

**Interview with Shana Kuhse, commercial fisherman**

**Occupation:** commercial fisherman

**Port Community:** Stonington, Connecticut

**Interviewer:** Sarah Schumann

**Date and year:** June 3, 2019

**Location:** Stonington, Connecticut

**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: My name is Sarah Schumann. Today is June 3rd, 2019. I'm in Stonington, Connecticut. Could you please state your full name for the record?

Shana Kuhse [SK]: I'm Shana Kuhse, and I'm out of Stonington. I fish generally on the Sara Elizabeth, but I've been taking trips on the Tradition as well.

SS: Your occupation is commercial fisherman?

SK: Yep.

SS: Is that fulltime or part-time?

SK: Yep. It's been the only full time job I've ever held.

SS: How old are you, Shana?

SK: I'm twenty-four.

SS: And what is your educational background?

SK: I graduated high school from Ledyard and never went to college.

SS: Ok. Did you grow up around here?

SK: Yep. I grew up in Gales Ferry, and I currently live in Voluntown. I've always been within a half hour radius of right here.

SS: Ok. Do you want to tell me about how you got started in the commercial fishery?

SK: Yeah. When I was thirteen, fourteen, or so, one of my father's buddies was looking for help for the summer. I had no clue what it entailed. I'd met him a few times, knew he was a good guy. He had me come down here, and I started stringing bait. I slowly started going on the boat and taking on more responsibilities. That was my summer job up until I graduated. Then, when I graduated, I came down here full time to string bait. I did that for about two years straight. Seven days a week, almost all year. It was last year I started running a commercial lobster boat, the Crustacean. I worked with Rob Smith as well on the Sara Elizabeth, which is my main boat and has been for about four years now, for lobster and conch. Starting last winter, I started on the Tradition with Aaron Williams, just doing winter trips for fluke mostly.

[01:57]

SS: You said originally you started because one of your father's buddies was a fisherman. Was your father also a fisherman, or is he?

SK: He used to drag when he was younger, but it was never his thing. He has his own tree company. He would just go fishing in the winter when things were slow.

SS: Are you the only fisherman in your family?

SK: Yep. I just kind of picked it up on my own, just through trial and error and a lot of time, found my way through it.

SS: And you strung bait, you said, for a number of years before you actually started fishing?

SK: Yep. That was my more entry level into other boats and people I didn't know. I was down here every day, talking to everyone, putting in a lot of time and effort. It kind of just got around that I was a decent worker. I started going with other people, and finally, that's when Rob with the Sara Elizabeth took me on as his fulltime deckhand.

SS: I've done some bait-stringing myself, and I have to say that it's not typically thought of as one of the most romantic aspects of being in the fishing industry.

SK: Not quite. A lot of people seem to look over it [laughter].

SS: [laughter] And yet, there was something about it that appealed to you?

SK: I absolutely loved it. It was hard to explain. Being on the boat and doing bait is a much more rewarding thing. Doing every piece of the job, at the end it makes it seem like more rewarding. Just doing bait was definitely monotonous, but now that I'm running boats and doing all that, it's just a piece of it, like everything else. You have to prep everything to be able to go out and actually haul everything. I'm one of the few people down here who can actually say they like doing bait. Everyone else, it's their absolute pain. It's relaxing to me. It's repetitive. I don't have to think, just nonstop.

[03: 30]

SS: Yeah. What were some of the things you liked about it at first? You said you were thirteen when you started?

SK: Roughly, yeah.

SS: What were some of the things that made an impression on you about this work then?

SK: Most everyone in my family is self-employed, so the whole idea of being able to do what I wanted was the main draw when I was younger. I fished my whole life rod and reel off my own private boats. Just the water, the ocean, has always called me anyway. Just being given this opportunity, I kind of ran with it. It was never what I thought I was going to do at that age, but looking back, I can't see anything else either, though.

SS: There's nothing else that you have considered doing?

SK: Nope. I've done a couple other odd jobs. I worked for my father's tree service before. I don't mind it, but I do this every day and go home happy every day. Everything else, I've yet to see anything else that's able to make me feel that way. For the future of the fisheries, that's definitely a scary idea, for the fact that I've put all my time and effort my entire life into this, and for the lobstering aspect especially, it is slowing down. It's a dying industry, especially around here.

