

**Interview with Patrick Fehily, vessel owner and commercial fisherman**

**Occupation:** Vessel owner and commercial fisherman

**Port Community:** Point Pleasant, New Jersey

**Interviewer:** Sarah Schumann

**Date and year:** January 29, 2019

**Location:** Point Pleasant, New Jersey

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

**Transcriber:** Sarah Schumann

[Start of interview]

[00:00]

Sarah Schumann [SS]: First I'm going to state my name, Sarah Schumann. Today is January 29, 2019, and we're in Point Pleasant, New Jersey. Now, whom do I have the pleasure of talking with?

Patrick Fehily [PF]: The pleasure of talking with? I'm Pat Fehily in, like you said, Point Pleasant. I own the fishing vessels Major Expense and Market Price. I'm twenty-nine, originally from New Jersey. First-generation fisherman. Nobody in my family has done anything like this, which will probably lead me into some other points later on as we speak.

SS: Before we go there, there's just one other biographical question. What's your educational background?

PF: Some college. Never graduated college. Left college to go fishing. I don't have a degree in anything. Aside from that, just high school.

SS: And you run a full time fishing business full time?

PF: Yes.

SS: Ok, so that's it for the biographical questions I have, so have at it. Tell your story!

PF: Basically, when I was in high school, we moved down to this area in between when I was in elementary school and junior high school. Right before I went into high school, my next-door neighbor introduced me to a friend of his that had a lobster boat in Belmar, New Jersey, which is the next harbor north of us here. I went with him one day to buy some lobsters, and I met the guy. The minute I saw it, it just kind of captivated me. It was something I was interested in. The guy offered me to go out on the boat with him a few times. I enjoyed it. I guess I must have made a little bit of a difference in their day, as far as work goes. I worked with him summers on the boat, what we call baiting and banding in the

lobster world. Just bait sacks and banding lobsters and whatever else needed to get done. But I didn't really consider making it a career at that point. Just thought of it as a job. When you're in high school, you have an idea but you don't really have a direction. Time went on. I stayed in touch with him. Thought about going into some different careers. I thought about maybe going into the electrical business, which is what my dad does. He's an electrician. Or maybe trying to go and work for the government. Just different things. I did everything from working at a golf course to working as a part-time summer cop here that they hire during the summer in town. Just tried a lot of different stuff. But I kept in touch with him, and for whatever reason, it was always kind of just on my mind. I kept thinking about it. Every time I would get a chance to come down to the harbor and see the boats, I would. I just always had some type of a passion for it. I went away to school, because it was one thing that my parents were kind of adamant about, was "You have to get a college education. It's very important." I went to community college here. Then I went to Florida, and I tried college there. The key word there is "tried." I kept in touch with this guy. His wife called me one day. He had cancer and he passed away, and she was also diagnosed with stomach cancer, and she said, "Look, I don't want to leave a mess for my kids. I know the boat's not worth a lot. I don't really know what permits and traps and all that are worth. Would you have any interest in it?" I don't think I was even off the phone with her and I was on my way to the airport, coming home. Because I didn't really enjoy college. It just wasn't for me. Didn't really mesh well. I just couldn't get an interest in anything. I came home. I had a conversation with my parents. My dad was all for it. Mom wasn't.

SS: How old were you at that point?

[04:03]

PF: I was twenty at that point, because our first boat came when I was twenty—between twenty and twenty-one. Came home, kind of went through the motions. Was still interested in buying this boat and everything, and was thrilled beyond belief. I thought I was lighting the world on fire. The boat was just a total piece of trash. There was just nothing to the boat. Not something I would ever consider buying, now that we are where we are. But be that as it may, it's what's available at the time and you don't know any better. So I started going through the negotiating process with her, prices and everything. Next thing you know, this individual had four kids, and this was a deal between her and I. Well, the next thing you know, the kids get involved, and that changes everything, because now the price went from XYZ to ABC, and that's not what we agreed upon. We looked at the financials of the business, and it's really not there to justify what they want. I think that was what did away with that deal. That deal fell apart, and I was pretty heart-broken, because I had left school to go do this, number one. I left the sort of walled garden that college can sometimes become and came up here to do this, and I wanted that boat because I had a history on that boat. It was the boat I worked on. I had a history with him. And it didn't work out. There was another individual who had been running that boat for them, and who also worked on the boat at the time I was a kid working on it. It was an older guy. He said, "You know, there's another guy in the back of Belmar, in a little town called Shark River, who wants to sell his boat and retire." He said, "The boat isn't much, but it's got a good permit. It's got some traps." We went back there, talked to him. He gave me a great deal. We got our foot in the door that way. We had to buy a lot of traps and rope and buoys, and it was an education and it was an expensive one, but that was kind of how I started. That boat had a lot of mechanical issues and it really wasn't that big. We wound up, within our first year, just

