

Name of person interviewed: Reidar Bendiksen [RB]

Place interview took place: Fairfield Inn, Working Waterfront Festival

Date and time of interview: September 25, 2011

Interviewer: Madeline Hall-Arber [MHA]

Transcriber: Laura Orleans

Abstract

Immigrating to this country at 16, Reidar commercially fished for thirty years until he began a gear constructing business. Reidar recalls fishing in the fjords of Norway, and his time scallop and dragger fishing in the U.S. to his eventual successful shore side business.

Demographic information

Sex: Male

Ethnicity: White

Age; 66

Born; Norway

Occupation: Owner / Reidars Trawl & Gear
Fairhaven, MA

Key words

Role

Shoreside business owner/ operator

Commercial fisherman

General Social and Cultural Characteristics

Family, family roles, family organization

Social and Cultural Characteristics of Fishing

Other social & cultural characteristics of fishing

Socialization/ Training to be a fisherman

Gear and Technology

Trawl

Dredge

Other gear and technology

Business and Economics of Fishing & other Maritime

Shoreside support services

Business and economic effects of regulations

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MP Cool you guys are good. Have a great discussion. We'll see you in a little bit.

MHA Alright. Ok. Thanks Mike. Alright. Welcome.

RB Thank you.

MHA and you, for the purposes of the process, please tell us what your name is.

RB My name is Reidar Bendiksen. I'm, want me to tell more?

MHA Yes!

RB Well I've been a fishermen for about thirty years and then I've been doing gear construction, by that I mean fishing gear for the last twenty, to twenty-five years. Because some of the fishing, my fishing experience and the gear experience also kind of overlapped so you have some on both fields.

MHA Great. So maybe we can start with some of your background. I know that they probably did this in the first interview, but it's still good to have.

RB You mean

MHA Where you were

RB in this country? Or?

MHA Well where were you born?

RB I was born in Norway. I was an immigrant here when I was only sixteen years old. Believe it or not I fished in Norway for a couple of years before I got here. I started when I was fourteen.

MHA Really?

RB Yeah.

MHA Are you from a fishing family?

RB Yes. Fishing family. You know my grandfather and grandmother they had a farm. But they had eight children see. So I'm son of one of them children, it's not really the oldest one of them siblings, but you know the oldest one traditionally gets to take over the farm and it didn't work out in my father's way so he turned out to be a fishermen. So he fished in Norway you know up through the 30s and into the War and even after the

War. And then he immigrated to here in 1951 and became a fisherman in New Bedford and he's owned several vessels kind of that, kind of was, handed over to me. I ended up on one of the vessels here. That was a sub chaser that was my first job here. Sub chaser that actually saw action in Normandy during the invasion. It was built in 1943 and then brought overseas during the invasion and then when the War was over it came back and the surplus boat like that was then became a fishin' boat. So he bought it with somebody else and fixed it up, rigged it up to a fishing boat and that's where I spent my first five, six years fishin' here.

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MHA Let me ask you a minute about your father's experience in Norway. How did he go from a farm boy to a fishermen?

RB Maybe I didn't explain that enough. But you know, traditionally the oldest of the boys siblings takes over the farm, and he was not the oldest. He was further down the line

MHA Right

RB He was more in the middle. He was like next to the oldest I guess of the boys. So, but anyway, the grandparents lived up for a long time so there was not time to take charge anyway so he became more involved in the fishing part.

MHA How did he learn it?

RB We come from an island and what you have on an island is boats, you know. So he turned out to be a small fisherman. He fished with your lobster pots. You know he had a stack of lobster pots in the cellar of the house that we lived in there. When I got to fish afterwards when he'd gone to America, he had long lines, he had gill nets. He had all kinds of stuff stowed away there you know. He even had a boat that he had hauled ashore you know for the trip to the United States that he put on the water again you know in 1960 when he came back. Because then he figured I was old enough to be able to handle it and take care of it then that I did. I spent like three years with that boat and did the same small kind of fishing like he used to do. So that was kind of my start. Then you get a little bit of experience of everything, every kind of aspect that you know fishing did in the small way. And I think most communities fishing starts that way. So I think that was a very valuable experience.

MHA I'm sure it has helped you even after you switched over to the gear to have

RB Most definitely. Most definitely. I went a little commercial fishing you know with other people there too. I mean we, I spent one summer in the fjords seining. I was fifteen years old. We were seven men. I was cook. I was cook for seven men and we had boats that we towed along with us because to serve as a seine you need a lot of different aspects, different boats and stuff you know they use for that. We had four boats we

towed along with us. And on one of 'em was a dory that had a generator and lights on it and stuff.

