

Interview with Lucas Raymond, commercial fisherman

Occupation: commercial fisherman

Port Community: Rye, New Hampshire

Interviewer: Sarah Schumann

Date and year: February 3, 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]: Okay, I just started the recording. Great. My name is Sarah Schumann. Today is February 3, 2021. We're doing an online interview via FaceTime with Lucas Raymond. Lucas, what is your occupation?

Lucas Raymond [LR]: I'm a commercial fisherman. I'm a gillnetter out of Rye, New Hampshire.

SS: Is that a full time or a part time job for you?

LR: Full time.

SS: Full time? What's the name of the vessel that you're on?

LR: Currently, it's the F/V Witchcraft. I know back when we did our first interview, it was the Sweet Misery, I believe. I think I would have been fishing on that.

SS: Okay. How old are you?

LR: I am twenty-eight.

SS: Okay. What's your educational background?

LR: I have a high school diploma. I went to college, but I don't have a degree.

SS: Okay. Alright. Well, those were the only quick biographical questions that I wanted to ask you before we got going in earnest on the interview. Now, at this point, it's really up to you to start wherever you'd like to, just to tell us about yourself as a twenty-eight-year-old fisherman in Rye, New Hampshire. Where would you like to begin?

[01:17]

LR: Oh, boy. I'm not sure. I guess what I'm currently doing is running the F/V Witchcraft, out of Rye. We're currently leaving out of the Wentworth, because they're dredging Rye. That's irrelevant. I actually ended up running it because Jay injured his shoulder recently. I had to scramble to find some crewmates and run the boat for him. Actually, speaking on the page of what you were talking about, I actually hadn't fished with Jay last year. The year before, we had fished so hard, so many days. I just had my first son. We were making alright money, but not compared to how many hours we were working. We were on the boat a hundred and fifty hours a week for three months straight. I think we took like six days off or something. I was evaluating how hard I had to work to make any sort of living to support a family. It just didn't seem logical, so I actually left fishing for a little while and I did carpentry for most of the year. I did some other things. I worked on some boats on the weekends and stuff, just because I couldn't get away from it completely. Then I ended up working on a lobster boat for a month before Coronavirus hit. Then the market got all messed up with that. I worked on a farm for a few months. Then Jay ended up calling me back and said, "Lucas, is there any way you'd come back and fish for me?" We talked, and he knew I didn't want to be going quite that hard. I wanted to be home to hang out with my family and stuff. We decided that he wanted me to come back to work and I wanted to fish again, so I did. I started fishing with him again. I don't know, three months ago probably, he injured his shoulder pretty bad, so I started running the boat again. Before that, I fished with Jay for—I think this is my ninth year with him. We fished on the Sweet Misery for seven years. I started fishing when I was twenty, right after I got out of college. I helped him work on the Sweet Misery, get it ready to go fishing, and then he offered me a spot on the deck with him. I pretty much fished ever since, for the most part.

[04:11]

SS: How did you know Jay in the first place?

LR: I dated his daughter. We broke up and he offered me a job. Yep.

SS: Nice. Was that your first exposure to fishing?

LR: It was. Yeah. Just being around him, I saw his lifestyle. I thought fishing was really cool. I admired how hard he worked and what he did. It is an amazing job. I still have a lot of passion and love for fishing. I know, when we had talked last, I think I was probably a little more positive about it. But like I said, I ended up leaving for a little while, just out of frustration, mainly about fish prices. We were catching an alright amount of fish, but just the amount of hours compared to the reward I was seeing was not worth it. I love fishing and I love being out there. There's not much I don't love about fishing. But I want to be with my family, too. When you have to work something like a hundred-plus hours a week to make ends meet, it makes you question things. This year's been a little better. There's a new lady running Yankee Fishermen's Cooperative, which is where we sell our fish. They're in Seabrook, New Hampshire. She's been working on getting our prices better, finding some better markets for us. Whereas like that last year that I had fished with Jay, when he first bought the Witchcraft, I felt like, I don't know. It's a direct sign of the industry, the way it's going. It was a volume fishery. Sometimes we saw prices as low as eighty cents a pound for our pollock that year. It was infuriating to me, honestly, because the pollock that we're

bringing in is an excellent fish. Honestly, one of my favorite fish. The amount of work we put into getting it and all that, and then you see eighty cents a pound.

[06:47]

SS: What is a decent price for pollock?

LR: I would say two dollars a pound, I'm happy with. Sometimes we see more than that. I've seen two-fifty, something like that. I'm more than happy with that. If you can make two dollars a pound on pollock, you can make a living on a small- to medium-sized boat. A pretty good one. But at eighty cents, it's just a volume fishery. The only people that supports are giant boats that are landing huge quantities of fish, beyond what we could even do with our gear method, honestly, I would think, gillnetting. I mean, you can catch a good amount at certain times a year, but I think you know what I mean. The way it's headed is just all the really big draggers, corporate fishing, and I think the prices reflect that. Just volume. I don't know.

SS: How big is the boat that you work on?

LR: It is forty-eight feet.

SS: Okay. Are you state waters or federal or both?

