

Interview with Lyle Peele, commercial fisherman

Occupation: commercial fisherman

Port Community: Manteo, North Carolina

Interviewer: Sarah Schumann

Date and year: January 13, 2019

Location: Manteo, North Carolina

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

Transcriber: Sarah Schumann

[Start of interview]

[00:00]

Sarah Schumann [SS]: My name is Sarah Schumann. I'm in Manteo, North Carolina, with Lyle Peele. It's January 13, 2019. Lyle, could you just briefly state your occupation?

Lyle Peele [LP]: My name is Lyle Peele. I'm a commercial fisherman. Full-time.

SS: What's your homeport?

LP: Manteo, North Carolina.

SS: The name of your vessel or vessels?

LP: I don't have a name.

SS: You don't have a name? What vessel or vessels do you have?

LP: I have three different boats: a Carolina skiff, a little stumpknocker, and then a homemade well boat.

SS: Ok, you'll have to define some of those for me. Stumpknocker?

LP: A stumpknocker is just a flat-bottom skiff. and of course a Carolina skiff is just a flat-bottom boat also. Then a well boat is where the motor is recessed in the boat by a couple of feet. It's just made for a little bit shallower water.

SS: I see, interesting. What's your age?

LP: I'm twenty-nine.

SS: Twenty-nine. And your educational background?

LP: I graduated high school.

SS: Graduated high school. Here in Manteo?

LP: Yes, ma'am.

SS: Why don't you give a little description of your fishing career?

LP: I'm a fifth-generation commercial fisherman. Since the age of nine, I've been pretty much fishing. I helped my brother for ten years, mullet fishing and circle netting, and of course, helping the family business. We're crabbers and soft crabbers. Then I kind of kicked off on my own to fish nets when I was sixteen. Got my own license. Been struggling ever since then! [laughter] I don't know. I enjoy what I do. Now, the past couple years, I've transitioned over to flounder gigging in the summertime. Because fishing's not how it used to be. There's so many regulations regarding what we do, what we can catch, what size nets. It's a never-ending battle when it comes to that. It's almost every week, a new proclamation comes out saying what we can catch and what we can't. You pretty much have to hop from one fishery to another as the season changes. It's hard and it's expensive.

[02:22]

SS: I take it your dad fished? And you've got a brother who fishes too?

LP: My brother fishes. My granddad fished. His dad fished. My great-granddad fished. We've been here for a long time.

SS: Is your brother older than you?

LP: Yes, ma'am.

SS: You said that the flounder gigging is sort of an adaptation—

LP: I used to do a lot of mullet fishing in the summertime and fall. And now, fish prices with mullets, they've gotten cheap in the summertime. It involved burning a lot of gas, riding, looking for mullets. I'd rather go flounder gigging where I can burn a little bit of gas and make a better profit, opposed to wear and tear on your gear. You got to constantly hang new nets, different sizes. It's really expensive to chase a forty-cent fish all the time.

SS: Ok, so that's an adaptation to sort of an economic—

LP: Yeah. It's not like it used to be. Ten years ago, you could hang a mullet net for a couple hundred dollars. But now, a hundred dollars will barely get you a bundle of webbing. Three bundles of webbing will cost you three hundred bucks, plus top line, bottom line, and corks. You're looking at a thousand dollars for a net. You could tear that up in one week. Then you got to start back all over again. It's really expensive to keep doing what you're doing.

SS: The mullet is a gillnet fishery?

LP: Yes, ma'am.

SS: Flounder gigging is kind of like a spear? Is that right?

LP: Yeah. It's just a prong. You go at nighttime and use a bright light. They lay on the bottom and they feed. And pretty much, when you go up on them, the light's bright and they get like a deer in the headlights kind of thing, and they'll stay right there and you just stick them.

SS: That sounds really fun.

LP: I love it.

SS: It sounds like a nocturnal treasure hunt.

LP: Yeah. In the summertime, I become a zombie. It's all instinct. I just keep going.

SS: So you're fishing day and night in the summer?

LP: No, I (unintelligible) most times and I wake up at five o'clock and do it again. My girlfriend doesn't like it very much, but you got to do what you got to do.

SS: Yeah. [laughter] So that's in the summer. Then, walk me through the rest of your year.

LP: Fall time, when the fish start going into deeper water, I will transition over to flounder nets. Because the water's so deep, you can't use lights and the water clarity's not as good. As the water temperature keeps dropping, you got to set in deeper and deeper water. Then after flounders move out of the sound into the ocean, that's when I normally pull out all my gear, put my boat up, and I'll transition over to being a mate to go drop-net in the ocean for croaker, ribbon fish, spots, bluefish. I don't really like the ocean very much. Especially when it comes to our bar. It's bad. A lot of people have had windows blown out, their boats rolled over in the bar. The Army Corps of Engineers don't understand how beneficial a jetty would be there, to keep the inlet free, because some places in the inlet are two foot. Under the bridge right now is two to three foot of water. You can't get through there. We have to go through the southern span to get out. It's putting lives at risk, I'm sure.

[05:48]

SS: Whose boat is that, that you're working on?

LP: His name is Buddy Coppersmith. It's the Emily Shae.

SS: And what size boat is that?

LP: It's a thirty-eight foot MDI.

SS: So it's still relatively small.

LP: Yeah, everybody who goes in the ocean—besides the trawl boats—everybody's boats are under forty-five foot. If you go in a bigger boat, you're going to burn more gas, more expense, and the boat's slower. It pretty much means you're out there. Drop netting for croakers, it's pretty much first-come, first-serve. The faster you dump your fish and get your

gear out, the better off you'll be. If you're the last boat to a pile of fish, there's already fifteen other people setting all the nets on top of it and you're picking up crumbs.

SS: There are a number of boats participating in that fishery?

LP: Normally it's about fifteen or twenty of us that are doing it.

SS: What exactly is a drop net?

LP: It's just, kind of defined as you mark the fish on your fish finder. You set the net on top of it. It drops down. That's what it is.

SS: Is it like a cast net, kind of?

LP: No, no. It's just a gillnet.

SS: Oh, it's a gillnet.

LP: We just call it a drop net. It's the definition of a drift netting, pretty much. We don't put the anchors on it.

SS: Ok. You find the fish and you set the net on them rather than waiting for them to come.

LP: Yeah. We set out nets and go back to the first one and start cranking it up. The fish are kind of spooky, so it's quick.

SS: How many crew? Is it you and the captain?

LP: It's me, the captain, and one other guy. Some people go just the captain and the mate, and then others will have three mates on the boat. I guess it all depends on how hard the captain wants to work and how much share he wants to divvy out. Other boats don't like to give as many shares to the crew, and there's others that pay really well.

SS: Have you worked on other ocean-going boats or just this one?

