

Interview with Tori Thomas, commercial fisherman

Occupation: commercial fisherman

Port Community: Point Judith, Rhode Island

Interviewer: Sarah Schumann

Date and year: October 23, 2020

Location: Narragansett, Rhode Island

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. Today is October 23, 2020. I'm in Narragansett, Rhode Island. Could you please state your name?

Tori Thomas [TT]: Tori Thomas.

SS: Tori, what is your occupation?

TT: I'm a commercial fisherman.

SS: Do you have a specific home port?

TT: Yes. Point Judith, Rhode Island.

SS: Do you have a specific vessel that you work on?

TT: Yes. Primarily the Brooke Elise.

SS: Two more questions. How old are you?

TT: I'm twenty-nine.

SS: What is your education level?

TT: I have a bachelor's degree in environmental policy with a focus in fisheries economics.

SS: That's it for the biographical questions that I wanted to go over before we get going. As I mentioned, the purpose of the interview is to share your story to let people get to know you as a fisherman and reflect on your career. Where would you like to begin?

TT: Probably 2013, when I completed my undergrad and I began working as an at-sea biologist for a contracting company called MRAG Americas, with the observer program. Prior to that, I had been living inland for the most part. I had done some research down in southern Alabama and took some courses in ichthyology and coastal wetlands ecology, everything that's kind of tied together. I knew I wanted to be on the water. I wasn't sure what aspect that would be. This job was my first "big-girl" job, my first adult job where I had a lot of freedom. I had opportunities to work as much or work as little [as I wanted]. Once I started working on fishing boats, it just kind of clicked for me. I was really unaware of the commercial fishing industry. I was brand new. Super green. There was a huge learning curve. Throughout my observer career, I had a lot of really positive experiences. And then I had a small amount of negative occurrences and experiences. It all pretty much stemmed from the resistance that fishermen had towards the program. I wanted to understand why. Why is it that before I even get on the boat, my position is pre-determined to these guys? It was really frustrating. I was like, "We're all here to do the same thing, essentially. Your job is different than my job. But we're here for the common goal: to make sure that sustainability can be a goal when targeting certain species and different fisheries."

[03:43]

TT: After three years of working with that company, there were things that I just didn't agree with. I don't know if it would be considered the management side, but for the most part, when they started proposing that the industry had to provide the funding for the observer program, that was something that I just could not get on board on. I couldn't get on board for that, per se, only because I had seen and worked alongside these guys. Nobody else is doing what these people are doing, trying to provide the healthiest and freshest seafood. I just didn't agree with it, and so I quit. I quit observing, and I was like, "Oh man, I'll probably never get on another fishing boat again." I was really sad about that, because I had developed relationships with all these fishermen. I had developed friendships through this. I could go to different ports all along the East Coast and know people. For that part of my life to be over, I was pretty sad about that. I wasn't ready to let it go. I moved back inland, and I hated it. I hated it. I was job searching. I was trying to find something where I could utilize my at-sea experience and really get what I needed and feel fulfilled.

[05:30]

TT: Out of the blue, in 2017, one of my girlfriends called me who had started fishing. She had a similar situation where she was an observer, worked for the company, got tired of the company, and then completely liberated herself by becoming a deckhand on the fishing boats. She called me and she was like, "What are you doing?" I was like, "Nothing! I essentially hate my life. I just feel like I'm underutilized potential and I'm wasting away." She said, "Come fishing." I was like, "Ok! I'm going to." This was in February 2017. My first trip was on the Brooke Elise. The captain really took the time to explain things to me that I had seen as an observer, but handling gear, handling catch – it's black and white from observer position to transitioning deckhand. There's just much more responsibility as a deckhand. Especially maintaining the integrity of the vessel. I started, and I felt strong. I finally felt like I was fulfilling this purpose of getting back into it, but having so much freedom. Not having to send land texts, having to submit piles of paperwork in a short time frame. I could just *be*. I could process the catch and enjoy being out there, without – not without having any responsibility at the end of the day, but just kind of feeling *free*. I worked on the Brooke Elise

consistently for two years. I also do other contracted biologist work for the Virginia Institute of Marine Science. Usually when the season slows down about May, I'll go down to Seaford, Virginia and do these sea scallop surveys. It's really fulfilling work. It's also really nice too, because I go from being a deckhand and having all that responsibility, to being a contracted biologist where everything is going on around me, and I just have to focus on my certain tasks at hand. Right now, I get the best of both worlds. I get to utilize my on-deck experience and actively fish, and then I can utilize my education background and be a contracted biologist.