LR: Federal.

SS: Federal only.

LR: Yes. In New Hampshire—I know you had said this was kind of interesting before—we don't have state fisheries. We have pretty much lobstering. There's a girl who's kind of starting to buy some crabs off some people, but that's still mostly caught out of lobster traps. Just last year, I believe, they opened up purse seine for pogies, but they have quite a bit of limitations on how you set up your boat and stuff. You can't use mechanical advantage. Honestly, I don't know all the rules, but I think you basically can't use a power block to haul the seine. The reason they did do that—I will give them credit—was to keep the bigger boats out of our state waters. The big, big seiners from Maine and Mass. They didn't want them catching the all our pogies. I will give the state credit on that. I believe they could have set the law up a little bit different, so that only New Hampshire boats can do it or something. But that's beside the point, I guess.

[09:25]

SS: You mentioned pollock. What other species are you targeting?

LR: Well, we do catch a very small amount of cod, what we're allowed. We catch hake. In recent years, the past couple years, we fished a lot more on hake than the beginning of my career.

SS: Why is that? Why did that change?

LR: Because it's been very hard to make a living in closer. We started going a little bit farther out. Not too far. We do mostly two-day trips now. It just had to do with, inside, the types of fish you're catching. We're seeing more cod, a higher ratio of cod to, say, pollock. There's not really as much hake inside where we fish. A lot of the guys in there, they used to make a really, really good living. A lot of it was catching cod. The cod quota just decreased to a fraction of what anyone used to be allowed to catch. When we see cod in the nets, we basically run away from them. Yeah, a lot of it has to do with the cod. Like I said, where we're fishing, we're catching more hake, because we moved. That definitely helps. Also, another fish we rely on is monkfish. That really helps us out a lot. Some people put the monk gear in closer, where they day-fish. But where we like to monkfish is out a little farther, so our groundfish gear is closer to our monkfish gear. Yeah, it's just a shift we had. Jay bought a little bit bigger of a boat. The Sweet Misery was only forty-two by fourteen. Now we're on a forty-eight by seventeen Newfoundland boat. It's built a lot different—or not a lot different. It's bigger than a Novi, really. More space in the fish hold, bigger bow, built to go out later in the year and worse weather, stuff like that. The change definitely just needed to take place. I personally really like day fishing. One of the things we see inside a ton is dogfish. That's what a lot of the guys inside are making a living on, is dogfish. A couple, few hundred pounds of fish mixed in with them. Jay just wanted to get away from that. Like I said, we see too much cod, not enough fish. It became a real grind to make a living inside. Back in the day, they used to fish in a lot closer to shore. You know, we used to fish twenty, twenty-five miles out. Now we're fishing, normally, anywhere from forty to fifty-five, sixty.

[12:48]

SS: Yeah, I can see where that is a tradeoff between going fishing and spending time with your son. Tough to balance those two things.

LR: It's very tough. That's something that fishermen struggle with, in general. Just time away. Time away from your family. It's always been a struggle. But I know, going back to what I said, Jay, in his beginning of his career, he did offshore fish. Even more than what we're doing now. He was spending four, five, six, seven days out at a time. Then he made a switch. When he decided to buy his own boat, he bought a smaller boat and wanted to go day fishing. When I started fishing, that's what we did, was day fish. As the years progressed, we found we were spending more and more time out fifty miles off, out of Rye, like I said, doing two-day trips or three-day trips. Then you need to be able to hold more gear, you need to be able to hold more fish, etc., so Jay bought a bigger boat. Once again, this kind of goes with the way fishing is headed. I like to tell people all the time. In my eyes, NOAA and the government, they say that they're doing these things to save the fish. I just personally don't believe it. There's still fish being landed, in some cases in massive quantities. It's who's catching them. It's really, really headed in the direction of just big boats, just catching massive quantities at once, instead of, back in the day, hundreds of small boats fishing on a lot smaller quantities.

SS: How do you feel about that? Would you ever fish on a bigger boat, if the opportunity arose?

LR: Honestly, I don't know the answer to that question. I mean, I don't like it. I don't like that that's the way it's shifted. I would fish on a bigger boat than I'm on. I would never want to switch over to some monstrous corporate fishing strategy that I don't really agree with that's

hammering on a resource. I think at that point, I would just rather get out of it. I don't know. That's a really, really tough question for me, honestly. Especially now. I did get away from fishing for a year. I missed that a lot. But I will say, even right now, I actually interviewed with the fire department to get on a fire department job, to just try and get by a little better than what we are now. I will say, my plan with that, I'm hoping that I can fish on the side, maybe get back to day fishing a little or something like that. That schedule kind of allows [that]. It's a pretty flexible schedule, I guess I'd say. One of my reasons, one of my thought processes with that, is have a steady paycheck and still be able to fish, and in a way that I like. Fishing on a relatively small boat, in close to home.

[16:44]

SS: When I first met you, we were at the New Hampshire Food Summit, something like that, in a session on young fishermen. If I recall correctly, a lot of that conversation—and I can't remember who said what—but it focused on how difficult it is to move up from being a deckhand to having a boat of one's own to run. Can you speak to that a little?

