Not only is it just sad, but just the way it is right now, commercial fishing in New England alone, the money it generates is ridiculous. It's ridiculous.

RB: You think, it's from the fishermen to the wharfs to the fuel to the trucking companies.

Tom B: Yeah, it's a domino effect.

RB: To the ice houses to international.

Tom B: It's sad when Cape Pond Ice makes more money selling T-shirts than ice.

RB: Yeah, because of the Perfect Storm movie, they make more money selling T-shirts than ice.

Tom B: It's just the domino effect.

Tim B: Don't they say that somewhere?

RB: Yeah, I think it's in the Sacred Cod movie.

Tim B: Yeah, it's sad. What is the show or video we watched where they said NOAA has the second amount of regulations to the IRS?

Tom B: No, to the airlines.

RB: No, to IRS.

Tom B: We're like eight hundred regulations away from surpassing airline regulations.

Tim B: Isn't that kind of crazy?

Tom B: I think so. I think something should be put in place where if you want to create new rules, you have to abolish other rules, or there needs to be a limit. You can't just regulate shit like that. It almost seems like it's just illegal. It's supposed to be America, land of the free, and it's really not. I understand that you need conservation. But you don't need just—

Tim B: Conservation can overrule an industry, but an industry can't overrule conservation.

Tom B: Right. You can't rape the ocean, but you can't just let us not go do something.

[84:05]

RB: All we're asking for, really, is a happy medium. We're happy to work with NOAA, with observers, whatever.

Tom B: I don't want to pay for observers, just to get that noted.

RB: I'm pretty sure they won that court case.

Tim B: No, they're working on grant money.

RB: Well, anyhow, we just want a fair shakedown of the whole deal.

Tim B: Like we said earlier, no one wants to ruin the ocean. It's true. No one in the industry wants to ruin the ocean. No one wants it to be like, "Alright, this is the last year, boys! Then she's done!" No one wants that.

SS: [laughter] In terms of thinking about the future, are there any things that you could point to that give you hope or things that could be built on? You are the guys who are inheriting this industry, and it will eventually be up to you to make sure it has a future. What are some of the things that people in your generation could support to turn this around?

[85:11]

Tom B: Support your local fisherman is the bottom line. This is it. It either happens now, or if something doesn't change in the next five years, we're going to be the last of it. That's it.

SS: Next five years? That's all you're giving it?

RB: If something doesn't change for the better.

Tom B: Right, if something doesn't change for the better, if stuff just keeps getting worse and worse. No one's going to jump into a shit storm voluntarily.

Tim B: There's young fishermen around here. It goes back to with their kids. They already know. Their kids are infants, and they already know: they will not do this. They're already dead set on it. They won't even bring them on the boat. Nothing. They won't even let them get into it. That's pretty sad, that generations of knowledge is just going to be thrown away because of regulations. That's all it is.

Tom B: Right, and once that's gone, to think that you're going to rebound from that? I mean, just the knowledge. Once it's gone, it's gone. Once these guys die, who's going to be there? Like I said, you can't just go pick up a class of high school or wherever or an afterschool class that teaches you to go fishing. You're not going to get knowledge like that, unless you go on a boat and you work with someone. Once they're gone, they're gone. All these fishermen that I know, they've been fishing so long that they know how the ocean works. They've lived their whole life on it. They know how it works. They know what to do, how to do it, every little detail. Once it's gone, it's gone. It's going to take a hundred years to come close to what they already know, once it's already gone. That's why I think if they don't change anything for the better in the next five to ten years, I think we're it.

[87:25]

SS: That's a very short timeline to fix this.

Tim B: Well, the rules have cracked down so bad in the last decade that it's almost at the point now where it just takes one more stupid rule to just ruin.

Tom B: It's like the straw and the camel's back. We're right there. You're going to break the back pretty soon there, every couple of things you want to throw on it.

Tim B: Just in our short decade of fishing on our own, we've seen a lot of adapting down here, between gillnet regulations, trap regulations. Now, the lobster industry, which has been our whole life, is pretty much getting there. It's coming right down to like the gillnetting. Pretty soon, we're going to be faced with, do you go to a different industry? Like scalloping? And make that investment and hope that it works? Which is probably what we'll do.

Tom B: Yeah, we're just throwing shit at a wall and hoping it sticks. That sums it up, right there.