[08:45]

TT: So many people that have come from the observer program shun me a little bit, because they're just like, "Why are you willingly putting yourself in danger, in an industry where the presence of women is like—?" How many of us women deckhands are there down in Point Judith? I could probably count on one hand. For me, I wanted to make a decision involving my time and energy that was non-traditional. Once you are out there, you develop such a deep connection to the water, to the weather, to the seasonal changes, to fish that you see during certain times of the year, seeing something new, seeing a sunrise or a sunset, or just working yourself to your absolute physical limit. It's like, anything in this life is going to kill you. You might as well do something where you wake up and it's not the same thing every day. When you're hauling back the net, you don't know what's going to be on the other end. That concept really enamors me. And yeah, it's dangerous, and yeah there are some negative occurrences, especially being in a male-dominated industry. But it is what you make it. If you're able to develop boundaries, learn on the fly, and be versatile, you're limitless in what you can accomplish as a deckhand here. I describe it sometimes as a love-hate. On the best days, it's like this: flat calm, sun coming down on you, you're getting your limits, you're getting nice quality fish that eventually someone else is going to consume. And it's thankless work. It really is. But I, right now, can't see myself doing something else. As challenging as it is, it's really rewarding to my soul to have such a connection with a natural resource and good-quality seafood. Obviously, I feel like maybe I can't be a deckhand forever. But right now, what better way to understand what's going on out there, than to be fully immersed in it? So that's kind of where I'm at right now.

[12:08]

SS: The Brooke Elise is a dragger?

TT: Yes.

SS: And the season, it sounded like it was more in the wintertime?

TT: It's all year. It's all year.

SS: What are you fishing for?

TT: Right now, we are targeting whiting. But in Rhode Island, I feel like for most boats with the multi-species permits, there's not just one thing. You can target one thing, but you're going to catch like everything, for the most part. Anything that you can keep that's of size, in season, within regulation, that's what we target. It's like whenever my mom asks me, "What

did you catch today?” “Well, there’s like nine different species that we caught today.” That’s how it is. Yeah, we want to target things that are more profitable, where the prices are high. But we don’t have the luxury of knowing those things and being able to execute that.

[13:24]

SS: Are you doing state waters or federal waters or both?

TT: Both. I think it’s more of the state waters in the summertime when the squid move inshore. But it’s federal. A large majority of our time is spent offshore.

SS: Are they still day trips or are you going on longer trips?

TT: Right now, we’re doing day trips. On average, a two to three hour steam out to the fishing grounds. We’ll leave at like three o’clock in the morning. We’re at the boat at three. We’re in by noon or one most days, if all goes as planned—sometimes later, sometimes earlier.

SS: You said that there were some negatives to being in a male dominated industry, and that there aren’t that many women in fishing. Do you want to say more about that?