LR: Absolutely. Yeah, I think it's extremely hard. Especially if you didn't have any help. I got lucky in a lot of ways to have met Jay. He's been an excellent mentor to me. He was very eager from the start to show me how to run a boat, how to catch fish, not just do the everyday deckhand stuff. I think a lot of boats, even just starting at the beginning right there, I think a lot of boats like to just leave people as their deckhands, and not really train anyone on how to run a boat, how to be a captain. I didn't have that struggle at all. Jay was eager to teach me and I was eager to learn. My third year fishing, he started letting me run the Sweet Misery a little bit. Pretty much ever since then, my whole career has been switching between being a deckhand and a captain for Jay. I had a lot of help with that, and on top of that, Jay has always been—I don't even know what the right word is. But he's been, once again, eager to help me. He's been pushing me to get my own boat and go out fishing. He always says, especially now, he really wants to see the fishing industry survive. As do I. Especially in New Hampshire, I would say, I don't know if it will, at all, honestly, besides lobstering, our one state fishery. I mean, the amount of boats that are left is just so small. Right now, landing at the coop, we're the only people bringing in fish, honestly. The only boat. This summer, there was—give me a second to think about it—this summer there was maybe five or six boats landing at the coop. One of those guys, perfect for your interview. One of them is retiring. Dave Goethel. I don't know if you've ever—

SS: Yeah, I know him.

LR: He's retiring. He's trying to sell his boat. Well, actually two of them. Mike Anderson, he owns the Rimrack. He's trying to sell the Rimrack right now.

SS: Those are literally the two New Hampshire fishermen that I know of. That seems like that's half the fleet.

LR: Yeah, it is. There's two other guys that don't sell to the coop. Both of them will continue to fish. Jay will continue to fish. One of the other guys I mentioned, or one of the other guys I was counting, he's getting old. He's been trying to sell his boat for probably five years, but no one's bought it. Yeah, I'd say most of the fleet is getting out. There's probably three of us that will stay, if possible.

[20:28]

SS: With all these boats on the market, is that something you've thought about? Would that be realistic? Do you have interest in purchasing a boat from a retiring fisherman?

LR: Absolutely. I kind of got off the topic of your question, but I planned on looping back to it.

SS: Follow your train of thought.

LR: No, that's fine. You didn't at all. The major challenge, I would say, is permitting—being able to afford a permit. Right now, Jay still owns the Sweet Misery. Once again, going back, he's extremely, more than willing to help me. He really wants to see me own the Sweet Misery. He's willing to personally finance the boat for me and everything. It's not even expensive, what he wants from me for that boat. But even if he gave me that boat, the only thing that I could think to do with it is dogfish. If I went dogging, I have a friend who has a boat with an open access permit, and that's essentially all he's allowed to do. There's a few other little fisheries. It is extremely, extremely hard to make a living on solely dogfish, without being able to land any other fish and do anything like that. That's kind of where I'm at. The major, major hurdle is just affording a permit. Even buying a permit, anything that's even in the affordable range is mostly just qualifying permits. From there, you have to lease fish to be able to catch fish. Your margins are shrunk. I'm sure you know, but for the purpose of the interview, that's the huge issue with cod. Each permit is allocated X amount, and if you're approaching your allotted amount, you have to lease cod, just to be able to keep fishing. Even if you're not fishing on cod, you have to have cod that you can land. If you are landing any cod, a lot of the time, you're losing money on it, not even making any money. Like I said earlier, [if] we see cod in our nets, we basically run away from that area. That makes it difficult. It shuts a lot of areas off to us that otherwise would be open. I don't know. But yeah, it's very difficult. Even if I found the perfect boat, or even if I got given a boat for free, I still need to buy a permit. Like I said, a cheap qualifying permit is twenty-five, thirty thousand dollars. That would have probably no allocation on it for fish. It'd probably have some pollock on it. But those lease out really cheap anyway. That's not really what people are struggling to buy or find. A huge part of it's cod. Without even fishing on them, I'd just need to be able to lease it, and they lease for two dollars plus a pound. Half the time, that's what they sell for at the market. That's what I'm saying. It's a choke species. It's a quite a struggle. That's another part of it. You can invest all this money into this, and who knows if anyone's even going to be allowed to fish in a couple of years. I mean, that's the way that it's looking over here. I'm sure you must have talked to some people in Gloucester and I'd love to hear what some of them have to say. I'd listen to those interviews. That's a city, they used to have how many fishermen? Hundreds and hundreds of boats. Never mind deckhands; I'm talking about owners. Now how many boats leave out of there? Thirty? Forty? I think there's less than fifty.

[23:09]

SS: Yeah, it's pretty diminished.

LR: Yeah. New Hampshire went from forty to fifty fishermen down to five, pretty much. Most of those guys don't even go all year anymore. A lot of them don't have enough quota on their permits to really make a living. It's a sad state. I don't know. Yeah, it's a very difficult industry to get into. Like I said, you can spend all this money, spend a hundred to two hundred thousand dollars to have a decent boat and decent permit. It's going to take a while to pay that off in fish, nowadays.