SS: Can you say a little bit more about that?

SK: There's a lot of regulations in every fishery, obviously. With lobstering, I know them a bit better. I was fishing federal Area 2, and there's a pot reduction program going on to reduce the fishable pots by fifty percent on every license. We went from two eight hundred pot allocations to eight hundred total between two boats. Even then, the boat I was running, I'd technically be able to fish four hundred forty by the end. That's two days of work. Between dropping the amount of catch, dropping the amount of time I'm working, the amount of bait I have to do, everything gets drawn down. I was at the point where I could do seven days of work, and now it's dropped down to about three or four, if that. I've had to branch out. I'm running a conch boat now, something I never thought I'd do. I'm not that crazy into it. It's the fact that in the summers, I have to work seven days a week. There's no money to be made in the winter, so I have to try to make my entire year in three months. The catch has been dropping off. The shell rot's been getting worse around here. They're talking about implementing no fishing on Sundays during the summer. There's a lot of things coming at us at once, that's really not making it too easy to continue what we're doing. I was hoping to be able to lobster all last winter, but between the weather and the catch, there was no way that I could pay any of my bills, let alone survive. That's why I had to jump on the Tradition, to get any sort of work. There's few people down here that can truly just fish.

[06:24]

SS: When did you start running boats, and what was that progression like for you?

SK: I started running the Crustacean on my own last year. Before that, I'd done—not on my own, but just running the boat while the captain was there, and just a slow progression over the last three years of getting the swing of it. It's not that hard of a thing. Gaining the confidence was really the main issue, because once you set the gear, at least for us, we leave it about four days. In my mind, it always raced, "Did I set it right? Is anyone messing with it?" All the responsibility's on you. That was the hardest part to get over for me, just overthinking everything. That boat sold, actually, so I'm going to be running the Sara Elizabeth. The way

the lobstering works, I can run a federal boat but I can't run a state boat, unless I have my own license. I can only conch on that boat, and then I go back to being just a deckhand for lobstering.

SS: Do you have your own conch license?

SK: Yep. With the conching, it's the same general idea. You haul them every night, just about. It's just the same general idea of a trap. You have to do the bait every morning, everything. It's not steady, by any means, but it's a good supplementary income on top of everything.

SS: But you're not too crazy about the conching?

SK: Running the boat is much more stressful than running a lobster boat, because of the time and how the people are around here. It's a very aggressive industry, for sure.

SS: Is that closer to shore?

SK: Yep. I can only do Connecticut waters, so I stay within the sound here.

[08:19]

SS: When you're lobstering and squidding, do you stay around here? Are those day trips?

SK: Lobstering, how we do it, it's always been day trips. For state waters, we can only haul from sunup to sundown. For federal waters, we can technically haul whenever we want. It's right outside of Quonnie, so it's right in Block Island Sound. It's a two-hour steam, so we just do sunup to sundown again. With the squid trips that I was doing with Aaron, those were about four days, usually, up in Nantucket Sound. In the winter, we were doing everything from Virginia trips for fluke, which is eight days or so. Depending on the season, it can range anywhere from day trips to over a week.

SS: In terms of who else you're working alongside, on the Sara Elizabeth, is it just you and the boat owner?

SK: On the Sara Elizabeth, depending on what we're doing, if we're conching, it's me and this kid Nick, who used to work for me last year on the Crusty. We're going to do a dual captain thing this year for the conching. We're both going to switch on and off being captain and deckhand, so that if I need to take transit trips with Aaron, we can swap in and out. Not a common practice. Actually, Peter over there used to do that with Frankie as well, where they had a dragger together. It's a nice setup. Normally in the summer, I can't take a single day off if you're sick or anything. Having him trained too allows us to take a day off or find other work when necessary, because we know it's not going to be a killer year.

SS: How old is he?

[09:58]

SK: Twenty, twenty-one, I want to say.

SS: Another young fisherman.

SK: Yep. He's been in it for life. He started young.

SS: On the Tradition, how big of a crew is it?

SK: During the winter, we have the captain and three deckhands. In the summer, it's the captain and two deckhands. The last trip, it was Aaron, Nadia, and I. It was actually one of the only all-female crews on a dragger in the area, if I had to guess.