because that boat couldn't really get the job done, we went up to Maine and we bought a boat through a brokerage agency in Massachusetts. That boat I had for about two years or so. It was a forty-foot Novi, a Canadian-built boat. It handled the sea really well, real easy to handle. That was the boat that I got really attached to, because over time, obviously, I was running the boat myself—myself and one or two other guys, depending on the time of the year. Worked real hard at it, and started to accumulate more traps and more knowledge. Started to kind of learn from our mistakes and everything. Eventually, that boat—it was a good boat, but there's always kind of that thought in your mind that, "Well, if I had a bigger piece of equipment, maybe I could fish offshore a little bit more. I could move more traps. I could catch more lobsters. At the time, like I said, I was still docked up at Belmar, which is like a half an hour ride from my house. But I always wanted to be in Point Pleasant, because our buying stations are here, our ice is here, it's a little bit closer to the bait company that we use to supply our bait. Our other supply companies are here. And it's like five minutes from my house. I wanted to be here, so we moved the boat down here, from Belmar to Point Pleasant, and I docked next to a guy who's got a forty-seven-foot H and H lobster boat, brand new, nice boat, beautiful boat, huge—an absolute aircraft carrier of a boat. At the time, he had an individual working for him who was a pretty qualified guy. The guy that owned the boat, he wasn't really making the money that he should have, and he wanted to either build another boat or go into another fishery and build a boat for that. He wanted to get out of lobstering. We thought about buying that boat. That deal fell apart. We ended up buying one of my current boats, which is the Major Expense, which is another Novi, and on that boat, there was a lot of permits. There was day scallop. There was obviously another lobster permit, some monkfish licenses—a lot of very useful permits. That was the boat that kind of opened the door for us to get where we are now. Now, we still lobster, we still gillnet, but our business is primarily scallops. Any fisherman will tell you that that's one of the more lucrative fisheries out there. That was the fishery and the boat that was the real pinnacle for us. We lobstered with it strictly for the first year. We did great. Then, the second year, this was in the height of the scallop market, when scallops were thirteen dollars a pound all year. The U12s and U10s were closer to nine bucks a pound. The guys were making a lot of money. So I gave my crew the option to go scalloping for a little bit. We rigged the boat up, got a dredge, got a winch put together. It was a little bit of a struggle the first year. We didn't really know what we were doing. We had some crew issues, and the amount of output that we had to come up with for quota leasing and everything, it was a learning curve. But after our second year doing it, things got a lot better. We brought in some new people that made a lot of difference in terms of crew. Crew is a huge factor in this business. Once we did that, and we got good at what we were doing, then we felt it was time to invest in something long-term. And that is the boat that we're sitting on doing this interview. It's a fifty-four-foot Westmac that we built from scratch up in Maine. Beautiful boat. It took about a year and a half. It was between a year and a half and two years to build. It was like twenty-two months to build. Like everything else, way over time, way over budget, but we got what we wanted. We still have the Major Expense and that boat fishes just as hard. So we expanded to a two-boat operation. Once we did that, I actually stepped off the boats into more of an administrative manager-type position, because when something breaks on one, you've got to be there to fix it, and the last thing I want to see is the boat or the crew held at the dock because I'm not around. Occasionally, I'll still fill in and go with the guys, and the boat's not going to sit at the dock for a crew issue. But I'm on the administrative. And that's allowed me to do some things like develop private markets for our product, and try to get a better price, and get more involved in the bureaucratic side of it—the regulatory side. That is

very, very important, because no more so than ever, you need to be up on everything that's going on. When I say that, you need to know what's going on with offshore wind farms, offshore drilling, regulations, landing limits, gear restrictions, seasonal closures, whale regulations, there's so many different things. Now that we have these different permits for these various fisheries, we need to be up on what's going on with all of them. That's kind of my role now. I'm handling more of the shoreside operations of things, which in my opinion are just as important. I don't get offshore as much as I would like to, which is a little upsetting. But the flipside of the coin is, everybody plays a role. I'm very lucky to have great captains for both of the boats, and great crew for both of the boats. I have no worries. Obviously, I want everybody to come back safe, but I can have the confidence in knowing that if something did happen, they can handle it. We're very lucky to have that, because that's one of biggest struggles I think anybody has in this business is crew. Unfortunately, now, there's a lot of guys that come and go. You don't have a lot of long-term people. That also goes back to where we are in terms of a fishery. There's not a lot of opportunity there for younger guys, so a lot of the guys on deck look at it like it's just a job, whereas years ago, I think guys looked at it like, "Well, the deck is a stepping stone, but I'm going to own a boat one day if I work hard." Now, just the exorbitant cost of the permits and the boats and the traps and the dockage, insurance, quota leasing. You basically need to have either a private investor or go rob a bank if you want to go fishing, because there's just no opportunity for younger guys who are coming in to have the financial wherewithal to go get into this.

