

Christina Package-Ward: So, do you mind if we start with how you got into fishing?

Billy Williams: Sure. I got in the Navy in 1963. There were some classmates of mine there got about the same time – or somewhat later, not too much later. They worked out of Newport for different things. Then one of my classmates and a friend, his uncle had a fishing boat. That skipper, that fishing boat, got moved to another fishing boat – and he was a part owner. So, he ended up running the boat – I say he, the nephew, which was a classmate of mine. Danny Hall was the name, Daniel. He was getting ready to come up, and he needed a crew. So, he got a couple of people that he knew, ex-Navy veterans. That was the first experience I had of fishing. That was 1965. We got up here in July of 1965. It was a little bit early for the crab season because they weren't quite mature enough for that year to start. The buyers didn't start buying for another little bit. So, we used that time to continue preparing to go fishing, and then we fished that fall season. Then starting the next year, at sixty-six, we fished at the start of sixty-six on the same boat – I did, anyway, then. The skipper, Denny, he moved off to another boat, and we had a new captain on the boat. Don Smith was his name. We fished over spring months of that year, then brought the boat down back down to Oregon for refit.

CPW: So, how long did you fish up here?

BW: Well, I fished that season, and then that boat had a fire. To move it and get it ready, they used a different crew to do that. Then I flew back and met the owner of that boat on another boat. They were bringing it around, and then convert over to crab fishing. So, that's what we did with our time then. Then after we got around with the boat, I got hired on to that boat. I helped prepare that boat to get ready, which did take a little bit of time. So, we weren't able to get it ready by that year. It was spring the next year by the time we got ready and came back to Alaska – or came to Alaska with it.

CPW: Was that boat owned by the Halls?

BW: Yes. It was owned by Wilburn and his wife and maybe some other shareholders. It came up in the spring of sixty-seven. So, I remained on that boat until we had some kind of a break.

CPW: Was that the *King and*...

BW: No, that was the *Rondys*. No, the *King and Winge* would come later then.

[laughter]

CPW: They need to have somebody write down a chart of when things happened or something.

BW: Yes. So, I was involved with the *King and Winge* later on. I was involved not as a participant, but I was around the *King and Winge* the first time I was at –

CPW: So, when did you stop fishing?

BW: Well, I fished until 2005, I think it was. It hadn't gone over to rationalization yet, but it

was real close. So, we fished the spring of 2005. I just went to that not too long ago. I'm not sure if we – I know we tendered at that year. We had to have done something in the spring of 2005, but I don't recall now exactly where it was.

CPW: So, did you get crab quota then?

BW: Well, yes. It was a skipper for the years I participated, which was opies and bairdi. For those years, I didn't participate in the king crab fishery. It was two skippers on the boat – or king crab at the skipper for those years. Then when we went back to one skipper for the year, they didn't include that year. They only took two years there or something like that. I'm not sure it was that time once it took, but it didn't include me on it. So, I fished just king crab all those years and –

CPW: Did not care. [laughter]

BW: Excluded. There were some others who felt the same way. You know what I mean? I guess there was things you could have done about it, but I wasn't aware of them then. You do the right things, and you can make it work.

CPW: So, I guess with the boats that you were on, were there a lot of other Oregon people on the boat?

BW: Sometimes, there were. Especially if the boat was out of Oregon, then that seemed to be – when you're a shipyard doing upkeep on the boats and you're looking for a crew and you're in Oregon, it's real easy to make them Oregon people. Then when you do have Oregon people on the boat, then a lot of times, Oregon people will vouch for you people, because that's who they know. It is convenient to take somebody that somebody vouches for you. That seems to work out real well. [laughter]

CPW: So, do you think that is why so many Oregon guys ended up coming up here?

BW: Well, that's part of it. Especially if you happen to know something about the people you're hiring, it seems like it makes it work a little bit better. I mean, it doesn't make it work, but it seems like it does that though.

CPW: Could you tell me a little bit about how fishing was when you first got into it, maybe compared to how it was when you got out?

