

**Interview with Lenny Russo, commercial fisherman**

**Occupation:** commercial fisherman

**Port Community:** Portland, Maine; Gloucester, Massachusetts; Naknek, Alaska

**Interviewer:** Sarah Schumann

**Date and year:** May 10, 2019

**Location:** Gloucester, Massachusetts

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

**Transcriber:** Sarah Schumann

[Start of interview]

[00:00]

Sarah Schumann [SS]: Great, the recording is started. My name is Sarah Schumann. Today's date is May 10, 2019, and I'm in Gloucester, Massachusetts. Would you please state your name?

Lenny Russo [LR]: Lenny Russo.

SS: Lenny Russo. What is your occupation, Lenny?

LR: I'm a captain and a deckhand on a trawler—drag fishery.

SS: Is that your full time job or part-time?

LR: I fish September to May out of Portland on the dragger, and then June and July, I have my own boat in Alaska for salmon gillnetting.

SS: What's the name of the vessel that you're on in Portland?

LR: Teresa Marie IV. That's owned by Jimmy Odlin. He has five boats, so that's one of his boats. I work for him.

SS: Teresa Marie IV?

LR: Teresa Marie IV, yeah.

SS: And the one in Alaska?

LR: Joelle Marie.

SS: Your homeports are Portland and Naknek, Alaska?

LR: Yeah.

SS: What's your age, Lenny?

LR: I'll be twenty-eight June 1st.

SS: So twenty-seven right now, for a couple more weeks?

LR: Yeah.

SS: Before we started, you were telling me a little bit about your educational background.

LR: Yeah. I didn't want to be a fisherman, originally. I tried to stay away from it. All the older guys were like, "You don't want to be a fisherman." So I tried to go to a tech high school for masonry. Then I went to the Corps of Engineers in the Army, doing construction for them. Went to college. Worked construction management. Got my associate's in that. Then I really couldn't find a job in construction that paid that well. Then, my first fishing trip, I made a lot of money and I got hooked after that.

SS: So you did construction at New England Tech, you had said before we started?

LR: Yeah. I worked for a mason out of high school and then I went to New England Tech in Warwick.

SS: But you also mentioned to me earlier that you come from a fishing family. Is that right?

LR: Yeah. My grandfather came here from Italy. Him and my dad worked on my uncle's boat. Then they went to Texas and bought their own boat, drove it back here, and then that's how they started. The Miss Trish I. When my uncle Peter got out of high school, him and my dad became partners. Then they fished that boat for a while, sold that during the buyback, bought the Miss Trish II, bought the Jessica D, bought the Mary and Josephine. Then my uncle got sick. He couldn't captain one of the boats anymore. They really couldn't find any sober captains for the other two. That's the reason that my dad sold the other two and just kept the Miss Trish. I was young. I was twelve, I think. That's why I didn't take over. I didn't even know if I wanted to be a fisherman. That's how our family got started. Then I eventually got into it.

SS: Did you ever go along fishing when you were growing up?

LR: My first fishing trip, I think I was fourteen. I graduated eighth grade that summer. I think it was ten days. The first three days, I just puked. I got seasick. But after that, I never got seasick again.

SS: Never?

LR: Never. It was just three days of horror, and then it passed.

SS: Where did you go? How far out?

LR: I was fourteen. I don't really know if it was Middle Bank or Georges Bank. It all seemed far to me at the time. That was my first trip. During the summers and during school vacations, my dad would take me fishing. Just a trip here and there.

SS: As a job or just for fun?

LR: No, I got paid. But it was just for one week. It wasn't for a long time. I did that until I joined the Army, and after that I did college, and then after college is when I went full time with my father, for about seven years on the Miss Trish II. You just want me to keep going?

SS: Sure. What else?

[04:12]

LR: Alright. I worked on there for a long time. The boat got easier, because we kept getting cutting machines and ice machines, and the boat was nice. But I wasn't learning. I kind of peaked out as much as I could learn on that boat. I already knew how to fix everything. I knew the boat like the back of my hand. I knew the style of fishing my dad did. Last year, he let me captain for a few trips to see if I could do it. I did good. I had some big trips. But then my dad was like, "After Alaska, I'm going to captain again." I was like, "That's fine. But I don't want to be the fish hold guy or the deckhand for the next ten years." My dad doesn't plan on retiring soon. When I got back from Alaska, we talked, and I was like, "I think it's better if I find a captaining opportunity on another boat, and then maybe when you retire or you want to step down, I'll come back." He was supportive about it. That's when I called Jerry Leeman, captain of the TM IV. He's thirty-seven. He's been working there for about ten years. I knew him through radio talk. When I had the Trish, my dad was like, "If you want to talk to the good captains, talk to Jerry and a couple of the other guys. They'll tell you. Those are good guys you want to talk to." I talked with Jerry a lot on the radio. He was wicked helpful. I knew he had a similar system as the Trish: the cutting machines, the ice machines. It was the same setup. The boat's just slightly smaller. I called Jerry, and I was like, "Do you need a relief captain or a deckhand? I already know how to fix all the stuff." Jerry was like, "Yeah, I've been here for ten years." He had never had a relief captain, or not a successful one, so he doesn't have a lot of time at home with his family. I was like, "I'll come work for you and be your relief captain so you can spend time." The first few months there, it was a little rough. The Maine people don't like outsiders, so it was a little rough for a couple weeks, but it got better, once I showed them that I knew what I was doing and I kept all the machines running. The amount of fish we were catching went up from the average. The amount of money went up. Jerry let me take the boat after a couple months, because I had to learn where everything was on that boat. After a couple months, I took the boat, and I did really good with that. Then I just stopped now, to get ready for Alaska.

SS: How did you start going to Alaska?