[13:33]

PF: It's extremely, extremely difficult. Even from an existing standpoint, it's hard because you got to have the operating capital. The business has to generate the money to keep it going. It's very, very easy to get behind, because these cost a ton of money to run. So it's a fine line to walk, between profit and net and gross and crew share. There's a lot of math that goes into it. Fishing now, as I see it transforming in New Jersey—I can't really speak for other states, because I know in Maine, there's a lot of people who want to go lobstering and they have a great apprenticeship program up there and they really structure their fishery well. But down here, I just see a massive human recruitment problem, because our fisheries are on the rebound and we're in great shape in terms of fish stocks and lobster stocks and scallops. We have very good stewards of the industry, when it comes to the fishermen. We're all in it to win it. The last thing we'd ever want to do is put ourselves out of business. But there's a real disconnect between us and the management, and a real distrust between us and the management, because we personally feel that their science is very flawed that they use, and because of the flawed science, it leads to stricter regulations, and because of the stricter regulations, it pushes people away from doing this. This is a great way to make a living. There's a lot of freedom in it. There's a lot of great things about it. But the problem I see is that there's just not a lot of young people coming into it. That's going to be a big problem, I would say, within the next ten to fifteen years. That's going to be a huge problem. Because, honestly, once you downsize an industry to the point where there's not many guys left—like in New Jersey, there's hardly any guys lobster fishing anymore. We used to have, between Point Pleasant and Belmar, a couple hundred boats. Now, for all of Area 4, as I understand it, which is Montauk, New York, down to Barnegat Light, out a certain amount of miles. Active licenses, I think there's about twelve or thirteen, and fulltime, I think I could rattle off maybe five guys that do it full time. The rest are like weekend warrior, part-time guys. That's not only indicative of the state of our fishery, but we've changed as a society

also. People want to go to college and get a degree. I don't see a lot of people who want to put the elbow grease in and do the manual labor. That's in all industries. That's auto mechanics, that's landscapers, that's all industries. But fishing, I would just hate to see us get into a situation where we dwindle even more in numbers than we already have as fishermen because we can't find guys qualified to come into boat ownership or move up to the wheelhouse. Even with these individuals that are hired to run boats, there's really no young captains out there. Everybody's on deck. That's not good either, because eventually, the guy that sits in the chair inside, he's going to step off the boat one day. There's got to be somebody to pass the reins to. I can't really speak to what guys saw twenty or thirty or forty years ago, because I wasn't around then, obviously, in this business or in the world. But I think that now, we're facing problems of, like I said, a human recruitment problem, because the cost of the business has gotten so high that there's just no opportunity there for a twenty-year-old that doesn't want to go to college, that wants to work on the back of the boat, to save up a hundred and fifty grand to get himself in the business. You can't get a boat for a hundred and fifty grand. You need half a million dollars just to get started, if you want to go lobstering, if you want to go scalloping, whatever—and that's just day scalloping. If you want to go trip scalloping, you need seven million dollars. It's just too unrealistic. I blame a lot of that also on corporate ownership. I don't think there's anything wrong with having more than one boat, but when you have corporations that have ten, fifteen, twenty boats, they're a huge stakeholder, and they have influence financially, politically, what have you, that we don't have at this level. It's a shame, but a lot like other things, the smaller guy tends to get drowned out and doesn't get heard. That's frustrating, because we're the guys that really feel it the most. I don't know.

[18:05]

SS: As hard as it is—and you've just described the costs of buying into this fishery and how steep that is—but you somehow managed to pull it off in a fairly short amount of time, being a wayward college student less than a decade ago, to now owning two really nice boats with diverse permits. What's your secret?