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So the idea for that was we fished in the fjord. Fjords are deep, deep, deep. So they took the dory and it was nice weather like this usually. There was no wind much in there. There was kind of like quiet all the time. And at night they took the dory and they started the generator and they shone the light right down in the water and that kind of brought the fish to the surface. So then just before dawn, you'll be out there just before dawn and you seined around the light boat. You know. And you get the catch that that had drawn into the light during the night. So that was unique kind of fishing.

MHA And what kind of fish were you catching?

RB That was sprats, what they call brisling, sardines. You know that you get in little sardine cans with oil in them and stuff. They were quite neat.

MHA So what did your other siblings do?

RB My brother was like three years older than me and he did more or less the same. He did the same thing, you know. And we ended up here both of us. He was like three years ahead of me. He came to the United States in 1960 and I came in '63. And the difference was the age.

MHA Yeah.

RB Because we had both finished school in Norway and then the difference between, then three years I had to finish the school so he came here first and then I come in here after 'cause I was the youngest.

MHA When your father came over did he come over to New Bedford first?

RB Yes he did.

MHA And what drew him to New Bedford?

RB He had a younger brother here that had, he went more to sea. You know he was a merchant man and then he ended up down in I think it was in New York, or it could have been Florida. A lot of them guys even went to Florida you know. And they served time on the yachts and things like that. And I think he was one like that did that. You know on millionaires yachts as crew and stuff. But he ended up here also. He ended up in Brooklyn. He knew a lot of people there because there was a lot of Norwegians around that time and they came ashore on steamers and stuff you know. So he went from there. His name was Bjona (?) they called him Benny here for short. And he ultimately ended up in New Bedford fishing because the fishing was also going on in New York at that time. This was back in the '40s or so, late '40s.

9:00

And he met so many people from this area that he wanted to see what it was all about so he came up here and this is where he met his wife. His wife's name was Lillian.

MHA Was she also Norwegian?

RB No she was, she was like a, I think she was more French. French, yeah. Mostly. French Canadian or something. I'm not sure about the Canadian part. But anyway he married her and they had kids. There's kids around here yet today. And they lived up in New Bedford. So he was the one who guaranteed for my father to come over. 'Cause at that time you couldn't just go in here on, you know unannounced or anything. I mean you had to have somebody to sponsor you, you see? They called it guarantee that he was gonna get a job and he was gonna be a good part of the society and he was gonna you know make sure that this was gonna happen. So, that's how my father got over here.

MHA So your father came a little initially.

RB Yeah.

MHA And left your mother

RB Yeah.

MHA How many

RB I only have two of us, my brother and me.

MHA But you do have lots of uncles and aunts at that time?

RB Not here, but you know in Norway we had a lot of them at the time and since then died away now, but, really from eight children, siblings in my father's family there, it was very few kids. Most of 'em ended up over here believe it or not. You know in Norway today, there's only two. Out of six people. And the two that was over here had five in between them. [laughs] So that's

MHA And what was your neighborhood like over there? Was everybody doing both farming and as families both farming and fishing?

RB Mostly that's what was goin' on because it was a small island actually it could almost be compared to Cuttyhunk. You know you live, a hundred people out there year round and stuff. And there was no cars or anything like that. You were able to get a bicycle around, but mostly your transportation was boats.

MHA So when you landed catch, how did you transport it? How did you sell it? Who did you sell it to?

RB Depended on what you had. Because fish you had to kind of go into the main town which was like forty-five minutes ride with the boats at the time and sell it fresh, you know? As far as the shellfish, you know like lobster and crabs and things like that, you could keep that alive you know in the water for a long time before you had to sell them so you'd gather it up,

12:00

you know you'd gather so much up and then you finally went and brought it all aboard a boat and you then you brought it to the dealer and sold it. So you didn't have to steam in every day that you were fishin' you know.

MHA And how about the sprats, were they...

RB The sprats that was a different story. There was canneries that had what they call buy boats. They came just for tendering and taking up sprats. They did the same thing in the Maine coast with the carriers, you know sardine carriers. So that's how they unloaded them. Yeah.

MHA And so you came over in 1963? Is that what you said?

RB Yes.

MHA And how old were you then, you were sixteen?

RB Sixteen. Head first in the scallop pile. Yeah, yeah.