[07:08]

LR: Funny. The deckboss on the Miss Trish, he's been going to Alaska for forty years. One year, he asked me, "Hey. Do you want to come to Alaska this summer?" I said, "Yeah," because I hated the summers here. They sucked. The prices were bad. I'd rather be at the beach than sweating on the boat. We just caught dogfish all the time. I hated summers. It

was small checks and long trips. So I was like, "Yeah, I'll try Alaska." I was actually saving up money to buy a house, because I wanted to invest in something and I was making all this money on the Trish, so I was going to buy a house. Then Nino Trenti was like, "Don't buy a house. Come to Alaska. Maybe you'll like it and you'll buy a business." The price of the permits and boats are expensive. I was like, "I don't think I can afford it, but I'll come and check it out." I went as a deckhand, and we caught a lot of fish, like two hundred thousand pounds. He had two guys picking, and I was pitching. It wasn't flush deck, so we had to toss all the salmon. They're all talking about making big money, and then we got the price: fifty cents. All the fishermen were talking, "We haven't seen fifty cents in twenty years. This is an abomination." They were going crazy. I was thinking, instead of buying the house, to buy a business, just like that guy said. That's when the price of the permits dropped in half. Then I bought the boat, the gear, and the permit, for just what the price of the permit was the year before. I talked to my dad about it, and my dad really helped me out, because I had the money to put down, but I had no collateral. My dad did that for me. I got the loan, went to Alaska. The first year was hell. Everything broke. On a new boat, you got to figure it out. But we still made money. We forced the trip through. We did good. Every year after that, it got better and better. I learned more and made more. Last year was my best year. I'm hoping this year is even better. He just dragged me there, and I saw the fishery. It was easy to understand. Dragging, you can't see your gear. You got the doors under the water, the rollers, the cans. If they're pitched this way or that way, you don't really know that's going on. That's huge. Where the salmon gillnet is just a straight wall. Once I saw that, I was like, "This fishery's pretty easy, in my opinion." You just set out nets straight, compared to dragging. I saw that it was simpler, it was smaller, it was quicker. I liked the fast-paced fishing. It was a nice break from here. Working with family's kind of stressful. Ten-day trips suck. It was a nice getaway. You go there, and it's just fishermen from all over the world meeting in one spot. You hear stories. I love it in Alaska. It's a nice break.

[10:20]

SS: You were a deckhand for only one season up there before you bought the boat and permit?

LR: Yeah. No one believed me. They're like, "Everybody says that." I'm like, "No, I'm going to do it."

SS: It really made an impression on you, then?

LR: Yeah. I saw the money we made on a bad season. I was like, "What do these captains make on a good season?" The next year, a lot of people were proud of me and wanted to help me, and then a lot of people were pissed that it took them ten, fifteen years to get that. They kind of wished bad things upon me. There were mixed reviews of me buying into it so early. But same thing, after a couple of years, they saw that I'm just trying to make a living like everybody else. No matter where you go, it's always rough in the beginning.

SS: Did you consider, instead of taking that money and buying a boat and permit up there, using it to buy a boat and permit here in New England?

[11:29]

LR: Well, here, my dad owns the Miss Trish. If he wants to retire or whatever, he told me, "You can have this if you want it." I told him, "To be honest, I don't know if I want it." I love fishing, but I think the main reason there's a lack of young people is the time away. Don't take any offense at this, but most girls can't wait for their man to come home after ten days. It's a lot of physical labor. It's a lot of mental stress, too. More mental, I think. That's why I think a lot of young men—or women—aren't getting into the industry: the time away from loved ones, kids if they have them.

SS: But it's always been that way. Why would that be different now?

LR: Yeah, but the generation is soft. The generation after me. I think my age group was the last. Now, everyone is on their i-phones, their i-pads. There's not blue-collar workers. Everyone's on their computers now. They're used to being home. They're used to being comfortable. You can't take a pampered high school or college kid on his laptop, and throw him on Georges Bank. He's going to be like, "Fuck this shit," no matter how much money you give him. There's the old saying, "iron men in wooden ships." They ain't like that no more. Now you got steel ships and soft kids. Everyone's offended. I blame the younger generation for being so soft. I blame the older generation for being so secretive. They didn't teach anybody anything. They kept all the knowledge to themselves. And now they're like, "How come there's no new kids?" "Well, you didn't teach them how to mend, because they would have stole your job or there would have been a competition for your spot. You didn't teach them how to navigate in the wheelhouse, because they would, you know." I think a lot of the older people have something to do with it, also.

[interaction with server, because interview took place at a restaurant]

[14:05]

LR: On my boat, like I said earlier, I didn't know how to mend. I was on that boat for six years. My father, half the time, captaining and owning a boat is stressful—doing both—half the crew didn't speak English. They were Italian. I can understand it pretty well, but I can't speak it. Even though I can't really understand it. Sometimes they'd start talking really fast or start screaming. Sometimes I'd ask them to teach me something. Right away, they're just like, "Forget about it," and rip it out of your hands. A lot of the younger kids get scared away from the industry because of people like that. They won't teach you. If you try, they'll kind of just yell at you. I guess it would kind of be illegal, these days, the way people used to treat deckhands. Just hazing, screaming at them, making them do stupid stuff. I think that it's not like that anymore, that I've seen. But that's how it was when I started. It was brutal. They tried to make you cry. They tried to make you break. I guess it was their style of toughening you up, which I felt like my generation could handle. Not that I wanted to, but I was forced into it and it did make me a stronger person. That's why I know what I know now. But like I said, if you try to bring someone in 2019 and try to throw them into a situation like that, I don't think they'd last too long. Now, the smartest and all those fishermen are gone, so there aren't that many people to teach what few young people are here. They're dwindling quick, and I'm going to be honest, I don't know any captains younger than me that aren't on drugs. Drugs is another huge problem in the industry. I get pissed when people are like, "Oh, you're a fisherman. You're a drug addict." That's stereotypical. I'm like, "No, because my father's boat is drug free. If you're a drug addict, you're fired. The boat I work on, Jerry Leeman, he's very strict. Absolutely no drugs. But then there's other boats that are horrible.

The stress of being gone away, the stress from other crew members and captains, the stress makes people develop a drug habit. I think that's why there aren't too many young people.

[16:51]

SS: Tell me about how you learned mending twine and other stuff.