PF: The secret is you got to have a good business sense about you, too. I mean, pennies make dollars. If you can get five cents a pound better—I mean, there is loyalty to a fish buyer, but if a guy is taking advantage of you, you got to go somewhere else. If you want to put in the work and market your own product, that's huge, and guys are doing that now and they're making out well. That's very, very important. But the secret is just: save everything you make. That's the only secret in the whole thing. Don't go out, if you had a great year lobstering, and buy a seventy-thousand-dollar pickup truck. Don't go out and buy six new snowmobiles or whatever. Save your money and it can happen. And a lot of it, too, is you sell a boat and you use that profit to invest in a bigger boat. A lot of it is flipping money and moving money around. But the reality of it is, it just comes down to hard work. That's what it comes down to. I see a lot of people now who will buy a big, beautiful, flashy boat, and they won't fish it very hard. The boat has to work in order for any revenue to be generated. You can have the nicest boat in the world, but if you don't want to go fishing, you're not going to make it. You have to put the work in. That's really the secret to the whole thing. You have to put the work in. You just have to be smart with how you spend your money. Fishing now is papers. It's permits, and investing in permits and in quota, or a long-term return, that's the smart choice. You have to participate in fisheries that you can make money in. I look at some of our local gillnet fleet, and they're working for pennies. They're working very hard for

pennies. Every fisherman works hard, but if you could work hard and get a better return in a different fishery and you have the permits to do it, why not? It's a business savvy thing, is really what it comes down to.

[20:29]

SS: How did you learn to be business savvy?

PF: I guess from my parents. My parents are self-employed and I take a lot of advice from them. They're very involved, as far as, I bring them an idea and say, "What's your outlook on this?" They will either say, "Yes," or "No. What do you think the right thing is?" Because they don't know anything about fishing. You make a lot of mistakes, and that's what you have to learn from.

[21:03]

SS: Financially, when you were first starting out, did you get help from somewhere?

PF: The first boat was very reasonably priced, because it wasn't much at all, so it wasn't too much to swing. But when I bought that boat, I was like, "Geez, this is an astronomical amount of money. Jesus Christ, what are we going to do?" Now, we're at the point where if we don't move that through the business in a week, we might as well not even be here. Very different perspectives from then to now.

SS: When you say "we," do you have a business partner or something?

PF: No, no. I'm just saying in general, as a company.

SS: Ok.

PF: It's a little different perspective now.

SS: It sounds like you've found that the way to grow the business is for you to get off the boat and to manage the shore side of things.

PF: It had to be, because if I was to stay on the boat, it's very hard to have multiple boats, because one is always broken, there's a crew issue, there's a broken hydraulic hose, there's a transmission problem. "Hey, can you run to Sea Gear and get us a bucket of links or rings or scallop bags or whatever?" You have to advocate for your product, too. You have to go to your buyers and say, "Hey, listen. The guy down the street's paying a dollar and a quarter higher than you. Why is that? Because I'll take my business down there." There are people that I constantly do business with, and there's something to be said for that loyalty, but I'm loyal to them because they've always treated me right. Be that as it may. That's part of the puzzle too, is making sure that your business is getting what it needs, also.

SS: So when you're getting involved in marketing your own catch, it's mostly just negotiating with different wholesalers?

[22:42]

PF: Negotiating with different wholesalers. We're trying something new this year where we're going to try marketing our own scallops through one of the local wholesalers, because he's also a fisherman who has multiple boats and went and just opened up a huge retail-wholesale operation. I'm trying to support him a little bit. It seems like now, the field has kind of been weeded out and guys are mostly honest with you now. There's a lot of power with the Internet. People talk about prices. It's a little bit harder for them—when I say them, the fish dealers—to pull a fast one now. Now you know where you should be, because it takes nothing for Canadian fisherman to get on Facebook and say, “Hey, American guys, what are you getting paid?” Then we all go back and forth and you kind of come up with that.

SS: When you say you're going to market your scallops through this other guy, what does that mean?

[23:40]

PF: He's going to basically buy our scallops and see if he can do a little better on prices for us. Because like I said, a quarter a pound, ten cents a pound, that's the difference that makes a difference. There's a lot of places to sell where it's convenient, but you might not get what you're looking for out of it, so that convenience costs. If you're willing to put in a little extra work, you can probably find a little higher price for your product. That's realistically what I'm going to need to do.

SS: In terms of the different species that you're catching, scallops, you said, really helped—

PF: Scallops are our backbone. Lobsters are our secondary, and then we gillnet some monkfish in the winter. That's more just to keep the crew working. That's not a huge moneymaker for us. The scallops, if we didn't have them—

SS: That's the mainstay.

PF: That's the mainstay. That's the mainstay.