SS: It seems like you feel like it's a safer bet to do something else for stable income, and then fish part time on the side to get your fix. Is that right?

LR: Yeah. Not just to get my fix, but yes, I mean, I do. Like I said, one of the reasons that I believe in this is I think the industry is extremely important. I mean, we're feeding people. An industry that feeds people shouldn't be treated like this and shouldn't be just acted like it's not important, and that it can leave, and all the history with it. I mean, that's a major reason why people moved to America and New England: for our cod, for fish. Now most people don't even know that, never mind look at the importance. Fishing's so far removed from society, I think. For that matter, the way we eat is too far removed from society. A lot of the time, I think people are not aware of the work that goes into feeding them. They're not aware of the struggles of the food producers, farmers and fishermen. I think that's really a shame. People just go to the grocery store and grab something off the shelf and complain about how expensive it is, when in reality, it's too cheap. People that can afford to make food that cheap are giant corporations that do it on a massive, massive scale. It's Walmart versus mom-and-pop shops. I think time and time again, we've seen quality suffers. I mean, that's a brick of America and our society: small shops, independent business owners, and entrepreneurship. I think a lot of that's lost. It's sad. I think, just in general, the fishing industry is extremely important and dear to my heart. I know one thing I said in the interview last time, that I find really bothers me, it's kind of on the same page of being so far removed from your food supply, is fishermen are often blamed as the scapegoats for problems that we have with our ocean. Like, "Oh, there's no fish left. Well, the fishermen messed it all up. Now if they disappear, who cares?" I think that's such a shame and such an ignorant way to look at things. I'd say more of the issues that are going on in the ocean, from fish volumes to everything that's happening in the ocean, a lot of it is directly related to how we live on land: everyone's consumption on a massive scale, everything we have, chemicals leaching into groundwater, running into rivers, running into the ocean. Everyone just uses single-use plastic and doesn't think about it, doesn't care about it. Even if they do, they go, "Oh, well, it's getting recycled," not really realizing that plastic is the least recycled material there is. What in reality happens to it is it ends up in the dump or it ends up in the ocean, and it's causing major problems. I've said it a hundred times to people. How hard is it to use a reusable coffee mug, instead of go[ing] to Dunkin Donuts and get[ting] a plastic coffee cup? Why? It's infuriating to me. I think that's a major problem with the oceans. Like I said, the way we live on land is harming the oceans. Even people who have never set foot on land [editor's note: narrator may have meant to say "on a boat" instead of "on land"]. Going back to corporatization, the corporate farms that are just dumping chemicals into the ground in the Midwest, and they run out of those rivers, cause dead zones in the ocean. Fertilizer. These single crops. Make money on corn, because corn syrup is cheap. Our food industry is very messed up as a whole. It's harmful to people. It's harmful to the environment. It's all set up for corporations. It's not set up for small people and businesses. Sorry, I know I'm ranting.

[30:51]

SS: No. Describe a better picture. In the perfect world, what would New Hampshire fisheries look like, and how would that fit into a better food system that works more for the people, the land, and the water?

LR: I think just returning to what it was, a long time ago, honestly. I mean, when it was all small, or almost all, small-scale. I can use scalloping, even, as a perfect example. I've been out scalloping on Middle Bank. Actually, there's some small fishermen who still do it, but they make a decent living for a month. I was scalloping out on Middle Bank. I'll say there was probably twenty-five, thirty small boats and twenty-five, thirty big boats. By big boats, I mean eighty-foot draggers. The laws on them, they're fishing IFQ, individual fishing quotas, like our fish stocks are set up. They're allocated X amount or they'd have to lease to land however many scallops. They're allowed to pull it out of this huge area. But they're in fishing on Middle Bank with all the little guys. The amount of scallops there was unbelievable. I mean, there was, like I said, probably sixty boats, big and small, all fishing on this little area for a month. The scallops were just like, it was great fishing. But then the scallops obviously dry up, eventually. In my eyes, the whole time, I was thinking, these big boats could be out way farther, fishing on some other scallop bed, making a good living, and all thirty of these boats here, the little boats, could be here probably all year making a living. I doubt they would have the same effect as the large boats, because those large boats are just hauling in so much at once. How's something's supposed to recover, when it's just being fished on that hard and that intense, in such a small area? I just don't think that the small boats could ever cause an issue like that. We're fishing with—a ten-foot dredge you're allowed, I believe it is. Don't quote me on the size. It's ten. Maybe it's twelve. I believe it's ten feet you're allowed, wide though. The big boats are allowed two fifteen-foot dredges. They're hauling in the same area with two fifteen-footers, and we have ten feet behind us, if that. Most of the small boats that are fishing don't even have a full ten-foot dredge, because they're not big enough to even be able to pull that. I think you can just have a lot more independently owned small boats, at the least, fishing in close to shore, making a good living and being happy doing what they are, and not causing excessive damage. I don't know. I don't have all the answers. I said that at Slow Fish too, and a lot of people asked me, "Well, how do you fix the issue?" I said, "Well, I came here to see what other people said about that, because I don't necessarily have answers." I'm not ever going to say the ocean isn't changing. I think the ocean's always changing, even if humans weren't a factor. I wish we weren't. I'm not saying we shouldn't work to be better. We should always be trying to. We should always be bettering ourselves and bettering our impact. But the ocean's ever-changing. The Earth's ever changing. To be able to adapt with that, that's one of the many challenges of fishing. I think it's one thing I've heard—I don't know the quotes off the top of my head, but I've read quotes and heard quotes of people saying it's unbelievable, the adaptability of fishermen. To just keep figuring something out to make a living off the natural resources in the ocean. It's a very cool, interesting part of what we do. There are so many different fisheries. I know you've pointed that out to me. In Rhode Island, you have a lot of state fisheries. When you're fishing for bluefish, is that in state waters?