TT: Yeah, I mean obviously I come from a strong feminist background. But my version of being a feminist is more on the strategic side of it. I know what battles I can fight, and I know what battles are not worth investing my time in. For the most part, what I’ve experienced is when I first started walking around the Point and looking for work, I got a lot of sideways glances. I got a lot of assumptions like, “Oh, it’s just an observer.” And I was like, “No, I’m actually not an observer anymore. I want to get this real-life experience by working alongside these guys.” It really shouldn’t matter what’s between your legs, per se. If you’re available and consistent and able to do the work, none of that should matter. But it’s like, some men are very simple, where they just see a woman and they’re like, “You’re an accessory. You don’t belong out there. You belong maintaining the home. Why don’t you have a husband? Why don’t you have kids? Realizing that you’re not going to be able to change those types of people’s mindsets. They’re going to talk about you if you’re doing good. They’re going to talk about you if you’re doing bad. As long as you maintain those boundaries and know what you’re capable of, as far as your work ethic goes, it really shouldn’t matter if you’re a man or a woman. Some guys are just like, “Yeah! I’ll take a girl on my boat any day! Any day!” I’m like, “But are you just taking me on your boat because you want to be seen with me on the boat? Or are you willing to give me a chance because I want to work hard, because I want to represent the female population?” You know what I mean? I just want to be a good representation of what women can achieve out there. And sure, there’s times when I’m not strong enough to do things and I need assistance, but a lot of the times, some of those guys aren’t even strong enough to do that. I find that I have to have this balance, where I can compensate for what I can’t do with what I can do instead. The problem, I feel, really has revolved around this generational mindset of what and where women belong. Or so they say. I’ve met plenty of fishermen where their wives fish alongside them. Or they’ve had women deckhands and their wives allowed that. And then there’s some women, where no other woman that’s going to be on that boat. Or there’s no women allowed on there. And I get it. That’s where I said, I know where to pick my battles. Fortunately, I don’t experience that much anymore. Yes, I’m a woman—but my work speaks

for itself. It's genderless. There's no gender being placed on it. It's really just about representing yourself through your work. They can say whatever they want. Anyone can say whatever they want. But at the end of the day, if you're getting it done, you have a positive mental attitude, you're being safe, there's respect among the crew, then it doesn't matter if you're a man or a woman. It shouldn't. But that's in a perfect world [laughter].

[19:03]

SS: You had said something about feeling like you were fulfilling your purpose, that when you went back inland you didn't feel like you were fulfilling your purpose.

TT: No.

SS: I'm curious, how would you describe that purpose and how long have you had the feeling?

TT: I just knew that I needed to be connected to something. In order for me to provide my best work and put my best foot forward, I needed to feel a sense of connection. Working on the water provided me that connection. I think that throughout our life, our purpose changes. Adapting to the person we want to be, our purpose changes. Moving forward and looking back, telling future generations that you were out there doing everything that most women don't get the opportunity to do—and it's like, they can! We can! I think part of being fulfilled and feeling fulfilled is knowing that you're doing something different than the regular late twenties-early thirties woman. If you think about it, most people are married and have families in their late twenties. I never felt myself being complete with that. I wanted to have the freedom to work anywhere. Once you get a sense of direction and duties that happen on the vessel, you can work anywhere at any port on any boat. I mean, I would never work on a lobster boat or a crab boat or anything like that. But I'd work on another dragger. I'd work on another gillnetter. I think there's a lot of self-doubt that's instilled in us sometimes, especially as a woman. Like, "You can't do that. Look at your hands. Your hands are too small. You can't, you know." And it's like, "Actually, yes, I can. You just have never *seen* somebody do that. Therefore, you have nothing to go off of." I'll never live inland again. I realized what I was compromising—the part of myself I was compromising when I moved inland. I didn't realize how big of a piece it was, until I was there, until I felt stuck, until I felt like, "Oh gosh, this does not cater to who I am in the slightest." It took a lot of pondering and a lot of apprehension to get past, in order to fully decide to immerse myself in the fishing industry. But since I've made that decision, it's like, it is what I make of it. If it's bad, it can be bad. But I like to focus more on the positive experiences that I have, which outweigh the bad any day of the week.

[23:06]

SS: It sounds like you have sort of as leg in two different communities. You were an observer and you have a bachelor's degree in environmental policy. And at least in the observer community, that a lot of people didn't understand why you would jump ship and become a deckhand. But you also mentioned, even back when you were an observer, forming those relationships and friendships with the fishing community. I'm curious about how you perceive those two different types of relationships with these people. Do you feel different about each of them and around them?