SS: Is all of this in federal waters with federal permits?

PF: It is. There's really no state fishery here in New Jersey anymore. It's all federal.

SS: Ok. You mentioned getting involved in the bureaucratic aspect of things.

PF: That's frustrating, because a lot of that stems back to things that happened or took place before I was around, so you kind of have to learn the history of your fishery and then make some predictions of what will be around. A lot of that comes from what you see, what the observers see, what NOAA sees, what the other fishermen of the older generation have seen and continue to see. You put it all in a hopper and see what you come up with. Not everybody ever agrees, but everyone does their best. That's the one thing I like about the scalloping. The only aspect where the corporate ownership is good in that is that there's so much money involved in it, between corporate ownership and whatnot now, that they don't want it to fail. They can't have it fail. And they have the influence to kind of push it in good directions. Whereas when I go to our state lobster meetings here, it's a total waste of time.

It's the most mismanaged thing I've ever seen in my life. Guys will just disagree with each other for the sake of disagreeing with each other. And that's ridiculous, because nobody benefits there. It's childish. But the flipside of that coin is it's what we have left and what we have to work with. But it takes a lot of time. Between going to ASMFC meetings in Virginia, going to Massachusetts, Rhode Island, here in New Jersey, wherever, and it's a lot of information to process at once. You have to kind of sit down and digest it, and say, "This is good. This is bad. What do you want to do here?" As a fishery, after the meeting, you kind of have to get together and say, "Do we want this? Do we not want that?" There will always be one or two guys that kind of go against the grain, but for the most part, I think it's easy to get everybody on the same page, collectively.

SS: When you are going to those meetings, are you going as just an individual business owner, or are you part of an association?

[26:57]

PF: No, I'm going as an individual business owner. I'm part of the Cape Cod Fishermen's Alliance. I'm not in Cape Cod, obviously, but a friend of mine that I lease a lot of scallop quota from, he encouraged me to join because he's a board member there. It's kind of nice, because they represent a lot of the day boat scallopers, and they keep you in the know as to what's going on, with the newsletter. We thought about forming an association for the lobstermen here in New Jersey, but there's so few of us left and none of us like each other, so that was a waste of an idea. I think that the younger guys that are left really want to see it succeed, but there's really, beside myself, in terms of the lobster fishery, I think I'm the only guy below thirty. I think there's two guys that are in their thirties, and the next step up, everybody's in their fifties or sixties. There's a huge gap there.

SS: Why is that?

[27:52]

PF: I think that was just when there was a little bit of a downtrend in the fishery. I don't want to say that our stocks weren't healthy, but they're not what they used to be, for sure. Based on what we're told at these meetings that we go to, according to them—when I say "them," the powers that be—it's never going to rebound to what it was. But because of different acts like the Magnuson Stevens and all these different things that are in place, we still have to try and rebuild it. That's where we argue, because there are so few of us left here. Let us stay status quo. Don't change anything. Let us keep doing what we're doing, if you know it's going to stay the same. By law, they can't let us do that. They have to try and implement different measures. So that's kind of what we're doing now: seasonal closures, gauge size differences. There's only so many things you can try. It gets exhausting after a while because we don't see any improvement on our end. When we do see an improvement, the government says, "Oh, no there's no improvement." There's a lot of smoke and mirrors, I think, with the science behind it. Luckily, there are some things that I agree on, and you try and take what you can from that and build it into the greater good.

[29:18]



SS: Now are you unique around here in terms of being a first-generation fisherman, not coming from a fishing family?

PF: Yeah, the one other kid that's like that, he's the one that just opened up the wholesale retail. In fact, I've got to go pick up a check from him. Aside from him, everybody else has a father or a brother or an uncle or something. I don't want to say that I envy them, but they have knowledge and insight and maybe a certain amount of respect from the other fishermen that I didn't have. You know what I mean? People get very jealous of your success, so when you do well and you start to grow, you make a lot of enemies, for no other reason than jealousy. I think those guys—"Oh yeah, my dad fished, and whatever"—they get a little bit more respect from the other fishermen, but to be honest with you, it's nice to be respected, and it's nice to be liked—and I like to think that we treat people well, with enough dignity, in the industry, that have been here a long time and have family in it that are still welcome, but to be honest with you, I don't give a damn what they think or not. I can't deposit their respect in my bank account, so whatever. But it is still nice to be one of the guys. And that's changed quite a bit too, because you'll see guys who unfortunately will never elevate to the wheelhouse that don't like you, but they kind of kiss your ass a little bit, because they might need you for a job one day. It's a little strange, but it happens a couple times a week. The comments will be passed, and people will say things. You just got to develop a thick skin and let it roll off your back, because generally it's people who don't have a huge stake in it and people that don't know what they're talking about that make the most noise. You just take it from where it comes and move on.

