

Joshua Wrigley: This is an interview for the Maine Coast Oral History initiative to be shared jointly by the Maine Coast Fishermen's Association and the Island Institute. The date is August 14, 2013. This is Josh Wrigley, and today, I'm at the home of fisherman Randy Cushman in Port Clyde, Maine. The subject of today's interview is his reflections on his career, how he got started in the business, and his family's participation in the fishery over several generations.
[recording paused]

Randy Cushman: Can't beat blueberries. Love blueberries. They're healthy.

Scott Sell: Right now, man, they're the best.

RC: Maine blueberries. My wife bought – I think she said twenty-five pounds yesterday.

JW: Really?

RC: We freeze them.

SS: Does she buy them fresh and then freeze them?

RC: Yes. Cook with them all through the winter.

JW: They're in season right now, right?

RC: Yes, they are.

SS: [inaudible] really good.

RC: And they're really good. There's a big difference. A lot sweeter. A lot sweeter taste.

JW: How many people in your family have been fishermen?

RC: Oh, boy. I'd have to sit and think about that. It's quite a few. My three brothers. My nephew right now is going. You're talking right now or in the past until –?

JW: Now and in the past.

RC: Then you had my grandfather, my uncle Richie, my great uncles, which was Buster Cushman. We're going by nicknames here. It's easier for me to remember. Spinner Cushman, Leroy Cushman, Woodrow Cushman, my great-grandfather Jack Cushman. I got to think. Because we have other Cushman offspring – cousins. I have John Crane V and VI. (Ashley's?)

the fifth. We pick on him. There's like five generations of John Crane's, which was from my father's sister's side. Troy crane. That's from my father's sister's side. I'm trying to think. There's more. I'd have to really sit down and think about it, Josh. But there's quite a number.

JW: And they go back five generations?

RC: There's five generations in Port Clyde, yeah. But I think as far as being fishermen, in general, I think we go back all the way to Bremen before that. I'm not sure when it all started as fishermen. But originally, we wasn't fishermen. We come across on the *Mayflower*. Robert Cushman and his son Thomas came over on the *Mayflower*, and Robert Cushman was a (wool carter?) – was it (carter?)? I think it was. Whatever that is. [laughter] I don't know what that is. Anyhow, they settled in Plymouth, Massachusetts.

JW: What brought them up to Maine?

RC: I'm not sure. That's something we haven't been able to find out. But Apollos Cushman was the one that first showed up in Maine, and that was in Bremen, Bremen, Maine.

SS: What year are we talking?

RC: Oh, boy. I'd have to look back. But it's right here. I don't know what year. Actually, it doesn't say the year. He had twelve children. They had a lot of kids back then.

SS: Yeah. Had to have a lot of hands for the farm.

RC: Yes. I'm not so sure if he was farming or not in Bremen, but he could have been. And I'm not so sure if he was a fisherman. We haven't been about to find that out.

JW: Is Bremen far to the south from here?

RC: Yes. Yes, it is. It's right across the bay, Muscongus Bay. It's right in the same neighborhood as New Harbor. You heard of New Harbor? Bristol? South Bristol?

JW: Yes, yes.

RC: Pemaquid Point?

JW: Yes.

RC: It's right on that same peninsula.

SS: Near [inaudible]

RC: Yes. It's right in that same area. My great-grandfather Charles Cushman, which we all knew him as Jack Cushman, was one that came to Port Clyde. He married Bertha Stone, and that's the reason why he came to Port Clyde. She's from Port Clyde.

JW: How did he meet her originally?

RC: That I'm not sure of. My grandmother Eva could probably answer that.

JW: I'll have to ask her.

RC: I'm not sure how they really met. But that's how we ended up settling here though, and that's why we have five generations, all because of him right now – in Port Clyde.

JW: Did they marry in Port Clyde?

RC: That I'm not sure of either. You're asking quite a bit, Josh. That's beyond my time.

JW: What did he fish for?

RC: Lobsters. He was a lobsterman. That's what he fished for. He was a lobsterman. Let me see [inaudible], Scott. He loved lobstering. That's all he wanted to do. That's what he did.

JW: At that time, was there a big lobster market in Port Clyde?

RC: That I can't answer either, Josh. My guess is probably similar to what's happening now. I got an idea. Actually, it's probably less market back then. I don't think it was a very popular item back in those days. I mean, they really struggled. I can remember when my grandfather did. His son, Shannon Lee Cushman, Sr., had seven children, and there was times it was hard for them. Being in a small community like this, you have benefits. You have friends and neighbors that help you out. What I can give you, for example, is the guy that owned Port Clyde General Store back then used to let them buy food through the winter and wait until they made money during the summer months during the season.

JW: So, they could buy on credit.

RC: They bought on credit. Yeah.

JW: What years are we talking about here?

RC: Jeez, we're probably talking back in the '50s, back when my father was young. Right in that general time – '50s and '60s. It was not unheard of. They really did that back then to get them through the wintertime. Then, come summertime, they start paying them back. You don't hear that happening these days.