BW: Well, first got into it, we had hydraulics. We used hydraulics for certain things, and hydraulics had been around for a few years. We used them for anchor winches and winches rigging up heavy loads and whatever like that. But there were some things that, later on, they used for hydraulics. We used manpower at that time because we had the manpower available, and they knew how to do those things for a lot of years. So, that's one of the things we used. Then later on, they'd used hydraulics for – for instance, pot launchers, we had manpower for that. There were probably some people hurt from doing it by hand, but there's probably more people hurt by using hydraulics later on. That's what I would say. Usually, them by hand, we were able

to put – and then if somebody did get hurt, it was something minor. Later on, when the pot launchers did it, then they became real major, just like all winches. But the pot launchers were quicker. They were able to pick up a pot load of product up and rattle it around, make a lot of them come out. So, that was one of the benefits of that. There's a little video on people where they couldn't shake the pot. We could try to shake them, but we couldn't shake very much. Bit like trying to shake a big old walnut tree or something like that. Tractors would shake them eventually. But at first, they just had them rattle like branches or something.

CPW: So, how would you get the crab out without...

BW: We picked them out.

CPW: Just by hand?

BW: Actually, we had what we called picking pots. If this was a crab pot, a picking pot, the door would come open like this. See, in a dumping a pot, your door would come open like this, and it would come out then. So, there's benefits for both, for people that had this kind right here. When we picked them out, eventually, they learned how to take that pot and open the door and then shake them up that way. So, you shake them up. Boy, that way was efficient there. So, you get to modernize it. You can take one pot, and you can get the job done quicker by using the equipment to do that.

CPW: But the hydraulics are kind of more dangerous?

BW: Well, sometimes, when things wouldn't work right, it could be more dangerous, because you had more weight up in the air. So, if it wouldn't work right or something, somebody would do something funny – and the unexpected, like a big wave would come over. But they could come over anytime whether you have hydraulics or not, though.

CPW: So, how many people were on maybe your first boat?

BW: First boat?

CPW: As far as crew...

BW: It was a small boat, and there were three of us on the boat – the captain and two crewmen. Then later on, if we'd get on the bigger boat, then they had a captain and three crewmen. Then later on, when we'd fish around the clock, there would be – we'll say a captain and four crewmen. They would have a – not a full-time engineer, but an engineer that was designated to be the engineer full-time. A cook could be pretty much a cook – not full-time. It would be the same way. He'd take a hundred percent of the work, things like that [inaudible]. But we got the job done. It was a smaller crew. It worked out good. I don't have a favorite either way. But if you always look at, "Boy, it was sure good back then when we did that way," and then over here, we'd say, "Boy, it was sure good when we started doing this way here," you'll find it good in both ways as well. It's easier to do it –

CPW: Did you enjoy it more either way?

BW: Yes. It's kind of like the Navy. "Do you like the Navy?" Sure, I like the Navy. You remember the good parts. Being out to sea, there were some good parts. Some of the pumping and the other stuff, your ceremonial types of stuff, maybe that wasn't your favorite part of it. Same with fishing. You liked a lot of the parts of it, and some other parts – you'll get to fish long hours in heavy weather or something like that. There were parts of it that you liked to enjoy later or something.

CPW: Did you just fish around Kodiak then for the most part?

BW: Sometimes, I did. Yes. When we first came up here, we fished around Kodiak. Then the next time we come up here, we didn't fish Kodiak at all. Then later on, when I started running the *King and Winge*, we fished around Kodiak for – well, we'd come up during the Bering Sea season in July or the first part of August, and then we'd come back here and do the Kodiak season from that. Then if the Kodiak season is at the end and there was nothing left in the Bering Sea, maybe we'd go back out there.

CPW: Where did you deliver to in the Bering Sea?

BW: It depends. When we first started fishing up here, we delivered it on Alaska, which, Pan-Alaska was a major buyer at that time. Then later on, when we got there, we sold it. Then when they started the season later, sometimes, we'd only have time for one trip. Then if it worked out, we'd bring the crab back here, and then start our Kodiak season then. But it was various in different years for various reasons.

CPW: What would some of those reasons be?

BW: Well, like to have more of the season. If we had a chance to make another trip before we'd come back, then we would try to sell out there and get back out and make another trip out of it. Then a second party we had, we didn't have time, then we'd bring the crab back here and sell it in Kodiak and then get ready for the season. That would be one example of it. There'd be things like that.

CPW: That makes sense. [laughter] So, how long have you lived in Kodiak for?

BW: Well, lived in town since – 1973 would be the time we did.

CPW: Why did you choose to stay up here?

