

Female Speaker: Jiri, could you tell us a little bit about yourself? For example, where you are from, what you fish for.

Jiri Nozicka: Well, I was born in Czech Republic and I was raised there until [19]97. I came to the States, I came to Monterey in 1999. I started fishing there. That was my first commercial fishing experience. I started fishing there on the fishing vessel, *San Giovanni*, which I currently fish still. So, that's pretty much my story. I fished on a lot of boats as well. I fished in Alaska for sockeye salmon and Bristol Bay at several seasons. I fished for another groundfish and tuna at Half Moon Bay in San Francisco. So, for thirteen years, I've been fishing up and down the coast here.

FS: What brought you to this career?

JN: God. [laughter] God brought me to Monterey, I think. For some reason, he wanted me to fish. I really don't know why I like it. I never got seasick, so it was one of the signs. [laughter]

JN: Ninety-nine percent of people get seasick really bad. I didn't. So, that was one of the signs that I could do this, and I really enjoyed it. I really like the challenge of the commercial fishing. It's a job that you'll never stop learning. US teachers, sometimes, I'm pretty sure you're questioning yourself, "Why am I doing this? These kids don't listen to me anymore. I'm wasting my time." So, the fishing, it's – when you come to a moment like this, it will immediately change. You got a new lesson to learn because the motion is a huge factor in the fishing. The fishing boat is a huge factor, always something breaking, something changing. The fishing gear has a huge amount of things that need to be always worked on and figured out and tuned up. Then you're working with other people. Again, the winds around you. So, it's so many factors that the commercial fisherman has to obtain in order to be successful and to be safe. I think that's what really kept me in for a while, and it's just loving it.

FS: So, we hear a lot about how much background knowledge is required to be a fisherman. Based on that, it seems like a fisherman would want to specialize in a particular style of fishing or in a particular species. What do you specialize in?

JN: I specialize in bottom trawling. Fishing on *San Giovanni* is bottom trawled for about six to something years out of Monterey for over fifty years. So, when I came in the picture, I just jumped in. I really enjoyed bottom trawling. It's challenging. It's resourceful. It's a good way to fish. It's really hard. It's probably one of the hardest back-breaking fisheries that you can get into because there's a lot of sorting, a lot of icing down. Just really physically, it's very challenging. I think it's probably more than the others I have experienced. But it's a really nice fishery. I like it.

FS: What are the species that you target with the trawl fishing?

JN: Well, we fish the groundfish complex. Along the West Coast here is about – it contains about seven different species. So, we catch all of them. We catch about twenty different species of flatfishes. We fish halibut, sanddabs, Petrale sole. We fish Dover sole, English soles, skate wings, different kinds of rockfishes, black cod. It's just a huge variety of fish that we catch. I

like that. It's getting bored by one fish.

FS: So, as a trawl fisherman, what do you say to folks who say that trawling just clear-cuts the bottom of the ocean?

JN: That they should learn a little bit more about trawling. They should employ a little bit of critical thinking and put a little bit more trust in the fishermen, in their neighbors. Because fishermen, just plain logic, is that like over here on the West Coast, the bottom trawling has been happening for over hundred years. The trawl fisherman doesn't go blind. We go on the same spot over and over. The spot that we fish on several times a day sometimes, they're productive after a hundred years. So, if we were so destructive, there will be no fish already. We will be fishing in desolate places, and we would not make a living. We will be the first one to be out of business. So, I think that's the true measurement of the sustainability for the trawling. We produce food and we produce fresh quality food, seafood, and a variety of it. There's always going to be a cost. When the farmer plows the field, he plows the dirt, and he kills a few worms.

FS: [laughter]

JN: When we build a road or build a house, we destroy something in order to build it up to sustain ourselves. If we're not going to be able to do that in the ocean to some measure, we are going to be able to kill a few fish that we really don't want or a crab gets washed. I mean, then we shouldn't be really doing anything else and just sit here and die. [laughter]

FS: Well, talking about squashed crabs, what percentage of your catch is bycatch?