SS: No. No one's going to trust you with that.

RC: No.

SS: Were there any guys making a good bit of money on groundfish?

RC: Ground fishing back then was just really getting started in this community back then. It was actually [Forrest] "Ford" Davis [who] was the one that started that in this community for small boat. But there was big boats – O'Hara up in Rockland. They was going for years. Let me think. I'm trying to think what years it was. I can't remember what years it was the O'Hara fleet was going, but they date way back. They was going Grand Banks red-fishing. My great uncle, Woodrow Cushman, fished on the Grand Banks for redfish on the – what was the name of them boats? Fifty-fathom boats or sixty-fathom boats, they used to call them, out of Rockland. The big, steel boats back in the day when they first started dragging, probably back in the '40s, '50s, in that time. But also my wife's grandfather, [inaudible] – he fished on the *St. George*, and the captain – the owner of that boat lived right here in Port Clyde, (Clyson?) Coffin. He fished eleven years on that boat, a hundred and seventeen-foot wooden boat – went to Grand Banks. So, we also have family history on my wife's side that's involved in this community. But dragging, yes, that was probably back in the '40s and '50s around here

JW: Was that shortly after dragging became a more popular fishing technique?

RC: It did. What made it more pop – it started – back in that time, believe it or not, you could make more money off groundfishing dragging than you could lobstering. Back when I started my career, it was the same way when I was a young fellow. If you wanted to make money on the water fishing, you went dragging. Lobstering, you didn't make the money – not as much. Now, it's gone the other way. Now there's more money in lobstering than there is dragging. The roles have been reversed. [laughter]

JW: What were wages like back then for dragging?

RC: It was good. I can honestly say the wages are the same as they are now, with a lot less overhead. Things were a lot cheaper back then. It wasn't unheard of for some crews to be making forty to eighty thousand dollars a year.

JW: Really?

RC: Yes. This was back in the late '60s, early '70s.

SS: Still quite a bit of money.

RC: That was huge money. I mean, if you look at the times, that's probably equal to 250,000 now. Back then, them guys – I knew guys back then – I was just a young fellow – going to the car dealership, pulling out their wallets, and buying a car right on the spot – cash.

JW: Did the money usually last them through the winter, or would they work in construction during the offseason?

RC: Oh, yeah, it'd last them.

JW: Or continue fishing?

RC: Right, right. They fished through the year. Dragging, you fished through the year. You had the bigger boats that went groundfishing all twelve months out of the year. The O'Hara boats did. The smaller boats, like what you see in this community like I have, used to rely on three fisheries – three different types of fisheries. It was groundfish. It was shrimping and scalloping. Those three fisheries. Because it was more inshore. The reason for that is because groundfishing – it was always known [that] groundfish come in inshore during the warm, summer months. They come in to spawn. In the wintertime, they're back offshore again – deep water. So, they wasn't accessible for smaller boat fleet like I have. It was harder to fish for them during the wintertime because of the weather, and you have to go further and all those – it was just harder to do. So, in order to groundfish through the year, you stayed on the big boat. They could fish on it twelve months out of the year. They could chase them offshore.

JW: What about shrimp and scallops? What seasons –

RC: During the winter. Cold months.

JW: – do those take place in?

RC: Cold months. The scallop season was usually in late fall. Usually, November/December was scallop season. Then shrimp season would start usually in December and would go right until the end of May as a rule. Then we'd pick up a groundfish season again from June to scallop season.

KW: So, did most people who were operating smaller vessels tend to move with the seasons and pursue these fisheries?

RC: Right. Right. You did it because they were successful, at that time, in your dooryard. Okay? The ground fishery, you pretty much fished the same area almost twelve months of the year; it's just what came in at the time. If you can picture it, the groundfish came in from June to – basically, from June to about the end of September, and then they'd back offshore. So, you'd go out and waste your time [if] you try to catch them; they weren't there anymore. So then you [inaudible] went scalloping. Scalloping was way inshore, right next to the beach. Now, shrimping would start – when shrimping [would] start in December, you go off in the neighborhood ten to fifteen miles, then they keep coming inshore. In January, it'd be around five to ten miles. In February, you was anywhere from a mile to five miles from shore.

JW: Really?

RC: Yes.

JW: That's really close.

RC: See, they keep working in. They're coming in for a reason: spawn. They dropped their eggs. So, it was inshore. Small boat dragging like I have was an inshore fishery, basically, is what I'm trying to say.

JW: When was the first time that you went fishing?

RC: Five years old, my first overnight trip, purse seining with my father on the (*Wave Guard?*). Yeah. My mother had a fit. [laughter] I can still see that in my mind, believe it or not. I still remember seeing the fish, the herring, the big set of herring – purse seining. You never forget that. I was five years old.

JW: How many did you catch on that trip?