LR: Naz, Ignazio Sanfilippo taught me. He has the Cat Eyes, over here at Fishermen's Wharf. It's a small dragger. I knew like the basics, a little bit. Then I had Naz come over to my house. I have a huge net in my basement. That's where he taught me to cut it out first, siders, gores, and then we looked at map plans. He taught me everything like that. That's how I learned, in my basement. Then, on the Trish a little bit, I put what he taught me into practice, and then a lot of it on the TM IV in Maine. Then he actually drove up to Maine, just because we did a lot of damage on the net and I wanted to learn how to do it. Well, I think I knew how, but I thought I'd be more confident if he was there, just so if I did anything wrong, he'd correct me. He drove up to Maine for me, and we pulled out the net. It's a big net. The TM IV is a big boat. We got to the damage and he showed me how to do it.

SS: Is he just a friend or is he a relative? What's his interest in seeing you succeed?

LR: Naz, I'm best friends with his son Joe. Him and Joe fished on the Cat Eyes for a while. Then we took Joe on the Miss Trish when we needed a guy. Then when fishing got really bad for the small boats, Joe couldn't work with his father any more. His father could make a living by himself, but he couldn't afford a deckhand. So Joe, to help his dad out, me and Joe actually went and got a hundred tons captain's license together, because my dad said, even though we don't need it right now in this industry, it might be required pretty soon to be driving these big boats. My dad got it. My uncle got it. Me and Joe decided it's a good idea that we get it. It's good to have. We went, we got our license together, and then Joe decided to go tugboating. He does three weeks on, three weeks off. I think it's called "weeks." I'm not sure. He works for some tugboat company. He decided to do that. That's another thing. He was a fisherman and he loved fishing, but then he went tugboating, where they offer insurance and health insurance and all those benefits, probably a pension and stuff. Fishing doesn't offer that. But that's how I met Naz, through his son. Naz came fishing with us on the Trish. They both came and did trips with us. Naz is a really positive, happy guy, and he's always willing to teach people if you ask him. That's the problem, kids don't ask. The older guys aren't going to twist your arm to teach you. You have to ask them. That's how I met Naz. Then Naz taught me on the net. Gloucester's a tight community. Everybody knows everybody here. My friends are all somewhat fishing-related here. My brother did a few fishing trips, but he didn't get into it. He's tugboating also. My brother has two weeks on, two weeks off, where the company I work for now will do ten days, and then if the owner is like, "Well, there's fish out there. Turn around." You're home for twenty-four hours and then you turn right around. If you work for a company like that, you make all this money, but what's the point of making all this money if you have no time to spend it and nobody to spend it with? There's a difference between working for a family-owned boat like my father. It's more stressful in ways, because if something broke, I was the engineer. If the pump broke, I had to fix it. If the oil had to be changed, I had to change it. Anything electrical, anything wrong with that boat, it was my responsibility. Any morning, with a family-owned business, the Gloucester routine is you come down to the morning every morning at eight—except Sundays, because they go to church—show up on the boat every morning at eight,

check for whatever has to be fixed, do maintenance. That was a lot of work for me. Then I started working for this company out of Maine, where they make you do a lot of turnarounds and longer trips, compared to a family-owned boat. You own the boat, you go out whenever you want and leave whenever you want. A company boat, you go and leave when they tell you to. But if they do give us a few days off, the company has onshore engineers to fix the pumps and do all that maintenance. When I get home, I actually do have a few days off. I'm not with my family on the Miss Trish, probably working eight to five or eight to three, depending on what we have to do. Family-owned businesses and company-owned boats, they both have their ups and downs. Which one's better? I don't know. Like I said, they both have their ups and downs, but I guess I can do more what I want on the family-owned. If anything breaks on the company boat, I don't care. The company is going to replace it. But if something breaks on your boat, you start sweating, because you got to replace it. That's that. Fishing, I don't know. I'm still indecisive on if I want to keep doing it, because I just met a girl. Started dating her a few months ago. My ideal, I would like to own boats and have other people captain them for me. That would be my ideal job. But I'm the youngest captain. I don't know anybody younger than me from Massachusetts to Maine. Like I said, there's no young people. What sucks is there are some good captains, they're just on drugs. That's what sucks. There's a lot of people who have a lot of knowledge, but they're wasting it.

[23:55]

SS: That's too bad. Are you thinking of going back to construction?

LR: No.

SS: If you were to leave fishing...

LR: If I were to leave fishing, no. I don't think I would leave fishing. I would just downgrade. I would go on maybe a smaller boat. I feel like dragging's good for now. It was bad not that long ago. It was more stressful in the past, because I was younger and I wanted to be home more, with the friends and going out, when I was like twenty-one, twenty-two. Then as I got older, the money got better and I knew more. I got more knowledge, so I got better at it, and I liked it because the money's good and I'm good at it. Every time I take out a boat, I fill it, and every time I work the deck or I work the fish hold, we always get good remarks on the quality of our fish. I'm really good at it and I want to keep doing it, but how can I stay in this industry without sacrificing all of my social time? That's what I'm trying to figure out. Maybe a lobster boat or a small scallop boat. Maybe go hooking. My friends go lobstering and hooking. I would love to have the Trish. I would love to take over my father's business and have that be my boat, set it up the way I want it. But I would want to have maybe a relief captain. You do a couple trips. I'll do one trip. You do a couple trips. I'll do a trip. That would be ideal. I don't know how I would get young people into this industry. What could I do to convince them? What could I do to make it appealing to them, besides the money aspect?

SS: Really?

LR: Yeah.

[26:15]

SS: Hmm. What about it appeals to you?

LR: With me, it's different, because it's been in my family for so long. My grandfather did it. My father did it. My father has gone through so many boats. He worked so hard to get where he is. People have offered him millions for his business. He goes, "No. One, if I sell it, what am I going to do with the rest of my life? Sit here like a lump on a log and do nothing? No." He goes, "It took me my whole life to get to where I am, to get the Miss Trish to where it is." He has a lot of pride in that boat. He doesn't want to just sell it to some company. For me, I have a lot of pride in the industry, because my family's been in it for so long, and my father's put so much effort into it and I've sacrificed already seven years into it. I'm already that deep into it. I don't know. I'm proud of my family and proud of my dad. I've already come so far and achieved so much and know so much about it and I'm getting better at it. That's what makes me want to stay here. How do I get someone who has no family fishing, no knowledge of fishing at all, to get into this industry? I don't know how to convince these kids. There aren't really many family-owned boats, either. The companies are kind of buying them up now. I got all my time and family history in it. That's why. I want to see the fishing industry thrive. I want to see it do better. I think ninety percent of it is the amount of time people have to sacrifice to make a living.