TT: Yes. Oh, yes. I always felt different, even as the observer on the boat. Not that I sympathized with fishermen, but I just realized that these guys work so hard. These men and women work so hard. There's no guarantee. There's no guarantee of a paycheck or you coming back in one piece. And it's like, when I was seen as the enemy on the boat, that killed me. That really killed me. I was just like, "No! I'm here as an extra set of hands." I wanted them to be able to trust me as much as I trusted them. The day trips were kind of different. You get on the boat, you get off the boat, and you never see these people again for the most part. But when I did long offshore trips, the level of uncertainty in the beginning of the trip versus the friendship at the end of the trip, I was like, "Wow, if I was just a deckhand, that relationship would be instant. There wouldn't be this doubt. There wouldn't be this abrasiveness between us. It is tough. I have a lot of friends who are still within the fisheries management and observer program, and all throughout that construct. I definitely censor myself around them, because their perception of fishermen is not great. I'm not saying it's not justified. I've met plenty of pieces of shit. Plenty—fishermen and non-fishermen. But because the community is so close-knit and everybody knows everybody, they're able to form these judgments upon it from an outsider point of view. You're not really getting to know somebody when you're a stranger as an observer on the boat. You're not. You're not getting those guys' best selves, and they're not getting your best self. I think a lot of judgment is formed without fully understanding. The responsibility of being a boat owner or captain, and then managing your crew and maintaining a crew and maintaining the integrity of the vessel. I felt like I was just more blue-collar in that sense. I couldn't sit behind a desk for eight hours a day. I couldn't crunch numbers. I'd rather crank wrenches and learn the mechanical aspect and the process of everything that goes on within the industry. I've done shoreside, like boat maintenance and stuff like that. It's just full circle. Getting on the boat, bringing in the catch, doing everything that's expected of you—it's full circle. The way I describe it, I am on either side of the fence. I do understand the necessity for management. Do I agree with the process in which they make these regulations? Not necessarily, but that's because I don't fully understand it. The same way that the people crunching numbers don't fully understand what it's like being out there and being at the mercy of Mother Nature. I've lived in Rhode Island for a couple of years now, and I don't have many friends. I'm ok with that. Because people who don't understand fishing will never understand fishing unless they're doing it. They can hear stories. But the truth is, they'll never understand until they're out there. Then the people that were past observers and stuff, some of them have such a negative disposition towards it. And I understand. But it's like, we're constantly faced with things that we don't like. We're constantly faced with things that we have to do that we don't necessarily want to do. But it's like, what silver lining can you find in that situation? Do I like to go out and have a good time? Yes. But my vices do not throw me off balance. Fisherman like to drink, they like to party, they like to have a good time. But not all of us are like that. Some of us can maintain that, can work hard and play hard without disrupting our wellbeing. I get two reactions when I tell people I'm a fisherman. Two reactions. They're like, "Oh man! That is so cool! You're out there. Is it like *Deadliest Catch*? Is it like *Wicked Tuna*?" And I'm like, "No, it's not. It's different." And then some people are like, "Oh, why are you doing *that*? You're not going to climb the ladder. What, are you going to run the boat? It's a dying industry." Then it's like, "Shut up. What do you do with *your* time?" The people who make these judgments are crunching numbers or on the computer nine hours out of the day. It's like, "You've lost touch with reality. There are plenty of negative things about your job where I'm not like, 'Oh, you do *that*? You're not utilizing your degree.'" "You're wasting your

potential by putting yourself in such a compromising and nonprogressive industry.” It’s like, “No, I’m not. That’s just you projecting your thought upon it.”

[30:49]

SS: That’s really interesting, that people feel the liberty to comment on your career choice like that even when they know nothing about it.

TT: Right?! Yeah.

SS: Tell me about your family and your upbringing. Where did you grow up?

TT: I grew up in Poughkeepsie, New York, which is smack dab in the middle. There’s Albany, there’s New York City, and then there’s Poughkeepsie. We vacationed a lot on the water. I just knew from a young age that the ocean was something that was a part of me. That’s the kicker. I didn’t grow up in a fishing family, besides rod and reel and freshwater pleasure fishing. Also, I’m allergic to shellfish. I didn’t really have the opportunity to have that influence and know what it was about until I did my undergrad. What really was my deciding factor was this ichthyology course that I took at Dauphin Island Sea Lab, on Dauphin Island. Our class was going out on this little dragger, towing and doing a complete species inventory. I was like, “Woah! This is by far the coolest shit I’ve ever done in academia.” I was like, “I want to do this. I want to know what inner workings and what things make the industry tick.” But my upbringing had no influence on that. It’s just like once I was in, I was hooked. I was “hooked” [laughter].