Tim B: What happens if we get regulated out of scallop fishing? We already know that we're probably not going to go groundfishing.

Tom B: What are you going to do?

Tim B: I'll give you a call when I'm down flipping burgers or something.

Tom B: What are we going to do? They just keep backing everybody into this little corner. Every year, backing them in, backing them in. You got nowhere to go. We want to buy a scallop permit. If you actually want to be able to fish it, you're looking at half a million dollars, at least, just for the permit, never mind boat, gear, ten grand on a fucking dredge. It wouldn't be bad. We could do it, because we have lobstering to support that beginning stage of that business. But you take away lobstering, and it's like, "Well, we don't have the money to do this."

Tim B: Lobstering supported our scallop investment. There's not doubt about it.

Tom B: Right. It supports everything.

Tim B: Now, if they take away the foundation of our future business model, that seemed so ducky five years ago, it don't matter what ideas we have. It's just dreams at that point. I just think it's sad that there are young people who are generational fishermen, and they already know for a fact. Their kids can't even talk yet, and they're just, "Nope. Not being a fisherman. Nope." They're dead set on it. They already know. They can come a few days a week, but they won't let them come on the boat to even begin an addiction to it. They won't let them go down that path.

SS: Anything else we haven't touched on that you'd like to bring up before we wrap up?

[90:49]

Tim B: We're mulching over the same shit at this point. We hate the fucking whale people.

SS: Any final comments?

Tim B: I just really hope that these people actually stop and think of the young people. If you're not worried about the older people—and I feel like some of them aren't too worried, because they are on the way out and they don't have children or a family or any heirs being left in the industry. I just hope they really look at it and try to find out that a lot of people just want a happy medium.

Tom B: If I could say something to them, I would just say, "Imagine if we were your kids. You're just going to take away everything." If you were one of the people that make all the rules, "Imagine if we were your kids. What would you do? Would you just take away everything that your kid wants to do?"

Tim B: Well, you [to Tom B] have an electrical background, and you [to RB] have a history thing. Not saying that you ever want to use those things. But I'm screwed. I have a high school diploma. Everyone knows that a high school diploma isn't shit in this world anymore.

Tom B: Yeah, that's all I could say. With all these rulemakings and everything about fishing, with the young people, "Imagine if we were your kids." They wouldn't be so hot to come down with the hammer.

RB: They'd tread a little more softly, I think.

Tom B: That's the only thing I could say. That's the only thing I hope for. I understand people have a job to do, but I just hope that they can factor in real life, how life actually works, not just stuff on paper that looks awesome.

[92:57]

RB: It's kind of like—I just thought of this—it feels like you're convicted of a murder that you didn't commit. I never had entanglements. There's been no deaths. Now we're getting punished for it.

Tim B: Yeah, if you combined everybody's years of fishing down here, there's hundreds of years of fishing down here. Not one entanglement. Nothing.

Tom B: I really try, really hard, to see the other side of things. I would rather, in my lifetime, see National Marine Fisheries Service want to work with the fishermen, because I'm not dead set against National Marine Fisheries Service, because we need a happy medium. We can't just have no rules. But we can't be overruled. I would like to see, in my lifetime, that we can actually work together and have some peace.

Tim B: Care about the resource and care about the people that use the resource. Equally. Equally care for both sides of it.

Tom B: I would happily work with National Marine Fisheries Service, if the science and data that came off my vessel went to building a better future for sustainable fisheries. Absolutely.

Tim B: I truly think that a lot of people—

Tom B: Feel the same way. But it's just the fact that if you give them an inch, they take a mile.

Tim B: And the problem is they feel the same way with us. They feel like if they give us an inch, we take a mile.

Tom B: Obviously, you ain't going to change the rules in the middle of the game. They ain't going to say, "Permits are free." I understand that. But, at the same time, there's got to be some sort of happy medium, with everything involved. Like the State of Maine, I know the State of Maine buys permits and they have pilot programs where if you want to go buy a blank multispecies permit, you can lease quota from the State of Maine for eighty cents a pound, so their guys in Maine can go make money. That's something for younger fishermen to do, or fishermen that are currently fishing. The State of Maine protects their fishermen.

Tim B: There's also a lot of moving parts to when they cut back. Just the lobster industry in Massachusetts alone—never mind Maine, who is the biggest lobster people in the world—but the amount of people that are not on boats, that benefit from the fishermen, is ridiculous. Between dealers, packaging companies—the whole economy of fishing—is ridiculous. Because it is a perishable product, so you're talking a lot of hands, a lot of people that touch everything.