[28:22]

SS: On the Teresa Marie IV, are there other young people on the crew?

LR: Yeah. Actually, I was really surprised when I went to work for these people in Maine. Everybody in Gloucester is old. Everyone on the Trish is forty to sixty. I was the youngest kid there. Mike Collie, who's still there, is thirty-three, I think. But everybody else is old. Everybody on every boat in Gloucester is old—all the crew, all the captains. Tommy Testaverde, I think he might have a few young guys on his boat. But then when I went to Maine, Jerry had three twenty year olds. Two are twenty-two and one is twenty-three. Jerry is thirty-seven, which is the youngest captain I've ever known, besides Tommy. I was really surprised to see that many young people on one boat. Then there's Lee, this old guy Lee. Well, he's not old, he's forty-five, but he's older than all of us. Then there's Luke. Luke's a young captain. He's thirty-seven I think, also. But yeah, I was really surprised. That was the most young kids I'd ever seen on a boat. On the Trish, I was used to seeing my dad's friends. Everybody's just old. All the Grace Marie, the Captain Domenic—unless the Captain Domenic's son's still there, I don't think so—everybody's just old. There's just no young blood back in this industry right now.

SS: That's particularly true in Gloucester right now, it sounds like?

LR: Gloucester, yeah. But Gloucester used to be the biggest, oldest seaport until the nineties, and then we dropped, dramatically. In Maine, like I said, there's five boats in Maine. There aren't many boats. They're all older people too, besides the boat I worked on.

[30:50]

[content redacted]



SS: How do you see it in Alaska? Is it different?

[37:00]

LR: A *lot* of young people in Alaska. A lot of young people in Alaska. But the fishing there is six weeks long. It's a vacation. Half of them go there to party and get away from home. The money's good. I think that's what it is. Everybody can work their nine to five from August to May. June and July, they just go there for six weeks and make a bunch of money and go home. That's why I don't see Alaska being very stressful on anybody, because it's so short and sweet, and usually profitable, where dragging is year-round. They fish all summer, all winter, no stopping. That's why I feel like Alaska is all young people. It's nothing but young people.

SS: But it's really no comparison, in terms of full time fishermen versus seasonal?

LR: We call people in Alaska shoemakers. It's like a term. A lot of them aren't fishermen. They're electricians, masons, bartenders, shoemakers. A lot of them don't even know how to fix their boat or mend nets or anything. They go there and they're out there fishing for two months out of the year. Then they go back to their nine to five job. There's very few fishermen there who are fishermen fulltime, like me. I fish and go fishing in Alaska, where most people don't. That's why I don't think it's that stressful for those people.

[38:49]

SS: What kind of fish are you groundfishing for in New England?

LR: My dad's boat is a family-owned boat and my dad's motto is, "You always want to make your crew a trip. You want it to be worth a paycheck." The only way you can really guarantee that is to catch a hundred thousand as fast as you can. Doesn't matter of what—redfish, pollock. So with my dad, we'll try to go for haddock, try to get the money fish. That's usually a good price. He doesn't have much flounder quota, so we don't really go floundering, unless it's bad weather or there isn't much groundfish around. My dad's style was to go for the haddock. If you can't get that, try to load the boat up with pollock and reds. We'd go hump jumping. That was my dad's style of fishing, just to catch a hundred thousand as fast as you can. Catch whatever you want. There's haddock. There's lobsters. There's grey sole, dabs, multispecies permit. Catch whatever you can. Then I went fishing with Jerry and the company boat. It's supposed to be a haddock boat. We're only supposed to target haddock, because we're supposed to supply so much haddock a week for this company. That's what they want, so that's what we do. We'll target haddock until the end. They'll usually do three, four, five, eight-day trips on the Trish, and if they can load up on pollock and reds, come home, unload, and go. They'll do two trips to our one. We'll stay out ten, twelve days, but it's all haddock. My dad just tries to fill the boat as fast as he can, usually, unless the price is good. Jerry usually plays the price game. Like, what's good this week, what's good that. Jerry does a lot more flounder. My dad doesn't do a lot of floundering. He does a lot of hump jumping. He doesn't have a flounder net. He has two rock hopper nets, because all he goes for is groundfish. From Jerry, I learned a lot of good floundering spots, good bottom spots, that I never knew with my dad. I learned all my dad's spots. Now, I'm learning all of Jerry's hot fishing spots. Two different fishermen with two different styles of fishing, so now I'm learning both. I thought that was going to be real helpful. We catch whatever we can, and

every boat's different. There's mudslunkers who stay in the mud, and they go for flounders and monkies and money stuff.

SS: What did you call it? A mudslunker?

LR: Mudslunker. Yeah.

SS: That's what you call the trip?

LR: The groundfish boats, we go hump jumping. Mudslunkers, they just do six-hour tows, pick up flounders. Long tows, long trips, where when we go pounding groundfish, it's two-hour tows, one-hour tows. If you're on them, you're just trying to hustle. There's mudslunkers, like a muddy slunker—a slow term—and then we try to fish a little faster pace and put down groundfish. Jerry's not a mudslunker. Jerry's been doing it for a long time and he's got a lot of knowledge. I plan on staying with him for as long as I can and try to pick up as much as I can out of his brain. I already know how my dad fishes. Now I'm trying to learn how this guy fishes. That's my plan. I promised him one more year of relief captain, because I want to learn from him a lot. He gave me the opportunity, so I want to let him have as much time as he can with the family. "My oldest just graduated high school," I think he told me. "I want to see the other two grow up," or something like that. I think when the oldest graduated, it kind of hit him. He wanted to spend time with his family. He said he's had some relief captains in the past, but they just go out, they wreck the net or do something to the boat, and come back. Or they did good, but they would just take his knowledge and his maps or whatever, and leave. I promised him one more year. Then, after next year, that's when I got to make a decision. Talk to my dad, if he wants to retire or slow down. My dad had some medical issues recently that weren't on the table when I left. Then he had a heart attack. Then he just broke his back. The doctors are like, "He might be able to go back to work. He might not." We'll see in terms of that. I could either stay with Jerry, take over my dad's boat—but I'd only take that over if he'd sell it to me and I'd run it my way.