RC: I can't remember what they caught. Back then, you had the catcher. The purse seining boat – they didn't actually load that boat. That's the boat that had the big net that caught the fish. You loaded a separate boat. They called it a carrier, and you usually would fill that carrier

– whatever you caught – as a rule when you made that set. My guess would be, if you want to talk poundage, probably talking in the neighborhood of a hundred thousand pounds of herring in one set.

JW: Did your father work with the same carrier on a continual basis?

RC: This was the purse seiner, the catcher boat. The (*Wave Guard?*). My father had his hands in all fisheries pretty much growing up, except for one fishery – gillnetting. He did just about the other fisheries.

JW: Why didn't he do gillnetting?

RC: It was never really picked up in this neighborhood, in this community. I don't know what the reasons are for that. I think a lot of it has to do with what we have available to us for fish. You hear more about gillnetting more to the East and more to the West. Usually, gillnetting went hand in hand with codfish, pollock, and hake. Our type of bottom that we had out here – we had mainly flatfish, which – you don't gillnet flatfish. You have to bottom trawl. That's what I do. I bottom trawl for flatfish. That was pretty much our mainstay for groundfishing was flatfish, more than the round species. We did have some pollock and hake. Once in a while, you'd have sets of haddock. You always hear the stories about all these fish, lots of fish. Well, they don't tell you the whole story. Back in the day, when I was young, in my father's day [and] my grandfather's day, yes, they had big sets of fish, but it wasn't every single time they went out. They call it fishing for a reason. You're not going to get them every time. I had big sets in my career – big tows. But I can also tell you a lot more bad ones than big ones. [laughter] And they could, too, even back in the day. Everything's done by season. This Gulf of Maine never had hundreds thousands of pounds of codfish every time you went out. Never ever. Never will.

JW: So, on your first trip, had your father not told your mother that he was taking you out with him?

RC: Oh, yeah. I don't think she agreed with it at the time.

SS: He said, "I'm taking him anyway."

RC: Yeah.

SS: How far outside did you go on that first trip?

RC: I can't remember, really, to be honest with you.

SS: But it was [inaudible]

RC: I remember the trip. Oh, yeah. Probably, it's been pretty much a mainstay – probably either off Seal Island, Matinicus, or Monhegan. My guess would be off Monhegan somewhere if I had to guess. I don't know if my mother would remember it or not. My father passed away. He's been gone. He died in 1995.

JW: For how long did he fish during his life?

RC: He fished up until I think the last six years. It might have been longer than that. Actually, seven years. I think he was forty-five when he stopped fishing. The doctors told him he really shouldn't be doing any more because his body was deteriorating. We call it in our business, you're getting busted up when you get older. We have our limitations. I'd love to be able to go on a big scalloper to the [inaudible] right now, make the big money. But physically, my body's not going to let me do it. I'm busted up. It's the term that we use. It happened at a young age when my father [was] forty-five. The doctor said if you're going to keep going, you're going to die. So, he came ashore. But he also had another skill that he was very good at, and he was very well known for. He was a boat builder. He could really build boats. It was unbelievable what he could do.

SS: Did he have a boatyard in Port Clyde here?

RC: He had a boat shop. Yeah, right behind the house, our house where we lived in Port Clyde. Yeah. Still there. And my nephew Dylan, the fifth generation, bought that house, and he has that shop now to himself. But also, I was fortunate; I was able to build boats with him growing up. So, he was a Jack-of-all-trades, really. He done it all. He built boats.

JW: [inaudible]

RC: Lobster boats. Lobster boats. Mainly lobster boats. But he could rebuild a dragger. He fished drag – I learned dragging from my father originally. That's when I first started. He went groundfishing, shrimping, scalloping, purse seining, lobstering. Let's see. What else did he do? Something else. Oh, whiting fishing. He did that, too. Plus, he built boats.

JW: Do you drag for white?

RC: No. When they had the whiting fishery here, it wasn't a very – it didn't happen for a long time. It's very few years of it, basically. A lot of that has to do with market and accessibility to the market from where you're catching them. It's not a high-priced fish, so it takes volumes. To catch them up here, you have to pay so much a pound to get them from here to the market.

There's some circumstances where what you're getting for that fish is actually what you're actually paying to get them to the market. So, you're just breaking even by catching them.

JW: So, it's not worth it.

RC: It's not worth catching. So, the whiting fishery ended up to the West in Portland, where the market was, so you didn't have the trucking involved. The extra cost is mainly trucking. Anyway, he could really build a boat, and that's what he did at the end of his career is build boats. I often wonder if that was worse on him than actually fishing in a boat.

JW: Really?

RC: Because, in all honesty, I had the same skill. My father passed that on to me. That's half the reason why I'm still in business: because I'm able to work on my own boat and maintain it instead of hiring it out. If you're going to pay someone a hundred dollars an hour to work on your boat, and you're only making twenty, it doesn't make sense anymore. You're not going to stay in business. But anyway, to me, working on them is just as hard as fishing them. In all honesty, I'd rather fish about any day than build it. [laguther] That's my perspective on it.

