

Interview with Eben Nieuwkerk, commercial fisherman

Occupation: commercial fisherman

Port Community: Portland and Kennebunkport, ME

Interviewer: Sarah Schumann

Date and year: January 28, 2021

Location: online

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]: I just turned the recorder on, so we'll begin. My name is Sarah Schumann, and today is January 28, 2021. We're conducting this call over the internet. Where are you located right now?

Eben Nieuwkerk [EN]: I'm Eben Nieuwkerk, and I live in Wells, Maine.

SS: Great. Eben Nieuwkerk. Wells, Maine. Just turning up the volume. Alright, Eben, what is your occupation?

EN: I'm a groundfisherman-slash-lobsterman. I own two boats. One is homeported in Portland, Maine, and the other one is in Kennebunkport, Maine. I go groundfishing and lobstering, a lot at the same time now. A lot of things have changed over the last couple of years. Bait prices have skyrocketed. I go monkfishing as well, while I'm out there groundfishing. We have specific nets to catch monkfish. When I tail them, I keep the heads for bait for the lobster boats. That makes a really big difference, not spending sixty-three cents a pound for bait. It's crazy, the bait prices now. Ever since I was a kid, I would go groundfishing with my father, and I really enjoyed it. Groundfishing is really neat. You never ever, ever, know, from one day to the next. You could swear you could have a fifteen-thousand-pound day one day, and the next you could have five hundred. The unknown is really interesting. Your [unintelligible] machine can look absolutely great, and you can think for sure you're really going to get them, and you can set it. The unknown is really pretty neat. To try to track the fish, to follow the fish, to try to figure out where they're going, why they're doing what they're doing, is, I find, a lot more challenging. Lobstering, you kind of just set a trap, and over time, you'll catch something. Lobstering is just a very slowed-down pace, versus what groundfishing is. You can pretty well predict what you're going to catch, week after week after week. It's just not as exciting, I guess. I graduated high school a year early to be able to go groundfishing with my father. I was really fortunate. He had a second boat that he was able to offer me to be able to use, so I spent three years as a sternman, and

then he forced me to quit. He forced me to use his other boat. I was actually quite happy going groundfishing, and I didn't want to go lobstering. He made me. He told me I needed my lobster license. At the time, I didn't understand it, but now I'm glad I have it. It's a really handy tool to have. If you don't get your lobster license before you're eighteen, you pretty much won't get it. There's people who have been on there for fifteen years waiting to get it. They're spending half their lives, or their career, waiting to get a license. In my opinion, that's wrong. I think anyone should be able to have it. Anyone should be able to go lobstering or groundfishing, if they want to. Groundfishing's harder, though. By going to the sectors, they made the permits very valuable, and so it costs so, so, so much money to be able to afford to go groundfishing. I have essentially three hundred thousand dollars out, to be able to go groundfishing. If you're not a good lobsterman, and you don't generate a lot of money, you couldn't do it.

[04:07]

EN: On top of that, you have to have a good teacher. My father, I can always call him and ask him, "Hey, where are the fish? What's going on here? I'm doing horrible." To have a backup, a lifeline, where you can essentially tell him what you've been doing and where. He's fished out there for twenty or twenty-five years. Since 1997, he's fished out on New Ledge. You think about, twenty-something years of experience of fishing there, you have reliable information that's not a lie. It makes a big difference to have that. Without that, the way the rules are, and to avoid the codfish, and to spend that money on permits. Then you need a high-caliber boat. You need a boat that's going to hold up to bad weather. You're forced to go trip fishing now, the way the regulations are. It used to be you could go day fishing and you could do good. Now, with the dogfish in the summertime, you can't go summertime gillnetting anymore, groundfishing. The dogfish are a serious problem. If you set out, say one string of nets, you could have fifteen, twenty thousand pounds of dogs. It wouldn't even matter how much you want to pay the crew; they won't go. Or they'll quit after a day. It's too much work, because you don't even get paid for the fish, so you're throwing thousands over the side of the boat. The things are unbelievably rugged. They don't even die. You'd think they'd die from coming up, but they don't.

[05:58]

SS: You said in summertime, the dogfish are a problem, which I understand. I work on a gillnetter too, in the summertime in Point Judith, and I'm familiar with that problem [laughter]. Anyone who works on a gillnetter is. Why does that force you to go trip fishing? I missed that connection there.

EN: In order to be able to catch the groundfish, it's changed. You have to be able to go in the fall, when the water is cold. I don't start groundfishing until the second week of September, and the second week of September is when the weather starts to sour up, so you need a substantial boat. If I wake up in the morning, and all of a sudden, the weather wasn't quite what you thought it was going to be, you can't just be in a thirty-five [foot] Duffy and be fifty, sixty miles offshore. You'll blow the windows out of the boat and you'll rip the wheelhouse off. My gillnetter is a forty-eight-foot boat that weighs fifty-five thousand pounds. It's all from being heavily fiberglassed and designed. It has a wave breaker, half-inch-thick windows. It's designed so that if you wake up in the middle of the night and it's blowing thirty, thirty-five [knots], and it wasn't supposed to be, and you have a ten, twelve-

foot chop on, waves are coming over the bow of the boat into the windows, you've got to have a substantial boat that can take it. My other boat is a forty-two-foot Osmond Beal, and the bow is none too high on it, with glass windows. I know for sure I would have blown the windows out of that boat, multiple times, being in the weather I was in in the larger boat. You get caught in it. You don't know. The weatherman's not always right. He says it's supposed to be this, and then all of a sudden, it's not what he says it was going to be. To steam back and forth, a lot of times, you get the crap beat out of you in some of the weather. You can't just steam fast and cruise along for the day fishing. It's completely changed, for the time of year and your fishing style, this and that, and with observers. I have found with the observers, when I was day fishing, a lot of their goal was to shut the boat down for the day. It was really frustrating. With going trip fishing, it doesn't matter that they say you can't leave the dock and your nets are on the boat. You say, "Ok, well, I'll go and get my stuff and we'll leave this afternoon, then. No big deal." You're not stressed right out. Where you're day fishing, your nets are out there, and they tell you you can't go fishing, well now all of a sudden you got rotten fish in the nets. And then you got another observer, say they looked at the flares wrong. I've had them look at the flares wrong, look at the EPIRB wrong, or something like a sticker—the EPIRB's getting handled every day, so somehow the sticker fell off. You're now not eligible to go because you don't have one stupid little sticker.

[09:02]

SS: That sounds like a hassle.

EN: Yeah. I went to the hundred percent program so I don't have to take observers anymore.

SS: What's the hundred percent program?

EN: The Nature Conservancy paid to have the cameras put on my boat. Every trip I do now is all recorded. The Nature Conservancy essentially, by me not cheating, by me not discarding any fish, like the other people out there that don't run cameras on their boat. They are discarding fish. I am really, really against it. The system that National Marine Fisheries has created forces you to cheat and discard fish. Geoff [editor's note: Geoff Smith is a staff person at The Nature Conservancy Maine Chapter] leases me fish at reasonable costs that allow me to make money on them, and I don't discard the fish. The Nature Conservancy is trying to promote people that are not cheating, make it so you can fish and not have to cheat. There's tons and tons of boats that are discarding so many fish. Like right now, there's a hake shortage, so everyone's discarding hake. All the draggers, they're discarding them right now. It's really too bad. They came from, say, eight hundred feet. They got the bends. Their belly is completely exploded. They're not going to go down. They're going to float on the surface until the seagulls peck the bellies out of them. It's a poor system. The days at sea system worked. I want to say it was because of Carlos Rafael, the Codfather. He was pillaging and stealing hundreds of millions of pounds of cod. It's affected all of us. You think about twenty or thirty eighty-, ninety-foot boats stealing codfish from the ocean. And he had it going straight to the New York market, which is the big money market. Those buyers then didn't need our fish. They're getting it for a way cheaper cost from those big boats. Those buyers would have had to come to the Portland Fish Exchange to buy those fish. Because of him, they didn't. For twenty years, they were trying to figure out a system: "How do we stop him? How do we stop him?" Now we have a different system. It happens to benefit all the big boats. The big boats are now monopolizing the permits, and it's making it really hard for

somebody, say, to buy more cod allocation. If I wanted to buy a permit with good cod allocation on it, it would cost me like 150,000 dollars, to gain like four thousand pounds of cod. It's so hard to pay for that. It doesn't just pay for itself in a year. It would take twenty years to pay off, ten years to pay off the permit, even if you're doing good.

[12: 25]

SS: What permits do you have, and how did you get those permits?

EN: I have the offshore lobster. Both boats have a monkfish D. Both boats have a northeast multispecies permit, but only one of the boats has actual fish allocation. The monkfish fishery is its own fishery, so you're allowed forty days at sea per permit per boat. But you can't lease those days at sea. I can't transfer those days at sea from one boat to another boat. Three years ago, there was a really good tail price. You could make a good living off of just catching monkfish in the summertime. Monkfishing, you're using a large mesh net. You're only doing a twelve-inch mesh net. You might have seen that. A lot of the Rhode Island guys do that. It was a really cool fishery down there for a long time. But now a lot of the prices have kind of flunked out. Do you know the blue label? The certified clean fishing kind of thing?