LP: I've worked on a couple. I've done bluefin tuna fishing, chased sea bass, done longlining for tile, catching spiny dogfish, done sharking. Done them all.

SS: So there's a lot to do around here.

LP: There's a lot to do. But there's not a lot of profit.

SS: It sounds like you really have to do a lot of things just to make a year's income.

[08:11]

LP: Yeah. Fifteen years ago or twenty years ago, when my dad was strictly crabbing, he could hard-crab and soft-crab all year long. It paid for all the bills and he wouldn't have to worry about anything. Now, he has to do carpentry work. For the past four or five years, he's

actually in the ocean on another boat, doing the same thing we are, because you can't make it no more. You can't do one fishery and survive. It's not feasible.

SS: What's the reason for that change?

LP: The price of gear is astronomically high. Bait's high. Gas. Everything that has to do with the boat is ridiculously expensive. Even motors are thirty, forty grand. You can't buy a good boat now for under fifty thousand. If you have a boat that you're crabbing or fishing in the sound, you can't take it in the ocean. You need a bigger boat. I couldn't take my little sixteen-foot boat in the ocean. I'd have to buy another boat to do a different fishery. Always have to have another boat.

[09:30]

LP: Like I said, my family, we fished for generations and generations. That was my dad, who I was just talking about. He's been a crabber his whole life. Then my granddad, he helped found Oregon Inlet.

SS: He helped found what?

LP: Oregon Inlet Fishing Center. That's where the charter boats are, by the bridge. It's been passed down from generation to generation.

SS: But it sounds like it's been evolving too.

LP: It's getting a lot harder. Luckily my little brother don't want anything to do with fishing. He's kind of smarter than that.

SS: [laughter] You think that's the right choice for him?

LP: The way things are, yeah. It's a struggle. I struggle every year.

SS: Have you ever thought about doing anything else?

LP: I've thought about it every day. Like going to college. But I look at college and having to pay thirty grand back or forty grand back in student loans—it's going to be years and years before I pay that back. I mean, I want to build a house and have a family. I'd have to put all that on hold for years. I'm going to turn thirty. I'm not getting any younger. It's hard to do what you want to do when you're a fisherman.

SS: It's hard to do what you want to do when you're a fisherman?

LP: You have to either choose, "I want to be a fisherman, and I'm going to devote my time and succeed," or "I want to be a family man." You can't be both. It's not possible. I know a lot of people outside the fishery don't understand that. They think it's all rainbows and unicorns. It's not. We struggle every day.

SS: And it's getting harder?

LP: Every year is getting harder. More regulations we have pinned down on us. You know, what we can keep, what size we can keep, what size net or gear we can use. It's bad. It used to not be like this.

SS: Are there times even within your own career that you remember being better, or easier, than it is now?

LP: Yeah, a lot of times. Like, in the sound fishing. There used to be more trout, more drum. You can't do that any more. You can only have seventy-five trout per day and seven drum. The people upstairs who are doing the paperwork, they take a sample somewhere and they think that's the whole fishery.

SS: Trout and drum fisheries used to be part of your portfolio?

LP: They weren't really a target fishery. It was more along the lines of bycatch, especially with drum. Trout, in the wintertime, we would target, because they would go to deeper water, and you can circle-net them. Years and years ago, we could make one circle set with the net, and catch a couple hundred pounds of drum. There weren't any regulations on how many we could keep. Same thing with trout. You could go catch three or four hundred pounds, and you could make a day's work out of one day fishing. Now if you go target some drum or trout, you could spend all day trying to catch those seven drum and trout, and you wouldn't have much to show for it.

SS: It sounds like you've adapted by just diversifying. You have three boats, which is a lot of expense relative to the income, just to diversify.

LP: Well I have three boats, but I just switch the motor off of each one, so it's not like I have a full set for each.

[13:11]

SS: Ok, I see.

LP: Little boats are cheap. For a thousand bucks you can get a boat, or you can build one. But what I'm trying to do now, I'm trying to buy a bigger boat in deeper water. Because hand pulling the nets in twenty-foot water, it's hard when it's rough. It's going to cost me fifteen, twenty grand to have a boat running. It's hard for what I want to do. I want to build a house this year. It's a lot of stress. Every day I think about it. I don't want to set myself up for failure. I don't want to bite off more than I can chew or have the bank take what I got, because they don't care if you can't fish a day or you miss a payment. They're going to take your stuff. Every fisherman thinks the same way. If I don't go fishing this week or make a check this week, who's going to come knocking next week to collect a bill? If a fisherman tells you they don't think about that, they're lying. It's not just in North Carolina or my hometown. It's the whole East Coast, from Maine to Florida. It's everywhere. We're all under the same pressure of things being shut down around us that we used to do. A lot of times, to get to another fishery, you have to spend a lot of money for permits, gear, new boat. It takes a lot. I've read and heard a lot of people say, "Well, why don't you do different stuff or why don't you do that?" "If you want to lend me fifty grand, I will be glad to go do it!" Because I need new gear, new boat. I might need new permits. "Yeah, I will gladly go do it if you give

me money. But where am I going to get all that money?" I got to grind on something to achieve that, and by the time I have enough money to achieve that, that fishery might not be active, and how am I going to get the permit?

SS: Are there opportunities for loans?

LP: I think you can go get, like, a personal loan from the bank to get something. But I don't really think the bank's going [to] want to lend me ten grand to get a shark permit or forty grand to get a bottom permit for bottom fish. They're looking at it as it's their way of making money. If I don't pay my loan, what are they going to get back? They're not going to do anything with a permit. What good is that? There's only a few of us who would want that permit.

SS: The market's limited.

LP: You can't really turn it around and sell it to somebody else. You can, but there's maybe ten of us in the whole town that want it. Not many people want to pay ten grand for a permit or forty for that.

SS: What permits do you have now?

LP: I don't actually have any permits. I have a gillnet permit and a bluefish permit. But that's just stuff that you have to get from Marine Fisheries. When it comes to stuff in the ocean, I think that's through NOAA.

SS: Federal permits?

LP: Yeah.

SS: The stuff you have now are state permits?

LP: Through the state.

SS: Are those relatively easy to acquire?

[16:27]

LP: If you have an active commercial fishing license, you just go up there and you tell them you want a—they call it a set net permit for anchor gillnet. I think it's like five bucks. And the bluefish permit, I actually didn't need to have it, because within three miles you don't have to have a bluefish permit. I guess it's some kind of federal thing—the bluefish.

SS: I see. So you have it but you don't need it.

LP: Yeah.

SS: So you have a state license that covers a lot of this stuff?

LP: Everything within three miles that's non-migratory. King mackerel, I can't catch, because they consider that a migratory fish. You have to have another permit for that.

