

Interview with: H. Gordon
Occupation: Meat Cutter/Retired Fisherman
Port Community: Sullivan, Maine
Interviewer: K. Yentes
Interview Location: Howard's Truck
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KY: I can take anything out that you would like me to. I am going to write this up and send it to you for you to review. If you could state your name and how old you are.

HG: I am Howard Gordon Jr. and I am 54 years old.

KY: Can you tell me a little bit about your neighborhood? Was it a fishing neighborhood?

HG: As a child I grew up in a fishing neighborhood which is Sullivan and from that point I traveled several different places and then my teenage age years came back to my father and mainly spending the weekends fishing with him. I never really had a set neighborhood.

KY: Was your father just a fisherman or did he have any other occupations?

HG: My father was just a summer time fisherman basically from April until November. He started when he was 11 years old until he was 78.

KY: When did you start fishing?

HG: I started fishing when I was 12 years old and until I was 17. I fished weekends and summers while I was in high school. Then stopped fishing until I was 35. Between the ages of 35 and 45 I fished a few times in the summer. From 45 to 53 I fished every chance I could get.

KY: Was there any particular reason for the laps in time you were fishing?

HG: Mainly situational things. I chose not to be a fisherman because of the inconsistency of the income I was going to make. I got married and had two children and needed a steady source of income. The money, it wasn't there fishing, you would make your money from April until November then you would live on what you made during the summer and it wouldn't take care of my two kids. I went to school and became a meat cutter and chose that profession, then as part time and as I got older I wanted to kind of re-hook up lobstering with my dad and that is what I did.

KY: I know you have your one daughter and then you have another child?

GH: I have a son, Chad.

KY: Did you ever want them to get into fishing?

GH: I kind of wanted my son to, because it would have worked well for his behavior to be self employed and not have to deal with people and being self employed would have been perfect for him. So I would have loved to have him be a fisherman.

KY: But just the way to licensing works out in Maine, he couldn't get a license or a student license because he was no longer in school?

GH: If you go, the way I understand, in high school any kid in high school can actually get their license that is not an issue. It is once you are out of high school you can't get it. If you have it and give it up, you can't get it back, that's the law.

KY: What was it like to be a child of a fisherman?

GH: You know a lot of pride in having a father as a fisherman. Always wanted to be part of this pride. It's an honor having a father that was a reputable fisherman, a good fisherman people saw that and I always wanted to do this, I always wanted to be a fisherman as I got older. When I was a kid it wasn't such a big issue, I wasn't interested in that. I got older and matured and the burning desire to become a fisherman was there, kind of always wanted to but it wasn't a reality at the point I was at.

KY: So what was your first fishing job? Did you start out fishing, or baiting bags, or...?

GH: When I started with my father we would bait the bags and haul the traps. We didn't have a pot hauler; we hauled the traps by hand. So I am sixteen years old, I think a sophomore in high school, I have gone from 150 lbs. to 185 lbs. in one summer just from hauling these traps by hand, I would bait the bait bags and haul the traps by hand. It was just the hardest thing you could possibly imagine. You couldn't move your arms anymore, pulling rope. So I started right off doing it all, you know hauling traps.

KY: What kind of boat did your dad have?

GH: Bay boats, usually a flat bottomed twenty foot boat. First boat I think we had, had a 25 horse on it and that is what we fished with. As time progressed, he went up to a 22 foot with a 125-150 horse outboard motor on it. He was always known for sinking his boat, so you never knew what month from the next what we had for a motor. He had an issue with sinking boats, I'm not kidding that is what he did. Always something stupid, go out and bail the boat and the motor would be on the board on the water. There we go get it in, get it fixed and get another one.

KY: Did you know any women that were involved in the fishing industry?

GH: Not personally, no. There were a few ladies that were up bay that would harvest kelp and dry that out. Personally know them, no you would just see them harvesting it. It seemed to be a man dominated industry.

KY: When you started to fish, you started to fish again when you were 35?

GH: Yea 35.

KY: Did you have any other occupations while you were fishing?

GH: Yes I was a fulltime meat cutter.

KY: OK.

GH: I did that for extra money, mainly just wanted to be on the boat with my father.

KY: What was a typical trip like, when did you leave, when did you get back?

GH: He was an early fisherman, he would want to be on the boat when the sun came up. If the sun came up at four in the morning he wanted to be there when it came up. He wanted to beat the heat. He never wanted to be out when it was hot. We would be in by 11 or 12 o'clock at the latest. So it was just mainly early morning, but it depended on the tide too. Sometimes you would have to play with the tide, sometimes you would have to go out low tide to get some of the traps that were down. Coming into that river the tide would hold some of them buoys down. [Phone Rings] I forgot the question, the phone threw me off.

KY: Just what a typical trip was like.

GH: It was nice, you would go and bait the bait bags and haul the traps and come in. It was just a typical day, you would play with the tides, different area each day and try to let the traps set for three days, two or three days, and haul them back.