[32:55]

SS: Where did you do your undergrad?

TT: I went to a small private school in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania. I was an athlete, so I did not necessarily rely on my grades to get me into college. I played softball. That’s how I had gotten into school. It was my junior year where I was struggling academically. I was struggling physically with injuries from playing softball. My coach could see me suffering. She knew. I’d show up late to practice because my animal behavior fieldwork class ran late. We were catching butterflies. We were monitoring raptor migration. She knew how that stuff lit my passion. She was like, “Well, my sister is finishing her thesis studying this peninsula in southern Alabama, where the eastern portion of the peninsula was touched by the BP oil spill and the western side wasn’t.” She was like, “You need to go down there and work with her. This is something where you’re going to love it, you’re going to get your hands dirty, and you’re going to be in that environment wholly.” I drove down there, we met, we really hit it off, and then she became an observer, got me an observer job, she met her husband on an observer job, and they got married and have a family and just have this beautiful life. If it wasn’t for her being out there, none of that would have happened. Nobody in my family fishes. Nobody. Even in my extended family, nobody is a commercial fisherman. I just kind of saw the road less traveled, and I was like, “I’m going to go that way.”

[35:09]

SS: What does your family think about your career choice?

TT: They worry a lot [laughter]. They worry a lot, but they respect the fact and they trust my instincts. They know now that if I don't feel comfortable on a boat, I'm not going on that boat. If the weather's bad, I trust that my captain is able to make the decision to go or not go with the best interests of his crew in mind. And they know I can stand my ground if I'm experiencing confrontation. But they worry a lot. I actually told my mom about Vessel Finder this past year, and she tracks me now. But before, I'm kind of glad that she didn't know about it, because there would be trips where I didn't know when I was coming in and I didn't want them to worry more than they already did. They are proud of me. I have an older sister who is in a male-dominated field as well, so her and I can really connect on our experiences and provide the best unsolicited, solid advice with anything. Then my middle sister was in the military. We all kind of chose non-traditional occupations that really help challenge us, but also help shape us into being stronger women.

[37:03]

SS: You said you probably couldn't be a deckhand forever. Where do you see your future?

TT: My ideal occupation would involve cooperative research, working with and for the industry, because these communities are unmatched in what they bring forth to the world. I feel like they're really undervalued. People don't have connection to their seafood. Not everyone—there's definitely people that I educate. Like I'll come over with some fillets, and they're like, "What is that?" I'll give them the rundown—the biology of it, what behavior these fish have. They're like, "Oh my gosh. I never knew that!" I'm like, "Well, where are you getting your seafood from?" "Oh, you know, it's something frozen." "Do you know how close you live to one of the most bountiful ports? Why are you getting frozen fish from the West Coast when you could be going to the dock or going to a fish market on site and getting something that has had less time from boat to table than whatever flash frozen bullshit that you're convincing yourself you're getting nutrition from?" I forget what you asked me.

SS: Future plans.

TT: I would love to do cooperative research. I would love nothing more. Building a relationship with these fishermen is how you're going to soak in their knowledge. I remember when I went through training as an observer. It was very by the book. It was very protocol-this, protocol-that. You needed to do this without questioning, da-da-da-da. I'm like, "No, that's so mechanical." These guys *know* the water. They'll target things based on the wind direction. What better way to understand it? I ask questions constantly. I'm like, "Why are you doing it this way? Why are you setting this much wire? Why are we adjusting the net in this way?" I want to know, because it is a science. It is a science. There's a knowing that these guys just have. It's like an instinctual understanding. I feel like it's so misunderstood in the policy and regulatory realm. Ideally, I want to bridge that gap. I want to bridge that gap, because we want healthy fish stocks. We all want that. Not just for the biodiversity, but for the economical sense of it as well. Do I agree that fish are just dollar signs for me? Absolutely not. But does it pay my bills? Yes. I don't know. I just feel like there's so much resistance between science and industry, and it just stems from either side being misunderstood, but not being willing to bend and see each entity's perspective. Do I expect to make giant strides in this community? No. But I think small victories are much more ideal. CFRF is a wonderful nonprofit program that I would love nothing more than to