SS: Ok, got it. That makes sense.

LP: There's a lot of stuff that overlaps each other. You think you have this right but it's wrong.

SS: Sounds like a learning curve.

LP: It's bad. It's stressful, man. Like right now, thinking about it, it's stressing me out. I got to fish yesterday, and it was rough. We only caught a couple hundred pound of fish. I'm not going to go back fishing until maybe Wednesday. If I don't go Wednesday, we're not going to go until Saturday. I'm not going to get a check this week. It's tough.

SS: Yeah. So the pressure's on to really make it count, when you can go.

LP: Yes. A lot of people fish most of the year and then as it gets harder, they'll transition to other work to supplement their income. Last year, a vote come through, trying to get rid of the part-time commercial fishermen that didn't have a percentage of their income. That's half our voice in North Carolina. Those few are half the licenses that are commercial. That's half our active voice that's pushing for the fishery. If they go, that's better for the other people to squash us out. "Oh, well, there are only a certain number of licenses. We really don't need them." It's tough, because a lot of the guys are older people that have health problems or can't fish when it's rough. They're going to get their license eventually taken away, or have a certain number of trip tickets every year and a certain amount of your income. It's killing them.

SS: That was pushed by people who wanted power over the commercial—

LP: That was the hardcore rec anglers down south that are on the coastal conservation board. They want to keep wiping us out, one by one.

SS: Is that a big conflict here in the state?

LP: It's major. People don't understand that the CCA is backed by oil companies. They think it's all rainbows and unicorns, and lovely people, and they're not. They want to name every fish within three miles that's in state waters a targeted game fish that you can't catch commercially. They want drum trout, snook, and flounder. They want only rec anglers to be able to harvest them. That's unfair. If it's a public resource, we have just as much right as they do. Like I was explaining earlier, down south, it's a hundred and fifty rec anglers to one commercial guy. That one commercial guy can have seventy-five trout, and there's a hundred and fifty rec people down there trout fishing. Even two per boat—that outweighs the commercial guy tenfold. But they see gillnets as the most destructive thing on earth. We're the problem. The reason they don't catch fish is "because of us." No. [unintelligible.] That's what it all boils down to. We don't want to wipe out everything in the ocean and sound, because what am I going to catch next week? Everybody that lives along the coast that doesn't know about commercial fishermen, that's what they see. They see the pictures that have been taken in other countries. The sea turtles wrapped up in nets, and the dolphins. They think that happens every day. It doesn't. I've only seen one or two dolphins dead, and they were diseased or they'd been hit by a boat. I've never caught one in a net. I

never caught a turtle. It's just, there's a bad stigma around fisheries. It's just sad. I mean, I'll admit, there's a couple bad ones in the bunch, but it's not all of us. I admit that people who are doing bad should get their license taken away and shouldn't fish no more, because it makes it bad for everyone. I bet where you live, there's a couple bad guys in the bunch that make it look bad. But the rest are good guys! I think it's like that in every town. That one bad guy, it ruins it for everybody.

SS: The public image.

LP: Yeah. There's just not a good public image around seafood in general. All the imported stuff that's coming in nowadays—honestly, it's disgusting. But people don't know the difference. They go to the seafood market and they see, "fresh East coast-caught tuna, thirty dollars" or this nasty imported stuff for twenty, and they're like, "Oh, that one's cheaper. I'm going to get that." It tastes nothing like the good, fresh stuff. They can't understand why it's more expensive. It's not farm-raised. It's not (unintelligible). Explain all the permits and the gear—that's why it's so expensive. It takes a lot of money to chase fresh seafood. It's stressful.

SS: Do you think that your generation has to deal with more stress than previous ones?

LP: Yes. Very much so.

SS: Definitely?

LP: I know a few people my age and a little bit younger that fish. But a lot of them, they're not going to buy a house anytime soon, have a family. They're struggling. You know, I know one guy that's younger than me. He's saved up money for fifteen years to buy the boat he has now. Mack Hopkins. His dad is a long-liner and now his older brother's running the boat. He saved up for years to buy the boat he has now. Now he's transitioned over to running the boat in the ocean. I can't save up forty grand. If I do, it's going to be spent on something else. It's hard. I don't think the state of North Carolina is giving out commercial licenses anymore. Now, they have it so you can't sell your license without selling your boat with it. They're making it harder to get new generations into fishing, in general, is how it's happened. I don't know. It's bad. They just want to crush us. I think they'd rather import cheap seafood and sell it for more. Would you rather make a ten dollar profit or a hundred dollar profit? Obviously you'd rather make a hundred bucks. The people who buy seafood, they don't really know the difference between fresh and domestic, I mean, overseas seafood. It definitely makes you age quick, sitting here and thinking about it.

[24:38]

SS: When you think about the future, where do you see things going? What do you think about your own future?

LP: By the time I'm forty, I'm not going to be fishing no more. I'm going to have to find something else. I mean, I like doing manual labor, being outside. I can't sit inside. I'd go nuts. I've thought about being a farmer, being outside and doing manual labor all the time. But they're killing farmers off too. Kind of the state now. Anybody who does manual labor—it's

like building houses, stuff like that, trades—they're killing it for everybody. I think anything that doesn't involve [a] PhD in something, they frown upon.

SS: The state?

LP: Most people in general. They'd rather send Sue and Johnny to college so they can be lawyers than send him to a trade school to be a plumber. In the long run, he'd probably be better being a plumber than having to pay back all the loans. But they don't want their boys and girls getting their hands dirty. I'm just glad my younger brother chose not to be a fisherman. We kind of beat that into his head when he was little. My family, we've struggled. It's not good.

SS: How old is your younger brother?

LP: He's twenty.

SS: What's he going to do? Or what's he doing?

LP: I think he's trying to go into the Coast Guard. I've taken him fishing a couple of times. He likes doing it. He likes the money. But as a whole, waiting for the morning, the crack of dawn, fishing all day long, coming home and not having anything—he doesn't like it. He'd rather make a guaranteed paycheck every day. I would too. But I'm thirty. This is all I've ever done. I was running around in diapers checking the shedders for soft crabs and helping my dad move pots around. It's bred into my DNA. Once you get the bug, it's hard to get out.

[27:04]

SS: And your older brother? He's fishing?

LP: Yeah. He fishes in the sound like I do. He does a lot of mullet fishing. That's his main thing.

SS: How old is he?

LP: He's forty—I think forty, forty-one.

SS: So a bit older. How does he feel about these things?

LP: He'd say the same things I'm saying, except a lot less nice. It's tough for him too. Like I was explaining about circle netting, why I got out of it. It's the same way for him. It's a lot of wear and tear on your motor running all day long, new gear, what you can catch, what you can't catch. It's the same principle.