SS: Why is that? You mean you wouldn't run it for him?

[44:18]

LR: No. He has his way of doing things. I have my way of doing things. I want to own it. I would like to captain the boat, but I got to run things my way. I don't want him coming on, and "You do this." No. That's why I told him, "When you're ready to let go of the business completely, sell it to me, then I'll take it." I love my dad. I love my uncle. I love all the guys on the boat. But after seven years of being with them every day—see, I'm out there fishing with them every day and then when I'm home, I go down the boat every morning at eight. It got to the point where they were all irritating me. I'm like, "Before I start hating you guys, I got to leave and branch off." So I left and started working with Jerry. I miss those guys and I would love to work with them, but I know it would just go back to me getting irritated with them. I don't know if they plan on retiring soon, but I was just like, "I love you guys, but I'm really happy where I'm working now. Jerry's the captain, but I'm the deck boss or the first mate. When he's not there, I'm the captain. The owners really aren't around, where on the Trish, it literally feels like everybody's the captain. My dad will say, "Let's do this." And then he'll say something, and someone else will say something. Everybody has an opinion. Six captains on that boat. With the family, everybody can put in their two cents, where on a

company boat, you just do what the captain says. Very different. Family, we're so close, and everybody's been working together for ten to thirty years on that boat. Everybody has to put in their two cents. There's no, "The captain says we have to do it." There's debate about it every time. I don't want to go back to that. I want it to be my boat. What I say goes. If I take over my dad's boat—because my uncle owns it, too. My dad and my uncle, they're part owners, so I'd have to buy them both out. Either that, or like I said, Jimmy has five boats. The Nobska and the Morue are good captains and really knowledgeable guys, but they're getting old and they're getting ready to retire soon. I was thinking after next year, after being Jerry's relief captain, maybe be the fleet's relief captain. I'd be the relief captain for Chris and Jeff and Jerry, and learn all their—they all fish the same, but they have different—like the Italians in Gloucester, they roll up their nets different. They do things different. When I went to Maine, I was kind of a little lost. We fish the same industry. We're both dragnets. But they do things the way that Maine people do things. I was like, "If Maine's this different from Gloucester, how different are New Bedford dragnets from Gloucester?" The Nobska and the Morue are from New Bedford. Jimmy's got three in Portland, Maine, two in New Bedford. The Harmony, the TM III, the TM IV are in Portland. The Nobska and the Morue are in New Bedford. I talk to Chris and Jeff on the radio. They're really good guys. They've been doing it for a long time. That's what my dad told me when I took out the Trish: "There's three captains you talk to on the radio. It's Jeff, Chris, and Jerry." It was between Jeff and Jerry, because they both have cutting machines, and I wanted to be on an advanced boat like the Trish, just because I like catching a lot of fish fast, processing it fast, it's just like a new, faster generation of fishing. I wanted to stay with a boat that's up to my speed. It was between Jeff and Jerry. I called Jerry, and he was like, "Yeah." That's why I ended up going with him. I would love to be the fleet relief captain. But like I said, a lot can happen in a year. I don't know which decision I'm going to make. Either stay on the IV as a relief fleet captain or take over my dad's boat. I don't know. I did construction for many years before being a fisherman. Like I said, I don't really know what's coming up, but as far as I can see. Well, this year, the fishing's been going great. This year has been good for me. Last year was good, too. I don't know. I do see fishing—I think if fishing rises and there's more boats—I don't know. I feel like the market died, too. The prices have been crap for a few years. People not getting paid right might have thrown the young people away and stuff. The fishing industry was down. I think that's another reason no one was really getting into it. It was kind of going to crap for a while. They were cutting the quota. Everybody was kind of getting scared. Half the little boats went out of business. That didn't make any young people want to get into it, either. Now it's bouncing back. Now we're doing good. In the past couple years, we've been doing good.

SS: In terms of the resource or prices or what?

LR: They're giving quota back. The price has been shit for a long time. The price has actually been decent this year—well, for us. See, my dad has a family-owned boat. He goes and unloads at something like Cape Ann Seafood Display Auction, or people out here like Giacolone's, and they get the auction price. Sometimes it's good. Sometimes it's not. Our boats, because they're company boats—Jimmy owns five. Actually, Jimmy sold it to Blue Harvest Fisheries. Jimmy just manages it now, I think. Blue Harvest Fisheries is opening a facility in New Bedford and they're going to push more fish. All our fish is already pre-sold on the company boats. I think we only put four thousand pounds on the auction last trip, out of the ninety-six that we caught. All our fish was sold. If you have your own boat and you go to

the auction, you get forty cents for your haddock. Our fish was already pre-sold for eighty. I'm not sure. I know our fish is pre-sold, so even if we do bad at the auction, we still get a good price. There's companies trying to buy more boats. Some people are skeptical about it. Like, "Big companies are going to buy up all the boats, and then there's going to be no more family-owned fishing boats. Companies are going to own it." Other people think it's better, because the company buys everything. We're getting this guaranteed set price right now. I don't know if it's guaranteed or set, but it's a lot better than everybody else is getting, because the company is able to push so much more fish, I think, because there are five boats feeding it fish. That's why we get a better price. I think if more boats went to work for a company like that or bought into a company like that, and the fishermen knew what they were going to make before they got home. Like if you knew you were making a dollar a pound, and you weren't working for twenty-five cents a pound. That's the scary part. You don't know if you're going to make a check or not, if you're not on a good boat. Fortunately, for me, the Trish has always been good. The TM IV has always been good. We always make a check, a year's pay. But some people don't, on other boats. They don't do very well. Some people make the same amount of money fishing as they do on land. It depends, if you work for a family-owned boat, if you sell to an auction, or is it pre-sold fish? I think the fishing is getting better. That's why the company's buying into it. There's a lot of fish around, too. Everybody's catching fish right now. That's why I think it's going to bounce back soon. But there's not enough people to run all these boats. If the industry bounces back, and we start making a lot of money, maybe that will attract young people. If there's more young people, maybe you can have more of a rotating crew. One way to actually get young people on the boat, what we try to do on the IV, is to have a rotating crew. Only four crewmembers go fishing at a time, but five work for you. You rotate. You have four trips on, but then you get one trip off. That would give you a break. That's one way to get the young bloods back into it. I think if we had more young people working for companies, where there was maybe not a set price, but at least a guaranteed price, you know you won't get lower than seventy cents. Maybe that would get more young people into it. Because it sucks. You catch a hundred thousand pounds and you don't make any money off it. Like one trip, I caught thirty thousand of pollock and made a dollar fifty. I made three grand. Didn't do much work, made good money. The next trip, I made like ninety thousand. We got less than fifty cents. I made 2,700 bucks. I just did three times the amount of work for less money. Now, that will discourage young blood. Like, "What the hell? I did all that work for this little money?" The big trips will get people hooked, but if they get too many of those bad trips, they're probably going to run. I worked for my dad, so he started me off at a full share, which is because I work for my dad.