SS: Who do you have for crew on your boat?

[31:29]

PF: Each boat has a captain, and then we have two to three guys that go every trip, and then occasionally when things get busy, we might throw a fourth guy into the mix, and we have a couple guys that come part-time, like they have regular jobs on land and they'll come on weekends and give the regular full time guys on the boat a day off or something like that. We keep a pretty healthy roster of guys. I want to say between two boats, we probably have six guys full time, and then we have probably four or five guys that kind of part-time fill in here and there. We keep pretty steady guys.

SS: Age-wise, what are they like?

PF: My youngest guy is thirty-three and the oldest guy is fifty-five or fifty-six.

SS: So your entire workforce is older than you?

PF: Yup, and the older guys can't stand the younger guys. They just don't have the same work ethic. And the older guys were around twenty, thirty, forty years when the fisheries have changed. They see what it used to be, and they expect that. Unfortunately, with this younger generation, everybody's different now, and that's unfortunate.

SS: In what way? Can you elaborate?

PF: They just don't want to work hard. They want to run right for their bunk. They don't want to take a watch. They want to cook breakfast if they've got the watch in the morning, when everybody's getting up. They'll try and find ways to cut corners. That's another thing that you have to watch as a boss is who's getting away with things that they shouldn't, and who's not. That's one of the hardest parts of it, is everybody's like, "What's the magic pedal to push when it comes to dealing with people?" There is none. You got to push on all of them a little bit. You have to flex quite a bit to deal with the personalities of the crew.

SS: It sounds like you're comfortable supervising a bunch of people who in some cases are decades older than you. Was that hard to get used to at first?

[33:35]

PF: The guys I have are pretty good, because they've been around a long time. But I have had guys in the past that are just totally, "I'm not listening to you." You know what I mean? Obviously, they're not here for a reason anymore. Yeah, it's a little weird sometimes. It's a little weird. Because I go to them sometimes for advice, too, like "Listen, what do you guys think we should do in this situation?" I think they see that and they respect it to a certain extent, like I'm respectful of their knowledge and their wisdom. It's a good combination. There are still days when I'm ready to scream and pull my hair out, because they might do things that piss me off or they might not see it from my angle, but that's any business owner in any industry. Unless it's yours, they're never going to see it the same way you do.

SS: You mentioned earlier that sometimes there are young guys around, but you know they are never going to elevate to the wheelhouse. Can you say a little something about what separates those people who can grow and have a future like you do in the fishing industry from those who will always be on deck?

[34:43]

PF: Two things: common sense and drive. Those are the only two things. There's so many great guys here that are literally workhorses that can do anything, but they have no common sense. If a guy wants to move up, he'll show you. He'll put in the extra hour and keep the boat clean. He'll come inside and ask the captain a few things that he might see on the chart plotter or the depth sounder. A guy gets better when you don't have to tell him what to do. Then there's guys that are great workers, but you've got to tell them the same thing every day, over and over. Then there's guys that just flat out don't want to move up. They're comfortable where they are. It's usually pretty easy to tell. That's something you can't even really describe. It's something that you see, and you're like, "That's a guy that's got a future." And then there's another that you're like, "He's a good worker, but I wouldn't put him in charge of a boat." And two, there's definitely different qualities. The captain has to be responsible for the boat. He's got to watch out for the safety of everybody. He's got to watch out for other traffic around them in terms of other boats, other fishing gear. A big part of it is knowing the engine room, what's going on down there, the mechanics of the boats. That all comes with responsibility, and we're having a hard time finding that in younger people. But for now, what we're doing seems to be working, so we'll stick with it.

[36:27]

SS: Do you have any kids or a spouse?

PF: No. I have no kids. I'm not married. Which is good—I mean, it's good and it's bad, it would be nice—but the flipside of the coin is that it gives me a lot more time to devote to this. But it almost makes you resentful to the business in a sense, because you want to get other things out of life, but this is one business that just consumes every second of your day. It's a hard balance to find, but I would hope that over the years, you get better from a management perspective, and you learn how to manage your time better and how to manage things better, and maybe that will allow you to do other things in life that you want to do.

SS: Are there still some learning curves? In some ways, it seems you've got these great boats, you've got it all figured out. What are the things you're working on?