SS: Is he planning on staying with it? Or is he looking at other options?

LP: I think it's all he thinks about is fishing. He's not doing anything different.

SS: Despite the frustration?

LP: Yeah. It's a love-hate relationship, constantly. One day you love it. The next day, "I'm quitting. I'm selling all my stuff."

SS: What are you doing to make it work for you?

LP: You got to be versatile. You constantly have to look at what's next, pretty much. Say, this week, I can't get out croaker fishing, I got to stay in the yard, I got to do gear work. I got to get ready for the next fishery. If not, when that fishery comes, I'm going to be behind. So on my lay days, when I'm not fishing, I got to constantly be cutting out net, rehangng net. It's a never-ending cycle. There's no days off. Doesn't matter if you're fishing or not, you're doing something in the yard.

SS: Is it just you, or do you have crew that fish with you?

LP: I just do it by myself. It's a lot easier that way. Ain't got to listen to somebody griping because they didn't make a check. But a lot of people, they hire somebody helping them when they fish in the sound. Crabbers, they go with a mate. It's hard to shake a couple hundred pots by yourself, go through the crabs and drive, all at the same time.

[29:15]

SS: Do you do some crabbing as well?

LP: Springtime, from April to June, I do crabbing. That's when the peeler crabs start.

SS: Is that a soft-shell crab? Or it's about to molt?

LP: That's when they're starting. It used to be springtime, there's like, that was like twenty-five, forty percent of your income for the year. Now, it's not that way. Last year was the worst soft-crab season we've ever seen.

SS: What was that owing too?

LP: The water was so cold last year. When the water starts warming up, the crabs begin to turn into peelers. A white line, we call it green, that's when they've just started. Then there's a red line. That's when they're going to molt within a couple days. When the crabs come through, they were real green. When they're real green like that, they won't go in to a Jimmy crab. Because they're looking for a mate, is pretty much how it is. When they came through where we were, they didn't want to go to a Jimmy crab. They pretty much bypassed us, went into the sound. Then they turned and ripened, when they were ready to shed, and everybody up in the sound could get them. Everybody here—it was impossible. It takes a lot for soft crabs too. Every year we got to make sure our shedding tanks are sealed up good and make sure our pumps are working. We got to wash out peeler pots to get all the hair off of them, the dirt and stuff. Dip them and get them all ready.

SS: Is it a different pot you use for peeler versus soft crabs?

LP: Yes, ma'am. A [hard] crab pot is a bigger meshed wire. It also has cull rings into it to get some hard crabs out. A peeler pot is chicken wire, it's just sort of a thicker gauge. It has no

cull rings for blue crab to get out, because some of the little peelers we catch are like an inch, two inches long. A one-inch crab will shed into a mature sook crab and only be two inches long. That's as big as it's going to get all year. It's weird.

SS: But those are marketable?

LP: Yes, ma'am. As long as it's a mature crab, it's marketable no matter what size it is. But when they shed the soft crabs, it doesn't matter what size they are for that, people love them. They go like hotcakes.

[31:54]

SS: Interesting. So is a peeler crab, are you baiting them with a Jimmy crab?

LP: Yes, ma'am. When it first starts, when they start turning to peelers, the Jimmy crabs, they always molt first, so that they're ready when the female crabs molt. The first week or so, we set all our pots blank. No bait, no crabs in them. The Jimmy crabs, they crawl into the pot.

SS: They just go in looking for shelter?

LP: A place to hide. We catch what we call crawl-ins. Then, that kind of fades out, and then the female crabs start. That's when we start putting different crabs in the pots.

SS: A different pot or the same pot?

LP: No. No. The same pots.

SS: So you put out the pot, let the males come in, and then the females show up and come in.

LP: Yeah.

SS: Interesting.

LP: A lot of people don't understand that. They think we put menhaden or fatbacks in it.

SS: Interesting.

LP: It's fun. I enjoy springtime peeler season. When it comes to summertime hard-crabbing, I don't do it. I hate it.

SS: Why is that?

LP: It's hot. The bait gets rotten quick. You come home cussing, smelling. Not my cup of tea. My dad, he's always done it. He loved it for years. But now, bait's twenty-two dollars a flat for fifty pounds. Then you turn around and you're selling baskets of crabs for thirty. There ain't much markup there in profit. Twenty years ago, you could make a lot of money off cheap crabs. Dad told me stories fishing up towards Alligator River. He would catch fifty boxes of crabs a day, and they were cheap. Bait was dirt-cheap, and gas was cheap too. You

could make a thousand, two thousand a week. Back then, that was a lot of money, and you did that every single day all year long until it got cold. You made a good profit. It ain't like that now.

SS: Because of the price of bait?

LP: Price of bait. Price of fuel.

SS: And the price of the catch?

LP: Crab pots are expensive—forty-some dollars apiece now. You get one blow, and you lose twenty-five pots, what are you going to do?

SS: Yeah.

[34:21]

LP: Stress.

SS: Stress. Now, is it that prices are increasing for all of the inputs to fishing, or is the problem more on the outputs side, that the price you can get for your crabs hasn't gone up along with the expenses?

LP: Both. Some catches have gone up a lot. There's some others that have been cheap. But it's mainly the price of gear, the fuel, motors. The whole gear thing—it's really expensive. The price of things have went up, but you're not getting a price increase with it. Now, you'd pretty much have to sell a thirty-dollar basket of crabs back then, you'd need to sell for a hundred-some now to make the same amount of profit. It's faded a lot of people out like that. All the old-timers, they can't make it. The younger people that are now fishing, they're fishing six, seven hundred crab pots a day to make what the old-timers did with two hundred.

SS: Sounds like a long day.

LP: Yes, it is. It's hot. It's just a never-ending battle. It's always something.

[35:43]

SS: So you said there are a few other younger fishermen in this area?

LP: There's a few of us that are doing it. But most people are smart enough to not be a fisherman.

SS: So those other children of fishing families, when they grew up and chose not to become fishermen, what are they doing now? Are they still in the area, just doing other stuff? Or have they moved out?

LP: Some of them are still in the area. A lot of them have moved away. Dare County is a nice place, but it's just a trap. If you don't leave, you're stuck here. A lot of people do leave, they get sucked right back. It's a small place. We don't have much. We don't have big

corporations here. To own a house here, you're looking at half a million dollars. It's expensive. A one-bedroom rental is a thousand bucks. It costs a lot.

SS: So cost of living is a problem as well, around here?

LP: It's outrageous. You drive an hour and a half west, you can get a three-bedroom house for under a thousand. Big yard.

SS: Inland?