SS: That's not typical?

[54:46]

LR: No, that wouldn't happen. They would start at a half share. If you're on a good boat and you're making half share, I guess you're making okay money, but if you're on an okay boat or a bad boat and you're making half share, you ain't making much. That's another thing. Most people get started off at a bad pay already. Then if you have a bad trip, you make nothing. I've seen kids do ten days for three hundred bucks. They're not going to come back, you know? That scares them away. Any other questions?

[55:37]

SS: Let me think. Do you get involved in stuff beyond the fishing, like the management or science aspects of fishing?

LR: I don't. I would like to. I know a lot of people, mostly older generation, whatever. They hate NOAA. They hate the scientists. They hate the research people. But I don't. I want fish. I want there to still be fish. There should be regulations. Is it as bad as NOAA says it is? No. They're overdoing it a little too much. The purpose of their company, or whatever it's called, is to stabilize our fishing, because I want to fish for another twenty years. I want to stay in this business. Like I said, they were really bad in the past, but that was before my time. You know what? I'm making money. They don't bother me at all. The observers don't bother me. They're giving quota back. As long as they keep giving quota back. You can't just put people out of business. You can't just tell somebody that's been fishing for forty years that they can't catch fish anymore. I don't like that. But I do think we should save what fish we have left in the ocean, and at least let them reproduce more. I want there to be more fish. I don't think it's as bad as they say it is. I think if you're going to take quota from fishermen or tell them they can't go fishing, the government should compensate them for it. Don't just let people go hungry. I do support. I don't. You know. Yeah. Mixed feelings. But I think I'm a little more understanding than the older people.

[58:06]

SS: Is that a generational thing? Or just a personal difference?

LR: When people have been doing it for forty years, that have been fishing, making a lot of money, when there were a lot of boats, a lot of market, and NOAA started putting in all these restrictions. There used to be a hundred boats in Gloucester. Now there's what? Ten? Twelve? Not many. They watched NOAA kill their industry. Put restrictions. Get them in trouble. Give them fines. So yeah, they're probably going to hate them a lot more than me, where I just started seven years ago. It was already crap when I started, because that's when they cut everything: the cod, the flounders. Even on the Trish, which was a highline boat, my second year, we were scraping to get by. My dad has multiple permits, and we were still struggling. Imagine a little boat with one permit, how they were doing. I don't agree with putting people to that state. A lot of people had to sell out, because they couldn't make it. Joe had to leave his father because him and his father couldn't work together. Then, you had a hundred boats out there pounding the fish. Now, there's ten. We're not overfishing anymore. Give us a break. Give us some fish back. Give us some boats back. Give us some permits. Maybe if a young captain like me, if you give me some permits or some boats, maybe I can get some young kids into the industry. I don't think it's overfished anymore. I think they should give more back to the fisherman.

SS: How could they do that?

[59:50]

LR: I like Alaska, because you can only own one boat and one permit. It's not like a company can buy twenty boats and twenty permits. Everybody owns their own little business. Where here, Blue Harvest just bought five boats, where you work for that company. I think it would be better if the city would give you a permit. You give everybody a permit, and a boat, or you

buy your own boat or whatever. The state gives you a permit, and that permit allows you to go fishing, like Alaska. If you don't fish your permit for five years, you lose it. Somebody else would have the opportunity to buy the permit and go fishing. If you want to own a fishing permit, you should be fishing. You shouldn't be able to own ten permits and ten boats. You know what I'm saying? If you want to be fishing, you should have your own boat and your own permit. I don't think there should be one person owning ten permits and then renting it and leasing it to people. Because sometimes you lease the fish for a dollar and you sell it for a dollar and twenty cents. You don't make any money off of these fish.

SS: If there were more owner-operator fisheries, do you think it would be more attractive for young people to get into?

[61:20]

[phone call interruption]

[62:12]

LR: Yeah, I think every young man wants to own his own business. If the state or the federal or whatever gave you the permit or the opportunity, that would make someone, "Oh, I can be my own captain? I can own my own boat?" Maybe they'll get a small boat and a permit, do good, buy a bigger boat, buy a bigger permit. I don't know. That's just one idea.

SS: But you're working for a company that has multiple boats and permits.

LR: They own all the permits. They own all the boats. You can't customize your boat unless you ask them. Where if it's your boat, you can put the table over here, the cutting machine over here, or you can wind up your net like this or like that.

SS: Do you think that takes away some of the appeal?

LR: Yeah. I feel like most people would want to be successful in owning their own business. A lot of people don't want to work for big companies, I guess. A big company would be better if they offered fishermen benefits, but they don't. So what's the difference? I think fishing is going to come back, and is going to come back hard. I think there's going to be way more fish than boats real soon. Like I said, there were a hundred boats in Maine, a hundred boats in Mass, a hundred boats in New Bedford. Now, the fleet's completely depleted and there's more fish. So if there were a hundred boats then, there's definitely going to be plenty of fish when there's thirty boats. I think it's going to come back, and when it does, are these big companies, are the permits they already own, are they just going to have unbelievable quota? Or are they going to give permits and quota to the normal, middle-class people to start their own thing? They did the buyout, when they bought everything from us. What if they gave permits and boats back to us? If there is fish and there is money to be made, why not?