[13:31]

SS: The MSC? Or something else? The check mark thing?

EN: Yeah. Europe is using that as a tariff to keep our monkfish from going over there, which is really too bad. For say, in England right now, it is, I want to say, equivalent to twenty-one dollars a pound for a monkfish tail. Over here, I would say, on Sunday's auction, it went off at like a dollar-forty a pound. In 2016, we lost Europe as a buyer for our monkfish tails, and it has completely destroyed the tail market. What was a really good fishery—you could make good money on it—has now completely been destroyed, because of the blue label. In order to get blue label certified, it costs a hundred thousand dollars, so it prices all and any small boats out of it. The big boats got the redfish certified, and that's what has kept them going the past few years. But you can get denied, and have spent the hundred thousand dollars. I tried to get the Nature Conservancy to help, but that was a no go. Basically, I'm priced out of it. I bought two of those permits, planning on being able to do that, and now the tail price sucks. It was kind of a bummer. You make an investment, and then some super-rich people make a couple of adjustments and that sucks. I've been trying to fight that tooth and nail, trying to make the monkfish fishery certified and clean, or prove that it is. Because of the whales, they're totally weird about having twelve vertical lines. It's really been too bad. I should have equal opportunity to be allowed my fish go over there. But I don't blame them. They have monkfish over there as well. Their fishermen are making an absolute killing now. It's great for them. Too bad our country doesn't have a good market. It's that no one really eats it here.

[15:27]

SS: You said you've been fighting tooth and nail to try to get ours—

EN: To try and get the monkfish certified, because it is a clean fishery. There is no more plentiful fish in the ocean than the monkfish right now. I could go anywhere off the coast of Maine, and I could catch a monkfish. By using the twelve-inch mesh gear, you don't catch any codfish, other than the really big ones. It's a really clean fishery. My bycatch, I want to say, I'm catching ninety-nine percent what I'm trying to catch. Just monkfish. It's a really clean fishery with no discards. When I run a twelve-inch mesh, you're only catching the big monkfish, too. You're not catching any smalls. I'm not even interested in catching any form of the smalls, at all. It's really nice to fish that way. Then you're not killing any of the babies. You're letting the babies grow up to be big, and then you're getting paid good. The idea is you get paid good for having the big product. Where all the big boats, right now, they lowered the haddock limit to sixteen inches. That's a fish stick! You get a fish stick out of that fillet. Their goal is to catch as many as they can, as fast as they can rejuvenate. That makes it really hard for boats like me. I work off of getting a high price. They work off of absolutely massive volumes of fish. They're getting sixty cents a pound for most of their fish. They'll come in and land a hundred thousand pounds. For me, a dollar a pound average on the auction's a bad price. Typically, I'm looking to get a dollar-fifty to two dollars a pound when I land my fish. I try to come in with a really good product, with all large fish. I'm not a baby killer. I'm not even interested. I won't even fish on small fish. Not even remotely interested. Where those guys, that's what they feed on.

[17:33]

SS: What avenues are you going through to try to get monkfish certified or make the case that it's sustainable?

EN: Since Covid started, I kind of gave up on it. I've been working with Ben and Mary [editor's note: Mary Hudson and Ben Martens are staff people at the Maine Coast Fishermen's Association] and Geoff Smith, and we've been trying and trying and trying. Any avenue we try gets shut down. I put the cameras on the boat so I could have the information and I could show that it is a clean fishery. For the next three years, I'll have all of my monkfishing on camera, to prove. The evidence is there now. Me going monkfishing this fall, and up into this winter, I have it all backed up, so that I can use the evidence in the future when I have a little more time. I've been fishing a lot. With Covid, last summer was really not a lot of fun. I didn't save what I should have. I was very broke, and I was working very hard trying to make five hundred bucks. Oh my God, it sucked. This year, I fished really aggressively. I was on one boat or the other boat five days a week, hauling gear, pretty much in any weather, as long as it wasn't blowing forty. I had the opportunity to be able to make some kind of money, when the fish are there. You can only make the money when the fish are there. Then, Mary and Ben, they started that group there, where they are buying my fish to give to the needy, the homeless. There's a guaranteed two dollars a pound. That was really, really helpful for us. The pollock price is not that sustainable. Say we land thirty thousand pounds, we might only get forty cents a pound for them. They might steal them from you. Mary and Ben created a sustainable market for us, that we're going to get paid two dollars a pound for what we can catch. Even if they only took fifty percent of our catch, it made a really big difference. It took the effort off the auction. It made a really big difference. I started using the monkfish heads this fall. I was tailing my own monkfish and saving the heads. I was catching my own bait all fall for lobstering. Lobstering, the bait has been a really big deal. The price has been down about a dollar from last year. I'm able then to put a lot more bait in my traps, from catching my own. I was saving dogfish, you name it.

Anything that wasn't worth it to sell on the auction floor was going in the bait barrel. I threw almost nothing overboard. That was really pretty neat, to have such a clean, clean—if you think about it, there's no waste. Whatever I can't sell, I throw in the bait barrel, we're bringing it in. We're going to put it in the traps. You're not wasting the fish, then. Any monkfish, say it was on a long set and it died and it wasn't going to be an edible product, we throw it in the bait barrel. With the monkfishing, you fish a lot of times a four- or five-night set. They can live in the nets for quite a few days. Then, when I got out there and I set my nets out, I've got something to do, instead of waiting, twiddling my thumbs. I didn't take many nets. I was only running like thirty-five nets. A lot of times I was coming in with twelve or fifteen drums of bait. It was really successful. By catching my own bait, I could go on a long soak lobstering and I wasn't missing out on anything. I was always on like a week soak for lobstering, and I'd do great with that. I was able to put a lot of bait in the traps, so that it would all stay on.

[21:42]

SS: Lobstering, you said you have an offshore permit. You didn't say anything about a state permit. Do you have that?

EN: I do. I have the state of Maine. That's what I was talking about earlier. My father made me get it. I didn't want it. I didn't want to go lobstering. Lobstering, you have a lot of petty people. They nitpick and they whine and they complain. They're not the same group of people that groundfishermen are. I don't know why it is that you have two completely different groups of people. The groundfishermen, you'll never catch a groundfisherman crying and moaning and being nitpicky, complaining about buoys in a barrel down at the wharf or a couple of traps that you left down there for like a week. Very interesting, the two different groups of people. It's been a really big deal for us. Nobody likes somebody that does well, in the lobstering industry. Anyway, we've had a lot of troubles with lobstermen down at our wharf in Kennebunkport, complaining, calling the town manager about traps being left down there, or a couple of buoys or a barrel of rope, or even lobster crates. I don't get it. Essentially, there's a group of people that butt heads. You got one group of people trying to get the other group of people kicked out of the wharf. Lately, I haven't really enjoyed lobstering, because of the group of people. It's not really that much fun. I've been really enjoying catching the fish, groundfishing, going out for two or three days. I do a little trip, try to catch what I can catch. It's been a lot more fun. The group of people around you, those guys, you work together, because there's so little of us gillnetters left. Brian Pierce with the Gracelyn Jane, we've been working together. Geordie King, down out of Gloucester [on] the Brittany Lynn, we've been working together. You help each other get on the fish. You don't try to backstab each other. There's so few of you left. Are you going to be the last one?

[24:06]

SS: That's interesting. You keep the lobster boat in Kennebunkport and the groundfish—well, you said you have monkfish and groundfish on both boats. What do you do out of Portland?

EN: It has the better permit on it, and it has the offshore lobster, and that boat has my lobster license on it as well. Then the gillnetter is just gillnetting. It's got a monkfish permit as well as the northeast multispecies. I can catch the cod, haddock, pollock, hake.

SS: Do you keep one boat in Portland and one in Kennebunk?

EN I do. I'm not allowed to have two moorings in Kennebunkport, so the Portland boat stays a Portland boat. I've been trying to be able to even swing the boat on my mooring. Essentially, the town made it a rule that I'm not allowed to have a bigger boat than forty-four feet in the river. My other boat's forty-seven or forty-eight. Not much bigger, but rules are rules are rules.

[editor's note: content redacted by narrator]

[25:50]

SS: I'm hearing a lot of cliquishness within the industry that is a factor.

EN: Since I was a kid, I didn't really want to go lobstering. I always really enjoyed going groundfishing with my father. You had none of that, groundfishing. You'd go out there. The guys that make it out there, you can't be [a] nitpicky, petty little crybaby. That's just how it is. If you're that way, you're never, ever, ever going to be able to tolerate the conditions. You must see it. I mean, you've tried going gillnetting. I don't know. So yeah, when I was a kid, we had a fiberglass-over-wood skiff, with like a fifteen-horsepower motor and a small electric motor. We did horrible lobstering out of that skiff. On a good day, we'd catch like thirty-five pounds out of eighty traps. We were absolutely terrible at it. But that's how you learn. You don't learn from doing great. When you learn things, you learn from doing really bad. My first two years trying to go groundfishing, I did absolutely awful. All I caught was dogfish. Pretty much every day, I had a different crew. I was trying to get some form of crew on the boat. I ended up picking all the dogs and they were basically watching me work. That was terrible. I was trying to figure out, "How do I make a living doing this? What is this? How do you?" It was such a horrible experience to be out there with a terrible crew watching you work. Oh my God. It was absolutely horrible. It was a terrible experience.