LP: Yeah. Everything about this place is stressful and expensive. I love it though. It's where I grew up. It's everything I know. I moved to Virginia for a couple months to help do construction work. First month was fine, because all I did was hunt. After that, I realized, "I don't get to see the ocean. I don't get to see the sound. I don't get to fish." I was miserable. I came right back, right back to the same routine of struggling fishing. I guess I'd rather struggle fishing than be out west in the cold doing something I don't like.

SS: There's something about it. Even though it's stressful, there's something that pulls you back.

LP: It's in my blood. It's in my heart. It's everything I know.

SS: Part of who you are.

LP: It's been passed down through my family. Luckily it skipped my brother. It's enjoyable when you make a check and pay for your bills. It's just nice going for a boat ride. It relieves a lot of stress *at times*, and other times it makes you want to pull your hair out. I don't know what I'm going to do when they do shut us down though, because it's coming.

SS: What do you mean?

LP: Well, like I was talking about, out in the ocean catching croakers and spots. Last year, they tried to implement a proclamation saying that spot had to be seven inches long and croakers had to be a certain size. The past six or seven years, the croakers in the Atlantic have been on their downward cycle. They're getting smaller every year. We're using like three and a quarter stretch mesh right now, which only catches like a fourteen-inch or a twelve-inch croaker. A lot of fish, they're ten inches. If they implement that rule this year, that's going to wipe out the whole croaker fleet here, until they finish their cycle and they go back to big again. A long time ago, the rockfish in the sound, you could walk on them they were so thick. Eventually, disease, not having enough things to eat, they kind of died off and their cycle's been down. Now their cycle's coming back up again. Now we can't catch very many. I think it's probably going to be the same thing with croakers. They're probably going to implement a trip limit every time. Then once they implement how much you can catch a day, you never get back what you used to catch. It's like one of them things. If they put their foot in the door, that's it. They never take it out.

[40:03]

SS: It sounds like a lot of fishermen around here are operating sort of close to the edge, and all it takes is one thing—

LP: We're all skating on thin ice. It's every fishery. All it takes is somebody upstairs in the office to fill in a proclamation and other people say "Yea" on it. It gets handed down, and that's it. I don't know what we're going to do if they do shut down croaker fishing. We'll have to go sharking. But then if all of us turn to sharking, all the pressure will be on sharking. Then they'll look, "Oh, there's too many people and too many sharks being caught." Then, that's where the trip limit comes in. Then eventually, they'll shut down sharking. It's a never-ending cycle of you're in one fishery, and you get kicked to the next, along with everybody else, that one is the next up for grabs for people upstairs. It's like that with everything. We just keep getting kicked to the next fishery. Everybody keeps hopping to the next one, because they have to make a check. It's a never-ending cycle.

[41:18]

SS: Now, do you get involved in—do you go to meetings and get involved in advocacy or science and stuff?

LP: I go to flounder meetings. That's what I've been doing. Stuff for speckled trout. But a lot of meetings are held in Wilmington. One of the bad things about that, there are so many rec fishermen versus commercial, that we have no voice no more.

SS: Hmm. Is that where the offices are for the state people?

LP: Morehead is the main office for the fisheries. It's really unfair. The people that are on the fisheries board, a lot of them are hardcore catch-and-release anglers.

SS: Are there any commercial fishermen?

LP: I think there's one or two. There was a whole [unintelligible] about that last year, because they're really biased. They want no commercial trout, flounder, all that. It's a public resource. I pay for it too. I should be able to harvest it. But they think it's unfair. Because I go out, I catch a hundred flounder, and they only keep three or four, that it's unfair and I should be kicked out of the fishery.

[42:32]

SS: Are other fishermen around here diverse like you, doing different things in different seasons, or are some people more specialized at certain things?

LP: Ninety percent of us are like me. We have to hop. There's a few guys who are hard-core longliners for tuna or swordfish all year long.

SS: Those are more offshore?

LP: Yeah. But most people, they hop from one thing to another. They crab. They flounder fish. They set nets in the sound. They do whatever they can to make ends meet. We have to have everything at your disposal to make it.

SS: Yeah, it sounds like it.

LP: One day, you could be chasing this and the next day you have to have something else so you can chase that. It's like that in the ocean these days. The ribbon fish and the croakers. The ribbon fish, we're using a real, real deep net with finer mesh. A croaker net is shallow and thick mesh. If you set your ribbon net on a big place of croakers, it's a mess, because the nets are fifteen foot deep. A croaker, they'll go through a bunch of meshes and collapse the whole net. But one croaker net is fifteen hundred dollars, maybe more, and a ribbon net is the same thing. A couple of each on the boat, and you got to have one ready for each thing. You go out there and you mark. If you see croakers, you got to have a croaker net. You got to have two different things on the boat at all times.

[44:19]

SS: Now, you said your dad was mostly full-time crabbing. Does he still fish?

LP: Yeah, he still fishes.

SS: So he isn't quite as diversified as you. How did you learn to do all these different sound fisheries that you're doing on your own?

LP: Trial and error. My dad, he crabbed most of his life and then he kind of transitioned over to gillnetting for flounders when it was allowed. He kind of showed me the ins and outs. With my older brother, he was kind of like the black sheep. He didn't want nothing to do with crabbing. He went straight to circle netting mullets. My dad had never done that. I didn't know what jumping mullet was. It was a strange fish to me. I was nine. He showed me the ins and outs of that with him up until I was twenty-three, on and off. He kind of showed me everything with setting nets, circle nets, and everything that comes with that—hanging nets. So it was more along the lines of my older brother kind of taught me to be diverse and different species. But now, my dad's got to be diverse. He crabs, and then he hops on those boats and goes in the ocean. He can't make enough throughout the year to survive.

[45:52]

SS: Are there any people around here who don't come from fishing families who have gotten into this industry?

LP: A few of them. They're hating it. It was an eye-opener. They saw the big checks and the big catches and they assumed that it happened all the time. Now they invest all this money into getting a license and gear. They're kind of stuck. Got to make their money back or sell their stuff and get their money back. There's a lot of people every day that are selling their gear. You can always go on craigslist and find boats, anchors, buoys, gillnets.

SS: Are people buying it or are they having a hard time selling it?

LP: It's kind of hit or miss. You need specialized gear for each thing. Not a lot of people are going to go buy a shark net for sound fishing, because they have no use for it. That's only a

handful of guys who are going to have use for it. Same with a flounder or mullet net. You target a certain group of people. But all in all, it eventually sells. Maybe a couple of weeks or months. Then you only get what you put in it. Or maybe get half or a third. I think North Carolina as a whole should do more education when it comes to commercial fishing and trying to get young people back into it. I don't know but one or two people in high school right now who are trying to get into commercial fishing, and they're struggling. They're ready to just hang it up because they're seeing how hard it is. If it keeps going like that, then there will be no more fishery. It will all be like it is up north, with catch shares. Big corporations will have everything, and they'll make all the money. We'll make crumbs. They need to knock out the bad people and get the bad image away from fishing, show it how it really is. We're not out here destroying everything, killing everything that swims. We're just trying to make a check.