KY: Did any women that you know bait the bait bags or...

GH: Step-mother made most of the bait bags. When we first started out we would build wooden traps, so they were oak traps for the most part. Being that there was a lot of current, I mean she would bait the bait bags and we would build the traps. We would put an inch and a half of cement in the middle of the traps and five bricks in each end to hold them in the current. They were fairly heavy. She was much of a man as everyone else was, to tell you the truth.

KY: Have you ever found anything unusual or had any close calls while you were on the river?

GH: I have done more praying on a boat than I have in any church in my life. You know, you get out there and would be fishing and all of a sudden the fog would come in and sometimes it comes in so fast that you completely lose sense of the direction you are in. That wouldn't bother me, but I did do some scalloping with a diver in the winter time and you know the seas are just incredible. I can remember being out there once and the seas were rough, the boat would come up in the air and come right down I would be air born then the boat would hit and I would slide all the way to the stern. I would work myself all the way up to the bow and do the same thing again. The boat would drop out from underneath me and hit it and I would slide all the way back to the stern and have to walk back up. I had to try and hang on just to stay in the boat. There was praying involved in that. Going down over the falls you would, the motor would die or whatever and you are going sideways down over the falls and you could see the rocks coming and for some strange reason you would just get through it. I never fell overboard. My father never fell over, he couldn't swim a stroke. Which I think most fishermen couldn't and still can't.

KY: Did you or your father have any physical health issues related to fishing? Like a lot of guys say arthritis or back problems.

GH: I can't call it, I don't know, I consider myself a fairly hard worker so I have a degree of arthritis in my back. You know I can say that's on fishing because the amount

of muscles I actually built in my back as a kid was incredible, so when you don't fish you don't use them you lose them. I think within that I got arthritis in my back.

KY: How would you the industry has changed over the years?

GH: Technology is so much better, you have LORAN, radar, fathom, you have wire traps, the simplicity of it is so much better. You know now they have those small portable pot haulers that you can put on your boat, instead of having your big nigger heads set up.

Wife: You will have to edit that part out.

GH: No that is really what they are called. That is what they are called; well that is what I knew them by. So technology has made things easier for fishermen, outboard motors last longer they don't break down as much, traps are lighter and easier to haul because they are wire.

KY: Do you feel that because of all the new technology that some of the heritage of fishing has been lost, because some things are so much easier now?

GH: No, because there is always something more to do that is just as hard. You know you might not be able to haul...with the wooden traps you could only haul so many you know 100 traps and you were pretty burnt, wire traps you can haul 150. So you will just work harder in a different area.

KY: In your opinion what makes a good fisherman?

GH: Honest, somebody who takes care of the other people that are out there with them. Everybody takes care of everyone, you don't burn anybody, and it's just taking care of people. You work hard and keep your nose clean. That is what makes a good fisherman. You know you share, you help, help those who help themselves. Taking care of each other. I have watched Donny and my father, my father couldn't get the traps in and Donny would go out and haul the traps for my father. Then Donny wouldn't be catching any lobsters and wouldn't know what to do and he would call up my father, and my father would say "hey go up on this shore here and set some traps there and you will do okay there". And Donny would do okay, and that would keep Donny going and Donny would help my father get the traps out. So everybody just takes care of everybody. A real bonding.

KY: In your opinion what years were best for the fishing industry?

GH: That is a hard one for me. Wow. Fishing with him [his father] these last couple of years, and talking with him were absolutely incredible. My father had never caught a three hundred pound day in his life and the last couple of years, the last year he hit the three hundred pound mark which is actually incredible considering you are going out at five or four-thirty in the morning and you are getting in at ten or eleven and you have three hundred pounds of lobsters. You had a great day. He was like a kid in a candy store, because he would chase them around and play little games on where he could catch them and he would find them. It was pretty impressive what he did.

KY: What do you think the future holds for fishing in the community of Sullivan and the surrounding areas?

GH: If the government stays out of it they will do fine. If they leave them and let them regulate themselves, they will do okay. They know what they are doing, they are not out to screw themselves. You know, they have to stay out of it (government), they (fishermen) manage themselves.

KY: Would you recommend young people getting into fishing today?

GH: Absolutely.

KY: And why?

GH: It's an honest living and there is good money in it, there is great money in it. I would rather see kids get educations and college degrees, but for those that, that doesn't work for them fishing is a fantastic way to make money.

KY: Would you want to be fishing today with the current regulations that are in place?

GH: I would do anything to fish today, no matter what regulations are in place. I would just like to get a license to do that. I would have liked to of had my father's license when he passed. I think there should be some changes there. I think a father should be able to pass down his license to his son. I would love to be able to fish today. As a career change it would be great.

KY: When you were fishing, did you personally own a boat or did you work on your father's?

GH: I just worked on my father's. I was in it for the money.

KY: What was it like being in a relationship when you were fishing?