SS: Was he building and working on boards for a lot of guys in the fleet?

RC: Down here in Port Clyde, yes.

JW: Going back to what you were saying before, what activities aboard ship caused the most stress to your body?

RC: Anything – working on deck – physically. If you put so many hours on the ocean, it's going to take its toll on your body just from the motion. You're working your body constantly. I've had two knee surgeries. My next surgery is going to be replacement. I was supposed to have replacement a year ago if that gives you an idea. When your knees – when your leg can do this side to side as much as this, that's wearing your joints out. The doctor says, "Look, it looks like a pendulum." [laughter] I got two torn [rotator] cuffs, one in each shoulder. I got fingers that don't work anymore. A thumb that doesn't work anymore. I got a toe that won't bend right now. This all takes its toll. It's physically demanding. When you watch shows and things, it is – it's physically demanding. Every person is different. Some people can work forever hard like that, and it doesn't take its toll on your body. But [for] some reason or another, with us, with me and my father, it's taking its toll when you're fifty. But also, we work – I still work on deck. I still take out down the fish [inaudible] when I get in. I still enjoy it. I still enjoy the adrenaline rush of it all, I guess. [laughter]

SS: You want to talk about the adrenaline rush at all, like what it is that gives you the adrenaline rush? [inaudible]

RC: I call them horror shows. Those things you don't want to happen. I shouldn't say I enjoy it, but it gets the heart pumping. You don't really realize it until after you get in, and it's like somebody took a thousand pounds off you. You're like, "Oh, that was close. I guess we won't do that again."

SS: Are you talking about rope around the leg or something like that?

RC: No. I have never had rope around my leg. I've had close calls of losing the boat.

JW: Due to bad weather?

RC: Due to bad weather and breakdowns – the combination of both. It's not usually one thing. It's a combination. Usually, you find your weak points in bad weather. If something's going to break, it's always in bad weather. It always breaks at the worst possible time.

SS: Murphy's Law.

RC: Right. So, you have a lot of close calls. After you've been on the water for so many years, you're going to have close calls, anybody is. It's just a question [of] how you handle it and if you can still move on afterward. In most cases, you can, but there is cases you can't. I have guys that haven't been able to move on. They quit. I know more than one guy.

JW: Has that been because of fatalities at sea?

RC: That, yeah. Mainly that, yeah. It's really hard when it's a close friend and somebody in your community. Knock on wood, I've never been in that position. But I can see where they're coming from if I did.

JW: What was your first vessel?

RC: It's right there in the dooryard. It's undercover. You drove up by it. That boat right there was built in 1950. When I got it at twelve years of age, it was twenty-five years, and it needed to be rebuilt. It had been sitting on a bank for three years. You've all seen it. When you're driving down the road, you see an old wooden boat sitting on somebody's lawn that's been sitting there for a time. You can see through the seams and all that. It's distorted. It's twisted. That's what that boat was. It was actually going to go to the dump. It was a friend of ours. My father looked at it. I was at the point in my life, believe it or not, that it was time for me to have my own boat

and run it. Twelve years old. Can you imagine that? You think about that. You look at a twelve-year-old now; you're like, "No way would I let him go out in the harbor right now and go fishing."

SS: [inaudible]

RC: This is how young they taught you back then.

JW: What year was this?

RC: Twelve? It was 1974. I was running that boat up there in that dooryard. It's a twenty-foot boat at twelve years old. It was built in 1950. It was actually older than that, now that I think about it. What was it? Yeah. Twenty-four years old. Anyway, they was going to take it to the dump. My father says, "No, my son and I are going to turn that into a boat." And everybody's laughed about it. "How are you going to fix that?" In all honesty, I can remember at twelve years old, looking at him like, "This doesn't look good. It's going to sink before I even get it out." I ask everybody this question. I'm going to ask you two. What do you think – the first thing he did with that boat? What would be the first thing you do to a boat like that? Think about it.

JW: [inaudible]

RC: You can see. It was quarter-inch seams.

SS: Caulk the seams.

RC: You can't caulk seams with a quarter-inch gap.

JW: Just re-do the hull entirely.

RC: A lot of boat builders probably know – they've been doing it for years and years, especially rebuilding old boats – what you do. First thing we did – it was Thomaston. We went up, picked it up, put it on a flatbed trailer, hauled it down here in Port Clyde. My father didn't say what he was going to do. He said, "Don't worry about it. We're going to take care of this." It was actually twisted. I never forgot – the stern was right-cocked sideways. The stern was like this. It was like that. It almost fell apart when we was putting it on the trailer. About twenty of us lifted it up, put it on a trailer. He drove it down here in Port Clyde. Past that white church that I was telling you about, there's a pond, and the pond's name is Jim's Pond – is the name of the pond. He backed that trailer up, and we threw it right in there. Then we took rocks and started throwing it in there. We're sinking it. We tied rope to the stern. There was an apple tree right

on the edge of that pond. It's still down there. We tied to the apple tree. After a while, it sank finally. There was a little bit of the stern sticking it out of the top of the surface. He said, "We'll come back [in a] couple weeks and take a look." We hauled that boat out in two weeks; it looked like a brand-new boat. It took its shape back, and there was no more seams.