SS: It's an interesting suggestion. Are there other things you can think of, such as policies or things that others can do, to try to support the next generation?

[64:55]

LR: One theory would be, we try so hard to provide quality fish, and we're not getting the price for it. In Alaska, if you have an RSW system, if you chill your fish, they give you twenty cents. If you flood your fish hold, if the fish are floating and not compact or whatever, they give you another five cents. They compensate you. They reward you when you take care of your fish. Here, on the Trish, we bought vats. We put the fish seven hundred pounds in a vat, instead of ten thousand pound pens. We have slurry ice, slush ice, to make the fish look good. My dad spent millions of dollars on cutting machines, ice machines, and vats, to bring up the quality of his fish, to get a good price. But we're still getting the same price as Joe Shmoe, who's taking out shitty fish. If the buyers or the auction or somebody could compensate us, if "Hey, if you have a refrigeration system, ice machines, cutting machines, if you're getting the fish off deck really fast, take care of the fish, you should be compensated for it," that would make more people want to provide quality fish. If people don't care because they're not paying correct, they're just going to throw the fish in the pen, a couple chunks of ice, and that's what you're going to get. I feel like "Why are we putting all this money into our boats and into our equipment, if we're not getting paid for it?" Ninety percent is fishing. It's literally fishing. You don't know whether or not you're going to catch fish, and if you do catch fish, you don't know what you're going to get paid for them. You're rolling the dice twice just to make a paycheck. What would help the young people, or any people, get back into this industry is to let them know what they're going to make when they get home. "Haddock is this price. Redfish is this price. Pollock is this price." Or at least a minimum price. That would get more people into it. Once you got more people into it, then you could teach them and get the rotating crews. Also, if they paid for it, why don't all the boats get vats now, all the boats get cutting machines, all the boats get refrigeration? If all the boats provided quality, would the people pay for them? I don't know. Could we come to a deal or work something out? Some companies in Alaska, they'll buy you the refrigeration system. You're supposed to get twenty cents a pound if you have the refrigeration system, but instead, you just get ten cents and the company will take ten cents, until the reefer is paid off. They want quality. The people in Alaska, they'll help you. They'll reward you for the refrigerated fish. They'll give you a reefer system or just take half of the reefer system and just take half the reefer price. If people were like that here, it would be better. Here, they penalize you. They punish you. The last trip, or one of the last two trips, I provided the best quality fish—ninety-six thousand pounds of high quality fish. I think maybe three individual fish out of the ninety-six thousand might have been a slight cut or smushed. Something happened. It was probably from the auction handling the fish. "Oh, look at this fish." I try really hard to provide quality fish. They complained about it and said the kids weren't putting the fish the right way. "Ok, I'll do it. I know it's going to be done right if I do it." I did it. They still complained. They still sent pictures. I know that fish is good. They just kept complaining to try to pay you the lowest possible price. They don't reward you at all. They try to find anything wrong with the fish. "Oh there's a gut. There's a liver. Markdown. Markdown." They're nasty here when it comes to that stuff. They're not very helpful. Nobody's working together here. NOAA's not working with the fishermen. The fishermen aren't working with the buyers. The buyers aren't working with the auction people. Where I feel like Alaska, the fishermen are part of a committee where they'll listen to you. I'm not part of any of it, but I should be, up in Alaska. There's lots of things to be involved with up there. There's lots of things to be involved in here in Gloucester, like my dad was part of a committee. He went to all these meetings. But every time they got home from a meeting, I'm like, "What did you guys get accomplished?" "Nothing." That discouraged everybody.

They went to all these committees in Boston and all these talks, but they were getting nowhere. If no one's talking good about the industry, no one's going to get into this industry. This industry needs to bounce back. We need to make money. There needs to be more fish. There needs to be better buyers. There needs to be a better price. People need to talk good about the industry to get people into the industry. No one's talking that good about it right now. That's probably a huge factor in that, too.

[70:11]

SS: Where do you think the industry is headed in the next ten or twenty years?

LR: It's going to go up, I think. Whoever's left is going to do good. They weaned out whatever they could. I think whatever is left is going to do good. There will be a lot of fish. Right now, what I can see with that [fish buying] company, my dad was going to do some deal with them, because they want a certain amount every week. Fishing, you don't know what you're going to get every week, unless you have multiple boats supplying that. I think the fishing's going to get better because there's going to be more fish. Therefore, there will be more boats providing it, and we'll have more market. There's not much guaranteed fish. There's not a guaranteed market. Then when you ask, they don't give you any answers. "Where does my fish go? Why was it this price? Where does it go? How is your process?" The buyers won't tell you nothing, won't show you nothing. We're kind of cut off. There's really not much communication between anyone or understanding between anyone. Getting a bad price discourages people who have been doing it for a long time. Even people who have been into it are like, "Fuck this shit. I'm sick of the buyers. I'm sick of getting ripped off and working my ass off. I'm selling everything." That's another reason. Kids hear those stories, and, "Why am I going to get into that industry, after that guy just quit after thirty years of being in it?" I do see it going to get better, just because there's going to be more fish and hopefully more market. I hope it's going to get better.

[72:12]

SS: I think you said earlier that you tend not to plan too far down the road, but what's your best guess as to what your own life will be like in ten or fifteen years?