GH: That is hard to answer. It was good and it was bad. You worked you're a** off and make, I would work all week long for seventy-five dollars and it would kill me. I would have really liked to have made a little bit more, but he was just pretty tight.

KY: What are some of the effects you have seen or felt on your family or relationships as a result of changes in the fishery?

GH: It didn't affect me, because I was a full time meat cutter. It didn't affect me, my wages were actually made through being a meat cutter and fishing was to subsidize my income a little bit and it didn't effect me.

KY: What have been some of the ebbs and flows in the fishing industry; some of the ups and downs?

GH: Its, I would have to have been a more consistent fisherman to answer the ups and downs of it. I have seen the issue with the fishermen not being able to get bait. I have seen the hardships of the price dropping out from below them. I have seen the struggles that fishermen had just from the natural things that occur.

KY: Are any of your close friends in the fishing industry or would you say they come from other places?

GH: I have two or three close friends that are fishermen. I have one Tim [XX0:17:55] out of Stonington, he is a serious fisherman. There is another gentleman down there by

the name of Andrew Go, I know him. I have probably four or five friends in my life that I can address and talk to about fishing.

KY: The people that you get together with most often would you say...

GH: No it is more or less when we bump into each other, we will talk about that. Not in it all the time, especially now since my father passed very seldom once or twice a year I get a chance to talk about fishing with my buddies.

KY: Did you attend any meeting while you were fishing or get involved in any management processes?

GH: Not at all.

KY: Did you belong to any fishermen's organizations?

GH: Nope.

KY: Do you think that the meetings have any influence over the management plans?

GH: From what I hear no.

KY: Have you seen, this isn't in particularly your family but the wider community, any drinking or drug problems related to fishing?

GH: My experience and that may have a little factor on me and the fishing community on why I chose not to go out. I believe there is a major drug and alcohol problem in the fishing industry. My experience, except for my father, I don't know a single fisherman who is not a drunk and that is the truth.

KY: Would you say that is all over the state of Maine or is it more territorial?

GH: I am going to say that the majority drink, it is a minority that didn't.

KY: How do you think fishing is viewed by the wider community?

GH: The wider community thinks that fishermen are very wealthy, partly because they have for years have been able to hide their income in so many different directions that people didn't feel they were getting their fair breaks that fishermen would. The laws are changing and fishermen are being held accountable for their catches now more so than ever. But I don't think people see the whole picture of what is involved in being a fisherman. I think in the community a fisherman is a very well respected occupation.

"Oh you are a fisherman, give me some lobsters."

KY: Okay.

KY: What do you think, do you see a problem up here of gentrification where people are coming in and buying up properties and saying oh we don't like the smell of this bait we want to close this down.

GH: From what I hear from the fishermen, most definitely. They are having a major issue with that. They are coming here and they don't want to hear the diesel boats out there in the morning, they don't want to see the lobsters. For me personally I can never own a piece of ocean front property, I can never afford it, I can never own it even though my heritage is there maybe I didn't do it all my life but it is still my heritage this is what

my family did and it is being bought up by a lot of people. It is sad we can't even afford it though.

KY: Do you think a lot of fishing families are being forced out?

GH: Yea. The real people that want to make it will make it, because their parents will help them make it. They either have property or a relative has property, enough so that they are able to get boats in the water and fish. If you want to do it bad enough you can do it.

KY: Do you go to any of the fishing festivals?

GH: I so want to, but being a meat cutter my time doesn't allow me to. I would.

KY: Have you ever experienced any anxiety, worry, or tension related to fishing?

GH: No.

KY: What is it that draws you to fishing? What is it that you really like about fishing?

GH: I love the hard work, I love the smell of the ocean air, I like getting up in the morning and looking at a mirror on the water and just cruising up the bay, hauling the first trap. The peace, you can't say the quiet because the motor is running, but it is just so the serenity is just so...hauling the trap, everything that is alive in the trap it is absolutely incredible. It is so fulfilling. You get off the boat and you are dead, dead tired but it is a good tired.

KY: So do you have any other family members that fish any uncles or cousins?

GH: My uncle Russell in Winter Harbor is a fisherman.

KY: So you were the second generation of fishing?

GH: Yes I was the second generation.

KY: Are you aware of any superstitions or rituals that fishermen have?

GH: Oh my god, my father had so many of them, but I can't think of them. He had a few. I can't recall any, I know he had some but I can't remember them.

KY: Why did he practice those rituals and superstitions?

GH: Not to jinx his catch.

KY: When you were fishing with him did you practice the superstitions also?

GH: I did what he told me to do and said yes sir.

KY: Is there anything else that you would like me to know about fishing?

GH: Nothing that I haven't explained to you already. I wish I could give you more input, because I was mainly there to help my dad and listen to the things he said. To talk with, you would be out in the bay and boats would pull upside one another and they would just talk about what was going on. The comradery between the people was an amazing thing. I just wish they would let fishermen make their own decisions because they do know what they are doing.

END OF INTERVIEW