BW: Well, I started out when I was still single. Then on the years off, then I met my wife. I say off – I went to school, and then following school, met my wife. Then I was getting ready to get married, and then I had a chance to come up here before I got married. So, that's what I did. Then I ended up staying a little bit longer. [laughter]

But we got married. I said I didn't fish in Oregon, but I did, after we got married. Then I went

salmon fishing out of Newport on a – I'm trying to think of the name of the guy's boat. It was Bill (Grishaber?). His dad had that boat called *Whisper*. He was a salmon fisherman also. Now, I don't remember his dad's name anymore, but he fished out of Newport in the sixties, and both of them did. Now, Bill Grishaber, he went to barber college, and he was a barber. He was a young barber. So, he'd fish the salmon season, and that's the only fishing he'd do. Then he'd go back to cutting hair for the rest of the year. But Bill Grishaber might still fish. Some of the guys do retain that part there. They still fish. Locally, we have some guys – one guy's a lawyer, and he goes back to the salmon fishing area every year. Duncan Fields, and he's by the west and he does the same thing. He's a professor, one of the professors in one of the...

CPW: Oh, yes, I know who Duncan is.

BW: Yes, real nice guy.

CPW: Yes, he is really nice.

BW: Some of my kids were taught by Mrs. Fields in school. There's a couple of families, and they're there related there too. I don't know the schoolteacher very well. My wife does, but I don't, but my kids do too. So, I see Duncan and I'd ask him about the salmon I bought. Because of all the times we tendered throughout the years, they really brought in nice fish. Years ago, they brought in nice fish. They took care of them. They did a good job with that. A lot of fishermen do. Not just him, but they did. So, he says the fish, it's processed, and it goes on to the next step over there. So, the fish ends up in a certain place, and they go back. Then he'd get how much they want out of it. They process with labels, and they can put their own label on that way there. So, one of them might want a prettier label, one guy, and he might want to save money there.

CPW: So, how many people do you think came up here from Newport? Do you have any idea? It seems like a lot.

BW: Oh, yes, Newport and Coos Bay and Depoe Bay and Lincoln City. The first time I come up here, when we left Newport – not the first time. The first time I brought a boat up myself – then (Beanie?) was from – I want to say Depoe Bay. One of the other guys, he was from Lincoln City. Another guy, he was from some place in Oregon. I don't know where he was from. (Steve Lucas?) was his name. He was an Oregonian. So, we were all Oregonians. Then by the time I come up here, one guy was from Portland. I would pick him up out of Newport. On the way down, him and another classmate come up to find jobs, and they didn't find jobs. So, they were hitchhiking back. We were getting ready to leave. His friend had gotten a job on a boat, so he didn't want to go down. The guy I took down with me, he ended up staying in the shipyard with me, and then he was coming back up with us. He remains a fisherman to this day. He was a good man. He was one tough fisherman. Well, it worked out that way sometimes. Just something so small makes a –

CPW: Yes, a big difference.

BW: Big difference, yes. So, we got two up here. So, now, the big thing is Oregon has a pretty

good football team. So does Oregon State. No matter where they're ranked on the pole, boy, those are a couple of giants. [laughter] Some nieces and nephews went to Oregon State and some went to Oregon. A lot of families are like that. So, we like them both. [laughter]

CPW: Well, I am a beaver, so I do not like Oregon. [laughter]

BW: I had a sister that went to Oregon, and my little sister's kids went to Oregon State. So, it's kind of like that. Then my niece, she went to Oregon. Then other nieces went to Oregon State, so...

CPW: Well, they are still close to each other, right?

BW: Yes. One of my buddies, his girlfriend's son went to Oregon, one of the football players there. So, we watch him on TV. But she had (Demcor?) here, but that was here when I found out later that was – I called my buddy. I talked to my buddy. That was him. I recognized my buddy. In fact, he called – it was the last time he was in town – well, last two times, he called us. I had seen him both times. He still almost looks the same as he did, but with hair changing now. But he just left and went out west here to fish out west.

CPW: So, let me see what else I can ask you about. Could you talk more about how the crab fishery changed over time, what things were like when you first came up here – or even what Kodiak was like, because it seems like...