[27:47]

SS: What made you stick with it, through those two long, horrible years?

EN: Sometimes you just suck at something and you just got to figure out, "How do I do this around this?" Then I saw the monkfish fishery, and I was like, "Oh wow, that's a way around it." I started doing that. That was a summertime thing that you could do all summer. Then Covid made the whole monkfish market, what was already a delicate thing, completely collapsed. This year, I just did more groundfishing. By having a second boat, I was able to go groundfishing in between the lobstering. I was able to learn, and I've been enjoying going groundfishing more and more. Not sucking helps. Not getting completely dogged up. You have to be really, really determined. I guess it was years in. It took, I would say, to get to this point of being able to successfully catch a groundfish and not be horrible at it—I'm twenty-nine years old now. I would say I started at seventeen, really, going with my father. Here we are, twelve years later, and that was with having a really good teacher and being able to catch lobsters offshore as well as inshore. Instead of buying a brand-new boat, I actually put it together myself in the backyard to save the money. While I was lobstering, every day, if I wasn't lobstering, then I was working on the boat. It took me nine and a half months to put

the boat together. I bought a shell. There was nothing in it. There wasn't a rudder. There wasn't a stuffing box. There was nothing. I bought a shell. I ordered up a shell, the hull itself. A friend of mine set the engine in the back of the boat. I have what I call the boat tent. You know those ShelterLogic tents? I have one that is fifty feet long and twenty-five feet wide. I built a whole boat inside of a tent. I didn't have any help either. My sternman at the time, it was just him and me. We put the whole boat together in between work.

[30:28]

SS: Now, why did you choose to do that rather than just buying a turnkey boat?

EN: To buy a brand new forty-two-foot boat is probably \$500,000-\$600,000 dollars, bare minimum. I put it together with all composite materials so it can't rot. With the boat coming like that, you'd probably have even more. It would be closer to like \$700,000 to have a rot-proof boat. I ended up doing it for a lot less than half the cost by having it be my labor. I wouldn't say the boat's perfect, by any means. There's things I'd love to change, but when I launched the boat, I owned it. I ended up borrowing against it. My father has multiple groundfish permits. The one that I ended up with, it used to be a dragger fisherman's. Bronk, I can't remember Bronk's last name. Anyway, my father, we ended up exchanging permits around. He bought a monkfish permit, but he didn't want to put it on his original permit that he earns the fish on. He needed an offshore lobster, so we did a trade. He took the value of the offshore lobster off of that groundfish permit, and then I borrowed against the boat for that permit. Then, over time, I found a good deal on a monkfish permit, and I bought it. I borrowed against the boat. I was actually really fortunate that I didn't owe any money against the boat. Then, when I wanted the Shannon, I was able to use the equity against the brand-new boat to be able to buy the other boat. I happened to put in an offer. A fellow was sick of going fishing. He was quitting because of the crew. Crew is such a problem now. Drugs and you name it. One of the crewmen took a mallet and smashed the other crewman's hand and broke it. He said he was all set after that. He wasn't interested. He was all done. He's not doing it anymore. I put an offer on the boat, because I saw it for sale and he wanted X amount of money. I said, "Well, if you threw in a bunch of fishing gear and a permit, then I'd be interested in that." Basically, I got a really, really good deal on the boat. It made it so that I was thinking to myself, "All I have to do is do good for a couple trips for the year—three good trips for the year, and I can make the payments. I get to have a nice boat." It was kind of shit luck that I happened to get a nice gillnetter. One guy was getting out of it, and another guy getting into it. I have a vision that in ten years from now, fishing is going to be good again. But right now, it's really, really hard, because of the codfish regulations. You used to be able to fish inside of Jeffreys, and now you can't, because of the codfish. It's basically against the law to fish inside of Jeffreys for groundfish. The codfish interaction is so high, that you'd have to lease so much cod to be able to fish there. You might have a six-thousand-pound set of them. Then you'd be shut down for the rest of the year, essentially. There's only so much codfish allocation out there. You can't make mistakes, basically. That makes it really hard for somebody young trying to get into it, to have to spend, say, \$600,000, \$700,000 to be able to go fishing. There's no interest in that, because you'd be drowning in debt.

[34:29]

SS: You got loans from where? From a bank?

EN: Farm Credit. It's very interesting. Your credit for a boat versus your credit for house, a commercial loan versus your regular credit, is completely different. It's really weird. At the time period, I texted the guy and I told him, "Hey, I'm interested in a boat. I need a large sum of money." He texted me back, said, "Okay, I'll be over at your house on Friday to sign paperwork. I'll set you up." No credit check. My ability to make my payments to him is your credit. They go on a limb for you. As long as you're confident that you can make those payments. It's really weird, a line of credit for fishing versus a line of credit for like a house. You have to jump through so much hurdles to get a home loan to buy a house, versus he showed up and I'd say I spent twenty minutes doing paperwork with him.

SS: So that was easy. You just have to have the confidence in yourself. That's the harder part, I guess, for a younger person in general.

EN: You have to be able to generate the money, too, though. He did want to see how much I make and/or don't make. Yeah, it's really weird. I'm completely dumbfounded on how it works.

[36:16]

SS: Before we started the interview, and you've alluded to this a couple times while we've been talking, that you see yourself as a rarity in the fishing industry. Can you elaborate on that?

EN: For some reason, a lot of the fishermen's sons, they don't have an interest in groundfishing. I don't understand it. They all want to go just lobstering. It's too much work. They don't want to go groundfishing, because at times it's a lot of work, to pick the fish and dress the fish. Sometimes, you'll end up doing a twenty-four-hour day. If you get into the fish, you don't have a choice. You got the nets out. You have to deal with it. Lobstering, whenever you feel like quitting hauling, you can go home. If you're hurting, you can go home. Groundfishing isn't like that, though. Once those nets are out, and you're getting those fish, say something happens. You cut a finger. You can't just go home ten minutes after sending that trawl out. You got to bandage yourself up and you got to deal with it. You might need stitches. You're not going to make it home anytime soon. You got to duct tape it up, superglue it shut, and deal with it. It's very, very, very, different from lobstering. I don't understand if it's the work that people don't want to do. If it's too much work, if there's too much hurt? The younger generation, they don't want to feel pain. If it hurts, they're not interested in doing it. I don't get it. Both my crewmen on the gillnetter are both fifty-six years old, so they're almost double my age. They're what's left of the gillnetters. Most everyone goes dragging now, on those great big boats. There's not really a lot of small boat dragners anymore either. The whole small boat fleet, it's all turned into big boats. Ninety-footers, seventy-footers, sixty-footers. Joey Nickerson was one of the last ones on a forty-two-foot boat, and his boat capsized last year. That was really kind of a bummer. He was a fisherman out of Cape Porpoise. Him and my father used to compete. It's really too bad, something like that. You don't think about that happening to you, but it can happen anytime.

[38:57]

SS: You mentioned before we started the interview that you are married and have a baby. One baby, or how many kids?

EN: I have a daughter. Just one. I've been married for almost three years now. I have a one-year-old. I didn't know how I felt about being a father, before. I never knew if I wanted kids or didn't want kids. She's definitely growing on me, now that she has a personality. She's trying to talk and make her sounds. Whatever it is she wants, she'll make sounds to ask for whatever. I didn't want to not have kids, but I've never had that urge like, "Yeah, I want a kid tomorrow." It happened to happen, and I'm actually really happy that I have a kid now.

SS: That's good. Has that changed the way you fish or the way you think about fishing at all? Having a family?

[40:05]

EN: I would say yes, definitely. When it's absolutely terrible out and you're thinking about your kid at home and you really don't want that boat to flip upside down. Another friend of mine was on the Emmy Rose when that boat sank. I would say it definitely changes your point of view. He left two little girls at home forever. It definitely changes. You don't really think about it. I never really knew anybody that it happened to. Then to have two people in a year. Mikey Porper used to come with us groundfishing, lobstering, monkfishing. We had a lot of fun together. You don't really think about it, but that really hits home. I would say, definitely. There was multiple nights, when the weather was terrible, and all I could think about was him. You think about being upside down in a boat, banging on a door, trying to get out, middle of the night, it's dark out, you can't see anything, everything's backwards and upside down. The most messed up part is if you're trying to get out of the boat, and it's upside down, you got to go down in order to go up, if you think about it. Capsizing, it's like one in a million somebody makes it makes it out of it, especially in wintertime. Water's cold. I guess I didn't think about it much prior to it happening to people that you know. But after it happens to people you know, it definitely changes for you. As a small boat gillnetter, it would be very rare that you see a gillnetter roll over. As long as the boat's not overweighted. You get too much weight in it, then you can, definitely. You're changing where the weight is essentially. But, more so the draggers, you see that they get hung down or the steel in the lazarette breaks or something happens. You see the draggers roll quite a bit more. I can't even remember the last gillnetter that had gone down. Minus somebody making a bad choice or taking a boat through a storm. Forty-five-foot boats aren't designed to ride storms. They're a small boat. That's the little one [editor's note: baby daughter appears].