[48:28]

SS: Is that what you mean when you say "education"? Cleaning up the public image?

LP: Yeah. Some of these people on the board are hardcore rec anglers who are trying to kick us out. They need to take them out there and show how hard it is to do what we do, how little bycatch we actually do catch. When we target a species, we hardly catch any bycatch. We catch what we target. They think for every pound of good fish, we discard a hundred. That's how all the hardcore recreational fishermen are. That we go to an area, wipe everything out, and leave nothing. They just need to educate people how fishing really is. It ain't cheap and it's not glorious. We work hard for what we do. They're killing us off one by one. If the real old-timers were still alive, they'd be having a heart attack right now, because it's nothing like it used to be.

[49:38]

SS: Describe your image of how it used to be, what you've heard from your elders.

LP: I wouldn't say it was like the Wild West, but things were cheaper. There wasn't so much pressure on each individual fishery. There was a wide spectrum of different stuff that you could do. You could target menhaden. There were people doing stuff all the time. There weren't just a sole number of people in the ocean, going after croakers like there is now. There was people catching a few sharks, or they were in the sound catching bait. There was people in every group along the way. There weren't all of us in one group. For wintertime and spring, it was diverse throughout the whole year.

SS: I see. So now it's a sequence. It's diverse, but it's a sequence of things, where everybody's doing one thing, then everybody's doing another, and it used to be diverse simultaneously. Is that how it used to be?

LP: Yeah, that's how it used to be. Like springtime now, so many people jump on, they target soft crab season. Years ago, when springtime hit, people would go in the ocean and do stuff or they would go set nets. A couple of people would crab. Now, there's ten times as many people that are pressured into peeler crabbing. When that goes away, everybody jumps into the next viable fishery. We're pushed into only catching one or two species.

SS: Because of limits?

LP: Limits. Proclamations. Gear restrictions. It's like that all year long. It's tough. A lot of people don't see that in the fishery. They think we just go out and catch when we want, where we want. It's not like that. If I go and catch a rockfish out of season, that's a federal fish. They take my license, my boat, my gear. They take the truck I'm towing the boat with. They fine me a couple of hundred grand, for one fish. They don't see that. What do they think? There's a lot of rules when it comes to it.

SS: So what's the message you want the public to understand? Like if you had a thirty-second platform to make a television advertisement right now, what would you say?

[52:07]

LP: Educate yourself. Do your own research. Don't listen to everybody. Don't listen to what the bigwigs are saying. Dig deep. Find out for yourself. Hop on a boat. Find out how it really is. Find the truth. Step into the shoes of a fisherman for a couple weeks. Find out how it is. They won't make it. They'll starve. Because it's hard. Make money one week and then they can't for a couple of weeks. I know some people get paid every two weeks and they budget for it. For fishermen, it's not like that. I know we budget, but one week could be fine, next week my motor blows up, or I lose a bunch of crab pots or my gear gets run over. I got to spend hundreds and hundreds of dollars to try to get that back to get going. So just educate yourself. That's how I see it.

SS: What other solutions do you think should be explored to improve things?

[53:69]

LP: A lot of people upstairs need to get fired. Honestly. They need to get people in who know the industry. Not just people who have a degree in something. Just because you have a degree in science don't mean you can make a proclamation. It doesn't work like that. You got to put the boots on and touch the fish. You know most fisheries. You've seen firsthand how things like work. People like you who understand how up and down fishing really is would be better off to make our laws. One week, fish could be in one area. The next week, they could be twenty miles away. It doesn't mean the fish are gone, that they're nonexistent. It just means they have tails. They swim. That's what the people upstairs, they don't understand that. They set the net in one place and they don't catch anything, that's what they write their report on. They could go five hundred yards down shore, and there could be plenty. They don't see it. It's really frustrating.

SS: Yeah. Sounds like it.

LP: They need people who know the industry. I'm not saying that they need to stick a bunch of commercial fishermen up there, because then it would be biased, and the rec fishermen would think it's unfair. But they need more people who have been in the industry, or at least know where we're coming from. Because now, they're in office, and they don't want us to fish. It's killing us.

SS: They don't want you to fish, you said?

LP: They don't want no commercial fishing inside state waters. They keep bringing up that North Carolina's the only state that allows commercial fishing inside the estuaries and sounds. North Carolina's not like any other state. Period. We can sustain fishing in there. We have so many marshlands. We have creeks. We can keep doing what we're doing, like we're doing now, because we have so much area. They keep saying it's like a spawning ground for small fish, this and that, and yeah, it is. But we're fishing the correct size net we need, so all the little fish are getting through. We're catching what we're targeting. All the other states I think have pretty much outlawed gillnetting inside three miles or in their sounds. Honestly, from what I've gathered, their fishing is no better than it was when they could gillnet. Such as South Carolina now, they've outlawed gillnetting down there in the sound, I think. But their slot limit for drum is so small, and they're allowed to harvest a bunch, when you're a rec angler. Now they're saying that there's a shortage of drums. Duh! Because you're catching so many small fish.

[56:57]

LP: I really don't know what to do, when they shut us all down. I could go bang nails.

SS: Is that something that you honestly see happening within your career, or is that a fear? Is that a fear or a prediction?

LP: It's going to happen. In the past five years, there's been more [unintelligible]. Ten years ago, it's a whole different animal. Every year, it's getting worse. Like I was saying, last year, they did a reduction on fishing licenses. They want to slowly wipe us out. Their way of getting half of us out was saying, "If you don't make at least this amount strictly from fishing, you can't hold a license. Or you have to have this many trip tickets." That's going to kill a lot of us. Forty, forty-five hundred active commercial licenses, and thirty or forty percent of them are people who fish six or seven months out of the year and switch to land jobs for supplemental income because there's so much restriction now. They're going to be phased out. If you don't put one hundred percent into fishing and struggle like most of us are, you're not going to hold a license.

[58:30]

SS: So you really do feel like you're the end of the line?

LP: There's not going to be a sixth generation. I'm the last.

SS: How does that feel?

LP: It's scary. It's heartbreaking. I love what I do. You know? It's stressful, but there's nothing like it in the world. I love going on the water. See some beautiful sunrises and sunsets on the water. A lot of weird, cool stuff out there. No one else will be able to see that. When I'm gone, the people after me won't be able to see it. They're not going to go catch their own seafood unless they're a rod and reeler. If we're eventually phased out of North Carolina and all commercial fishermen are gone, the next step is they'll start leaning more on the recreational. We're the first scapegoat in line. After we're gone, they're going to look at other people—the environmentalists are going to look at the recreational fishermen. "Fish

are feeling pain. They're killing all the fish." Then, they're going to feel what we feel. They can't see that either. When they get their foot in the door, they never close it.