JN: Well, that's a very interesting question because bycatch, a lot of people think bycatch is everything beside – let's say, we fish on the beach over here of Santa Cruz, now we can't, it's closed. But we wish for halibut, then we catch sanddabs, flounder, Petrale sole, skate wings. All these species would be a bycatch because we would say, "Oh, we go halibut fishing." Well, we sell every single one of those fishes if they are legal sized. Whatever is not legal on the beach, it goes back in the water life. Whether it makes it or a sea lion eats it, that's another question. But you can talk about ninety-nine percent of the retaining of whatever we catch. If we go fishing in deep water shelf, where we're fishing currently, ninety percent of our fishing, we – by ratio is about, what we throw back about a couple hundred pounds of crabs. They're alive when they go back in the water, and that's about it from a twenty, thirty thousand pounds of fish that we bring in every trip. So, it's very minimal. Sometimes, we fish rock cod and you get one tow and you get five ton of fish, and they're all one species sometimes. Sometimes, it's not. But if we can sell it, we bring it in. If it's not regulated, right now, in the last fifteen years, the regulations forced the fishermen to throw fish back because we were not able to – we were not allowed because of the regulations to bring in certain fish. So, then we got blamed for throwing them away. Where you're throwing away perfectly nice fish that would find a customer, who's fault is it? It's not ours. We would normally retain it. So, the bycatch, it's very tacky issue. It's tacky with me and every fisherman and with the customers. Also, another thing is, if you have a small fish, if we were Chinese, there will be no bycatch because we would eat everything. But because we're American, we're spoiled a little bit, we like fillets. We like no bones. We see no eyes on the fish once we eat them. Our habits are to blame for fishermen's endeavors. Fishermen can bring it in.

I'll bring it in if you give me two cents for it, if it's worth it, or I can just give it away. I don't care if you take it. A lot of times, the farmers want to have it for fertilizing. A lot of times, we're not allowed. We will catch fish, and there was a species that we cannot catch and we call in the fishing game or government and say, "Can we bring it in and give it away? Can you come and take samples of it at least?" No. You bring it in, you go to jail. Then you get blamed for fishing in the wrong way. It's not the first fisher that gets the bad rap. It's probably not going to be the last one. But currently in the last fifteen years, the trawling really get the bad rap just because of – I think it's bad PR. They operate under common sense. To them, it's okay, well, one fish dies and ten gets kept. The birds, crabs, everything else eat it in the oceans. It's not waste. It turns into protein and it turns into feed for other fish. But to some people, it's a crime. I think that needs to change because if we're operating under these conditions, we will not survive.

MS: Over the years that you have been fishing, have you noticed any changes in the kind of fish or the quantity there?

JN: It changes constantly. It changes from day to day. I'll give you example. I'll kind of walk into it real quick. Our regulations are regulated by Catch Shares system now where we have a certain percentage of catch according to our history. So, most of our catches, because the biggest allowable catch for the entire coast is in deep water complex fishes, which is a Dover Sole, black cod and thornyheads, rockfish. So, we fish for those ninety percent of the time. We fished for them last year for about three months. We don't even try to venture in the grounds where we can encounter a few species of fish. They are really restricted. We have some species that we have four pounds for an entire year. So, we don't even go to those depths. We catch one fish that sometimes grow twenty pounds, thirty pounds, and we're done for a year. So, we don't even go to the rest, try to locate the rockfishes because for those, you have to kind of look them around. So, after two or three months of fishing, we overheard because one of the boats in Half Moon Bay started catching some rockfish and some sanddabs and some (grounds?) in Half Moon Bay – between here and Half Moon Bay. So, we started going [inaudible] and started catching sanddabs. So, we were fishing for them all the way until November when we had a breakdown. We had to rebuild engine, so we stopped for about three months. When we came back, everything is different. There's no sanddabs, no rockfishes. There's just a few or small flatfishes. There's a ton of small black cod that we want to stay away from. If I go there now, it could be different. If I go in the morning to a certain spot, I can catch rock cod. If I go in the afternoon, I don't catch any. The ocean is so massively independent. It just changes from hour to hour. We had a really cold water here. Last year, we had semi-warm waters. So, it constantly changes. It's mixing up. Each species of fish carries its own fish – each water column, each water temperature, it carries its own fish species. If you have a tuna, albacore tuna, and the tuna you catch in the waters – the water temperatures range about sixty-three to sixty-five degrees. If you get it colder, it won't go in there. If it go warmer, it go in there. So, if you find a spot that could be a fifty-foot wide, you're going to catch some tuna. But on both of those sides, you don't catch any. For them, it's a wall, and every species has the same system. It's in them. Sardines, they like warmer. Anchovies like a little colder, so it likes colder, not as cold. We had a really cold water here in the [19]40s, and that kept the squid away. Some people might think, "There is no squid. They catch them all." Where the fact is that the water just doesn't bring them in, and that changes from day to day. So, tomorrow, they could be catching hundreds of tons of them. So, I've seen changes from day to day, catch a lot of this fish, another fish, always different. But