SS: Just let the water twist it back into shape.

RC: Yeah. The water soaked up the planks, and she swelled up. She swelled up and took her shape. It looked like an altogether different boat.

SS: Amazing.

RC: Then, we rebuilt it, [laughter] and there she is. She's still out there in my dooryard. So, that's how many – now, that's sixty-three years old now that boat. I'll have you guys look at it when we leave. But we've rebuilt it again since. I bought ice – actually, sold it. I fished it until I was seventeen. Then I sold it, and I went off to designer school to learn how to design boats. That's something my father always wanted to do. My father had this model boat that he always wanted to build for himself. But he always wanted to have it drawn up. So, I went to school. I went for one year. When I came back, we took that [inaudible] model, and I designed it for him. I still have the blueprints here at the house.

JW: What did it look like?

RC: It's a lobster boat. I designed – I took his design, modified it, and modernized it at the time. It took me a whole year to do it. You don't have to go out fishing. I do it in the evenings. I get half a day off – I have a drafting table. I finished it. That's when the dock – he never did get a chance to build the boat. It broke my heart. Broke his heart, too. But anyways. The design's still there. It's down at the Lighthouse Museum, by the way – the half model of it.

JW: Really?

RC: Yeah, down here in Port Clyde. Yeah. There's a picture of it.

JW: When you designed it, what features made it unique?

RC: It was what my father wanted – his design. Basically, I designed the boat to his height. We're pretty short. [laughter] Believe it or not, the Cushmans that date way back are tall. But we ended up short because the Cushmans married short women. [laughter] So, our generation ended up short. But my great uncles and all them were all around six feet or better.

JW: Really?

RC: Yeah. So, my grandfather married [inaudible]. This is it right here. That's when they put it down there. Somebody built that – actually, a friend of ours built the half model. That's the actual design. That's what the boat would look like if it had been built. This is my mother. That's me. These are people at the time that run the Lighthouse Museum down there – take care of the lighthouse itself.

SS: Yeah, they've got the little house down there, right? They got caretakers who live there?

RC: Yeah, they rent the upstairs.

SS: Is that right?

RC: The downstairs is an actual museum.

SS: Right.

RC: I don't know if you've been in there or not.

SS: I've only been outside around the lighthouse.

RC: Go in there sometime. It shows the old Port Clyde packing down here, the factory, when it was burning. Shows that.

SS: Oh, cool.

RC: I can't remember what year that was that burned. I think I was seven or eight years old – maybe ten. I can't remember.

SS: What was the name to her?

RC: *Linda C.* My mother – Linda. That was going to be the name of the boat. I have the design in the house, the actual drawing.

JW: How long did you wind up using your first craft for?

RC: This one here out here in the dooryard? We bought it when I was twelve, but I didn't actually start fishing until I was thirteen because we spent the spring rebuilding it between other jobs. We rebuilt it outdoors in back of the house, where my father ended up actually building a

boat shop eventually after we rebuilt that boat. [laughter] So, I'm trying to think. Four and a half years. Then I sold it, went to school, came back. A friend of ours – actually, I sold it to my uncle, my father's brother. He had it for two, three years, and he sold it to a friend of ours.

JW: Was he fishing in it as well?

RC: Yes. That friend of ours fished it for quite a few years, then he retired. He called me up and says, "I'm going to sell the boat," and I bought it back. Then it sat in my dooryard like it originally did, sat there rotting. [laughter] My brother Gerry decided to get his hands on it. He started rebuilding it. Eventually, things just rolled around. We totally rebuilt it again in 2005, I think it was, rebuilt it again. So, it's the second time it's been rebuilt.

JW: Was your brother Gerry fishing with it then?

RC: No. We rebuilt it just to have a play boat for us brothers and friends down here in Port. We used to leave down in the [inaudible]. We didn't put it overboard this year. We used to leave it down there. If somebody wanted to go striper fishing or something like that, in that nature, I might take family mackerel fishing.

SS: Do a weekend thing?

RC: Yeah. Just [inaudible] and go – the brothers. Four of us were involved [in] rebuilding it. We took our spare time. It was in my father's shop at the time.

JW: Did the rest of your brothers inherit your father's skill for boat building as well?

RC: Pretty much. Pretty much, yeah. Everybody has a certain skill. Yeah. We can be both builders. We can choose to. I don't really want to do it. It was different back then. I loved boat building when it was wood. I'll be straight honest with you. When it was wood, I really enjoyed it. I could probably do it now if it was wood, but the majority of it now is all fiberglass. The last two boats I did with my father was fiberglass. I have no regrets doing it, but I wouldn't do it for a living. No, it's not my cup of tea – fiberglass.