BW: First come up here was a few months after – well, it was a year and a few months after the earthquake. Now, a few months after the earthquake, it must have been quite a deal, because you see pictures about it sometimes. So, it must have been really something. I mean, I tried to do business about that time. You had to really carry your plumbing up, your electricity up, everything. It had to be torn up. Because now, we see what happens during those disasters in the rest of the country. It happened back then there, too. For us, the water was put back, and the canneries were put back together. These guys were taking care of business. Now, we'd come into town, and we had enough business with this one cannery. Even though the crab season hadn't opened yet, they'd let us tie up to their dock, and for the crew to use their facilities. What they'd have, they'd have a community shower for the – maybe they used it for something else, but we could go on there and take a shower. Our boat was so small, we didn't even have warm water. To make warm water, we'd put cold water in a tub – I mean, a bucket, and put it on the oil stove. We were glad to have that, I guess. [laughter] The community downtown – now, see, it was only downtown where one place was – they had done something to make a grocery store. That was a big deal there too. Solly's Bar was a [unintelligible], and they had it fixed up pretty decent. They brought in the money and brought in also those first social life at that time. It had to be pretty small. People didn't have a lot of places to go. Movie theaters maybe were – and then bars and churches or like that. But they had something – what is it? I forget. A library? Something like that. For a library, they probably went with that. They probably had a new one made by that time, because that's one of the first things they do is get things back together. They had a lot of help doing that. The rest of the state usually – here, before, I wanted a book. They didn't have it, so they have a way to tell somebody they want that book, and then they'd bring them in. Boy, I tell you, it's neat. During the times of crisis, they probably used all that stuff.

CPW: So, what cannery, you said, delivered to you, and then became...

BW: We used to use the (Merry Jewel?), and it was part of New England, I think. It was this outfit – well, New England, they were big in Astoria. I think Newport was pretty big there too. They were for years, and maybe still are.

CPW: I do not think so, anymore. [laughter]

BW: There was one cannery that used to be in Depoe Bay, Depoe Bay Fish. Now, we didn't go into Depoe Bay in summertime. Our boats are too big to get in there. But the son the Depoe Bay Fish as the Depoe Bay Fish out of Newport, we've known him since he was kid. I can't remember his name right now. [laughter] Well, everybody knows him but me. I just forget his name.

CPW: Why did you end up fishing up here so much and only doing that one season in Oregon?

BW: Four months? You mean the summer?

CPW: Yes.

BW: Well, I just got married. The salmon season only lasts so long. I think it worked for them real well after that.

CPW: Then you came back up?

BW: Yes. Then we got to a point after that where I really didn't have good work down there. So, they needed somebody up here to help bring boat the down. I was experienced enough by that time to be available then. So, it's why I came back up here for that.

CPW: Was that with the Halls also?

BW: Yes, that was the Halls outfit. Yes. When I came back up at one time, it was run by another Hall. It wasn't a relative, but that other Hall was from Newport also. But it wasn't someone from the same family. There was another Hall family that comes out of there. They're real good fishermen too. Coincidentally, they were both fishermen, and both really good fisherman. John and...

CPW: Steve? No.

BW: Let's see. Clifford was his name. Clifford, yes. His son was a real good fisherman too. Well, he's involved with fisheries. I can't think of his name now either.

CPW: It is not Dan, is it? No. Steve?

BW: Steve, that's it. Boy, not only do you have the information, you know how to find it, too.

A lot of times, when we do that, we got the information, but we can't find it. [laughter]

CPW: Can you talk more about what things were like here in Kodiak? Is there anything you can think of...

BW: Well, when we come here, we don't actually fish in Kodiak. See, we get here, we come to Kodiak, and then we're resupplying maybe like that. Then we have some crab pots stored here. So, when we go dig those crab pots out, then we have a little more work to go. Old crab pots – when I say they're old, someone worked down with a modern web that we use today. They were put together by stainless steel, and they were put together by any way you can. But that was one of the ways you did it. You've seen a Dungeness pot, maybe a stainless steel also. They did that bigger pot, and they made a king crab pot out of it. We had some pots like that. So, when the stainless steel would have a place that wasn't good anymore, for one reason or another, and then we had to make it good, we used that wire to do it. But stainless steel doesn't stretch or nothing like that. So, if it would get caught on something, usually, it would tear out.

CPW: So, what are the current pots made of?

BW: The what?

CPW: What are the bigger pots made of?

BW: Well, the outside is solid steel for outer frame, and then they had an inner frame made out of web. You buy that web in long pieces, you'll know if yourself. The length would go forever, so you cut off the amount you need to make a pot. But anyway, we would patch that stuff. That was my first year, and we were – so, the two of us crewmen were pretty inexperienced patching, and then the other crewmen and the captain of the boat, he was experienced. He teaches what he could there. But it was awkward there for a little bit for part of us, because it would be like we'd have a day like this, and if you go out there and you work real hard or anything you do on a day like this, you stay pretty comfortably warm. Then if you're not experienced, we'd have to take off our gloves and do what kind of work we're doing, and we'll end up getting cold. That's the major difference between later on when you're experienced, and you're able to keep working along. But that first time, boy, cold.