SS: That's different.

SK: She's another one, never had anyone in her family fish or anything. She was living near Point Judith, just kind of showed up one day and slowly integrated, proved herself to be a decent person, decent worker, and just worked her way through—really, the only way anybody gets a job in the fishing industry.

SS: It sounds like you have been working with a number of other young fishermen, including some women. Do you feel like Stonington is a vibrant place for younger fishermen?

[11:09]

SK: All things considered, there's not many people getting in the fishing industry, regardless. I've hung around Point Judith. I've seen everything up there. Everywhere you go, I think it's the same thing. You got the handful of young people coming right out of high school and taking it as a family job or through friends or something. For sure, there's a decent amount of young people down here. But I see an equal amount of older people getting into it for the first time as there are older people. I see a bunch of fifty-something-year-old men who maybe did it when they were younger and they didn't have anything else to fall back on or were just kind of curious and are finally giving it a shot after wanting to for so long. I think fewer young people are getting into it for the fact that—I'm not quiet, I tell everybody—it's a dying industry. It's hard to look forward to next year and the year after, when every year since I've been doing it has been worse and worse. I think that's the main issue is really future stability. There's plenty of people who are doing well, don't get me wrong. But between regulations and everything from climate change to everything, it's hard to assume that things are going to stay the same if not get worse.

SS: How does that make you feel about your future in the industry?

SK: Very shaky. I purchased my own house last year. That's been a concern of mine ever since, is literally building my future on something that I can't see panning out for another year let alone the rest of my life. I'm going to keep struggling in it as long as I can, but I'm assuming I'm going to have to get an actual second job, whether it's something at night or over the winters or weekends or something. It's definitely a scary idea. I try not think too far ahead, for the fact that it's never a pretty picture in my mind.

SS: What would you predict if you had a crystal ball, and you were looking five or ten years down the line?

SK: For lobstering, especially, I see a handful of boats being around. But the majority of people without a second job have been quitting the industry. Maintaining a boat, maintaining

the bills, everything, those costs are so high compared to how little we're catching. This was probably the worst winter anyone's ever seen, talking to everyone down here, in terms of catch. I knew people who were going out, catching ten lobsters for a full day. If I had to guess, in five or ten years, lobstering's going to be just about dead around here. I guarantee there's going to be a boat sticking around, for the fact that somebody's got to do it, but it's not going to be a banner job anymore. I keep myself up at night thinking about, like you said, the five- or ten-year plan, and for my own life, I can't see much that's going to get better. Between water temperatures being different, winters being worse in general—not last year.

SS: In terms of rough weather?

SK: Yeah. It was not, this winter. But the winter before, it stayed so cold for so long, that the water temperature didn't change when it should have. We were like three weeks behind. We have a moratorium in New York and Connecticut now between the end of September to the middle of November, so we have to have all our gear out of the water. No fishing whatsoever. Pretty much what could have been a really great time for us, we couldn't even be out there. We can conch, but we can't lobster at all. Between seeing the regulations that they want to put forward that they are putting forward, we're getting shut down everywhere we try and go.

[14:58]

SS: You're talking about the fifty percent trap reduction?

SK: The trap reduction, the moratorium, the shutdown. We have the two boats for the fact that if you have a lobster license on one boat, and say you want to put a federal license on the same boat, you have to follow the most restrictive license. So if you had a federal and a state permit on the same boat, you had to abide by the moratorium in federal waters, even though it's a state regulation. So we're forced to have two boats so we can fish where we want and when we want, which is a lot of stuff that definitely stretches what we have to do.

SS: Here in Stonington, I'm seeing a lot of lobster traps, a couple draggers. Is it pretty mixed fisheries around here? Are there opportunities to do other stuff?

SK: Stonington's most known for the lobstering. It's the only real lobster port in Connecticut. I can't remember the exact number of people actively lobstering in Connecticut, but it's in the twenties, and we have like eight of them here. It's definitely a mixed fishery. The Heritage and Tradition came in here, I want to say, last year. They've been back and forth, but this is their homeport now. We have had two scallop fleets over there, but the Bomsters sold out. Joe Gilbert still has his boats. It's definitely a mix down here. Mostly the day boats. Mostly the lobstermen. A handful of draggers, now.