MHA Were you excited to come over? Or scared?

RB Yeah I had anticipations, a lot of anticipations, what this was gonna be like you know. I was interested in everything. Interested in the boats and the engines and everything on board the boats, you know. And I was kind of used to the fleet over in Norway and over there you know the boats was nice, well kept. They were you know, they were seasonal boats. They didn't fish all year round. That was the difference. You see the boats in Norway, laid, tied up a lot of time in the year. So the guys could keep 'em up and keep 'em nice and painted and everything else. And when you come over here you see a bunch of boats that, Oh my god what's this! you know. It was like fifty years behind times. You'd see schooners. I'd never seen a schooner before I come over here. I mean I've seen them in pictures, you know. Or maybe it was show and tell, you know somebody brought a schooner to the town or something like that, but you didn't actually go fishin' on that. And here when I come to this town, it was like Wow! They've got a town full of old slippery schooners. [laughs] They were stout boats and all that stuff, but they were too old for what they were doin'. And a lot of 'em just went bye bye the first few years that I was here. I mean every winter, I mean you'd hear about these things goin' down all over the place you know. They kept 'em too long.

MHA Yeah.

RB In Norway they had condemnation programs that get rid of old boats long before they were gettin' dangerous or anything like that. Over there [here] they didn't have that.

MHA Was that a government program?

RB Yup. Yeah.

MHA They would help pay for it?

RB Yeah. Subsidy almost, yeah. So you could get money for your old boat that couldn't be used anymore. Then you took that money and you went and bought a new one. That's how they did it.

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And you know the result was that the fleet was always updated as it should be for safety. So when we came over here I heard guys you know say "oh my God one guy said, first thing I did was went behind some building there and cried," he said "when I saw this" [laughs] And that is the darn truth, you know?

MHA Yeah.

RB But then again there was also newer boats and there was nicer boats too. But in the mix was this fleet of old slippery schooners that should have been retired years before you know.

MHA So when you say a schooner, would you describe it?

RB Well they were, dead giveaway you had a big long mast right in the middle of the boat. They were made for sail, you know. And somehow I guess the ship builders or even the guys that wanted to build them must have had some idea that that you know engines wasn't gonna catch or something like that so they can make sure that they can get out and get in. So they put the masts in there and everything to make sure that they could use sail if they had to.

MHA I see.

RB So I mean there was some of them that was fairly new comparatively you know. And they were, they fished for many, many years. But eventually they got rid of the masts in the middle. You know the mizzen mast or the main mast.

MHA Right. So how about, did they, were they the same ones that they used dories off of?

RB No, not actually there were some of them around too. You know the knockerbacks are what they call 'em. They were built for the dory fishing. They had the, some had a clipper bow, not to many of them around. But the round bow, what do they call that guy that, McManus, was that his name that designed all them boats? The blue-nosed boats, them boats, you know the Adventure out of Gloucester and all that. There was quite a few of them around. There was an old one down here that, here name was Evelynna Goulart that was one of them. And she fished for quite a few years while I was here in the early days and you could see she was a schooner, you know. And there was other ones.

MHA Do you ever think that maybe they should have kept the sail for the cost of fuel now?

RB No I don't think so. [laughs]

MHA A little too dangerous?

18:00

RB Not that, but you couldn't get any way to service that anymore. I mean sails, can you imagine buying sails for a fishing boat today? I mean you'd have to go to a yacht store to get sails. That's an expense too.

MHA True. So what was the first boat that you went on when you came?

RB That was the sub chaser that I talked about. She was a hundred and ten foot long. I think she was only about sixteen or eighteen foot wide.

MHA And course your father ...

RB And she had twin screw, two engines, twin rudders. And she had, they had put very small power in it. You know power that belonged in a sixty foot boat. But this boat was made for speed. So you just wound them engines up and you ran your eight knots. [laughs] if there wanted to really hook 'em up she would go ten knots.

MHA Was this trawling?

RB Yeah. Yeah, scalloping to begin with and then trawling after.

MHA I see. And was it over the side?

RB Yeah. Everything was over the side. Eastern rig. I don't know what you call a boat like that. It wasn't an eastern rig and it wasn't a western rig. It was a sub chaser it was converted military. And actually the wheelhouse sat right in the middle of the boat [laughs]

MHA That's different.