SS: Yeah.

[35:50]

LR: Yeah. See, that's cool. We couldn't do that here. I don't think, even if we had the volume of them around, I don't think that we legally can do it. I know, down in Massachusetts, they fish on stripers. We're not allowed to do that commercially. We have a lot of restrictions like that. We do have such a small shoreline as well. It's all really federal boats, besides—the few fishermen, not lobstermen. I don't know, I wish I had a better answer for what's a better picture. I think about it all the time. But I do just truly believe that smaller scale fishermen and farmers take better care of the earth around them. If you look at businesses and corporations, all they're about is dollar signs. Whereas, if you go into your local small farm, that's not what they're thinking about. Obviously, they're charging a large price for their product, but I don't think any of them are getting rich. The amount of work that is required to produce food is unbelievable. It's hard to understand unless you do it yourself, if you're there, putting in the work. You know. To catch fish is hard. There's a lot of very hard times financially. I think, like I said, if we had smaller boats, they'd be bringing in less quantity at once. The price would go up. Everyone on smaller boats could do better and could just continue to fish more months a year, bringing in lower quantities and really caring about the quality of the food they're bringing in, and really caring about the resource that they're extracting it from. It's not just dollar signs. We're all trying to make a living, obviously. But that's not what it is to us. If you have some corporate board telling you, you need to make X amount this month, and you just have to hammer on a resource to do that. That's not what we're doing. All these guys out here are trying to make a living their entire life. I don't know any fisherman that wants to kill off every cod. That's self-defeating.

[39:08]

SS: You mentioned speaking at Slow Fish, and I met you at the New Hampshire Food Summit. It sounds like you've been involved to some extent in some of these movements and giving speeches and interviews and stuff like that. Is that right?

LR: Yeah. Yeah. I can't say I'm comfortable with it, or I really like it. But once again, I think the fishing industry is extremely crucial. It's so important. I think it needs a voice. I think what you're doing is excellent. I'm very hopeful that it will make a change. When we were at the Food Summit, we were talking about starting a New Hampshire—possibly a New England— young fishermen's alliance. I think things like that need to happen. This young fish bill being passed [editor's note: Young Fishermen's Development Act, passed in December 2020], I really hope it makes a difference. From what I've heard of it, I don't necessarily know, with where the money's going, how big of a difference that will make. But that's a personal opinion and I hope I'm wrong. At least there's a light being shone on important issues. We need people to be out there catching fish. I really hope that it's small boats and independent fishermen. I hope things kind of come back. We've seen it with farming. A long time ago, farming was all independent fisher—all independent farmers. I'm mixing up my words here. Then we slowly got away from it. I think in recent years, obviously, it's nowhere near what it ever was, and I don't think it's ever going to go back to that. Because, what was it? It used to be like ninety percent of farms were small and independent family owned. Now it's the exact flip of that, I believe. Something like eighty to ninety percent are corporate-owned. But I think that people understand the importance of buying local from the small family farm. I think they see and taste the difference in their food. Once again, going back to even just seeing it produced. Driving by and seeing the farm and seeing the guy out there working. Understanding what it takes to have food. I think that's an important connection that people need. It's a connection to the natural, the real world and I think, we've become so separated

from that. I don't know. Something needs to be done about that. I really, really believe in the importance of small independent fishermen and farms, and I will always speak on that behalf, even if I'm not able to do this as a living, which is not what I hope for. I think just the reality of it is, and it did take me having a family and just trying to provide, it can be scary, honestly. As horrible as that sounds, it can. There's weeks, I'm like, "Awesome, I'm doing amazing." Then there could be a whole month you're just like, "I got to figure something out, real quick, because it's not just me." I can live on nothing. Not everyone can. And not a whole family. A whole family can't. And no one should have to. Once again, we're doing a very important thing here, bringing high-quality food in to people. People need to eat. The world's population is exploding, and we need to figure out a way to do it efficiently. I know a lot of people talk about fish farming and stuff, too. That's a whole other topic I won't even get off on. Personally, I don't agree with that. I'll leave it at that. I don't know. What was I even saying?

[43:58]

SS: Let me ask a question. Do you see other people around your age in the New Hampshire fishing industry?