PF: Oh God yes. Time management is a big one. Also, I would say just in general, the overall management of the business. I'd like to think I've got a pretty good handle on things now, but every once in a while you stumble and you make a mistake, and once you do that, you've just kind of got to figure it out and move forward again. You don't really learn from a mistake until you make a mistake. But as far as to pinpoint one thing, it's honestly hard to even give you an answer on that. I'm just not sure. Hard to put it into words.

SS: That's fine.

[38:14]

PF: I think we all have a picture in our heads of what we want to be, but getting there is—you know—and then not understanding why you're not there, sometimes. I need to really learn to grow in steps, to bite off small pieces instead of big chunks. That's a big one.

SS: What is the picture in your head about where you want to be?

PF: Right now, somewhere warmer! It's real cold here [laughter]! Eventually, I'd like to have a healthy mix of scallop boats and lobster boats. That's really it. Those are the two fisheries.

SS: How many?

PF: I would say, if I could get another two or three boats, I'd be happy. But I don't know if that's going to be a reality or not, and based on the way, the competitiveness of the market now, I may need to focus my attention more on wholesale, retail, moving my own product, getting a better price, things like that. It's strange. I didn't ever think it would get this far, and we're here, and I'm still pretty young, so I'd like to—but again, that goes back to "Rome wasn't built in a day" and you have to slowly grow and not bite off more than you can chew. Because it's very, very easy to do that, and then you get yourself into a situation where you're behind and financially things aren't working, and you don't want to get there either.

[39:46]

SS: Let me ask you. You have two boats already and you think about having two or three more. Conventionally, fishermen had one boat. What's the advantage that you see in having a small fleet of boats?

PF: More pictures for Facebook [laughter]! Honestly, financially, there's benefits, obviously. But there comes more headaches with that, so it's just a give and take, and I guess just a sense of accomplishment overall. You create jobs for people locally and hopefully keep the industry alive a little bit more and show some positive growth in the industry, but aside from that, obviously just financial benefits. Financial benefits and landings history, and you hope to grow and do well and do well. I think that's part of the problem with our current society is that everybody broadcasts their whole life and everything like that, you almost feel like you're not successful unless you have more than one boat. But I know some very, very successful single-boat owner-operators in the state of Maine, state of Virginia, North Carolina, here in New Jersey—very successful. So, I don't know. I think for me it's just a personal goal, more or less.

SS: What are some of the things that keep you up at night, when you think about the future?

PF: My neighbor's dogs [laughter]. I worry about prices of the product. Over the last few years or so, scallop prices have dramatically decreased in the summertime, whereas they used to be steady throughout the whole year. That concerns me. The lease rates of the quota, because we lease the majority of our quota in. I would say right now we lease ninety-five percent of our quota in. That's a very, very fine line to walk, because everybody's got to make money: the crew, the business, and everybody leasing the quota. When I say "they," I mean the guys leasing the quota. It pisses you off, because they'll squeeze you for every penny they can, and all they're doing is signing a piece of paper. We're the ones that have all the overhead and expense. That just drives me absolutely insane. The crew concern—yeah, we've had hard times with crew in the past, but we've gotten through it. But just, am I making the right moves in business? Are the decisions I'm making the right ones? Am I being fair to the guys? Are the guys being fair to me? Your mind just races: What can I do better to better myself? It's not necessarily worries. It's just all these possibilities out there, and how do we get there?

SS: A lot to think about.

PF: Yeah. Those are really the things there.

[43:02]

SS: If you went back in time and could talk to your younger self, what would your younger self think about where you are now? Did that former you ever see this coming?

PF: No, I didn't see this coming, but, how can I put this? It was a lot simpler back then and I didn't realize it. I thought it was really hard and really tough, but when I was by myself with one boat, it was a lot simpler. Then when you're there, you're like, "Man, that guy's got it made. He's got this big boat. He's got multiple boats. He's doing something right." Then you step in the driver's seat there and you're like, there's a lot more headaches with expansion, there's a lot more people with expansion to manage. There's more personalities. More this, more that. That's the problem. It's like, "I'm doing the right thing. But am I?" I would have told my younger self, "Just don't listen to all the bad advice people are going to give you, because there's a lot of people in this business, through their jealousy, that will give you one hundred percent bad advice, just to see you fail, because they get enjoyment out of that."