[42:58]

SS: Oh, hey! Hello! She waved, kind of. You were saying that young people don't seem to be drawn into groundfishing and gillnetting anymore. For those who are interested in pursuing that line of work, is there opportunity there? Is it feasible?

EN: Yeah, you definitely could make a fair check. You can do all right. I mean, I'm very content. I feel like I do good, I guess. I get to pay my bills. I got a new truck. I'm able to buy whatever it is that we need. If you can be able to save some money up, and you put some money away, to be able to have the things that you [need]. My wife has a nice car and I got a nice truck. To be able to do fun things with your kids and be able to enjoy time. I would say I

get to live a comfortable lifestyle, the way I am. I'm very content. So, I don't really get it. But, like I said, there's not a lot of people who have a teacher that can teach them. My father, it took him twenty years to get to his point, and then for him to be able to teach me, it took me, say, three years of gillnetting to be able to get to the point that he was at. We use a PC1 plot program. He was able to give me twenty years of information, put it in front of me on the computer. You think about twenty years of fishing information—fishing, lobstering, dragging, you name it.

[44:59]

SS: That's huge.

EN: Yeah. If it wasn't for him, there's no way I'd be in this position. That is the difference, by having a teacher. Without having a teacher, it'd be so, so, so hard to try to learn and continue to do badly, and then to have a massive debt out for the permits and the boat and this and that. It just won't work. It used to be you could get a thirty-five-foot boat and you could fish fifteen miles from shore and you could do good. What changed in the fishing industry is there used to be a two-for-one program for your days at sea. My father, if you kept it under a twelve-hour day, he could get two days out of one day at sea. He catches eight hundred pounds of cod and he'd go in. A lot of times, even back then, you're getting two dollars a pound for the cod. All these big draggers, like Maggie Raymond, she changed it. She turned it into sectors. Now that two-for-one's gone. It used to be, too, that in order to lease days at sea from a small boat, your footprint has to match. They had gross tonnage and horsepower and boat length. It had to match, in order to lease it to the big boat. Well, now, doesn't matter. I can buy fish from a twenty-foot boat, or a ninety-footer can buy my fish. Now it's become so big-boat-friendly. The big boats have priced all the small boats out of it. The cost of going fishing is so, so high now. You can't even, without having a teacher, and this and that. It's the fact there's too many big boats. There's too many corporate companies buying in and buying all these permits. That is the problem. It's a hundred percent that it's the big boats that are the problem. Believe it or not, it's not the small boats that made the codfish go away. It is a hundred percent the big boats that are the problem. Guys like Carlos Rafael. He should have spent the rest of his life in jail, and he's out of jail now. He did a couple years. For what he did to the fishing industry, for what he pillaged and stole from the industry, it's absolutely ridiculous that he could be out in a couple of years. He is why we are where we are. It's really frustrating to see. When I was going with my father, it wasn't unusual to catch, in the beginning of the sectors, we could catch three- or four-thousand pounds of cod in a day. Now, I think I landed four thousand pounds of cod for the season. That's without cheating, a hundred percent observer or camera coverage, to prove, to show. These are all spots that my father used to fish. Cod used to be there. It's the ninety-footers, eighty-footers, not owner operators on the boat. You have people that are druggies. If they had to pee clean to be on a boat, that would completely change the whole industry. There would be no more ninety-footers. All those guys are druggies. In order to work somebody twenty-four hours a day, for three days straight, they're all booting up or popping oxies or doing coke or they're doing some form of drugs. There's very few boats that aren't drug addicts on them. I would want nothing to do with being on a boat with somebody running the winches high on heroin. Could you imagine being in front of that winch? You got to guide the wire on? People lose limbs. Those winches have so much power. A friend of mine, he was on a boat when a guy got sucked into one of them. It cut him in half. His organs were hanging out of him. Those mistakes do happen.

SS: I'm trying not to think about that.

[50:08]

EN: Could you imagine being high, and running those winches, being on that boat, and being up for three days straight? I would think that OSHA would be like, "No, no, no, no, no! You can't be up for three days straight, dressing fish, cutting fish." I mean, you can't do it without drugs. You and I, there's no way. I couldn't physically, mentally, I couldn't be up for two days, cutting fish on a cold boat. The human body needs a break. The only way they do it is they survive with drugs. It changes things. They'll work for not much money too. They need their fix. It doesn't matter to them what they get paid. Then you have people that are like, "No, I'm not going to do that for that kind of money. Absolutely not." I would call it an epidemic of the heroin. There's so, so much. When they came out with those oxies, ten years ago—the crewman I have on the lobster boat, that's how it started for him was oxies. Then it turned into he couldn't afford the oxies. He couldn't get them anymore, and he turned to heroin. I think three years, he's been doing the subs and been clean. But it all started from the oxies. All those big companies saying, "The oxies are great," and then they get people addicted, and now we are where we are. It's really too bad. They basically made heroin legal to give it to people. Then they wonder why they turn to heroin. My whole generation, they're a bunch of addicts. I don't get it.

[52:05]

SS: That's sad. That sucks.

EN: You're losing a whole generation of workers. On one of the ninety-footers last week, a guy, he relapsed. Twenty-five years old, died. Because when you go to do it again, you think that you're not doing that much, in comparison to what you were doing. It's actually way too much for what your body can take, and it kills you. Typically, most of them, they relapse. Not good.

[52:56]

SS: Let me change the subject. You said earlier at the beginning of the interview, that you think that licenses should not be—

EN: The lobster licenses. You need to be able to do different fisheries, in order to be a fisherman. They made it so that you can't. I use my lobster license. I use the groundfish permits. I use the monkfish permits. I use everything to make a year's wage. There's not just one thing that makes you able to make a lot of money. Without the lobster license to have a backup, a fail plan. Every time I suck at fishing and I can't seem to find a fish, I fall back on lobstering. I can always catch a lobster. Lobstering's really pretty easy. You move some traps around, search and destroy, find them, get on them, you do alright. You can make the check out of it. You can recover from your failures. But groundfishing isn't that way. There's times that you can go six, seven months with failure after failure after failure, of not catching fish. I see it and I watch other people do it. It makes me wonder how, mentally, they can even put up with that much failure, to continue to suck and suck and suck, and not pull your hair out of your head. Without the lobster license, I wouldn't be where I am. I need the lobster

license. It's a fail plan. Anyway, they set it up so that if you don't get your license before you're eighteen, you won't get it until you're forty or fifty. Then your learning curve of being a lobsterman's over. Your opportunity to put in the long days. At forty-five or fifty years old, your body just won't put up with it. Your body can't. You're at a spot where physically, your body just won't. Your ability to make your money back and be able to put in the long days, the hard days, in your twenties and your thirties, into your forties, my body will put up with it. I see other people, and I watch. I watch all the time. There's so, so many people, too. Yesterday, I was talking to a couple of dragger fishermen. One of them, they let their lobster license go, because they wanted to be able to land lobsters in Massachusetts by dragging. Now he wishes he'd never let it go. He'll never get it back. He wishes that he wasn't stuck doing the offshore thing, dragging forever. Because he let his lobster license go, he'll never get it back. That's it.

[56:09]

SS: Is there some recommendation you would have for how to fix that?

EN: Basically, you have to do an apprenticeship with a lobsterman of sorts, in order to be able to get their license before they're eighteen. A lot of people don't know about that. I think it's wrong the state of Maine continues to not let everyone and anyone that wants a lobster license have it. There's so, so many people that wait forever to get it, and then they don't do much with it. Then they have a mentality that, "Oh, I could do what they can do. I can do it. I can do it." So they spend like ten years waiting, so that they can either do good or fail. Can you imagine waiting ten years to get accepted into a college, and then maybe you're going to come through or maybe you're going to hate learning it? A hundred percent of fishing is if you didn't learn something that day, then you didn't do anything. You didn't make any mistakes. Every time I go out on the ocean, I learn something new. I have an education. Something went wrong. Clusters in rope. There's a new way every day to be amazed on how something can go wrong. You'd be surprised how many things can really go wrong. You're scratching your head, looking at it like, "Wow, that went badly. I learned what not to do today." That's a pretty normal thing. That's how you learn fishing: what not to do. It's no different than college. It's just you're teaching yourself, I guess. But yeah, I wish that there was a way. I think that has a part in it. I would say actually all of the people that used to do a lot of groundfishing, gillnetting, they all have lobster licenses. Lobstering had been big money for the last five years, seven years. Now that the bait price has skyrocketed, it's changed. Anyway, those guys all moved from dragging or gillnetting to lobstering. They don't have to go that far offshore. Their time on the water is short. It's pretty easy duty. All those guys are aging out of it. They all have kids that could do it. I don't know if it's a money thing. I don't know. I don't understand. I don't understand. I don't understand. It's weird being like the only young person in it. It's definitely very, very weird to not have anyone in your age group wanting to do it, even.

SS: You said a few minutes ago that you think that the fishing is going to get better in ten years or so. But I'm also hearing that most of the fisherman are in this fifty-to-sixty age bracket. What's it going to look like, industry-wise?