SS: It sounds like you've been taking advantage of some of those opportunities to bolster your portfolio a little bit.

SK: Oh yeah. Everyone down here knows me. I know them. I can trust everyone here like my own family. I'm willing to go on just about any boat if they need help. My summers are dedicated to lobstering. It is truly what I love. I have nothing against the dragging, but I love my house. I love being home every night. That's a big piece of what influences me. But I'm willing to take any job that's offered or when someone's in need.

SS: Do you live alone or do you have a partner? Any kids?

SK: Right now my boyfriend lives with me. Me, him, and my dog. That's it.

SS: Do you have any reflections on the intersection of fishing and home life?

SK: In the summer, I'm working seven ten- or twelve-hour days, at least. I go home, I eat, and I sleep, and that's about it. I have to say, I wish I had the ability to plan things like other people with a nine-to-five job. Like my friends and I want to go to a concert. "What are you doing August 27th?" "I can't even tell you what I'm doing tomorrow." It is an issue. Not an issue, just not my favorite thing, how different everything is compared to a standard job. Then again, I wouldn't change it for anything.

[18:04]

SS: Is your boyfriend involved in the fishing industry at all?

SK: Yeah. He's the one that brought me the Gatorade. He fishes his stepfather's two boats down there.

SS: So at least he gets it.

SK: Yep. That's how we met, was right down here. He's another one. His stepfather's been in it for forty years at least. Everyone down here is struggling. None of us can pay all our bills. Boat owners especially. Not being an owner, at least I am not as affected, I guess, by a lot of it. I don't have the boat bills. I don't have to worry about that stuff. But it's still there. Everyone down here is not doing too well. The lobstermen, especially, are just struggling.

SS: Is boat ownership something you might see in your future?

[18:56]

SK: I attempted to buy a permit for myself last year so I could fish Connecticut waters, but I had to have a surgery last winter and I had to take three months off. Between the surgery and everything, the money just wasn't there. Once again, I sat up multiple nights just thinking about the future. "If I buy a ten thousand dollar license right now, and find a boat to put it on, can I even make that money before they cut my traps or they shut down an area or something like that?" It's a definite major back and forth. I still would love to own my own boat, run my own licenses, and stuff like that. But then again, I think it's more lucrative to be a deckhand.

SS: That's an interesting comment on the future of the industry.

SK: Yeah. Yeah, for sure. The captains are making much more money and that's fully understandable—the owners. But there's so much overhead: the bait costs, the fuel costs, upkeep, insurances, everything. I'm daunted just paying my own house bills right now. I can't imagine having twice that in boats.

[20:10]

SS: If you go back in time to when you were thirteen and were starting to string bait, did you foresee having a future like this in the industry? Did you think you'd still be here eleven years later, standing on the same dock, and loving it?

SK: I did. I was hooked the second I did it. I'm very strong willed. I'm going to do what I want to do. Once I got my teeth into this and realized just how much I enjoyed it, I didn't see anything else. That's another one of the depressing aspects of it. If this industry goes under, I'm losing everything I love. I know I'll find something else. But at the end of the day, this is what makes me happy. When I look around and think, everyone down here, how do you start new? If it shuts down in five or six years or I can't make it anymore, I'll be thirty and never have had another job. I'm kind of concerned about that. I know I can figure something out. But it's still a daunting prospect, for sure.

SS: Did anyone ever try to talk you out of fishing as a career? Parents or teachers?

SK: My teachers, for sure. I was very, very hell bent on the idea that I was not going to go to college. I was not in a good place during high school, and I knew I was just going immediately to work. My guidance counselors and my career counselors, "Well, you have to at least apply to a few colleges." I'm like, "I have twenty bucks in my pocket and that's all I have to my name. I'm going straight to work." By all means, they pulled me out of class multiple times to discuss the options with me—scholarships. I'm like, "I already have something I'm happy with that I can make money at that I'm good at." Multiple people, for sure. My ex-boyfriend's family, actually, was quite intent on me quitting fishing when I was with him. Their famous quote was, "When are you going to get a real job?" They were both schoolteachers. I was like, "I am nineteen right now. I'm making more money than both of you." Not in a negative aspect. But, this is a real job. I pay taxes. I'm here every single day. I'm actually doing something. I've got a lot of people in my life that have never fished, not realizing what is actually involved, I guess. Everyone thinks it's just a kid's thing you do in the summers. I don't understand it. For me, it's always been a definite job.