JW: How is working with fiberglass different in terms of craftsmanship?

RC: It's all chemicals. You look like a spaceman building a boat. Wood, you didn't look like that. I loved that when you walked into a wooden boat yard that was building wooden fishing boats, there's nothing like it. Just the aroma of that wood and the glues and all. Just a combination of everything. A newly freshly built boat, just the smell of it when it goes

overboard, you never forget it. It sticks in your mind forever. Now fiberglass, that sticks in your mind, too, but not in a positive way.

JW: [laughter]

SS: [laughter] Breathing heavy metals and chemicals.

RC: I'll put it to you this way. I was young. I'd have to really think back. I'd have to do it in steps because I did so much. After I graduated, the first three years was a blur. I did so much in those three years. Two of them – I built two boats [with] my father in that time period, and it was fiberglass. One was for my wife's father. The other one was for a friend of ours. I can remember my wife – we just married. When I came home after working on them boats, she said, "All I can smell is fiberglass every time you breathe." She could smell it. It was in my lungs. I never forgot that. What really scares you is even two months after building those boats, she could still smell it when I breathe.

JW: Really?

RC: Yeah. That gives you an idea how potent it is, building those –

JW: It must be very pungent fumes.

SS: Yeah, sticks in there.

RC: Stays with you for a while. [It was] a few months afterward before it finally cleared out of my system. [laughter] So, no, that's not my career choice. I'm not one to be suited up every day either – breathing apparatuses, and they have these white suits now that cover your body because I guess they figured it out –

JW: Is that to protect your skin?

RC: Yes, they figured out it even goes into your skin, into your bloodstream, these chemicals they build these boats with now.

SS: Yeah. You don't want to mess around with them too much.

RC: Right, right. Back then, they didn't know that, and we was doing it without all these suits. We found out after the fact that this was not good for you. But we've already been exposed. [laughter]

JW: How many fiberglass boats did you wind up building?

RC: I just did two with my father. My father was – the last seven years of his career, he was hands-on – half wood and half fiberglass. I'll be honest with you, there was a couple of times I remember before he passed away [that] I walked in that shop, and I just looked at [him] and said, "I don't know how you can breathe. I can barely breathe walking in here." [laughter] I often wonder if that had something to do with his death. He died from pancreatic cancer. So, it very well could have been chemical involved, but nobody knows. Anyway, I don't think he really enjoyed it at the end either, to be honest with you. The wood part was fun. Nice building a wooden boat. I have a [inaudible] design I did in school. After I did that design [inaudible] school – down here in the cellar. I just remembered that. I don't know why I forgot about it. It'd down in my cellar – that same design.

SS: Oh, nice.

JW: How have you seen the community of Port Clyde change since you were growing up here?

RC: When I was a young boy in this town, it was hopping. I mean, it was big. It was amazing. [inaudible] amount of people living here is – what you see in the summer, it was almost like that twelve months a year back then.

JW: Really?

RC: You really didn't have the tourists back then; it was all natives. It was all about fishing. We had two big processing plants down here. We have Port Clyde Sardine, Port Clyde Packing, which is all about herring. Then there was another processing facility that did lobsters, shrimp, and groundfish.

JW: Were those just down on the waterfront?

RC: Yeah, it was right down here, right in Port Clyde, right on the waterfront. With those two big facilities, it was quite the community. Tractor-trailer trucks were going 24/7, all night long. If you lived right downtown Port Clyde, you'd hear them trucks going up and down Main Street all through the hours. This is how busy it was. I mean, this is how busy it was. There was – one, two, three – three stores, and plus one extra candy store. Because we kids knew we had four stops. You'd walk the circle. Walk around the [inaudible].

JW: You had a circuit.

RC: So, you had four stores. That's how busy it was. You had a gas station. You had everything right down here in Port Clyde. You didn't have to go to Rockland for anything. Everything was right in Port Clyde. That's how busy it was.

JW: How many people did the processing plants employ?

RC: I'm not sure, to be honest with you. You could probably find that out down at the Lighthouse Museum. I think they have that information because after it burnt, how many people, who had the jobs, and things of that nature – it was in the hundreds.

SS: Yeah, I imagine it was a lot. Kind of a hot spot on the coast.

RC: Right. It was. Well, Port Clyde was originally named Herring Gut. That was the original name.

JW: Really? Why was that?