RB Yeah, yeah. So I don't know what you call it. Eastern rig, western rig? A little bit of both. But she don't rig like an eastern rig. The after gallus was actually right alongside of the wheelhouse and where we hooked up the wires and everything was like behind the wheelhouse and that was always, they were always chaffing on the hull because the way you hooked up the wires couldn't do it too far back like most eastern rigs so we had to bring it up forward more. And um, there was still another thirty feet of hull behind, you know behind where you hooked up the wires and towed them after. Cause she was such a long boat. [laughs] So she was different.

MHA So did that create problems when you were bringing back, hauling back?

RB Not too much. She was, she was a little bit heavy on the bow I would say where all the gear and all the fish was loaded up onto the bow on the forward bow to the boats so when you got sixty, seventy thousand pounds of fish like was normal in them days you know then she'd get bow heavy.

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And when you had to, when you ran the up against the sea or anything like that you'd tend to skip seas over the bow. Yeah. And so that became dangerous. You had to be aware of that. And if you got into real heavy weather, it could become dangerous because then you were gettin' seas over the bow all the time

MHA How about ice? Was that an issue too?

RB Ice could be an issue too if you get into that, yeah.

MHA How many crew members did you have?

RB Scallop in' we went eleven to twelve men. And then dragging we went mostly five. Yeah.

MHA So similar to the other boats.

RB Yeah

MHA Yeah. What was the scallop gear like then? Because they didn't have the as large of rings right?

RB No they used three inch, three inch rings and actually the drags were different too, at least the ones we had. They were adjustable type. You could adjust the bales (?) you could pull out bolts and stuff if you want to adjust the bale to the front bale, so the front bale could be up and you could have the after part of the bale even with the floor of the ocean floor, the way it was ridin' on the floor. But today they're just one piece. They don't do that anymore. But I could see the advantages with it. You didn't have no

pressure plates or anything like that, but the gear fished pretty good. It was nice, nice drags. We had two ten foot drags on that boat.

MHA Wow. And was there any kind of selectivity, or were you just catching everything? 'Cause the mesh size wasn't regulated either at that time was it?

RB No. There was no regulation whatsoever. It was just about, I mean you could catch what you wanted. But most of the time you got the mix of scallops and clam shells and empty shells and stuff you know. No big amounts of fish or anything like that. It was all bottom creatures. You'd tend to get lobster once in awhile. I remember gettin', I got a lobster that I still have hanging home in the cellar. You know I went and had it mounted and stuff you know. And it came up on the drag. And it was sittin' on top of the drag, it wasn't inside you know. It was sittin' on top of the bale so it must have just gotten there. And the bale came up over the railing and I see it sittin' there and it was perfect. There was nothing broken. So I went and got it. You know I told the guys stop right there. So I went and got it. And I put it on deck you know and I took it down the fish hold later and took it home. Thirty pounds!

MHA Wow!

RB Thirty pounds. Yeah beautiful.

MHA How would they put bands around that?

24:00

RB I didn't. I didn't. I put it down in the fish hold on ice so it would stay there for the duration of the trip. But it was so perfect you know. There was no broken pieces of it or claws or legs or anything. It was, everything was there. Yeah. So I still have that. And I even had it remounted one time and repainted because it got so old. So that's since '63 [laughs].

MHA So you've been scalloping and you've done dragging

RB Yeah.

MHA Any other kinds of fishing? You mentioned your father, well you did the long lining when you were in Norway

RB Yeah, did some of that too. Actually we fished dogfish for a long line in Norway among other things. Yeah. You could get haddock and we've got some cusk and stuff like that. But I didn't do a lot of that because I was rather young, you know. So I was more playin' around. You know you set out a few hundred hooks or something like that, you know. It was nothin' really that you could, you know, do commercial fishing with. It was just more playin' around than anything. But you get the idea in how to do it.

MHA So why did you switch from scalloping to dragging?

RB At that time the scallops, you know well you needed bigger boat, not a bigger boat, I had a big boat, but you needed more power, you know. The boat didn't have that much power. They thought the boat was gettin' older. And it would be easier on the boat if we changed it over to dragging, you know, because then you wouldn't have to bother with the scallop drags that always keeps banging up the hull and stuff. So they decided as owners, my father and his brother, that it was better maybe to change to draggin' and be easier on the boat itself. So we changed that boat over in the fall of '63 just at the time that John Kennedy got shot. I remember to this day I mean I was down in the boat workin' that time and we were installing the after gallus and somebody came running down from the shipyard, from the machine shop over there and he told us that Kennedy had been shot. So that's one of them things that sticks in your mind. You never forget where you were.