SS: It's definitely work, that's for sure.

SK: Everyone in my family, though, has been very supportive. My father absolutely loves that I'm doing what I love, and that's all that matters to him. Of the people still in my life, there's no one really that questions it anymore. They realize this is what I am, what I love, what I do.

[23:15]

SS: Are there any things that we haven't touched on yet that you think are important?

SK: I'm trying to think. I don't talk about this in, this aspect all that often.

SS: Have you ever mentored any people younger than you, or just new people to the industry?

SK: Yep.

SS: What do you say to them? What is your advice?

SK: I've had quite a few kids come and do bait, looking for just a summer job. Same thing. Fifteen, sixteen, seventeen-year-olds. Almost all of them hate it, right off the bat. I'm like, "If you can't figure out how to do this now, there's no point staying." They'd show up. They'd



whine the whole time. They'd complain. I'm like, "There's no way you can continue doing bait all summer if you're going to be like this." I'm like, "You can either quit now or you're going to quit a week from now." I'd always try and tell them. Starting with bait is probably the best way to teach someone how much effort, how much time, how much bullshit you have to deal with to be able to fish. I'd try and give them the advice. I never had anyone last. I guess my only issue is a lot of these kids would come in hearing all the stories that we're making all this money, that we're just catching stuff. There's so much more into it than that. That's the main issue with the kids that come in. They think you just go for a boat ride and you make a couple grand. There's a lot more involved than that. I had a kid work for me for a while. She's a bit older than me, but regardless, she came in. Her boyfriend was a fisherman, so she wanted to come in, she wanted to try everything. She tried. She just kept getting daunted by how much time and effort she had to put in. She loved it, too. She ended up working on a dragger for a while, which was much better for her. It was the same thing. I told her for quite a while, "Just fall in. Find your little rut, your little niche, and run with it from there." That's really the only thing you can do, is find a way to just completely blank out in your head and not think much. I've had very few people who've enjoyed this off the bat. I think it's just, simply, either you are the type of person who can enjoy it or not. It's simple, but it's all I've ever found, really.

SS: What makes a person the right fit for fishing, the type who enjoys it right off the bat versus the type of person who's never going to love it whether it's their first day or their thousandth day?

[interaction with another fisherman and his daughter]

[27:32]

SK: At the end of the day, it's in your blood or it's not. Strong willed people, I think, is necessary. Someone who's willing to push themselves first. You don't get any motivation. You have to either motivate yourself or you get nothing done. I think that's the main thing. Someone who's strong willed. Someone who's able to put aside a lot of their other life at times, to be able to actually reap anything from this. Determination. Grit. A whole bunch of stereotypical words. Someone who's willing and able to fall headfirst into this industry and just keep going with it. When I started, and even at thirteen, fourteen, I was having my mother drive me down here every single day, for the fact that it was seven days a week. Even a bad day, you have to enjoy it. You have to find a way to laugh. A big piece of it, too, is finding a crew you get along with. I see all these people who wind up on a boat where they just butt heads constantly. They work for a week or two. That's a big thing. You got to look at it almost as family. I'm with my captain and my crew more than I am at my own house, my own family, anyone I've ever hung out with. I go home and see my boyfriend for two hours, but I see Rob and Nick for twelve hours every day. You got to find a way to be best friends with these people first. That's when you really get to enjoy what you're doing. That's another piece of it.

SS: It sounds like you've found, when trying to introduce people to the industry, that there aren't that many people out there with those traits.

SK: No. I don't know if it's the people that have come down here. You get people down here weekly, usually walking around here and looking for a job. A lot of times, we'll give them a shot, doing bait or just simple things on the dock. The stereotypes of the industry hurt us in terms of who comes down here. You get a lot of the drug addicts who think it's a safe place

where they can work and just do their own thing, or the people who think they can make a quick buck and run. The kids that I had the most issues with when they came down, it was like a friend of a friend kind of thing, and they were just looking to try to get their nephew a job. I don't know if they think that because they're getting hooked up with a job, it's going to be easier or what. But it has never worked out.

SS: It's not what they expected.