Tom B: There's a lot of people that are employed because of fisheries.

Tim B: Yeah, and they've never set foot on a boat, but without it—

Tom B: They wouldn't have a job.

Tim B: Airlines, trucks, the people that work on all this equipment to move it. It directly correlates with fishermen. But since they've never seen it—

Tom B: They don't really seem to care about it.

Tim B: Right. That's another huge part of the business that people don't understand.

Tom B: Like, lobstermen don't have a license plate. We don't have a "Support your fisherman" license plate. All these guys are out fishing every day. We got no time, on top of all the other shit that we have to do, to even think that we could start some sort of campaign to advocate for the fishermen.

Tim B: That's a good point. There's no time.

Tom B: The lady up in Gloucester, the mayor, she's always, "My fishermen, my fishermen." She supports the fishermen. We need more people that support local, sustainable fishing and other businesses. That's why America became the way it is, because of small businesses. It seems like no one gives a shit anymore. The only thing I could think of as a turnaround is that a lot of people like to know where their seafood comes from. Everything—where their meat come from, everything. It's the only thing where people might say, "Oh, well, why am I

not buying U.S. fish? Why does every package I see say 'Taiwan' or 'Thailand' or wherever it comes from?"

Tim B: Canada, Norway.

Tom B: Yeah. Why isn't it saying "United States of America," when we have plenty of fish out our back door? When between Jeffries, Stellwagen, and Georges Bank—Georges Bank is the richest fishing grounds in the whole entire world. Yet, every single piece of fish that you see in every store, 99.999 percent of it says somewhere else other than the United States.

[98:27]

Tim B: When we were in Arizona, there was not one single piece. We went into a supermarket to get some stuff, and obviously, just being a fisherman, you just go, check out what is the price of fish, of haddock, over there? Or just anything that you see? Just curious to know, what's the value of it? What's it worth to them over there? The price is high, compared to here, obviously, because it has to be. It's not abundant over there. And not one fucking tag said, "Product of the United States of America." To think that we have the same exact things as all those things that are in that display case, and the reason it's not there is strictly because of regulations. That's the only thing. But no one knows that. The people in Arizona are looking, going—it's pretty easy to see why people get on board with it. They go in the supermarket. They see it. It says, "Product of India," or "Product of Canada." Then they read something somewhere or they hear about it on TV. "There's no fish." And they're like, "No shit, there's no fish. That's why everything's from Canada." But they don't know that it's their government. I feel like they don't have enough education to know that there is fish, but the poor guys aren't allowed to go and get it. I feel like their campaign gains speed very, very easily, because there's—

Tom B: A lack of knowledge.

Tim B: There's not enough people advocating for the fact that there is plenty. But you can't go and get it, so it looks like there's nothing. It's an easy sales pitch for people. "Oh, everything says something else, because we don't have it here." Bullshit.

[100:22]

Tom B: I don't know what to say. I really don't. Other than, out of all this, I hope that National Marine Fisheries sees that all we want is a happy medium. I understand that there needs to be both sides. But there needs to be a middle ground that everybody can reach to that everybody can feel comfortable. If people are seeing this, then they should be able to call National Marine Fisheries and say, "Hey, we're seeing this. I don't know what you guys are seeing." And they can be like, "Well, we're seeing this." "Well, let's figure out why we have two different answers." Let's not punish the fishermen for trying to help them out. That's kind of what happened with the scallop fishery when it crashed back in the late eighties, early nineties. They just let them go scalloping wherever the hell they wanted to and they let them take every scallop. No one really knew too much. Eventually, they realized that now the scallop industry talks to the government, and that's why it's such a thriving industry, because they call into National Marine Fisheries, and they're like, "Hey, we're seeing a lot of this here." They have different closures, different years. Everybody's happy.

But that's like the image I'd like to see with everybody, with National Marine Fisheries Service. The scallop guys, they don't mind calling National Marine Fisheries Service, because if they see more scallops, you know what National Marine Fisheries is going to do? "Here's more scallops to go take." That's the only way I can see things getting better is if everybody works together, not against each other. That's about all I got to say.

SS: That's a good note to end on. Sound good?

Tom B: Yeah.

[102:22]

[end of interview]