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Yeah. So for the duration of the time we had that boat, we sold her in 1998, I mean in 1968 and she was draggin' the whole time. We never went back scalloping with her. So I was skipper on her for two years. The two last years that we had her. And in the meantime we had bought another boat, the Moby Dick, you must have seen my model down there, right? Well that's the Moby Dick. We bought her in I think '65. So we, my brother went skipper on that.

MHA Older brother right? Yeah 'cause you only have one

RB So that, so then we had two boats for awhile. And when we sold, finally sold the Lillian B. which was the name of the sub chaser, when we sold her then we, the rest of us went on the other boat, the Moby Dick. So I have a lot of stories. Most of the stories I have from way back then comes from them two boats. The Lillian B. and the Moby Dick.

MHA So your brother and father and you all fished on the Lillian and then you all three of you went over to the Moby Dick with your brother?

RB Yeah.

MHA So at that point there were four of you fishing together? Or was there a fifth person?

RB Oh no there was only four of us.

MHA And how long did you, the four of you fish together on the Moby Dick?

RB Um, my uncle Benny, he sold out. I forgot exactly what he had but it was like in the early '70s. Yeah he sold out and then there was just the three of us left, my father and my brother and me. Yeah well he went, my father was a built in engineer. So my brother was the built in skipper. So I was the built in mate. After awhile. So I got tired of that after

awhile so I got all kinds of people that wanted me to take boats you know? So finally in 1972 I took another boat out of Fairhaven there named the Captain Bill II and the owner's name, his name was Mathais Bendiksen, Matt Bendiksen we called him. He came from the neighboring island in Norway. And also we kind of knew him, you know, know the family and all that. He was uncle of Mabel Bendiksen, the one who was Miss Massachusetts at the time.

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And he asked me to take the boat. So I said, well ok. Maybe I will try something different. I wanna try and get away from this family boat. There shouldn't really be that many people from one family on a boat anyway. Someone to kind of break it up, plus, you know I wanted to kind of get myself back into the skipper's seat instead of being on the deck and on mate all the time. Being the utility man, you know? So my family didn't like it too much. And it gave me a lot of problems in a sense because nervous problems and guilty feelings you know. Why should, you know, kind of like you had deserted 'em or something. You know. But you know I had to think about myself too in order to kind of build myself up you know with knowledge and get some experience in doin' these, doin' trips. You know of course I had a lot of ideas. And actually every time I took a boat, I had my chance many times when my brother stayed ashore or something like that, I was the one who got a bigger trip all the time [laughs]. And other people were startin' to notice this. So this was why they came and asked me to take boats.

MHA So do you think you were paying more attention to where you were fishing or was it the gear or what?

RB I think a little bit of both. Yeah. My brother he didn't know hard bottom or anything like that. He didn't know different parts of the bank that, you know, and I got the same knowledge in a sense, but I didn't have a chance to broaden that knowledge so I figured if I take another boat and gettin' information from other people that I knew had other information, you know I had to take that chance. And by takin' the Captain Bill II at the time, it opened up a whole other field of knowledge and different places to fish. That was invaluable afterwards.

MHA So how did you, when you took the other boat and you were the skipper, where did that knowledge come from? Who was transferring the knowledge to you?

RB Matt Bendiksen. He was an old skipper.

MHA I see.

RB Yeah. But you know he was in the age about like I am now. So he had stopped fishin', but he would still take the boat out once in awhile and stuff you know.

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But he had gathered an awful lot of experience on the northern side of the bank. We were always on the southern side, you know. Because that's the good side with the good

bottom and all that. Northern side you had to kind of know where you went. You had to know the little nooks and crannies. He always used to joke and say you got to go in between the wrecks and the rocks

MHA [laughs]

RB You gotta find the spots in between the wrecks and the rocks that's where the fish hang out, you know? So I got to learn a lot of that from him. And that was things that my brother didn't know.

MHA Right.

RB You know. And you know a lot of them places today believe it or not is closed because it was such an important fish habitat I guess.

MHA So did Matt have a log book.

RB Oh yeah. Log books, wreck books, he gave me all kinds of information, tows, you know, where to go, you know. And I paid attention. 'Cause when I was in the wheelhouse, I made sure I knew exactly where I was all the time and didn't get into trouble and you know tearin' up nets and hangin' up losin' stuff. So after a half year when I finally quit the boat because the other boat got into trouble you know they had a kind of big sticky kind of a strike over in New Bedford at the time and then they needed to pay bills. This was the Moby Dick at the time. So they needed to go fishin'. So I gave in in there to help 'em 'cause they needed crew. So I went back on that boat. But just in that half a year that I had the other boat I had learned so much information that it also helped them. So they could fish different places and you know never really had any big problem after that paying bills or anything.