[59:35]

EN: It's going to be great for me, essentially, is what I see. There's going to be very few people actually doing it, because there's a huge age group that's going to age out of it in the next ten years. That means there's going to be less people fishing. There'll be eight big boats doing it. It'll be a lot like what happened to the Alaskan king crab fishery. They got fifteen boats that are doing it. There's a couple small guys, whoever hangs on for the ride. There'll be more fish in the ocean and less people working on it, basically. It'll be great for a few individuals.

SS: Consolidated fleets of large boats and then a few little guys hanging on around them.

[60:25]

EN: Yeah. Yeah, basically. That's too bad. I wish there was a way that by being a small boat fisherman, you should get some form of like cod allocation for the week. It doesn't take much for my boat to make money. It really doesn't take much. Say I was allocated a thousand pounds of cod every week. I could make a good living on just the codfish. Between catching codfish and a couple monkfish and a couple pollock every week, I could make a good living on just that alone, say four thousand pounds. I could make a living on that. I could haul a couple traps in between. I could catch some of my own bait, this and that. It doesn't take much to make a small boat make money. When I untie the lines, I think, most of the time, my expenses are around seven hundred dollars, eight hundred dollars, for a three-day trip, where a dragger is nowhere near sustainable at burning four thousand gallons, three thousand gallons of fuel. They bring twenty-five tons of ice. They spend thirty to forty thousand to go do a five-day trip. I can make a good living on four or five thousand pounds of proper fish. Get a couple codfish, a couple monk tails, a couple pollock, a couple hake to go with it. That would make for a good auction for me. I bet I could make ten thousand dollars on that four thousand pounds. I'm essentially feeding four families off of that ten thousand dollars. They can make a good living, as well. I can employ people all year, on not much fish. It's really too bad. I'm talking to you about the younger generation and getting them to go fishing. If we could get an age group of people that are allowed to have X amount of free cod, and they could have it to catch, it would be huge. That would be the difference between being able to get people to go and not.

[62:56]

SS: Right now, we haven't said this, but I'm reading between the lines that you're in the sector?

EN: Yes. Yes. Last year, I got stuck in the common pool, so I was still doing the day thing. I wasn't happy about it. I was forced into it. National Marine Fisheries wouldn't allow me. I felt like it was really wrong on their part. They forced me. Essentially, I didn't get to get my permit signed into the sectors in time, when I had bought the boat. I got forced into the common pool. I was like, "Well, wait a minute. Wait a minute. No. No. No. I don't want to discard the fish. I want to land them. I want to land the fish." I was only allowed to land a hundred pounds of cod per day at sea or per trip. I was like, "Well, wait a minute. No. You're going to make me discard these fish and kill them for no reason. Put me in a sector so I can land them." They said, "No. Rules are rules." I was like, "Are you kidding me? You're going to force me to discard fish, when I don't want to?" "Yeah. That's your problem, not mine." I was like, "Are you kidding me?" I called, and I called, and I called, and I called, and I was like, "No.

No. No. No. Fix this. Let me land the fish." The observer coverage rate in the common pool was only like five percent, versus the observer coverage rate in a sector was forty percent or thirty-five percent. It's not against the law when you're in the common pool to discard fish. That is the law: you're supposed to. It's really kind of messed up. I was very disappointed with National Marine Fisheries on that. I felt like that was wrong. For your rules, you're going to make me discard fish? What is wrong with this picture?

SS: So you were in the common pool for a year and the sector for a year?

[65:06]

EN: Well, the other boat was in a sector. The lobster boat was in the sector. I got stuck in the common pool with the other one. I had fish I could land from my permit, and I didn't get to use that fish. I was pretty bummed about that. The fish are free in the common pool. I don't know.

SS: Fishing in the sector is better because of no discards?

EN: Yeah. Well, it's better for the environment.

SS: In an ideal world, I think you were saying a few minutes ago, that especially for young people to have a chance of making it on small boats, that it sounds like you can envision a system in which the smaller boats operated under a sort of a whole different set of rules, where you had a weekly allotment.

[66:01]

EN: Yeah, if they had a weekly amount, like in the common pool. But the common pool doesn't have much fish in it. The common pool, even though it's supposed to be not a sector, it's still a sector, because it still only has X amount of fish in it. Say I discarded four thousand pounds of cod one day, and there's only sixteen thousand pounds of cod in the common pool, that means I get three trips and I'm done, they're shutting down the common pool for the season. Yeah, not good. It's still a sector, but they don't recognize it as a sector. They say that it's not, but it really is. That's a sector. By having official allocation for it, that's still a sector. Some of the rules, they need some tweaking, and they need some form of way to benefit young people to be able to go. If your boat's below a certain footage, and you're just starting out, you get to have some free allocation. I would say that's kind of what Geoff Smith has been doing with The Nature Conservancy. If you go into the hundred percent program, we'll lease you fish for cheap. I want to see what you're catching, though. I want to make sure you're not discarding. In a way, he's kind of doing that, I think, I guess.

[67:27]

SS: Yeah. Programs like that, that sort of give you some extra fish to catch—

EN: Yeah, and lease it to you for a fair price—

SS: That would really help for young fishermen getting into it?

EN: Yeah.

SS: Ok. You've mentioned The Nature Conservancy partnership and the Maine Coast Fishermen's Association. Are there other things you haven't talked about yet that are ways that you are personally involved in management or science?

[67:54]

EN: I've been trying to get on the council. Some of the people on there are on there for the wrong reasons. The smaller the fish and the smaller the mesh they can tow, the better it is. I'm a hundred percent against that. You have the big boat mentality, I guess. You have the Maggie Raymond group, or whatever. What was it? What do you call them? The names of the boats there. There was a whole group of them the big boats. The Teresa Marie boats. She had a whole fleet of them. The Teresa Marie boats catch an enormous amount of fish, and they can pound up over any sort of bottom. They're pulling freight train engines in all those big boats. There's no safe piece of bottom for fish now. It's quite scary what they can go up over.

[69:01]

SS: When you said council, you're referring to the New England Council?

EN: I've been trying to get even a seat in the sector. I could at least have a vote in the sector, essentially, like one of the chairmen, I guess. On the council, last year, this time, I was doing a lot of meetings. I am all for a hundred percent accountability for all the fish. I'm sick of seeing those boats. Some of the crewmen on my boat went on some of those big boats, and they would discard forty or fifty thousand pounds of cod, kill them for no reason, pick out the biggest ones, dump the rest over the side. That is oh-so-wrong. No wonder why there's no cod. They're like, "Oh, where's the codfish?" "You guys killed them all." It is a hundred percent those people. Those are the boats that are a problem. They're the ones that are now prospering, and they get benefited by cheating. What is wrong with this picture? In my mind, I guess, they're wrecking and destroying the industry. They really shouldn't be allowed to lease my fish. I shouldn't be allowed to lease my fish to them. They shouldn't be allowed to buy my fish. They changed the system so that, essentially, they're running it. They're winning. You have a big boat fishery. It is supposed to be an equal opportunity fishery. It is not an equal opportunity fishery, in any way, anymore. Say I want to invest three million dollars into a big boat, big permits, and this and that. I could make a stupid amount of money, if I wanted to. But it's kind of like against my religion to do that. I have no interest in that. I have no interest in being part of what they're doing. It's wrong. I mean, there's some of them that don't cheat. But there's very few and in between. Robbie Roberge is the only one I know. He's not discarding fish, that I know of anyway. If he does, it's very minimal. The rest of those guys, though, they don't care. They're here for a check for this week, and they don't care about next month. That's kind of wrong mentalities. I'm looking at ten years down the road. This could be a great fishery again, is my train of thought anyway. They don't care. They just want a check for next week, next month. That's it.

[71:53]

SS: Yeah, that long term investment? Sustainability?

EN: Yeah. That's why I really enjoy the monkfish fishery. The monkfishing is its own fishery. There's a group of people that take care of just the monkfish. They make sure that they're doing good, all the time. National Marine Fisheries tries to take care of the cod, pollock, hake, haddock, cod. They tried to take care of like seven different species. They can't do it. They can't keep up with it. It's not possible. You need a group of people for each species. Basically, they got tweaked into being big boat friendly, not small boat friendly, which is too bad. You think about being in a small boat and being forty miles from shore and being almost the closest to home you can really fish, it's a long ways from home in the wintertime. You think about forty miles; that's not small boat friendly. As far as it goes for gillnetters, my boat is actually considered a big boat gillnetter, being like forty-seven feet. You don't see gillnetters above fifty foot, typically. Those are big boat gillnetters. My father's boat is a thirty-eight-foot boat. That's the difference. You can't fit that much fish on his boat. You can only put, say eight thousand pounds, and then his boat's starting to get too much weight on your boat, where I can comfortably put like fifteen thousand pounds in my boat. It's a big difference between the two boats. A really big difference. Having a ten feet longer boat, it's a really, really big difference. The two boats, one boat's a day fishing boat and the other boat's a trip fishing boat. Basically, my father used to be able to go fishing inside of Jeffreys. He'd have an hour ride out in the morning. No big deal. Basically, the rules changed. Now, you can't catch much cod. You have to steam out fifty miles before you can go fishing.