SS: So you think it's going to be their turn next.

LP: They're having more regulations put on all the time. It's payback for all the stuff we have to do. Everything we do, they have so many laws, and they have slot size.

[60:22]

LP: It's immoral. If we are still allowed to fish, I hope when I have a son or daughter, that they don't go into fishing. Go into politics. Everybody hates politics. We talk about them. But I mean, at least they would make money or something. Don't be a lawyer, that's too expensive. I can't afford that college. Don't be a fisherman. Go do something where you're making a paycheck every week and they're not going to phase you out in ten years.

SS: Did your parents try to talk you out of being a fisherman?

LP: Yeah, for a while.

SS: Or were they encouraging?

LP: It was kind of, I was helping the whole way. Because my dad was crabbing all the time, from sunup to late in the evening, so my mom would raise me by herself and I would have to help tend to the soft crabs. I was brought up around it the whole time. I remember, when I was six or seven, I said, "I want to be a fisherman." They were like, "No, you don't. It's hard. It's tough." And back then, it was still good fishing. You could still make a check. As the years went on, I wanted to fish more and more. As I got older, I went with my brother. When I was fifteen, I think I wanted to get my own commercial license. But in the state of North Carolina, you have to be sixteen. I wrote Morehead a letter stating why I wanted a license and this and that, and they ended up giving me one. I was the youngest person in the state of North Carolina to receive a commercial fishing license. Since then, it's been gung-ho. I love it and I hate it. It's like every other job. Work to live, live to work. That's the motto. I just hope they go a different route, because they're not going make it. They'll never own a house. It'll be hard enough to buy a car. It's hard enough right now.

SS: Not getting any easier.

LP: I'm so worried about trying to build a house and get a new boat this year. If I get this new boat for the fishery I want to do, they could shut that down. I'd buy all this stuff and the boat, and then I'll be short on the house payment because I won't have this new boat to fish in this fishery. It's a snowball effect. You just keep tumbling downhill. Once you fall behind, it's hard to get back up.

[63:12]

LP: It's not only in this town. The boy you talked to yesterday, he's going through the same thing. You got to jump from fishery to fishery. Some people hop in the fishery and think they can get rich quick. It's not that way. It puts more pressure on the people who have been

grinding it out for years. Then you know, the seasons change and you have to hop into a new fishery. Everywhere is the same way. You can't stick to one or two things and make a living. You have to be a jack of all trades.

SS: So what do you think separates the people who survive from the people who don't survive? Is there anything else besides just being a jack of all trades?

LP: You have to want to keep your head above water. If you don't wake up and tell yourself, "I'm going to go do this. I'm going to succeed at catching fish," you won't get up. You can't go fishing and be like, "I ain't going to catch crap today." It don't work like that. If you keep telling yourself something, you will believe it. It would be nice if I could tell myself every day, "I'm going to go make a paycheck." It don't work like that. But you can't keep down and out about it all the time. You'll never get going.

SS: So it's a mental thing.

[64:34]

LP: Yes.

SS: Believing in yourself.

LP: I know it's hard fishing, and it's hard to make a check. Do so much stuff just to make a paycheck. But if I dwell on that every single day, I would pull my hair out. My girlfriend knows what I go through. It's stressful. It's the same thing every day. You got to kind of take a deep breath and just charge at it.

SS: Train yourself psychologically to get on with it?

LP: Pretty much.

SS: Put the stress aside and go fishing?

LP: Yeah, you got to be kind of hardheaded and tough to keep doing it. If not, you're not going to make it. You end up being phased out or selling all your gear. Then you end up being, "Commercial fishing, it ain't worth a shit and da, da, da." A lot of people are like that.

SS: People who tried and didn't make it.

LP: Tried.

SS: Now they're negative about it?

LP: A lot of the hurtful things that have come from fishermen have come from part-timers like that, who have jumped into fishery, couldn't make it, and then they, "They were catching so much of this, and discarding that." That's what we call "weekend warriors" pretty much.

SS: They blame it on other people, other fishermen?

[66:08]

LP: We're the most regulatory job, I think, in America. Everybody else just doesn't understand it. I know I'm repeating myself. But it's ridiculous. We're dying off one by one. There's no one left to replace us. Up North, a lot of those permits, you can't assign to somebody else, you can't transfer to other people. When that person dies, that's it for that permit. You'll never get it back. That's what I was saying about bottom fishing. I wanted to get into that a while back. But you have to buy two permits. It'll cost you forty grand. You have one permit, and then you turn one in to the government, because they're constantly phasing people out.

SS: So you have to buy a second permit before you can fish the first one?

LP: Pretty much. If there's a hundred permits, you buy one and the government gets one, so then there's only ninety-eight people fishing, ninety-eight permits out there, so you're phased out year after year.

SS: That sounds complicated.

LP: Complicated and expensive.

[67:44]

LP: I just wish it was easier to jump to a new fishery without spending all this money, because there's certain things a lot of people don't do. Jake Griffin—he's shark fishing. He sharks down south. I think he's about the only one who shark fishes down there. He makes decent money down there. He enjoys what he does. But a shark permit, it's between, I think, eight and ten thousand. Then you have to have a big enough boat to get on the ocean. I'd like to do that eventually, but it's a lot of money for a boat and permit and gear. You have to pretty much decide years before that you want to do that, and then work yourself up to it. I'm afraid if I want to do something like that, I'm going to work years to attain it, and by the time I can get it, they're either not going to have the permits or they'll shut sharking down—because you know the controversy with shark, they think we're just finning all the sharks and discarding all the bodies. Bad public image.

[69:01]

SS: We've talked about the bad public image, we've talked about the regulatory uncertainty, and we've talked about costs and financial uncertainty. Is there anything else we haven't covered yet that you think is important?

LP: Really, that kind of touches on most of the problems.

SS: How about some of the solutions?

LP: That's what I was saying about the need to show people how the industry really is. And the people who do these fish samples, they need to hop on a boat that's doing the fishery. That's the whole problem.

SS: Does that not happen now?

LP: I don't think so. I think it's more along the lines of they just go somewhere and they set a sample net. That hurts a lot of people. If they would actually get an accurate sample, that would really help out a lot. Fish have tails. They move. They're not going to be in one area all the time. Then, my girlfriend was saying, she was talking about the observer program— putting the observers on the boat. I don't really have a problem with that. They're in a lot of danger when they go in the ocean. Crossing that bar is risky every time we cross it. Yesterday when we went across, we had white water coming up the windows. It don't take much with a wave like that to bust the windows out. If the observer's standing at the windows, then you could be liable for that. Then, there's a few I've heard about that were forging documents years before. Luckily they got fired. Then there's some of them that will hardly write anything down. They're not accurate. They make stuff up. That hurts everybody else, though. There's a few that are good people, that'll hop down and help you pick fish, they'll help you gut, they'll be real thorough and accurate about what's going on. Then there's others that'll sit and play on their phone and they can't give two shits about what's going on. They're in it for the paycheck.