MHA So did you tell your brother where to go? Was he still skipper at that point?

RB He was skipper and I told him where to go, yeah [laughs]. I guess that's what you, you got that right! And then this happened again in '75, '76 because then, then I got to go skipper on the Narragansett. That was a stern trawler, a kind of famous stern trawler too. You know that was the first one that came around, you know?

MHA Oh really?

RB And at the time, stern trawling was kind of unknown. I mean Jack Jacobsen owned a boat you know.

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And there was his brother Pete that came to me and says you wanna take that boat, I think he's lookin' for somebody to take that boat. So I said well you know, I'm kind of interested in that. I've never been stern trawling or something like that, you know? So I had made a trip on the Act One which was owned by Knut Orsheim just to find out how

stern trawling went. So I went out there and just to learn the particulars about it, you know. So then Pete came and he knew this and Pete came and asked me if I wanted to take the boat and I said well I'll consider that. I said you know maybe I'll do that. You maybe have a chance to broaden my horizons a little more, you know. And then through the same scenario, Jack was a, you know, a mountain of knowledge. He had done this kind of fishing, he made that boat. He rigged that boat up the way it was supposed to be and all this, you know. And he was running the mail with groundfish to Boston and places like that. So I mean I, it was too good of a opportunity not to take. So I took the boat. And I learned an awful lot from him. He had a lot of knowledge. The crew that was on the boat at the time had been with him for a long time. So they knew a lot of it, you know. So I learned from them. So that kind of broadened my experience with trawling.

MHA And did that, your taking the Narragansett, was that ok with your parents, your father and your brother?

RB Well they knew that I had don't it before so they knew I was gonna do it again. Yeah. Yeah. Actually they know that would benefit them in a sense yeah. Actually my brother afterwards he went and he changed the boat, the Moby Dick back to scalloping. So she went scallopin' for that time and until we sold her. But by taking the Narragansett I got so much knowledge then on bottom that I had never been on before, what they called the hard bottom, you know the Sankaty Side and the Channel, places like that, you know that I had never even put a net in before and so now I know that, spend a couple of years there and then I went on to the Chevis Regal, that was another one. Spent another year there for Biffy McLean and Paul Saunders who owned it. And same thing there.

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Made a pile of money with it. You know [laughs]. I think it was good experience. And I was ?? just in the right age at that time. We made money. There's no question about it. And maybe it's a good part of that there's no fish now. There wasn't anything to protect the fish. [laughs]. I shouldn't say that but that was a good part of it, I know that.

MHA So at what point, how old were you at that point I guess? Do you remember, around what year, we can figure out your age after.

RB Well '76 then I was what, thirty.

MHA And were you married by then?

RB Yeah. I got married in 1970. I met my wife three or four years before that. She was still in high school when I met her. [laughs]. Yeah, yeah. Talk about robbin' the cradle, but...so we went out for four years before we finally married. But that was a good thing. She's a good woman. [laughs].

MHA Seems to have worked.

RB Yeah. And she's a good wife and a good housekeeper and a good mother. So that's, she's got everything that anybody could wish for except money. She didn't have money, but that's alright. [laughs]

MHA You supplied that

RB I supplied that [laughs]

MHA So when did you switch out of fishing and why?

RB Oh I haven't gotten that far yet, but I got a few boats to go yet, but

MHA Ok we'll do the rest of the boats we can do the switch sometime later. Unfortunately we don't have a long, they only give us an hour to do the interviews, but maybe we should just continue along with the other boats and then the next interview

RB How much time do you have?

MHA We only have about six minutes left depending on you know when they show up.

RB Well let me finish up with the Narragansett. I had that boat for two years and that's where we spent our time was down in the Channel and fishing for groundfish and flounders and stuff on hard bottom. You know like I said there was something I hadn't done. I was always a good bottom fisherman, yellowtail fisherman, stuff like that before you know. So this gave me a whole new perspective of where to set a net and where to fish and how to fish.