get involved, because I know most of these guys [editor's note: CFRF is the Commercial Fisheries Research Foundation]. I feel like they would listen to someone like me or you, because you are out there. It's not like, "I've got my science degree, and I've just been doing analytics and reading graphs about fish populations." Yeah, I can be nerdy. I can nerd out on some fish stuff, but I'm ideal. I have a realistic understanding of the industry that's not one-sided. It's multisided. I just want to utilize both my biological sense and industry sense. It sounds so simple, but it's so complex. I know eventually that I'll find my niche. I know eventually that if I was to find a more sedentary, land-based job, that I could call one of these guys and be like, "Hey, I just need to go fishing. I need the fix. I need to just work with my hands and not think," and they would be like, "Absolutely. Absolutely." It's also this pressure to be professional, but it's like, I am! Everything I do. I want to bridge that gap. There's no reason that we shouldn't be working collectively to ensure the health of our oceans.

[44:10]

SS: Earlier you said that some people in your peer group outside of fisheries see fishing as a dying industry.

TT: Yeah.

SS: What is your take on it? Where do you see the industry going, and what do you say to them?

TT: There's going to be transitional shifts all throughout. These guys are getting old. As far as prospects for continuing this generation, I don't know many young fishermen, and the young fishermen that I know have problems. A hard-working, motivated, goal-driven person is usually hard to come by in this field. It's a very high-turnover, constantly revolving crew—people in and out, people that disappear and come back in the wood work. The consistency is just not there, which is unfortunate because you really can make something of yourself out there. You can really provide yourself a comfortable life. It's all determined by how bad you want it. Most of the fishermen I know are in their sixties. They're getting up there. It's like, this is it. Once they decide to stop fishing, they sell their boat. There's not this continuum of someone else that's going to run it. That's just the way it is. And too, that's due in part to how hard regulation has come down on some of these people. I'm not saying—like, regulation was not imposed at a proper time to regulate, let's say, the groundfish. Groundfish was a free for all for a while. There was a lot of fish that their age class was completely wiped out—no room for breeding females, no room for these animals to reach maturity, to ensure their population. All these guys talk about the "glory days." "We filled the boat every day. It was like that every day. We made big, big money. Life was good." But it's like, that's not going to be what happens for years to come. There's going to be a fluctuation. There's going to be fisheries that need to rebound and there's going to be fisheries that in turn thrive. It's hard to say what the future of this industry holds. I think there's a lot of pressure—a *lot* of outside pressure, those wind farms being one of them. There's a lot of people that are—I don't want to say "not rooting for" the industry—but there's not a proper representation and voice for these fishing communities. If you think about it, all these meetings, these seminars. What do they call what they host at the Bay Campus? Fisheries Council meetings [editor's note: the Rhode Island Marine Fisheries Council is an advisory council that holds public meetings at the University of Rhode Island's

Narragansett Bay Campus]. They host it at this day or night or whatever. Most fishermen are fishing every day, weather permitted, waking up at the wee hours of the night, working all day, maybe making paychecks, maybe not making paychecks, maybe getting hurt, maybe exhausting themselves. And then they're being asked to show up to these meetings to fight for their cause. That's asking a lot of somebody, especially having to run their own boat and stuff like that. How are these guys able to make it to these meetings without collapsing from exhaustion or just being so incredibly frustrated because they've been working all day and these people are just reading pamphlets. I don't know. I just feel like in order for the industry to thrive and continue and to be fruitful, there's got to be representation. There's got to be people who are willing to fight for that. Maybe there is, and I'm totally unaware of it, but I feel like it is a dying breed and there is graying of the fleet because these guys don't stop. They don't look up. Their head is down. It's like, that is a choice they make for their livelihood. It's not a question. I don't know. I mean, seafood is such an invaluable resource. Yeah, there's prices placed on fish stocks and different species, but this is *wild caught*. This is not in a pen or on a farm. This is the finest protein source you can get! That's the thing. There are casualties with farming, as far as land degradation, displaced fertilizers, runoff, and everything like that. And there are marine casualties as well. But, it's like, it's *wild caught*. There's no argument in that. I wish more people invested time and thought into that concept. But I think we just live in a convenience-based world, which is sad. I would love nothing more than to get young people into the game, into the fishing game.