LR: Very, very, very few. A really good friend of mine, Zack Griggs, he's thirty-two, I think he just turned. Younger than me? I think I only know one person younger than me. He wants to stay fishing, I think. When I say fishing, I don't mean lobstering. Once again, I do want to make that distinction. I know there are other lobstermen. That's a fishery that's still doing well in our area. That's something different than Rhode Island as well, because you guys used to do great lobstering, and from what I hear, that's horrible.

SS: All over. Yeah.

LR: Yeah. Mostly due to environmental conditions. The warming of the waters, correct?

SS: Yeah. Yeah. There's a few guys who do well, but that's pretty much all it can sustain.

LR: Yeah. No, up here, our lobster industry is still doing well. Hopefully it stays. But I think that's a lot to wish for, when you look at Rhode Island and states to our south. I think one problem that I see with that, up here, and maybe it happened as well in your state, is the pressure that that industry even has. A ton of people who used to be fishermen switched to lobstering, because their quotas were slashed. They couldn't make a living fishing anymore. They already had a boat and they like being on the water, so they went to lobstering. There can only be so many lobstermen. We can't all rely on one resource. Not every fisherman can do that. So yeah, I do have to make that distinction. I can't speak for lobstering. When I say fishermen, I mean catching fish, directly. Because that industry, it's in a different category for me.

SS: That's a good clarification.

[46:21]

LR: Yeah, I see people getting into that. But I don't see anyone getting into fishing. The old people are selling their boats and no one's buying them. Even really nice ones. I mean, it

hasn't been on the market that long, but the Rimrack's about as nice as the boat as you could ever have. I still think that's going to sell, but he's had it on there for a few months, and I don't even know if he's gotten any offers. I think that boat will be sold, and I'll tell you, I don't think it's going to stay in New Hampshire. I think someone's going to buy it in Mass., honestly. He's one of the fishermen I was speaking of earlier, and he makes a majority of his money in Massachusetts now. He fishes off the Cape for squid. He also scallops in Massachusetts waters as well as federal waters. But a majority of his money's made in Mass state waters, not New Hampshire, not even being landed in New Hampshire a lot of the time. I will say, I don't know what parts of that you should say for the interview, I guess, because that's his business, what he's doing. But if you want to say a boat in New Hampshire makes more money in Massachusetts, lands more in Mass than New Hampshire, I mean, I think that's a fair point. You know? Because back when he started, that wasn't the case. He could go out and go groundfishing. That's what it's directly due to. He can't do that well groundfishing, so he found other fisheries. The other fisheries don't exist in New Hampshire, so he had to go to Mass. I don't know. Yeah, it's tough up here. I think part of it, too, is we're not set up to help fishermen, either. You go to a place like Gloucester or even Point Judith, there always has been a lot of fishermen, and so there's still—I think, from an outsider's point of view, I know it's at least true in Gloucester—there's still an understanding of the fishery fishing industry. There's still businesses that are directly supporting and relying on the fishing industry. That's it. There's more understanding in the public. That's important, and it's very hard. When I was working on Vernon family farm, Jeremiah and I talked about things like this all the time. He said, "You know, I think a lot of the struggle with fishing is you only ever see a fishing boat when it's not working, when it's sitting at the dock, when it's sitting on the mooring, so there's really no understanding of it." There really isn't. It's interesting. You see a boat go out to sea and comes back, and there's fish on it. Or there's not—even worse. But I don't know. It's a thought all the time I have: how to develop more of an understanding of what we do, why we do it, how we do it. Like I said earlier, the importance of these interviews, and these events, like Slow Fish and these groups like NAMA that are just trying to create public understanding, and people really understanding the importance of this issue, and that we need these small fishermen to still be around and bringing in seafood for us. I don't know. Sorry, I feel like I like this format. I feel like if I knew what I was saying, I could get across a lot more with it.

SS: No, you're doing great. When you were away from fishing for a year, what were the things you missed the most about it?

[51:05]

LR: Oh, boy. It's hard to say, because I think a lot of it's a feeling. It's very hard to describe. A lot of it's the entire experience, I guess. Being on the water, the things you see, even the things you smell, like the fresh saltwater air, and the sunrises in the morning, and dolphins and whales swimming around you. People pay to see that stuff, and I get to get paid and see it. I love the whole thing. I love that it's physical work. I think just catching fish is just enjoyable. I think it's important. We bring in very high-quality food. We're the last hunters. It's the last commercial wild food source that's widely available. I think that alone is very important. Geez, what I would miss about it? I don't know. It's very hard to explain. Jay texted me one day. He sent me this picture of me covered in slime from setting out the net. The net had a bunch of slime in it that day and I was just covered in it. It was disgusting. Jay sent me that picture, and he goes, "Do you miss this?" And I was like, "You know, I do. I do."

That experience, I'm sure when that happened, I was like "This is this awful." Probably not a good day. Normally when the nets are full of slime, you don't catch fish, either. I don't remember the specific day, but I remember that picture and that happening. I don't know. There's nothing like it. There really isn't. Having worked on a farm now, too—not for a lot, I'm not a farmer, but I did a little bit, and I liked that a lot as well. But there's nothing like fishing. There isn't. The freedom of being out at sea. I don't know. Everything about it. Things you see, smell, everything. Like I said, it's just a different world. It's experiencing a different life in some ways. Very different than being on land.