SK: Yeah. You've done bait. You know what's entailed. Most kids, especially, the smell throws them off, the fact that there's maggots, bait slime is not a pretty thing, and a lot of people get turned away immediately.

SS: It takes a special kind to love that. But it sounds like there is interest, at least.

SK: Yeah. There's a lot of people who are trying. The fishing industry isn't going to die out due to lack of interest, for sure. It's getting harder and harder to find proper deckhands. I see a lot of the draggers, a lot of the trip boats, that keep subpar crews for the fact that they'd rather have someone okay who shows up every day. A lot of concessions have been made for the fact that someone's better than no one. Crews are less skilled than they used to be. Less—"trustworthy" is not what I'm looking for. People who ten or twenty years ago would have never been looked at twice by a captain have a fricking fulltime job, for the fact that beggars can't be choosers on this aspect anymore.

[31:25]

SS: It sounds like there's opportunity.

SK: Yeah.

SS: And there's interest.

SK: Yeah.

SS: But the missing piece is the caliber of the crew.

SK: Yep. There's a lot of boats, like the Ruthie L there, they have two fifty- or sixty-year-old men on there as the deckhands, and the captain is probably the same. Not that there's anything wrong with that. These are career fishermen. They've tried to find part-time replacements, and they haven't been able to find a single person that can fill a trip, let alone fill in when they should. There are many more older men in this industry, I have to say, at this point. But at some point, the tide's going to have to turn, or all these boats are going to go under. I think it's a matter of people realizing that there's this many jobs out there. None of these people advertise that they're hiring. It's one of those things. You either have to walk down and figure it out yourself. Or all the time, we'll have somebody asking, "Do you know anyone who can work?" "I don't. I don't have anyone in my life that I could trust to put my name behind to throw on a boat." I think that's a piece of it, too, is the trust aspect. God forbid anything happened to you when you have someone new. It's the worst situation possible when you don't have someone who's used to the boat, doesn't know where things are. There's a lot of concerns going into it when hiring someone else. I think that's the main reason why these boats tend to just kind of switch out the same older crew, people who have been on a hundred

boats in their life and know generally more than someone who's twenty and just looking to run.

SS: It sounds like there's a reliance on traditional recruitment strategies that may be limiting, in some cases, but there may also be a reason for that in terms of the risk involved.

SK: Yep. Yeah. When my father did fish, one of the stories I heard was that he got a job with Alan Chaplaski, who used to have a boat down here, and Alan had him send in a paper resume. My father was joking, "I've never had a job in my life that asked for a resume, let alone a fishing boat." He did, and he got the job. He's the only man I've ever heard of that ran a fishing boat and actually asked for an application to be mailed in. Other than that, just word of mouth or right time, right place. More often than not, it seems like that's how a lot of people first started. They heard from someone and showed up at the right time and right place and they started fishing and they've been there since.

[34:01]

SS: You mentioned regulations a little bit earlier in our conversation. Do you get involved in any management or science aspects of fishing?

SK: I've been attempting to be, a little bit more, in that we went to the meeting about the windmills in Rhode Island, in federal waters, and we've been signing a lot of petitions about that through SNEFLA. I can't think of the acronym right now.

SS: Southern New England Fishermen's and Lobstermen's Association?

SK Yes. Thank you. I'm definitely a voice there. We have our annual meetings, and when necessary, we'll go to other meetings when asked. A lot of the people down here try, and I'm attempting to get in, because your whole purpose here, really, these are all the same typecast people, the same fifty year old men, showing up at these meetings with the same exact agenda, same exact ideas. I want to start putting a fresh face, fresh ideas, fresh anything into these things. I know, in my mind at least, a lot of these legislators and these lawmakers, the people who are at these meetings, they think they're just pushing someone into an early retirement. I don't know, but I assume they don't realize how many younger people are being overlooked and, really, thrown under, for these new regulations coming in. Because when you're thinking, "Oh, this guy's fifty-five. He's fished his whole life. He has money. He can retire now." I don't have that option. I'd like to make that more known, that there are hundreds of kids and young adults out there that are relying on fishing as their income, as their livelihood. It's not just the stereotypical older man or older people in it. With a lot of it, I really think that talking is one of the better things that can be done about it. Aaron over there, he's a really big advocate for the fisheries, for everything, really. He's had news crews and everybody come and talk to him. It's people like that who are helping more than meetings, I think.