there's a lot of fish out there.

MS: What was the most unusual thing you have ever brought up?

JN: Whale head, still with the meat on it, eyeballs, and the brains. [laughter]

FS: Cool.

JN: No. It was about five years ago. There was a killing spree by orcas and they were killing everything in their way. Actually, one day, we were fishing off Santa Cruz right here, about five miles offshore. Then we saw there's pack of orcas killing blue whale cub. They eventually killed it. Next day, I caught – or three days later, I caught the head in my net.

FS: Oh, geez. Surprise.

JN: But the boat caught in submarine and airplanes. There's a shipwreck of the USS Makin, the last (blimp?) from the Navy, U.S. Navy. Actually, the pieces were caught on and off by a fisherman for thirty years. There were pieces hanging in the bar in Moss Landing. The daughter of the captain who shipwrecked it recognized those pieces. So, they start interviewing fishermen, "Where did you find these things?" They knew the crash (off of Big Sur?), but they didn't know what depth and what location, and the fishermen were always pulling them up. My father-in-law pulled out about two or three airplanes from that ship from the nets.

FS: Wow.

JN: So, they pulled out the torpedoes and bombs in years. There were two boats that my family had and within a span of four months, they both got hang in the submarine.

FS: [laughter]

JN: One was American, one was probably Russian or Chinese or somebody else because they never came up, but it nearly destroyed the boat and the crew in both times. There's always something weird.

FS: What is one of the more powerful experiences you have had out on the ocean?

JN: It changes. It's every day. Just the beauty of it. You go out there and – we live under such a burden of heaviness of regulations currently. A few years back, I've been – just burdens so heavily. You get mad, you get angry. Then you just have a quiet moment or something, you and your God because you depend on him. You live by faith. Every time I put that \$40,000 worth of gear in the water, I don't know if it's going to come back. It doesn't sometimes. It happened to me a couple of times. But it's just that the beauty of – being the connection with, really, directly connected to God's creation. You have beautiful moments. You have dolphins jumping around you. You have whales staring at you from the waters, being from – hours around your boat, following you around. You see the birds just squeaking out on you all day. It's beautiful. It's the connection, I think, a fisherman has. The smell of the fresh salty air and the fish as you touch the

fish because you catch it, that's your fish. I always come home. When I see crowds coming in, when I see the locals guides of Monterey, they see from the mountainside, if you come to Monterey and you see the (New?) Monterey, above the aquarium there, they see the boat coming in. They see the boat being untied, being gone from the harbor. They know it's gone. They're looking out for it coming back. When the boat comes back, they start coming in little by little. They know it has some good fish because if they have a squid bulk, (that's one?) – you just get a squid. But if you come with my boat, sometime twenty different fish. So, if you want a flatfish, you get it. If you get a rock cod, you get it. They're walking home happy. They have bags full and they're smiling. They come home, and you stop with them and they tell you how they're going to cook it, how they're going to prepare it. They're happy, sincerely happy that they got their fish, taking it home. That's a blessing. That really keeps me going because I feel like I'm doing something that has a sense that has a meaning to those around me. It's a blessing. I'm a blessing to others. What else can I ask of my life?