Being that I didn't have the family members in the business, how did I know they were giving me the wrong advice? That's where a lot of the lessons came from. Don't listen to the bad advice people give you, because they want to see you fail, and don't listen to them when they're jealous, because that does get in your head after a while. It's like, "Jesus Christ, what did I ever do to that guy?" You know? Don't listen to that. But yeah. Be your own person. Go with what you think is right, because there's going to be a lot of people along the way, and I can rattle off names from here to Tuesday of next week, of people that just didn't want to see me succeed for whatever reason, and gave me advice to do things, and they were costly mistakes.

SS: That's too bad.

[45:10]

PF: It is. It really is, because a lot of them are still around. You lose a lot of respect for people that do that. It's terrible. And there's no reason for it, especially when you're not a threat to them. Anyway, that's my answer to that.

SS: Alright. Are there any topics we haven't discussed yet that you think are important?

PF: No. I just wish that wherever this data goes, and whoever sees it, and whoever reads it, I would really like for our government to take—and even fishermen themselves, individually—there's so much that we can do to recruit younger people into the business, and to understand that it's still a thriving business and a lot of pride and a lot of hard work, and don't be afraid to go do it. I would hope that one day, National Marine Fisheries or NOAA or whoever, or our state regulatory bodies, would get together and try to work together to come up with an idea or a program or a panel or a council or something to come up with ways to recruit younger people into the fishery. Because that's one thing that we don't do. We're so worried about preserving the stocks that we don't think about the future on the human end of it. That's going to be a huge problem for us down the road. I just hope that one day, we'll see a resurgence of young people that want to go do this. I don't think it's going to happen, and I know that's a negative outlook, but I hope it does. I really do, because it's such a great way to make a living.

[46:50]

SS: What do you think it would take to reverse that trend and bring people back into it?

PF: I don't know what it would take. We did away with shop class. We did away with automotive class in high school. We did away with all these different things. We kind of pushed people to go for higher education now, which there's nothing wrong with, but I think we need to get the word out there that you can make a living without a degree. You can use your hands and your back to make a living, and don't be afraid to do that. It's more of a message that has to be sent: "There is a great career here. If you want to do it, jump in and do it and learn as much as you can, and you'll be fine." I don't know that that will happen, because obviously, things cost money to do, and to be honest with you, there's a lot of special interests with power beyond belief that have a lot to do with our future and where we are now.

SS: What are you referring to, specifically?

[48:01]

PF: Well, just these different environmental groups that have political power through money and lobbyists and everything, that may influence the ear of powerful people. That's not something that we have in fishing. In fishing, it's still Captain So-and-So going to a town meeting where his congressman or senator's going to be, and telling them, "Look, this is a problem I face." Whether this message gets through or not, who knows? But the best thing I think any fisherman can do is get out there and encourage young people to get into the business, and be involved—go to these different regulatory meetings, go to these panel meetings, these committee meetings, and during the public comment period, get up and voice your opinion. Get up and say what you see, the trends you see. Obviously, talk to other fishermen. Don't just get up there and piss everybody off and start yelling and whatever. You have to show the other side of things, that you can be professional and that you have a positive outlook.

SS: Why do you think it's important to show a positive outlook?

PF: There's a lot of doom and gloom in the business. You ask a lot of the older guys. "Oh, it's not what it used to be. Not what it used to be." But I don't know. You know what? If things were that bad, nobody would be doing it. Instead of complaining about how bad things are, get involved. Like I said, go to these meetings. Get up there. Try to do what you can to work with people to make things better. Whether that's talking to somebody like yourself or offering public comment or what have you, there's different ways to do that. So that's it.

[49:48]

SS: Alright. Great. Any final thoughts you'd like to leave?

PF: Not really. I hope I didn't offend anybody with anything I said. Just that overall, things are not terrible like a lot of people say that they are. I just hope that going forward, there will be a lot more emphasis placed on what fishermen see and fishermen observe, in terms of implementing different regulations and different conservation measures, and not so much based on what the science that is questionable sees. You can plug anything into a formula, and it's going to come up with something. We're telling you this is what we see on the boat, on the water. You're getting minute-by-minute action when you talk to us. When you collect this data that observers and whatnot collect, that information can be months and months and months old, or years old. So how's that accurate? I think we can provide a little more real-time info. I just hope that moving forward, our voices are heard a little bit more, through programs like this or what have you. There is a future here. I hope that, because there's only a few of us still left, that we don't get drowned out or anything like that. That's really all.

SS: Alright. Thank you very much for sharing your story.

PF: Thank you. Thank you. I'm going to go ahead and sign these here.

SS: Ok, let me turn this off. You can sign that.

[end of interview]

[51:36]