[51:32]

SS: What do you think it would take to get more young people in?

TT: I wish I had an answer for that. It has to be an incentive-based opportunity, which is unfortunate, because we go out there knowing that there's no guarantee. Some people can't fathom that idea. They're like, "No, I need to know that I'm making this much at this time, hourly, da-da-da." And it's like, no, we don't have the luxury of that, because we are at the mercy of Mother Nature. I feel like now, Gen-Z—like, we're millennials—and they want instant gratification. And it's like, "You're not going to get that! That's a conditioned thought. You don't need to feel like that." Also too, I feel like most people don't really want to work hard. They're content in doing what they have to do in order to live and survive and afford their lifestyle. Where was I going with this? Yeah, they just fear the unknown so much, the thought of fishing and going out to work for a day with the thought of not getting paid. Or having to do gear work—you don't get paid for gearwork. "What, you don't get paid to work when you're on the boat? What?" I'm like, "No, that's not how it goes. You can have your good days and your bad days." My friends that have moved on from observing, I'm like, "Come fishing. Come. You already know what it's like, and how to handle yourself on a boat." They're like, "No, I can't. I can't." I'm like, "I spent so much time thinking I couldn't do things, and that was just my own negative influence. We can do whatever we want. It's just, how motivated are you?"

[53:57]

SS: Those observers, so you think they're interested in fishing but there's a confidence issue?

TT: Confidence, and most of them are very sensitive [laughter]. They're very sensitive people that can't handle the rawness of the industry. You do see ugly things.

SS: As observers, they were probably on the receiving end of more negativity than they would be as deckhands.

TT: Yeah, that's what I mean. You can—my gosh, look at all these chickadees.

SS: So cute. It's interesting, because one thing I've observed anecdotally in the last five years or so is that the observer program seems to be a really interesting pipeline for young people coming into the fishing industry, and all the ones I know are women. I know three of you who started as observers and wound up as deckhands. That seems to be one of the few viable pipelines for reliable deckhands.

TT: Yes! Exactly. I hate to sound so negative, but that's a really positive thing. That's a really good way to put it. If it wasn't for observing, I would never be here. I wouldn't be here. I don't know where I'd be. I'm grateful for it. As much as I disagreed with the things that I had to do, I wouldn't have gotten to where I was without it. I wouldn't have made these connections without that. It's possible. For me, it made sense. It was like, "Oh, I already know how to be on a boat and do all this. It would just make sense." There's an intimidation factor, too. There's a huge intimidation factor to being a fisherman. It's not for the faint of heart, at all. You got to be willing to roll with the punches and do things that sometimes compromise your safety. But it's like, you're going to experience that in your life. You'd be naïve to think that those instances are not going to occur. I also think that manual labor is a foreign concept for young people too. Everything is computer-based, internet-based. Also too, I live in my own bubble. These people could be out there and I'm just not seeing them.

[57:00]

SS: Would you ever think about becoming a captain or a boat owner?

TT: I do. I think about it a lot. Because I'm accruing so much sea time. I'm accruing so much experience. I would love to work for myself. Part of working for yourself is being disciplined. What's a little overwhelming for me is the sense of responsibility as a boat owner. The responsibilities of everything—maintaining finances, maintaining the boat, maintaining a crew, maintaining your own sanity, maintaining your life while you're gone. I dream of it sometimes, and I'm like, "It would be so great. It would be great to be a lady captain. Few among the thousands." It's just, right now, I enjoy someone else being in control and having their confidence in me to fulfill what they expect of me, but not bearing the full weight of that responsibility.

[58:30]

SS: Is there anything else you want to go over before we wrap it up?

TT: I think we've really covered all bases, for the most part.

SS: Alright. Thank you very much.

TT: Awesome. You're so welcome. I'm glad we got to do this.

SS: You're very passionate, and I loved hearing all the thoughts that were running through your head.

TT: You're so welcome.

[59:01]

[end of interview]