LR: My best guess is I'd like to take over my dad's boat, but I like to be in multiple fisheries. I'd like to take over my dad's dragger, get a scallop boat, and get a lobster boat. If dragging goes to shit, I still got scalloping and lobstering. If lobstering goes to shit, I still got scalloping and dragging. I don't want to be in one industry. That's another reason I bought the Alaska gig. You can make a year's pay in a few months in Alaska. It's really, really good. Alaska's so sustainable, because you can't count the fish in the Atlantic Ocean. In Alaska, they count every single salmon that goes up the river. So many salmon have to escape and lay eggs and reproduce before they even start fishing. That's why I bought into Alaska. I know there will always be salmon. I know there will always be Japanese, and the sushi's blowing up, and everybody loves the organic, wild-caught salmon. Nobody really wants that farmed crap any more. When I bought in, I had all that in my head, when I was buying a business. I knew salmon was going to be sustainable. I bought in when we weren't doing very good dragging. Me and my dad got to a point where we were like, "I don't know if we're going to make it this year." My dad was like, "I think it was a really good idea you bought that boat in Alaska, in case this one goes down the hole." Luckily, it didn't. My dad bounced back and we did



really good on the Trish. That's why in ten or fifteen years, I want to see myself owning multiple boats in multiple different fisheries. In case one goes bad, at least I got three or four to fall back on. I don't plan on leaving the ocean at all. I'm really good at deck designs and stuff. On the TM IV, they were averaging two thousand pounds an hour. Now, we're doing about five thousand pounds an hour because I kind of made the system the same as the Trish. On the Trish, we're fast, fast, fast. We got to get things done. Also, I wouldn't mind designing my own boat, too. Get it the way I want it. The way I think is very different from the way my dad thinks and the older generation—not just my dad, but the whole older generation of captains. They have one style of fishing. They don't like change. They've been doing something so long, for forty years, that's how they do it. I'd like to own multiple boats in multiple fisheries and design them all to my specs.

[75:00]

SS: Do you see that as a feasible thing? There's nothing blocking you from doing that?

LR: Not really. My father said to me, "If you want it, you can have it." The Miss Trish is only a matter of time, if I want it. If I do that, I can have someone run the Trish and I'll go captain another boat. I'd make double the money with that. Then I'd get another boat and another permit, another boat, another permit, and just keep expanding. That's my plan. Will it go that way? I have no idea. I'm just trying to get through this year right now. But I would love to fish different types of fisheries, own and be part of it, and get more people into it. If I can't get young kids into dragging, maybe I can get them into scalloping or lobstering.

SS: What would your pitch be to a person who's thinking about trying fishing, to try to reel them in? What's great about it?

[76:04]

LR: What's great? I'd tell them the feeling of getting a big catch is satisfying. Loading up the deck. The money. It's what you put into it. I'd tell the kids, "If you're going to work hard and you put it all into it, you're going to get paid for it." It really depends on the person. If he's an adrenaline junkie and he likes sailing the seas, crashing through waves, pulling up big bags of fish, running around fixing things on deck, mending nets—if that sounds appealing to a person. Then you get the big paycheck at the end. A group of guys will always try to get a young guy into it, and we'll tell them cool stories. Then you got those old grouchy people who will say bad things and try to get them out. I would tell them, the only way I could really, if I were to go up to someone right now and try to get them to go fishing, "Look. The money's good. The money's great. Just come check it out and see if you like it." I'd tell them the money is good. What else would you say, really?

[77:32]

SS: For you, what's the most important part of it? Why do you want to dedicate your life to the water?

LR: It's for competitive people, mostly. You're out there fishing to make money, but you're also trying to make more than the guy next to you. I'll call Tommy. "How much did you catch?" "How much did you catch?" See who got the bigger number. It's a game. That's why

I like it. I like to see how fast I can get my crew to work. How much fish can I get down the hold? How fast can I fill my boat and how much money can I stock, compared to the other four boats in the fleet? That's what I like. I like smoking the other guys. That's why I like fishing. People come on the boat. Deckhands come on and they're like, "Lenny's a really good captain, a really good guy. He knows the stuff." That'll get my name out there, people talking good about me. It makes me feel good. I like fishing because once in a while, there are a couple kids who want to learn and want to do good. For those one or two kids who want to learn, I want to help them. Yeah, that's probably one of the biggest reasons I want to stay in it, is to get the young kids back into it, or keep the few that are still here in it. Because there's a few times when young kids have asked me for advice, or they've stayed out at the boat to work. That was a good feeling—sharing knowledge. Like I said, my father's generation—people my father's age or older—I'm mad at them, because they held back a lot of knowledge from the younger people. They called the younger kids "stupid." "They're not stupid. You guys never taught them anything. You can't just throw somebody on something and expect them to learn. It took you guys thirty years to get to this spot. It's going to take them a little time." I want to stay in this industry so I can share my knowledge with the younger people.

[79:49]

SS: It seems like you and Tommy are some of the only sons and grandsons of Gloucester fishermen in your generation who are still fishing.

LR: Yeah.

SS: What became of everyone else who came from a fishing family around here? What are they doing now?

LR: I don't even know what they're doing, really. Busty Noto, I don't know if his son's still fishing. He was fishing on and off. I don't know if he got into it. Captain Domenic had a son my age. What's he doing? I don't know. [content redacted] Me and Tommy. I really don't know anybody else, to be honest with you, besides those three in Maine. Have you gone up to Maine yet?

SS: I did, but I've only talked with lobstermen. Is there anything else you'd like to add that we haven't covered yet?

[81:28]

LR: Not really. That was pretty much my life story. I really can't think of anything else to say, except I really hope it gets better. I'd like to keep doing it. I actually think that net mending class, stuff like that, is what we need. But that's that guy Joe taking his own personal time to go do that. Probably his own money too. You know what I'm saying? Stuff like that would get young people into this industry. Net mending class. I would want to do that. I would love to stretch some net out and teach some kids how to mend, or have a bunch of old parts of pumps or engines, and teach them how to take it apart and put it back together. But I can't do that and make a living. I think maybe all these old, retired fishermen got to get out of their seats and start teaching these young kids some things. That would be the only way to save it. What's the net mending quote they got there? "It takes a village to raise a

fisherman?" Tell those old guys to get out of the Saint Peter's Club and start teaching young kids. Fold your cards. Put down your beer. Go share your knowledge. They go there every day and do nothing.

SS: Is that the place right across the street?

LR: Yeah, it's where all the Italian guys hang out, all the old-time fishermen. They sit there and talk about their glory days. How much fish they caught, how fast they could cut, how fast they could mend. People like that. Actually, everybody in that place should be at that net mending class. They complain about there's no young kids in the industry, but they're not doing anything about it. They just sit there, have your beer, and complain about it. "Get off your ass. You see a kid who wants to learn? Teach them." They think nobody wants to learn, but not many people want to teach, either. That's all I have to say.

SS: Ok, if that's all you have to say, I'll go ahead and shut this off and we'll consider it done. Thank you.

[84:00]

[end of interview]