SS: Aaron's a younger captain.

SK: Yeah.

SS: How old is Aaron?

SK: I want to say thirties or forties. Compared to everyone else, he's definitely on the younger side. Young in this industry is anyone under forty, it seems. It's a fully separate thing. Now with social media, it's a little bit different. When I was younger, I didn't have Facebook or anything like that. No one knew what I did. If people heard I was fishing, they just assumed I was sitting here with a rod and reel all day. Now, being able to share and talk with other people across the nation that are in the same industry, in the same boat as I am, it helps a lot, for the fact that you don't feel quite as alienated. Down here, it is a slightly younger crowd, at least in this corner. We have Nick, who's twenty, Nadia, who's early thirties.

SS: That's a hotspot for young fishermen! Social media has gone some ways to making you realize you're not alone.

SK: Up north, there's definitely way more younger fishermen getting into it. In Maine, with lobstering especially, there's a lot more kids that are inheriting their family's business. Or up there, you're still allowed to get licenses, so I think that's the Maine thing. Down here, you have to buy a pre-existing license, so it's hard for anyone to truly get in, without family connections.

[38:13]

SS: You talk about having a voice and showing regulators and the public that there are young fishermen like you, who plan on having a future in this industry. What would you say to them? If I was one of them, what would you want me to know?

SK: Pretty much that I'm here. I had to write something up for the windmill thing. It was along the same lines. This is everything I've ever loved, everything I've ever done, the things I really know, the things I'm confident at. With every regulation put in place, every time they talk about shutting us down again, I panic. It's the fact that I cannot look farther than two or three years ahead in the future and see myself as happy, for the fact that I have no clue. My entire future, like you said with the crystal ball idea, is blank. There's absolutely no way of assuming what's going to happen. For the fact that I have to check every news article, everything, to see what is the next move and how we can try and make ourselves look better to these legislators. A lot of the people down here aren't doing that. If I had to say a single thing—sorry to go roundabout on that—it would more so just be, I can't imagine anyone trying to tell these people at their offices and their jobs, "You can't do what you want to do, because we think it's this way or that way." I'm trying to find the words for this. I'm sorry. No matter what, I know I'm not going to be able to lobster my whole life. I might be able to fish. There's really, I feel like there's nothing I can do. No matter how much I talk, no matter how much I figure out something to say, to write to any petition to sign, everything's still happening at the same pace. We've all been to every meeting we can. We've all said everything we want to. No matter what, we get snuffed out. It's hard to feel like there's any forward motion, no matter how much effort we put in. It's more like, should I just give up now? Should I just try to find something else while I still have the time and energy to do it? Or do I just keep going and ride this boat until it fucking sinks?

SS: Yeah.

SK: Yeah.

SS: There's a joyful, romantic, and satisfying side to it, but the... there's this other shadow, this cloud that's always in the back of your mind.

SK: Yep. Yeah. Yeah. The guy I work for, he's attempting to sell off his boats. He doesn't want to, but that's his retirement fund. He's like, "If I hold onto these boats for another two or three years, they're going to be worth half of what they are now, and they're already worth nothing." People are fleeing, for the fact that nobody sees a positive outcome out of any of this. People I know are leaving to go join the union and go landscaping. There's a hundred things we can do and apply our skills at, but it's the fact that we're all here for a reason. We love what we do. At least I do. Even though we can make a living, it's still the fact that you're taking what is to me a big piece of myself. It's not just my job. It is my life. With every thing that comes in, it's a little piece of me taken away, it feels like.

SS: Well, let's hope that with this interview, that it helps inform a few more people about what that feels like, and strikes a chord with them.

SK: Let's hope so.

SS: Is there anything else that you'd like to add?

SK: Can't think of anything at the moment.

SS: Alright.

SK: Not really. Trying to rack my brain, but that's probably all I have there.

SS: Well, I think you've done a really nice job of painting a picture of what means so much to you about what you do.

SK: Perfect.

SS: Thank you very much for participating in this.

SK: Thank you.

SS: If there's nothing else, I'll shut off the recorder.

SK: Ok.

[43:12]

[end of interview]