SS: To get away from cod? Is that why?

[74.09]

EN: Yeah. It's changed so much that it drove him out of it. He's not doing it anymore. It was either buy a bigger boat and spend more money to be able to deal with bigger seas and terrible weather, or go lobstering. So he did what the other guys did. They turned to just going lobstering, because they didn't want the battle. They didn't want to fight. I guess being my age, you don't really care about the fight. When you start to be fifty-five, sixty years old, sometimes you don't sleep for two days. Sometimes the weather's horrible and the boat's rolling awful and you might only sleep two hours a night because the weather's so terrible. To be sixty years old and doing that? They're all set. They ain't doing that.

SS: Trying to take it easy.

EN: Yeah.

SS: How's that going for you trying to get more involved? I think you mentioned two things. You mentioned the sector board and the council. Let me just make sure, are you referring to the New England Council?

EN: Yeah, the New England Council.

[75:17]

SS: How's that been going for you, in terms of trying to get some of those seats and better representation for the small boat fleet?

EN: It's going nowhere. Terry Alexander, this is a really good example of Terry. He met with President Trump last year. At one of the council meetings, President Trump was there. He told Trump that Canada is catching more haddock than us, we need a smaller mesh. That's his exact words: "We need a smaller mesh." How many babies do you need to kill? They're already discarding small haddock. They're already towing a five and a half inch mesh. What are you doing? I can't even catch a haddock, because of the way they design those otter trawl nets. I can't mesh a haddock in a six and a half inch mesh. They can run a five and a half inch mesh. They're running a whole inch smaller mesh than what I'm running, and that's legal. But it's illegal for me to run a five and a half inch mesh. I can't do it. Why are the ninety-footers getting special rights that I don't have? I wouldn't be interested in running it, either, though. I don't even want a mesh that small. I'm not interested in killing babies. He's a council member. That's what's wrong with the picture there. He has a sixty-five-foot boat. He's big boat owner. That's what we have. We have big boat owners on the council. No more really needs to be said, I guess. He hires out his boat, so it's easy for him to go to all those meetings. I run two boats. It'd be really hard for me to go to all the meetings. Owner operator versus somebody making him a check. He's a hundred percent what's wrong with the system, in my eyes. Why not catch fish when they're valuable, when they have size to them? Let them grow. Why kill them when they're babies? I guess, being the new guy, it takes a long time before you get anywhere in getting a position and a seat anywhere at all. But definitely still staying involved. Like, right now, I'm doing the interview with you. I've done interviews. I helped Ben and Mary. I did interviews with MPBR about the two-dollar-a-pound pound fish. They helped me, and I made sure I reciprocated. Whatever I can do to help them. They seem really happy with the sector that I'm in. I'm happy with Ben and Mary. So if Mary asks me to do an interview with somebody, I ask what time?

SS: That's great.

EN: I try to give back.

[78:29]

SS: That's excellent. In terms of your future career, if you were going to picture yourself in your own operation, ten years down the line, do you see that changing? Where do you see yourself? Describe that picture.

EN: I'm in a very content place right now with the two boats. My lobster boat, I'm not allowed to swing any bigger of a boat on my mooring. I guess I'm content there. I've thought about a bigger gillnetter, but you get too big of a boat and it costs you too much money. When that boat was made, it was a really nice boat. It still is a really nice boat. They did a really nice job with all the fiberglass work. They built it really tough, and it's actually a fast hull design, so if I ever wanted it to be like a day fishing gillnetter, if I put adequate horsepower in it, it would go fast. If I could fish inside of Jeffreys, and do what we talked about with the codfish, I would be first in line to be able to do it with that boat. I could jazz up the horsepower on that engine. It's a high horsepower boat for what it is. It's a fast hull design. It's actually a really nice boat to have for its size to what its potential is. I guess I'm at a point where I'm pretty content. I don't see that I'd really want to be a dragger fisherman. I don't really agree with a lot of what they've been doing. It's not all of them that are bad though. It's just that the ones that are... [editors' note: name redacted by narrator]. If he sees a gillnetter's gear out there, he's going to make a beeline for it and he's going to try to

tow you up and wreck your gear. Then all of a sudden, you have webbing on the bottom of the ocean forever, for no reason, just because he wants to be mean to you. He wants to be a bully. That's what's wrong with the system: people like him. He's another one. I've heard stories of people finding him down the bunk, choking on his puke from doing too many pills. That's what you need, running a boat [sarcasm]! Could you imagine being his crew?

SS: Scary.

[80:50]

EN: How are you even allowed on the water with an operator's permit? How are you even allowed to run a boat that size? A boat that weighs 500,000 pounds? Bounce that off a piling. You're all screwed up on drugs, and you're going to bring that boat into port? Are you serious? I guess I don't see myself joining that gravy train. I'm in a pretty content place, I guess. I can catch the monkfish. I can catch the cod. The boat holds a lot of fuel. My boat holds like eight hundred gallons of fuel. It allows me to fish the whole ocean. If I want to go out to the Hague Line, I can go right out there. I hold plenty of fuel to fish offshore and hold plenty of fuel to fish inshore. I have decent fish hold capacity. If you land too much fish, the price will flunk out. There's only so much demand. The few times a year that I could fill the boat, say put forty thousand or fifty thousand on it, it's pointless, because you're not going to get paid for it. You could land ten thousand and get paid the same amount of money. You got to have your happy medium. You don't want to get too greedy, I guess. Hi, buddy [turns to his daughter].

SS: You describe a feeling of contentment with where you are right now. Could I ask you to reflect a little bit about what it is about your job, your livelihood, that you appreciate the most?

[82:40]

EN: I like the change of the sceneries. It's fun to go out fishing, but if I were to spend seven days a week trip fishing, I would ruin my family life. Typically, when guys do that, their relationships don't hold up. They don't have a good relationship with their kids. There's a happy medium of being on the water. That's where the lobstering comes into play. I wanted to make a little bit more money. I wasn't quite satisfied with what I could make lobstering. That's where the monkfishing and the groundfishing comes into play. I go do a two- or three-day trip. I can do alright with that. Then I do a little bit of lobstering when I come in. I'll haul my eight hundred traps. Then I go back out. I'm on land for three days, four days. Then I go back out groundfishing for a couple of days. I'm not completely gone all the time. Half the week, I'm at least in my own bed. Our daughter gets to see me and my wife gets to see me. You start going, like for Shafmaster, lobstering, they'll do twelve-day, two-week trips. Or some of those larger boats, they'll do turn-and-burns. They come in, unload, go right back out for another seven days. They're only on land for like eighteen hours and then they're back out fishing. Can you imagine living like that? That'd be terrible life.

SS: Not much of a life.

EN: Yeah, not much of a life at all.

SS: Outside of fishing, anyway.

[84:13]

EN: Yeah. I enjoy catching the fish and I enjoy going groundfishing. But if you do too much of it, then it's not fun anymore. It takes the fun out of it. There's a happy medium. Hitting the auctions right. There's a lot to fishing. If you hit Thursday's auction, the buyers aren't that interested in them a Thursday. They have to sit on the fish over the weekend, essentially. No one's working on the weekend. Then, on a Sunday's auction, that fish is going to get cut right up, and they're going to move it out, and they got their fish that they need, whatever fish they think they're going to sell for the week. I try to only hit the Sunday's auctions. Say I wanted to go fulltime fishing, I'm not interested in landing on a Thursday's auction. Then what? I just want to get what I can from fishing. To go beyond what I'm doing, then all of a sudden, you almost peak out and then you start going the other way, I guess, would be a good way to put it. Then sometimes, the weather is so bad that you don't get three-day opportunities. Last year, come November, the weather was so, so bad. There wasn't three-day opportunities. I only had like one day here and one day there and another day here. I just stuck with lobstering because the weather was terrible.

[85:43]

SS: In your younger days, have you ever pictured yourself doing anything other than fishing? Were there other career paths that you might have taken?

EN: I thought I wanted to be a mechanic for a little while. I worked at Neil's Motors in Biddeford. Working minimum wage at \$7.25 an hour or \$7.50, after they take your taxes out. I was working like twenty-five hours a week there. That was back in 2009 [or] 2010 when gas prices were like five dollars a gallon. I was losing money driving to work. What is wrong with that picture? I had to go fishing with my father on the weekends to be able to make enough money to be able to afford to drive my truck to go to work over there. I was like, "What is wrong with this picture?" I then decided that there was no way. I was all set with working inside and working an hourly wage, to punch a time clock and put in your time, and you're watching the clock go round and round. I'm all set. I can't do it. Fishing, I guess my hourly wage is a lot higher, bang for your buck. You're outdoors. You're doing what you want to do. If I don't want to do it, I'm not going to do it. I'm all set. I tried doing the mechanic thing, and I didn't enjoy working there. I didn't enjoy being indoors. I didn't enjoy the people. There was nothing about it I enjoyed, I guess, would be the best way to put it. That was about the extent of it, the trying something different. I mean, I do a lot of different things, though. I do all my own welding, for the most part. I do my own fiberglass work. There's a lot of different things that you learn to do on the boat. I'm my own mechanic for the engine, essentially. Something breaks, and I learn to fix it. I guess there's a lot more jobs in one, other than just catching the fish or the lobsters. You learn a lot of different trades in one trade.