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So I mean now I could do anything you wanted after I mean if you wanted to go hard bottom and chase some flounders around you could do that, if you wanted to go good bottom chase yellow tail you could do that. You know I had the knowledge to go anywheres. I mean you could take this table you could go all the way up. I knew exactly what to expect. Yes it was hard on my psyche for awhile and I think it was kinda hard on my family too, but not financially, it wasn't that, I think there was a feeling with them that, like the old timers, that you, you know you're supposed to work with your family and all this and you go away from 'em that's not to good. You get kind a looked down upon. So I, because of that I had an awful lot of guilty feelings and I developed problems because of that believe it or not. You know anxiety problems, especially, and after a few years, them anxieties actually got to me so bad that that's why I quit fishin' and went into a shore based business.

MHA Huh.

RB Yeah. I had actually I couldn't, I couldn't sleep good anymore out to sea. You'd get in the bunk and you just couldn't sleep. So then you get, you get so over tired that you know when you come ashore your head was swimmin' and you just couldn't function

very well anymore. You know. It got dangerous. And then if you mixed it up with some beers or something like that you know, it got to you and went to your head right away. So that's the main reason for me stoppin' fishing. It's not that you know I didn't know anything, you know I could have made plenty of money here if I would have kept on goin' the way I was. But at the time, the kids were growin' up and everything else and I knew I was at the age there, I was forty years old at the time you know and I was at an age if I was gonna start something else and get away from fishing, I would have to do it now. I couldn't wait until later on. 'Cause the older you get, the less stamina you have and everything so that was more or less the main reason and it was a good thing I did it because my sons was then in the right age that they were interested in what I did and it's not that I didn't have a boat no more. I kept boats and I finally even bought the Narragansett and had her the second time you know after the old owner and that's how Tor got his experience.

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You know he went out with me a few times too and learned the gear and learned the boats and you know so he took to that you know. And he got very interested in what I was doin' and you know we had boats and a gear shop at the same time.

MHA And how about your father and brother at that point? Where were they?

RB My father died in 1981 and my brother was skipper on the bigger boat that we had built in 1980. So he couldn't say he didn't have the best of it in a sense, he had a big brand new boat.

MHA Was he scalloping?

RB Scalloping yeah. But she was built to scallop a combination boat. Her name was the Viking. She was almost a hundred foot long. And you know I was the skipper on it. It was brand new. And he was the mate. So now it was the reversed [laughs]. And I don't know how much I should say of what happened there to break all that up, but his wife got involved and she didn't like me, always clashed.

MHA Hmm.

RB Yeah, always butted heads and didn't agree on anything. And in her eyes he was supposed to be the one that was gonna go skipper on this boat, not me. And to alleviate that we bought a second boat, it was the General George Patton. And I spent most of my time on her. You know just dragging on hard bottom and stuff 'cause it didn't make money with it, you know. But after some time this is when I started to have most of the problems. I couldn't sleep and all that. So I decided to get rid of her and start this gear shop. So I started pretty small way back in the late '80s. And you know that was my idea, you know. That I kind of abandoned them then. Oh that's what she came up with, that I'd abandoned him and the boats and I went into gear shop and I was a part owner on the boat and I was supposed to do this and I was supposed to do that. So that's a story I could keep on goin' on for a long time, but anyway I suppose your time is up.

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MHA Unfortunately yes 'cause it's really been very interesting to talk to you and hear some of the details that, I mean I know, I've talked to you a number of times about different aspects but to hear the kind of the history and the longer

RB Longer fashion, yeah.

MHA That's important

RB Yeah. But you know you gather an awful lot of information you know in almost fifty years. This is gettin' close to fifty years now when you figure the Norwegian time that I spent over there up to now, it's fifty years

MHA Yeah

RB [laughs]

MHA Where did the time go?

RB Where did the time go? You know. You know that yourself. You're lookin' back, you say my God, where did the time go?

MHA True. You are fortunate to have family still involved so much in the gear shop and be so intelligent

RB I'm very glad about that. And I quit at the time I did and the kids then got interested in what I was doin' of course I still had a boat, so they overlapped you know the two businesses and stuff. Tor got very interested in net designs and learned how to mend and he could splice wire. Believe it or not that guy shacker, first time he went out he went out with one of the skippers on the boat, Dennis Hoaglund his name was and I thought boy this Dennis Hoaglund he's a well known guy he's made money and all this stuff. Then they, Tor went out with him, he was just a young fellow, fifteen or so. And they busted up some wires and stuff on the boat. He's shacking trip, his first trip, greenhorn. And if it wasn't for Tor and his knowledge, he knew how to splice wire, they would have had to come in [laughs]. So Tor went to work and took a piece of wire and spliced up this and spliced up that and stuff you know and he shamed the skipper into givin' him full share the first trip [laughs]. So I mean that was a good thing, 'cause I taught him in the shop how to splice wire. He was kind of a rugged guy too you know and stuff. So that's rewarding when you see stuff like that. Yeah. And then today he's you know top notch guy.