MS: So, you became a part of this family that has been doing this for generations. What does it mean to you that you have joined in with these traditions and this history? How has that impacted you?

JN: Well, I became part of it. If you're a fisherman, you think fishing, you talk fishing. If you meet one other fisherman, they do the same thing. So, we have a really strong connection. So, when we meet at the Sunday lunch, we talk about fishing. When you are a fisherman, like when you're a farmer, you're going to talk about the dirt and the harvest and the winds and rains. With the fishermen, it's the same thing. You talk about fishing grounds. You talk on trips. You talk about fish. You talk about stories, and you become part of it. It's not your occupation. It's your life. That's what, I think, is the difference from whatever I ever did. I went to school. I was an electrician. When I came to the States, I started from the bottom, washing dishes, all the way to wherever, waiting tables, constructions. It's different because you have to become a fisherman. It's a life. It really consumes you, and it doesn't really give you a chance to do anything else. If you start doing it, you're starting of thinking a way and you're actually putting yourself in danger because if your mind is not completely there, you're in danger because the ocean is really, really a dangerous place because of its unpredictability. It's just really, really dangerous. If you look at the monument, then we can show you the names. I mean, within eighty years, a small community like this, 140 names, it's really, really dangerous. You become part of it. It's nice. I'm grateful for being part of a community like that. You're home. You have roots.

MS: So, what about your kids? Do you hope that they go fishing, too?

JN: Well, I wouldn't discourage them. I mean, I would discourage them from one point because I believe it's going to change because they cannot last. I believe that people come to their senses and they're going to say, "Okay, guys, we trust you. You do your best, provide us some food." So, I believe that's going to change one day. Currently, I would discourage them because they're going to become slaves. You have a feeling like slaves. You have people with the (whips?) over your head, sending you tickets, "Just send us a credit card number," and you got a ticket four years later, things like that. The observer is on, and this guy wants to know what you're doing. That guy wants to know. They have so many layers of regulation over you. It just overwhelms you. It feels like you're a [inaudible] slave. So, from that point, I would say don't do it. But then

I would encourage them to be there and just to experience what it is, just why I'm doing it. I don't have to do it. I did other things in life. I can do constructions and things like that, but it's just – it makes me happy. So, if it makes them happy – maybe they'll be miserable and they will never be rich, but I wouldn't discourage them. It's dangerous, but what's not? You can be on the highway, you can get killed, too. So, as long as they always have their hearts near God, then they'll be okay no matter what they do.

MS: Do you think it would be better if they were no regulations?

JN: Well, there's always been regulations. A lot of people think that there was no regulations in the sardine days. There was a lot of regulations. So, the fishermen have always been regulated by themselves. About a year ago, we had a discussion with the gentlemen who actually do a fish talks and assessments. They have a lab here in Santa Cruz from NOAA. I asked him, I said, "What was the best situation from their point of view as the regulators, as the people who actually look at the numbers, how much fish there is? What was the best level of harvest from their point of view? Which decade, which years?" He said, "All the way until the federal government stepped in. All the way until 1977, there was basically no regulations" because the fishing is so hard. Then in those days, if you were fishing and you were not making enough money, if you went out fishing every day, even if you went down to Big Sur and make (one ton?) and come in, you got beat up on the way. Sometimes you made money and sometimes you didn't. But if you didn't do it, then the crew wouldn't stay with you. They will go to somebody else. If you didn't do it every day, you're not making money. You were losing. So, they got out of it because there was a competition. It was the natural – the hardness of it. People who don't want to work that hard, they don't want to do it. They just leave. They go to something else. I'm not saying there will be no regulations, we'll be in paradise, we'll be okay. But there are a lot of regulations that are already in place by the fishermen themselves by the nature, by the nature of the trawling. We don't go (where the reefs?) are. We see these cliffs and these – an environment like this, I'd go in the place like that, I'm done. I'll lose everything. I know what these places are. I don't even go near them, even miles and miles near them. Then you look at the map of current regulations – like, for example, I can tell you what would make sense. The government wants to protect a certain rockfish. That's fine. Okay, close the zones. We have a zone that's a rockfish conservation zone right now, all the way from Mexico, all the way to Alaska. Canadians have it, too. Keep it close. Make it larger. That's fine. You want me to use net that allows rockfish to escape, that's fine, too. I'm using it now. But what I catch, let me keep it. Leave it up to me what I'm going to be catching. What is the most at the current time because they're changing all the time. One day, you can have a lot of flatfish. The next day, you get a lot of rock cod. But don't leave it up to [inaudible] might give me a certain number to the pound to make it harder for me. We can go fishing right on the edge of the bay here and we don't have to spend two days looking for a fish where we can catch enough for me to make a day for people ashore to make a drop. If I bring a load of fish, that could be thirty people having a job every day on one boat. So, it's a balance, and that needs to be done. Right now, it's out of whack. So, it's just not working. It's encouraging people to get out of business, really encouraging them. I came to Monterey twelve years ago. There was about sixty boats, sixty trawls between Morro Bay and San Francisco. Now, it's about three. That just tells you, (which is?) people get – running away and just hanging up. It's too much. I'm not going to do it. They got old. I'm the youngest, probably one of the youngest skippers around, and there's no new generation coming