[54:20]

SS: This is after nine years of fishing and it seems like the honeymoon hasn't worn off at all for you.

LR: [laughter] Talk to me when I come in when it's zero degrees out, fifteen-foot seas, and we didn't catch anything.

SS: Yeah. What are some things you don't like about fishing?

LR: What's that?

SSL What are downsides of fishing or of being a fisherman, choosing that lifestyle?

LR: Yeah. Well, one of it, going right off what I just said, sometimes dealing with the weather and dealing with working outside on the ocean. It's just brutal, really. It's not just hard. It's brutal. The ocean's an unforgiving place. It doesn't care about you, as much as you might care about it. It doesn't. You know? It can be very hard, physically. I can't think of another job that beats you up more just standing there. You can just be standing there, and the boat is throwing you around violently sometimes. That's a challenge. But that's one of those Type B fun things, anyways. You look back on it, you're like, "That was horrible." But for some reason, it ended up being fun, because it was challenging, I guess. You know?

[55:27]

SS: What did you say? Type B fun?

LR: Yeah. You know, there's like different types of fun.

SS: Oh, okay. No, I haven't heard about that.

LR: Yeah, I don't know all of them. I think it's called Type B. Type A fun's like, you're having fun, right now. Type B fun or whatever is like, when you're not really having a good time, but then you get away from it, and you can't stop thinking about it. Like, you want to do it again. I kind of think that's how fishing is in general. But, yeah, negative things. I think the biggest one is just the time requirement, the time commitment. I mean, the only way to make a good living out there, or any living really, is to put in a lot of time. All the time out there is amazing and I love being on the ocean. Like I said, just being away from your family is very difficult and, I don't know, a lot of the time not worth it. You question things, like, "I'm taking all this time." If you think about like time versus money, it's like, what money is worth time

away from your family? There really isn't any. I know my experiences on the ocean aren't just work to me. What I experience on the ocean, I love and I'm passionate about. That part is obviously part of the equation. But yeah, the biggest thing I hate about fishing is just there's not really a work-life balance at all. At all. It's work. There's always work. You're on the ocean, there's work to be done. Then you get in and the boat needs work. It's just, there's always something that needs to be done: for the boat, on the boat, on the water. It doesn't leave you any time to live any other parts of life, sometimes, and that can be very exhausting and frustrating. Yeah, that's the biggest thing I hate about it. The other thing, the other big thing for me, is just the amount of money you make, sometimes. Like I said, it's not always bad. I can't say that. I can't say that I don't make an okay living. But to work as hard as I make, to make an okay living, is frustrating, I guess. You know? I guess it's just all time, though. I just wish I wish I could spend a little less time on the boat, and focused on the boat, even when it's on land, catch a little bit less fish for a little bit more money, and make a decent living fishing a decent amount, and still have a family life and a life away from that, as well. I think a part that's great about it is when your family gets a little older, when kids get a little older, they come they can come out fishing with me and experience the things that I experience, and probably fall in love with it, as well. I don't know if that's a gift or a curse.

[59:26]

SS: What kind of person do you think falls in love with fishing? What kind of person is drawn to this lifestyle that gives you no work-life balance, so much uncertainty, all of that?

LR: What's it called? A self-masochist or whatever? [laughter] I don't know. I don't know exactly what type. I think you have to love the outdoors. You have to love working hard, physically. What type of person falls in love with it? I don't know. That's another interesting question. I don't know. I'll tell you I've taken a lot of people out that don't love it, that don't even like it at all. [laughter] Yeah, like I said, I was struggling for crewmates for a while. You see a lot of people that come out and they just get this look on their face. You can tell they're just like, "Why am I here? What did I do in my life to be here right now? It's downright miserable." [laughter]

[60:52]

SS: Are these people who thought they wanted to do it, or did you twist their arm?

LR: No, no, no, I didn't. They thought it sounded like an interesting job. I think there's a lot of romance. A lot of people romanticize about it: being on the boat, on the water all day, catching fish. It sounds great. A lot of people do it for leisure, recreation, you know? But what we do, it's not really that. Sure, once in a while, there's one of those summer days that it's nicer on the water than on land, temperature-wise, it's flat, calm, and you're catching the perfect amount of fish—not too much that it's an unbelievable amount of work, but you're still making good money. They do exist, days like that. I guess it's what you always picture in your head. But that's not fishing, in reality. A lot of it's suffering through weather and extreme temperatures, hot or cold, and just very demanding physical work. I think people underestimate that part of it a lot. I think a lot of people, they just don't know how much it takes. Like one of the guys that came out with me, that's what he directly said. He's like, "I work on farms, normally. I've done some hard jobs." He was like, "I didn't really ever think it