RC: I don't know where Port Clyde came from. I never did find that out. That was before Port Clyde. I don't know what year, to be honest with you, Josh, I really don't. Some of the way back things like that, that's where my grandmother Eva comes in. She knows a lot about Port Clyde and our family. I am family-oriented, but it's immediate family. It is [inaudible] my mother and everybody that I've grown up with. But the reality is, I've been on the water as much as I've been home, if not more, over the years. And you miss a lot [of] what happens ashore. You don't know what's really happening. I go out for a trip. I'll come home. I used to go seven days at a time when I started. I come home [and] I'd have to get caught up [on] what happened ashore. Then you go back out and do it all over again. Then you come back. A lot of things, believe it or not, your mother, even your wife, would forget. If it happened seven days ago, you didn't always get the whole story. I never forgot it when – just before my father passed away, I went in the hospital. It was about a year or so before he passed away, and he had to have something done. When you go in the hospital, they give you a chart of the body, and the doctor will say, "I want you to list everything you've had done to you over the years – broken parts, surgeries, things of that nature." Well, he filled one. Then he ran out of room. They had to give him two. Well, I was sitting there, looking at him like, ""There are two surgeries here I didn't even know about." Then my mother and my wife says, "Oh, you was out fishing. We forgot to tell you."

JW: Really?

RC: So, this is what I'm getting at. I even missed some of my father's surgeries and problems that he had growing up because I was gone. [laughter] You're in shock.

SS: No, no. I was just remembering in the springtime when I was making plans with you to film when you were offloading your catch early in the morning, and I was talking to Mel on the phone. You were out on a trip, and the bombing in Boston had just happened. [Editor's Note: The Boston Marathon bombing was a terrorist attack that took place on April 15, 2013, resulting in three deaths, over 260 injuries, and a massive manhunt for the two perpetrators, the Tsarnaev brothers.] Your son was down in Boston.

RC: My son was in Boston.

SS: She was freaking out. She couldn't get a hold of you.

RC: She couldn't get a hold of me. Right, right. That happens a lot. In my career, that's happened a lot. They try to give you the big things. If there's a lot of big things, you don't always get all the big things. You might just get one out of the two. You miss part of life in your family being a fisherman. Other than lobstering, you're day fishing. You're not going to miss – you've still involved with family on a daily basis. My type of fishing, you're gone a lot and was gone a lot. I'm gone less now because of the cuts we've had in our fishery. My trips are a lot shorter due to the regulations, and also due – I am getting older. And the boats's getting older. I can't do the things I used to do. [laughter] But anyway, I can remember that happened. That was pretty intense, to be honest with, to say the least. By the way, his roommate he grew up with here in Thomaston, was right next to one of the bombs that went off.

SS: The finish line?

RC: Right, right.

SS: Oh, boy.

RC: So, it was a pretty close call for us.

SS: Yeah, scary stuff.

RC: But my grandmother Eva, even my wife, my mother, they can tell you more about my family [and] what's happened than I ever could. For those reasons.

JW. Because of being a sea.

RC: Being at sea. That make sense?

JW: So, when you started your career, was the seven-day trip the average?

RC: Six to seven days. Yes. When I really started – well, no, when I first started, the first boat I took was only able to go three days.

JW: Is that the one out in your yard?

RC: No, no. You haven't taken him down to see the real boats yet, have you?

SS: No. Have you gone down?

JW: No, not yet.

RC: You haven't seen – this is the bow of my boat. That's a little bit different [than] what you're looking at in the yard.

RC: Yes. That won't even begin to fit in my dooryard. [laughter] You won't get it up the road. Let me see here. This is an older picture of it when I first bought it, but I've rebuilt it since then.

JW: How long is the *Ella Christine*?

RC: She's forty-five feet, but she's eighteen and a half feet wide. From the surface of the water, the lowest point to the top rails is five feet two inches. This is twelve feet off the water, the bow. She draws seven half feet of [inaudible] underwater. It's a big boat. Not really. When you think about it in the Gulf of Maine, it's a small boat. For dragging, going out in the Gulf of Maine, that's about as small as you want to be right there.

JW: How much fish could she hold?

RC: Iced fish – she can hold about seventeen thousand, seventeen-thousand-and-five. The most I ever put in – I'd done it, I think, maybe four or five times since I owned it – fifteen thousand. But it doesn't pay off to catch that many. The more you catch, the less they pay you. When you're on a quota system, you want to use that quota wisely. You want to get the maximum price you can for every pound.

JW: Why is it that they pay you less for having a –

RC: Bulk?

JW: – a large catch?

RC: They don't really need them. They're just paying them to take them off your hands. They think they're doing you a favor. [laughter] We won't get into that on this microphone.

SS: Yeah. I know there's plenty to say.

RC: Yeah, I have plenty to say on that, but we won't go down that road. [laughter]

JW: How far offshore would you go?

RC: I averaged – groundfishing – anywhere from twenty to seventy-five miles. Shrimping, anywhere from a mile and a half to fifteen miles.

JW: And when you switch between ground fishing and shrimping, what did it take to switch the gear?

RC: Usually, about two day's work. You're just resituating the boat, fish hold, things of that nature to handle shrimp in the fish hold versus fish. You're switching nets. The nets are the biggest thing that you're switching. Just your whole setup on deck. You change the setup because you're handling a different species. Groundfish is multi-species. I'm not sure if you're familiar with that or not, Josh, but each species is handled in a different way.