in because they don't see the future of it.

FS: So, the fisheries are changing. There is a lot of regulations taking place. If someone were to ask you what is the number one thing that you think someone can do to check if the ocean is healthy for our future, what would you say?

JN: Well, they are healthy. I mean, if you want to, from your point of view – I mean, you live on land, right? If you don't go fishing or you don't go boating, then you're going to – the only effect that you're going to have on fishing is the pollution, right? If you don't want to pollute, you use the common sense. People don't pollute on purpose. So, don't pollute. Be careful when you go on the beaches. I mean, right now, we're going in the extreme where somebody lifts the rocks of Sylmar Beach and they have cops behind them because somebody turns them in because they touched the rock. So, it doesn't make any sense. We need to let ourselves enjoy this beauty. I mean, it's for us. So, we should be able to enjoy – be part of it, not destroy it. Ninety-nine percent of people want to enjoy the ocean, want to protect it. They could have a one percent of people who don't care, but are we going to steer from the ninety-nine percent, their enjoyment just in order to prevent the one? It goes into the extreme. If people use their common sense and their responsibilities, we'll be okay. We were fine before. The ocean wasn't destroyed. When the sardines left, a lot of people will tell you, "Oh, there was nothing left." I mean, so many people on the wharf and they tell me there was nothing left in the bay, and we put the sardines back in it. Now, thanks to the conservation, we put the fish back in. We're putting ourselves in the place of God. God put them in. Because of natural cycles, the sardines are back because of that, not because we did the conservation efforts, not because – after the sardines left, there was a ton of other fisheries. They were alongside it. There has to be a balance in the trust. You got to trust me and I've got to trust you. I'm going to trust you that you're not going and wash your car in the beach with the citric acid or something. You know what I mean, the commonsense thing. You got to trust me as my neighbor or otherwise, you're going to have to trust somebody in China or Russia doing better job than me, and that's very hard to control. So, that would be a trust among us. I mean, come on. I mean, it's crazy. That's the type of a thing that we've taken too far. I mean, come on. Are you stupid enough to put your hand for the orca out?

FS: [laughter]

JN: You pay the price when she bites it, right? How do you – harming the orca when you're feeding it in the wild? I mean, what is it going to do to it? Nothing. We were so concerned about – well, we cannot touch anything. We cannot do anything. We cannot go around anything that we are putting ourselves out of the entire planet like we don't belong here. That's the sad part. What would our children think about ourselves – themselves? They're going to automatically think we're bad, we're evil. I cannot touch nothing, so I don't belong here. I'm an alien. That's the really bad part that's happening. When that changes, we'll be okay. There's plenty of fish. There's plenty of whales. There's plenty of everything out there.

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