CPW: Just because you get used to it, or...

BW: In July, it'd be down to fifty-five degrees. That's (longboard?) when you're working. You can see what to do next easily. So, you just keep working. [laughter] So, now, see, I'm so old now, I'd go out there and do some work like that, I can't work hard enough to – well, I stay warm for a while, right? But eventually, I got to stop. I got to stop and rest. I'll be sixty-nine in January. So, I still I want to do a little work out there then. I can't keep working all the time. [laughter] I've got something wrong with my eye now. Well, in March, I had a heart thing, atrial fibrillation. So, after the heart thing, they get through that, then they're having trouble with a stroke coming after that. So, I've been on that stroke medication since then. I did have a stroke – don't even remember when it was. But anyway, it wasn't too long ago. So, anyway, I take medication for that, in which I would have taken medication for it. Anyway, I had to lift my



stained glass door to work on it. Boy, it's heavy. I didn't know it, but I shouldn't have done that. So, I got a big old hemorrhage in one of my eyes like somebody hit me. I've had those before, and they blamed it on blood pressure. Well, when you're taking that medication and then you do something heavy, your eyes take a beating on it. So, this eye here, after I did that, then the other eye is the one my vision went down in.

CPW: Oh, weird. I wonder why.

BW: Then eventually, I went to the doctor. I went to the eye doctor too, and then he said, "Lifting that door is what caused it." Well, taking that medication is what set it up, and then lifting that door just – so, now, I just had that checked, and I got plenty of that medication – I mean, plenty of it. Maybe it's causing some of my eye to weaken a little bit. So, I woke up this morning, and there was a night light. All I could see was a real bright red. I said, "I don't know what caused that." Anyway, now, it's kind of...

CPW: Watering or something.

BW: I'd hate to lose vision on that thing. But the pharmacist guy, he said, "Oh, it will return back to normal."

CPW: Hopefully it is just temporary.

BW: Yes.

CPW: Scary with all the medication. You never know what they are – [laughter]

BW: I've had really good vision all my life. But I take my binoculars and I can adjust it. Boy, I see it real good. That's what happened. So, that doctor – he was an eye doctor. He didn't recommend glasses or nothing. So, that's when I just kind of lived with it.

CPW: Well, I hope it will go back.

BW: Yes. I'd hate to lose vision out of that eye, because boy, it's just so lucky to have good vision.

CPW: Oh, yes. No, I am the same way. Everybody else in my family has glasses.

BW: My sister could hardly see anymore. She wears big old thick glasses. Since she had an operation...

CPW: Oh, yes, the LASIK or LASIK –

BW: – boy, she don't wear glasses anymore. Well, I'm so happy for her, because I remember her telling me in high school – or maybe we were in grade school. She's gone blind, and then she kept get worse and worse. Then she ended up with no glasses. Oh, boy, I mean, I'm so happy about that for her. Jeez. I don't have any reason to cry here now, so I'm not crying. It's

just my eyes are being a pain here.

CPW: I am sorry.

BW: They're doing all right, I guess. I don't have to worry about bright sun. But if it's a sunset, I wear sunglasses everywhere we go now. I used to try to go to my car, because I'd store them in the back. Then I had the pain so much, I had to walk back like this. So, I just take them with me now. I just think that's also when I'm fishing either. Fishing, if anything, has been kind of healthy here. We don't have a lot of stuff out there like pesticides or insecticides. My dad was a farmer. I remember him coming in with a tractor wearing this. He's spraying for pests out there. Anyway, we lost to him years ago. He had it hard then also, cancer. Boy, tough life. You see these people, communities going through that. Just this year, our local state was going to use herbicide alongside the railroad, because it's – the time where they started growing, boy, it grows good. Well, you're going to use that with shit that – most of the world quit doing that. Maybe if you had [inaudible] come out –

CPW: So, you feel like fishing was a healthier way to...

BW: Lots of it is, yes. Well, some of it is, and probably some of it isn't. [laughter]

But most fishermen, if you're around it long enough, you'll grow up eating it. You have it available, so you're trying to eat it too.

[end of transcript]