[71:26]

SS: Do you have to take observers on your boat?

LP: No.

SS: Is that more in federal or ocean waters?

LP: I actually have had people call me. I've told them, "My boat's too small to carry gear and another person. If you'd like to follow me, you can." But they've never really bothered me. When I'm out fishing on a bigger boat in the ocean with those [unintelligible] out there, we had one a week ago hop on there. She was pretty decent. She wrote down what she was supposed to. She helped move totes of fish. But last year, we had one go on there that, he sat in the cabin the whole time and played on a phone. "You're supposed to be writing down that we're catching this and that." If three observers write down that we're catching nothing for a month, that makes it look like there's no fish there at all. There's a lot of wrongs when it comes to everything that involves fishing. It's hard to get the bad out. One bad kind of ruins it for a lot of people. All it takes is one person to say something negative and that goes up the ladder. When it gets to the head guy, and he hears, "Well, they're not catching any of this fish. Let's implement restrictions." That's how it starts.

SS: And it just snowballs?

LP: It comes right back down the ladder. You know how they say, crap rolls downhill. That's how it is. I know I'm only twenty-nine, but I've seen it when I thought it was good. It's progressively getting worse. I never saw it in the heyday when the real old-timers were fishing. They call them "tent people" on the whole Outer Banks that went commercial fishing. I never got to see that. But when I was younger, I thought it was good. But what I thought was good, my dad said wasn't nothing compared to when he was younger. I think every year it gets worse.

SS: Progressively worse. So there was a time when you didn't feel so pessimistic?

LP: Oh, I woke up everyday and I loved every minute of it. That was when I was younger. I also didn't have the bills to pay for. Another thing that's really hurt the fishery is housing developments. Wetlands around here are constantly being contaminated with runoff.

SS: What kind of species are affected the most by that?

LP: Everything that comes into the sound. Shrimp, oysters, crabs, flounders, trouts. It's everything. Fish aren't going to want to go up into a bay and lay eggs in habitat that has a bunch of runoff. Manteo Bay is pumping out, I think, a billion gallons of treated sewage water every day. No wonder there's no oysters in the bay.

SS: Is that something that's gradually increasing as well?

LP: Every year. There's more and more housing being developed, everywhere on the coast. When you build a housing development on a marsh, that gets rid of the minnows and the oysters and the crabs. The bigger fish, they go hang out on that feed. It's a chain of events. Once you delete that, they're gone.

SS: You think you're seeing the effects of that, in terms of the abundance of species?

LP: I know. It's declining. It's not because we're catching them all either. We have to go to new places, travel farther, spend more money, to catch what we used to catch. The houses are killing it. Everybody would rather build their house, have green lawns, fertilize stuff. They don't think where it goes after they spray it in the yard. Down south, when that hurricane came through last year, the bacteria in the water, in the runoff, it crushed their fishery down there. All my buddies that flounder gig down there, it was nonexistent. They were starving.

SS: They just weren't there?

LP: They never came into the inland waterway.

SS: They just avoided it?

LP: The water was so bad. There was so much runoff. So nasty. Then they shut oystering down. There's a lot of bad things putting pressure on this.

SS: From every side, every angle.

LP: It's everywhere. But people point the finger at us because we're the easiest to eradicate. They're not going to try to get rid of the construction guy and the company that's building houses. They don't see that he's doing anything wrong. It's been like that for a long time. It's sad. It is. It won't be too much longer before every lot in the Outer Banks here has a house in it. They're all within spitting distance. I don't want my next-door neighbor to reach out and touch my house. Luckily, I have a piece of property that's kind of nestled in the woods. But it's one of the last properties here. If anything ever happens to me, that property's going to go like hotcakes. I want to hang onto that, because it that goes, that's it.

[77:06]

SS: So that's sort of changing the quality of life, changing the culture?

LP: Yeah, it's a lot of what I call implants from other places moving out here. They come out and they think it's so great. And then they want to turn it into how it was. Why move down here if you're going to turn it into exactly—

SS: —where you left?

LP: Like I said before, this is a resort town. We pay a crazy amount of money to live here. Everything is high. You have to work that much harder to survive. It's hard to pay a thousand dollars for a one-bedroom sandbox, when I could pay a thousand dollars for a great big house [inland]. But I fish. What am I going to do?

SS: So the fishing must mean a lot to you, to have to deal with so many things just to keep fishing?

LP: I love it. I love it. It's a love-hate, seriously. There's some days I just want to burn everything I own and run away. There's other days I wake up and I get so excited to go fishing. It's three o'clock in the morning and I am ping-ponging off the walls. I am ready to get up. In a nutshell, I love it. Good and bad, it's all I've wanted to do. I just tell everybody, "If you want to be a fisherman, don't. Be a deckhand. Don't put any money into fishing. See how hard it is. That kind of changes your attitude." If you can help us out so we can get younger people in here, I think that would save us. Like you were saying, when you were asking for input on this, the old-timers don't want to say anything about it. Because they've seen firsthand about what helping did to them.

SS: What do you mean by that?

[79:19]

LP: They would give catch data and what was going on. They would turn the data around to hurt them. If one month, they're catching a certain amount of this, and the next month, they're not catching as much, the following month, they're going to shut it down. Every day, fishing's different. Every week. Fish aren't there one day and they may be the next. It's not that easy to the head honchos upstairs. They'd just rather stroke a pen. It's frustrating.

SS: So is there anything else that you'd like the people hearing this interview to know?

LP: Eat fresh seafood.

SS: [laughter] Good words of wisdom.

LP: Know where your seafood comes from. Go talk to a fisherman. See what it's like. Ask to ride along. Open your eyes.

SS: Have you taken tourists along with you to learn?

LP: I've taken a few. It's kind of like a love-hate thing for them too. They enjoyed it, thought it was fun. Like, "Yeah, you do this every day? Day in and day out? And some days you don't catch anything?" I said, "It's not that fun." They thought it was like, I don't know how to really explain it. It was like a vacation for them. They didn't think it was work.

SS: They only saw the romantic side.

LP: That's right. But, go talk to a fisherman. Go check it out. We're not all bad. Even if we wear eye patches and get drunk all the time.

SS: [laughter]

LP: We're good people.

SS: Alright. Well, I think that pretty much does it. Thanks. I'll shut this off then.

[end of interview]

[81:28]