would be too hard. But I just couldn't do it." I think a lot of it was weather, though. Like I said, the boat moving around. Working on a platform that's moving all the time is challenging. I think a lot of people can't overcome that. Not *can't*; I think they're not *willing* to put themselves through that. Yeah, I don't know. I think someone who falls in love with fishing is just, I don't know. I don't know the type of person, but I think there's like a beauty and struggle, sometimes, and it's part of it. I think, once again, going back to the connection with nature, that's how the natural world lives. The natural world is full of struggle. Most animals don't live in comfort. But humans have figured out this way to alter reality. A lot of us live in comfort all the time. Part of that's with money. I think that's why the way that people live in society and fishing don't truly coexist. They're quite opposite. Like fishing is very wild. It doesn't care what time it is. The fish don't care that it's Christmas. They're still doing whatever fish do. They don't care if it's the middle of the night. They don't care—or they do care—if there's a crazy storm coming. They care very much. But it could be horrible weather for two weeks before Christmas, say, and then Christmas is a nice day out. It's like, "Oh, I should go fishing today." That's what you're really thinking in your head. Me personally, I'd never do that, because I want to be with my family. You know what I'm saying? The way we live in society, people have a forty-hour-a-week schedule, and they work nine to five. They can schedule all these life events around that. People all the time are like, "Do you have you have Monday off?" I'm like, "I don't know. I'll tell you on Sunday, when the wind prediction's up. As long as the weatherman gives me a fair prediction, which they normally don't anymore." You're living off what nature forces you to live off. You go out and fish, and even excellent fishermen, you're living off what the ocean is providing for you, and that's that. You have to live with it. You can go out, do all the work you want, work as hard as you can, and sometimes you're not going to catch the fish. Other times, you're going to catch a crazy abundance of fish and you're going to do really well. Like I said, that's the natural world. I think, when you really allow yourself to engage in that, I think you do fall in love with it. You know? I think because it feels so natural. But the outside world, people who haven't experienced that, can't understand it. I guess it seems ridiculous. I don't know. I don't know. Fishing is something you have to truly experience to understand. By that, I don't mean going out one time, even. You have to fish for a while to understand all of it: the highs, the lows, the work that's put in, how great it can be sometimes, and how horrible it can be other times. Yeah. I don't know.

[67:48]

SS: I feel like you did a really good job of describing how fishing makes you feel and just the uniqueness of fishing, and why it's important to maintain those connections. Thank you.

LR: I guess I'll say, for one second, even farming—just because it's just a good way to explain it—farmers rely very heavily on certain factors that are in the natural world. I think that's why a lot of people fall in love with farming. Horrible weather can break them and great weather can make them. They rely on rain and a lot of factors that you can't predict. But they have more factors that they can control than us. Humans nowadays want to be able to control every factor. But fishing, you can't control almost any factors. You're in charge of your boat and if you're putting yourself out there on a horrible day, and whatnot, but a lot of it is just giving into the ocean. If it's horrible weather, you can't go. When it's great weather, you have to go. When it's great fishing, you have to go. There's something cool about letting nature control you, relying on the cycles of the moon and how that affects fishing and stuff.

There's just such a deep connection to me. It's all nature. There's definitely no other job in the world that is that reliant on natural factors.

[69:49]

SS: Yeah, it's pretty unique. You mentioned at the beginning that you did go to college, or did some college, before you started fishing with Jay?

LR: Yep.

SS: What were you planning to do with your life? Did you have a picture, before you fell in love with fishing?

LR: Yeah, I was going to school for fire science to become a firefighter. A lot of people in my family had done that before. I had been around the fire departments and firefighters a lot. That's where I was headed. Then I started fishing and fell in love with that.

SS: And now you're thinking about coming back around to the fire trajectory?

LR: Yeah.

SS: If you picture your life ten years from now, where do you think you'll be?

LR: One second. Sorry.

SS: Go ahead.

LR: Where were you saying?

SS: If you picture your life, about ten years from now, where do you think you'll be?

LR: Oh, boy. Honestly, that's a very hard question to answer. I guess the major thing that I want to ensure is being able to have quality time with my family, though. Wherever that's ensured, I guess. I hope that I'm still able to at least make part of my living on the water. But I do have bigger priorities than that now. I don't know. I would say, most likely, I'm going to figure out a way to fish as well, at least on the side.

SS: Let's hope so. You obviously love it. Was there anything else you'd like to add, before we wrap it up?

[72:11]

LR: I can't think of anything at the moment. Like you said, if I read through what I said already, I'm sure there's points that I think are very important that I probably have not mentioned. Like I said, I haven't done an interview in quite a while.

SS: Well, if you think of anything else that you want to add, that's fine. We can jump on the phone again, or you write them down or whatever's easiest for you.

LR: Alright. Well, thank you very much. The one thing I'd like to add, I already said at once, but I really do appreciate you doing this. I'm sure it's taken you a ton of time, but I do believe in its importance and having people like you put the work in to do that is exactly what the fishing industry needs, so we can have some sort of understanding.

SS: Thanks, and I hope you'll continue speaking out and helping the public understand what it's like to be a fisherman and why we need fisheries for the future, because you do a really nice job of putting that into words.

LR: Thank you. I don't feel like I do.

SS: Yes, you do. I'll shut off this recorder and then we can talk about what the next steps are

LR: Okay.

[73:34]

[end of interview]