MHA Knowledgeable

RB Yeah very knowledgeable. I mean everybody comes to him for information and knowledge. And believe it or not, I mean even with the times that we've had here now,

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you know it's very hard for me to say that we are losin' our business because my business in that shop has just gone up, up, up, up, up, like so. With less customers. We've lost an awful lot of customers because of the regulations, they've gone by the wayside. But we've picked up more than we lost. And bigger jobs.

MHA So do you think that's because there are fewer gear shops around? Or is it just that you're, you have developed such a great reputation?

RB I think the latter, yeah. I think the reputation really had a lot to do with that. And also some of the gear shops, I know the gear shops down in Greenport there had to close their doors. They couldn't do it anymore so there was one there so we were gettin' a lot of that business from that area, you know New York, Greenport and places like that, even from, even from Point Judith. Boats in around Long Island, Rhode Island. I mean there are, if I start to look at my files and see where all the boats come from, they stretch all the way from northern Maine and up down to Cape Hatteras all along. [laughs]. So I'm kinda glad to see how it went and I hope it keeps up. And I think that the fishing industry is never gonna collapse, they're gonna have to bring it up from here I think. You know, you need work for people. And I've been through quite a few recessions now, since I come here and the recession for fishing people, you never even knew what it was because you know you see that in the stock market. You know housing and things like that, when you work with something like we do, a species of fish that you know you get from the ocean, and you sell it, you don't notice recessions. Because you bring it in trip by trip, trip by trip, there's no such a thing as anybody come there and say that you can't do that anymore until it happened. That's our recession. You know. With a lot of the boats, it got so bad that a lot of boats went out of business, but I've never noticed it myself as long as I've been fishing one after the other.

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I always made money even in bad years, good years or whatever.

MHA You always had food.

RB Food and money. 'Cause you, you sold it for money, right? And money brings you everything else. You know cars and houses and whatever you want. As long as you have work. I mean that's a, that's a whole other subject.

MHA Yeah another subject I'd like to ask you about at some point are the various strikes that they had in New Bedford.

RB Yeah well they were union strikes.

MHA That was for the scallopers mostly right?

RB Collective bargaining. You know union, between union and boat owners, you know. Union in my estimation got a little greedy so then the boat owners after awhile start to look for ways to get out of the union contracts and I think you can see that all over the country with all kinds of unions. If they get too greedy, next thing you know the people are gonna rebel against it. You know. It's not that they're not good. I think the union did a lot of good to workers in this country on every level, fishing included. It brought rules to the fishing, even when there was no federal ruling or anything like that. They had scalloper for instance you know that had to go six and six watches so people could get their rest and everything. Gotten away from that altogether. It was a good rule. And because of the watches they had to go more men, now they go seven men, they used to go eleven. So because of the ruling, that you had to go only seven men on a scalloper now, three men lost their job, that you could have. But I mean the money they make in scalloping today, you could easily put three more men on there.

MHA Do they still have that same ruling?

RB Yeah.

MHA I didn't realize that.

RB Yeah. That's a conservation rule. They figured that eleven men could cut so many more scallops

MHA Right.

RB That they, they didn't, they brought it down to seven.

MHA Now that they have a quota, don't they have a quota that they can only bring in a certain amount?

RB No but they have open areas too. And this is because of the open areas. The quota, if it was only quotas which is looking kind of a catch share system

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then you could actually go as many as you wanted. But I, I am scared of catch share systems. The scallopers, if they go into something like that, first thing they're gonna do is cut so many percent off their quotas. So they're gonna lose anyway. That was the idea with the draggers. It was a, like a conservation percentage cut that they had to take off the allocations. If they do that with scallopers, they will know, I mean...so I mean you could talk for hours on this stuff, but I don't agree with much of it. I think union, back to unions, they were a good, good thing, but they got a little too greedy. And what happens is that when you get too greedy, next thing you know you lose it. So how many unions we got left? Teachers unions, labor unions and stuff. Fishing unions are all gone. The lumper unions, they are all gone. Seafood workers. So I don't know. Where do we start?

MHA I think we'd better stop now because I don't know whether

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End of Interview