[88:22]

SS: Other than that versatility and being a jack of all trades, are there other things that it takes to succeed as a fisherman? Is there a specific type of person who is a good fit for this career?

EN: I would say you have to be very determined. [editor's note: EN reaches for a plate] My wife has given me breakfast. You have to be able to tolerate pain. I would say if you don't have a high tolerance for pain, you won't ever be a fisherman. You won't. You have to be able to tolerate it and be okay with it. The determination. Even my father, the determination and the different things that he has dealt with, and seeing him deal with. Somebody would have totally anxiety attack and have a meltdown and that would be it in some of the bad situations that you get put in. You can't get anxiety-ed out, I guess. You get put in a lot of shitty situations, that you're like, "Oh, wow, I wish I wasn't here right now. This is terrible. I wish this didn't happen." There's a lot of problem solving. You have to be really good at problem solving. Definitely, the biggest thing though, is not having meltdowns when things aren't going good. Because like, for instance, three years ago, I was bringing traps home to go groundfishing out of the other boat, and somehow or other, one lobstermen had set over my brother, and then my brother had set over me, and my brother's buoy had got around the guy's trawl, somehow or other. It was underwater. It came up under the boat, and I sucked his buoy in the wheel. Then it sucked the other guy's traps in the wheel. The boat was stuck then. I had like seventy traps that were essentially hung into the propeller. The boat was stuck stern-to and it was crappy out. It was blowing like twenty-five, thirty, northerly. It was cold. We were making ice. It stalled the motor out. I couldn't do anything. I couldn't get the stuff out of the wheel. You can't jump overboard. It's February. I was stuck. The waves are rolling up the back of the stern of the boat. The boat was sitting bow heavy, the way the boat was sitting. If the waves were, say eight-footers instead of six-footers, they would have been coming over the back of the boat. I would have been taking on water. I was waiting for my father to come and get me and tow me home. It was definitely not a good situation to be in. You got to crawl up on the bow of the boat. It was covered in ice. There's a good chance you can fall overboard doing just, just to tie off, so that he could tow me in. That's just one situation of the many bad ones. When I was a kid, my brother and I, we wanted to have some pet ducks. We had a fourteen-foot skiff. We went over on the islands, to go look around, see if there's any baby ducks. They're really pretty cute. Well, I tied the crap out of the anchor to the bow on the skiff, but I didn't really look over the line from the anchor tied onto the bow of the boat. It wasn't tied off good. We left the boat. We threw the anchor out. Basically, the skiff was pretty much ashore. We went around the island, and we came back, and the skiff was like a hundred fifty, two hundred yards off, floating away. I was like, "Oh shit, that's our ride home." So, I hopped in the water. It was April and it was very cold. I tried to swim with my clothes on. I didn't make it far. I turned around, and I was like, "Oh, that's not going to work with clothes on." So, I took my clothes off. Then I tried again. I told my brother, if you feel like you're not going to make it, grab whatever you can for buoys and make a raft out of it, and I'll come get you. He made it halfway and he was too cold. He made a raft out of the buoys. I ended up making it to the boat, and I dragged myself in. He was so cold, he couldn't pull himself in. Not a good situation.

[93:28]

SS: How old is your brother?

EN: He was like twelve.

SS: Is he younger than you?

EN: Yeah. I was probably fourteen or thirteen. Young and not a good idea. But that's things. You have freedom to a boat. You're going lobstering out of a skiff, and you don't really think about just tying a knot wrong,

SS: Anything can happen.

EN: Anything. Yeah. Anything. We were pretty lucky that we didn't freeze to death in that water and drown. You think about, like a hundred-and-fifty-yard swim in thirty-five-degree, thirty-eight-degree water. I mean, you don't know any better either, though. What do you do? That's your ride home. You try and figure it out. We didn't have cell phones. There's no way to call for help. Then what? Are you going to spend the night on the island? There's no shelter. There's a great big rock pile of an island. There's no trees. There's nothing. That was a good example of not a good situation.

SS: Did you get the ducks home at least?

EN: There was no ducks. It was too early. There was just eggs. That was a disappointment.

[94:44]

SS: Well, I want to let you eat your breakfast. But is there anything else that we haven't touched on yet, that that you think is important to understanding your experience as a young fisherman?

EN: What was a really beneficial thing for me is my father, I think I mentioned he had a second boat. It was a thirty-five Duffy. He let me use it. I got to use it for a couple of years. I didn't have to make payments on it. I got to learn how to fish some bottom. Then I got to buy my own boat. I got like a stepping stool of a boat. Then I ended up buying a bigger boat than what that boat was. That was really, really beneficial, to be able to have a boat to use that you're not making payments on, to be able to learn, to be able to get your feet wet. That there is huge, to have a tool like that. To be given the information, to be given a boat to use to learn. I guess I got given a lot of different tools to be able to make money. It was my choice what I wanted to do with it. I could either be a slump, or I could go to work. He made it really easy for me to be able to generate money, I guess, would be the best way to put it. He gave me all the tools needed to be able to make good money. There's not a lot of people that have that opportunity, to get all those tools. The boat wasn't a freebie. You got to be able to use it, but it certainly wasn't like, "Here's a \$150,000 boat. Here you go. Have it." He gave me the tools, though, to be able to generate the money to be able to buy a boat. That there's a difference, I guess. That makes a really big difference, to have that.

[96:35]

SS: Do you think it would be possible for someone who didn't have that to achieve your level of success?

EN: I mean, he did it. I would say his fishing career was a lot harder than mine, so far. The biggest trap war in the state of Maine, he was part of, like twenty years ago. Anyway, at one point, he lost half of his gear in one day. Four hundred traps gone. Forty thousand dollars of gear. Yeah. And he made a recovery from that. He put his head down, and he built more

traps, and worked every day. He had a small boat and he would fish terrible weather in that small boat. He had a thirty-foot Repco. Say ten miles offshore and it's blowing twenty-five, he's taking waves over the bow, into the windows. He would be hiding behind the dash of the boat waiting for the wheelhouse to come off. Multiple times, he thought, for sure, the wheelhouse is going to come off that boat. Can you imagine ducking, hiding from a wave, hoping you don't get hit by the wheelhouse when it comes off? He was stuck in that small boat for a long time because some of the bad decisions he made in joining that trap war. Everyone else ended up getting bigger boats with nicer traps around him, and he was stuck, with shitty traps in a shitty boat. All decisions that you make. So, he knew what not to do. Then he'd be advising me, "Don't do that. Don't be causing problems like that. Don't join in on that. Avoid that. Go first somewhere else if there's a problem there." If somebody was being a douche, I just learned to fish somewhere else. I'd move the traps ten miles. I don't care. Like there's an inside group of fishermen that are none too friendly to fish around, and they made it so I couldn't fish an area. I couldn't afford to fish the area. I went like fifteen miles outside of them, and then another fifteen miles way up to the eastward. So, I had my gear thirty miles away from them. They had no idea where the gear was. They couldn't cut them off anymore. Problem solved. To learn to adapt is definitely a lot harder, though, without a teacher. He's spent a whole lifetime trying to figure out what he showed me, for say five years, four years.

SS: Yeah, sounds like a really important stepping stone.

[99:29]

EN: Without a teacher, you really, really—especially with the way that things cost now, you need a teacher. I don't see another person in any harbors around that will do what I'm doing, because they don't have a teacher. There's just no way.

SS: That's what really makes the difference.

EN: You need a teacher. Especially with the way everything costs now.

SS: I don't know if I got your boat names. Can you remind me?

EN: The gillnetter is the Shannon Christine. It's been the Shannon Christine since the boat was built new in '97. It's had four different owners now. The one I had put together is the Flying Dutchman. I have Dutch background, so it's kind of naming it after the heritage, I guess. That's a fast boat, too. Quite often, the boat gets airborne, comes out of the water, slams down. Some people asked me if it was from SpongeBob. There's a flying Dutchman in SpongeBob or something. There was like a ghost character, apparently. Interesting.

[101:02]

SS: Oh. All right. Well, I don't have any more questions for you. Anything else you'd like to say before we wrap it up?

EN: The windmill thing that's coming into play would make it absolutely impossible forever. You would kiss any small boats like me goodbye. Any young person trying to get into it, you can't really start with like a ninety-footer. You got to start somewhere. You start off small.

There will be no more. If those windmills go in where they want them to go in, there'll be no more small boats. There'll be no more young generation of fishermen. Their goal is to put a hundred and sixty square mile area of windmills in, off the coast of Maine. You'll never see another young fisherman join in. That will be the end of it, if they get their way.

SS: Is that because of the location of them?

[102:04]

EN: Basically, yeah. The furthest inside I can fish is where they want to put it. Then that forces me to fish another twenty miles outside of that. My boat isn't big enough for that. The boat won't put up with the weather eighty miles offshore. I mean, it could. But I'd be endangering my life. So then, I need a bigger boat. Then I need a sixty-footer to be able to go fish in that weather. The cost and this and that of running it, it's not worth it. So, if those windmills go into play, there will be no more young people in this industry, and you'll kiss any small boats goodbye. There won't be any more small boats. That'll be over, without that piece of bottom. It would be different if they wanted to put it in a hundred miles offshore, a hundred fifty miles offshore. But where they want to put it is like home of the small boat gillnetter. You can't take that away from them. Right now, we're at bottom low. The groundfishing industry, I would say, is at bottom low, for small boats, this and that. We've hit rock bottom. Then all of a sudden, you add windmills on top of that? I mean, you just basically pulled out like a trap for that rock bottom that you could even hit harder bottom. It would be the end, I guess is what I see.

[103:44]

SS: Pretend I'm somebody who's pushing windmills or somebody from Kansas who's like "Why does that matter?" Tell me why. I mean, I understand, but just pretend I'm not me. So what? If it sounds like the groundfish industry is already at rock bottom, why don't we just forget about it and build wind farms? What would you say to that argument?

EN: National Marine Fisheries has spent millions and millions of dollars to try to help the cod spawning grounds, the fish spawning grounds. There's herring spawning there. There's mackerel spawning there. There's dolphins and whales that chase all that feed. The fish need the feed, and we need the fish. You're taking a whole biomass. You're just sterilizing a massive piece of bottom, for no reason. The tuna fish go there. The tuna guys like to fish there. You're not talking one group of fishermen or another group of fishermen. You're talking all groups: tuna guys, the herring boats, the groundfish boats, the lobster boats. You're talking all of the fisheries. Not just one, not just the other. You're affecting everyone. You're not just taking from one guy. I'd rather see it shut down to no one can put anything there and no one can fish it. At least have it be a proper spawning ground, than have windmills go there. I'd rather no one can even go inside of that zone. At least I can catch the fish coming in or going out, and/or lobsters. But to have it sterilize the bottom? They want to dump cement carpets over their cable they're going to lay down. Could you imagine, on top of ledge? The ledge is where the spawning is happening. Where they can't penetrate to drill the cable down in, they're going to dump cement carpets over the top of that. You're going to dump cement carpets over coral reefs? Over habitat life? I mean, could you imagine if somebody just decided they're going to dump a cement carpet over your house while you're in it? Absolutely not. For what? If they were to go solar panels, solar panels cost two

thousand dollars per kilowatt to run? The windmills cost sixty-two hundred dollars per kilowatt to run. Why are we not going solar? Why not say, pay people to put them on their houses? You don't even have to make a solar field. Allow people to make money. Right now, they have it rigged so you can't generate money off of your solar panels on the roof of your house. You can only make your electricity bill break even, even though you're putting electricity into the system. They won't pay you for it. That's what's wrong with the system. I would put solar panels on my roof, if I could make five hundred, eight hundred dollars a month on it. But the way they have it rigged, you can't even make money on it. They're giving away this huge grant money for those windmills. Take that grant money and give it to homeowners. Give them a way they can make eight hundred dollars a month. Give it to the lower-class people that need a little extra money. If you make below X amount of money, give them solar panels to put on the roof of their house. Right? And then they can make extra money that way? What's wrong with that?

[107:20]

SS: Have you been involved—

EN: Instead of putting in—

SS: Sorry, go ahead. Instead of putting in—?

EN: Instead of putting in windmills, put them on the roofs of people's houses. Either way, they're giving out grant money for it. You wouldn't even affect the ground that way. You wouldn't affect forestry. You wouldn't need solar fields. You could do it right off the roof of people's houses, and you could make such a difference that way. You wouldn't be destroying habitat on land. You wouldn't be destroying habitat in the water. Then the people would maintain those solar panels. You don't even have to hire people to maintain those solar fields. You don't even need a group of people. The homeowners will take care of them. That would be absolutely great. You're putting to use something that's not going to be used and not be noticed. You're not taking away wildlife. You're not just ruining some marshes or a bunch of land for no reason. Why ruin a whole habitat offshore, when you could do the same thing on people's roofs?

SS: You're a really good spokesperson for all of these issues. Have you been involved in advocacy on this topic?

[108:50]

EN: I started a petition last night, completely against the windmills. So far, I got like fifteen hundred signatures. I'm doing whatever I can. I posted it all over Maine commercial fishermen. Any way possible I can try to stick a wrench in the spokes there. I guess I'm really passionate about fishing. I truly love fishing. Over my dead body they're going to put in those windmills on that piece of bottom, is how I feel. I'm going to try tooth and nail. Whoever I have to call, whatever I got to do to try to fight it, I'm definitely fighting it. I'm a promoter of the hundred percent program, too. Every fish needs to be accounted for, in order for the system to work. National Marine Fisheries needs to know that. I've been very adamant about that at the council meetings as well. Very adamant about the fish. I really enjoy the fishery and I want to see it a booming fishery again, what used to be a great fishery. Portland

Harbor used to be the biggest money-making port in the state of Maine. That's changed, now. Now it doesn't make diddly squat. It's all about lobstering out of Deer Isle and whatnot. I've been trying to help the Portland Fish Exchange. I go to meetings to try to help them generate ideas on how to generate more money, even though the prices aren't as good as they would be from Portland to Gloucester. The prices in Gloucester are definitely better. I still land in Portland, because I feel like we need the Portland Fish Exchange. Basically, paying a fee to keep that place around. I think that I do make a difference there. I think that by me landing there, I'd say it definitely made a difference for them. It definitely takes a [unintelligible] and helps pay for their crew there, and this and that. Every town in Maine offers a facility for fishermen, except for Portland, and I don't understand it. Portland is the only port that doesn't give a facility for lobstermen or fishermen. Well, they give a facility for fishermen to tie up to, but they don't offer anything to help lobstermen. I don't understand that.

[111:23]

SS: When you say facility, what do you mean by that?

EN: In Kennebunkport, for instance, two years ago, they got the working waterfront to help pay for a brand-new facility for us. They they spent like 1.3 million dollars completely rebuilding our wharf: brand new bait shed, brand new heist, docks, pilings, you name it. A completely brand-new facility. Portland doesn't give that. Wells, Maine, they give it. Ogunquit. All these different harbors all offer a wharf for the fishermen. Why doesn't Portland?

SS: Why doesn't it? Do you have any theories?

EN: I was actually trying to raise money. I was trying to talk the manager of the Portland Fish Exchange into letting me put up a heist, so the lobstermen, if they want to market their lobsters wherever they want to, then they can.

SS: What's a heist? Sorry, I don't know that word.

[112:28]

EN: A hoist or heist is a like the fish tackle. If you look at the Portland Fish Exchange, have you watched how they take out fish out of the boats?

SS: No.

EN: Look on the Maine Coast [Fishermen's Association]. Mary has pictures of fish coming out of my fish hold. They have a fish tackle there. If you look on their page, you'll see the heist, and you'll see the rope going down through the roof, and a barrel of fish coming out of the fish hold going up into the fish exchange.

SS: Okay, and what was the other word you just said that was a synonym with heist? A tangle or tackle?

EN: A hoist or a heist.

SS: And a tackle?

EN: Oh, a tackle. Some people call it a fish tackle.

SS: A tackle. How do you spell that?

EN: Some people would some people call it a fish tackle. I would say T-A-C-K-L-E. I'm not good at spelling.

SS: These are all kind of a hoist to lift your fish or your lobsters?

[113:33]

EN: Yeah. Kennebunkport, they provided us with one. Cape Porpoise, they provide the fishermen with a bait shed and a wharf and a chain hoist of sorts. Almost every harbor does. I don't understand why it is Portland doesn't offer a service. I was trying to talk them into, say, charge the fishermen a thousand dollars a year to use the fish tackle or a hoist. Tell them they can't leave anything there, you got to have the room, but they can use the hoist whenever they want, if they pay a thousand dollars a year. Well, I would say there's probably a hundred fifty lobstermen there, out of Portland, that could generate \$150,000 a year, by having a twenty-thousand-dollar hoist put in that you have to maintain. Why not? Right? To run that hoist would probably cost three hundred dollars a month in electricity. I don't understand. Why not? All I'm talking about is taking a twenty-foot by twenty-five-foot section of the desert that they don't use, and turning it into a hoist. The draggers could use it. The lobstermen could use it. The gillnetters could use it. Why not? I mean, you'd have to insure it, this and that, I guess, to insure it for the people, but you make them sign a waiver that says whatever happens while you're using it, whatever happens is on you, basically. Make it known that, basically, you can't sue them if something happens by using their hoist. Why not? I thought it'd be a great way to generate money. I would gladly pay a thousand dollars to be able to use a hoist whenever I want there. It'd be worth it to me. I think that a lot of other lobstermen and fishermen would agree. It was an idea for Portland, there. They wanted different ways to save the Fish Exchange, you know, "How do we generate money?" They have tackles that they're not even using, fish hoists that they're not using anymore. They could move it. All they have to do is move it. They don't even have to buy a new one. Unbolt it, move it around a little bit, bolt it back up. There you go. I guess I'm always trying anyway.

SS: Anything else before we wrap it up? Then I'll tell you about the next steps.

EN I think that's it.

SS: Okay, let me just turn off the recording.

[116:32]

[end of interview]