JW: Right.

RC: Some species, you head and gut. Some species, you don't. Some species, you only gut – leave the head on. It's all due to quality. It's all about quality. Shrimp is a shellfish. This one species is usually one size. It's pretty easy.

JW: This is the Northern shrimp, right?

RC: Right. It's pretty easy to do. Shrimping's easy. Anybody can do it. [laughter]

SS: It'd just be nice if you had the days to go, I suppose.

RC: I don't think we're going to have – we're not going to have that for a while.

SS: No.

RC: I'll be surprised if we have a season this year. We should have never had a season last year.

SS: It didn't seem like –

RC: That was a waste of time. That should never have happened. Never ever. Anyways.

SS: Are you pulling up any species you haven't seen much of before?

RC: Not really.

SS: Anything new?

RC: No, nothing new. No. Nothing seems to be out of the – what I'm used to seeing. I know you've been hearing a lot about water temperatures being warm and all that. It seems to be the big hype right now. I will agree with that last year. That was really rare. That was unusual. That was out of the realm. I mean, but the reality is this year has gone back to normal again. I go by my machine. The temperature is what I was used to seeing before last year. What I'm seeing out there in the ocean, these fish – every year is always different. What I mean by that [is] you always have a dominant species from year to year. That's been one of the big issues I've had with these regulations and what they're trying to achieve for the future [of] the Gulf of Maine. They always want to rebuild all stocks all at the same time. They still haven't figured that out. Us fishermen know better. You can't do that. It's impossible. The Gulf of Maine cannot support that. You're always going to have a dominant species. The best way to describe that is look on land. You have millions and millions of deer at the same time you have millions and millions of coyotes? No. You usually have one or the other. Eventually, that species dies off, then the other species rebuilds. You'll have years [where] you have tons and tons and lots and lots of rabbits. And all of a sudden, where did they all go? It's because we got predators now. Now, the predators are eating them all up. Now, there's not enough food for them. Now, they're dying. Now the rabbits rebuild again fifty years down the road. The ocean is no different. You're going to have a dominant species all the time. It's a doggie eat dog world out there. Doggie eat cat. I don't care what you call it. [laughter] You cannot have rebuildable biomass on every species all at the same time in one year. It will never ever happen. I don't care what they do. They can shut this fishery down for fifty years; you won't see it. Because there's always going to be that one species that will dominate.

JW: Is there any predictability in the trends that you've seen during your career in terms of what species dominate in what year?

RC: Not really. I haven't seen any – what's the word for it? You can't put a finger on it year to year. What you can do – as fishermen, what we've learned – and we learned this at a young age. You can pretty much tell what species is going to be where at certain times of the year and where they live at certain times of year the fishermen will predict. That's been almost dead-on year

after year. Give or take two weeks to a month. What I mean by that, for example, grey sole will go to this certain area at certain times of year. I was telling you about this earlier. There's a window. There's usually an eight to ten-week window.

JW: This is when they're spawning?

RC: This is when they come here to spawn or feed, one of the two. It's usually those two reasons why they're there: spawn or feed. But it's pretty much like clockwork. Once you figure that out, you can make a living at it. If you haven't figured it out, you're never going to make a living at it. You're going to go out of business real quick. It's that way with every species. What it is is every species has a type of terrain or bottom environment that they choose that they survive in, that they actually live in. You have different types of bottom out there. You have your mud, you have your sand, you have your gravel, and you have your rock. Those are the four major types. Each species has a favorite type of bottom they like to live on. I'm not going to tell you what each species likes and where they are; that's going too far. [laughter]

SS: Reveal your [inaudible]

RC: What I'm trying to say to you, though, they're pretty predictable. If you have a career like mine, as long as I've been doing it, I have a handle on where these fish are going to be at certain times of year and for how long they're going to be there. But other than that, with global warming, warm water, climate changes, I haven't really seen a big change in my career. What I have seen is the way we fish now compared to the way we used to fish. I see a lot less boats. [laughter] A lot less boats.

JW: [laughter] How has technology changed the fishery from your point of view?

RC: Technology had a lot to do with why we're where we're at. It made it really easy. It made it easy for me. My generation had it made. My father's generation had to work harder for it. My grandfather had to work even harder. They didn't have the technology we have now. I can honestly say for my size boat, it's three times more efficient than my grandfather's [and] two times more efficient than what my father had because of technology.

JW: What types of technology were most influential?

RC: I'm going to say the most was electronics. Electronics.

JW: So radar —?

RC: Radar, sonars, scanners, computers. We're going to talk about computers. I don't like computers. If I had my way, I'd get rid of every one of them in the world, especially on boats. If you took computers off the boats right now, you'd find out who the real fisherman is. And I'm going to tell you right now, you'd lose probably eighty percent of them.

SS: They wouldn't be able to find the fish.

JW: Everybody starts relying on it.

RC: They wouldn't be able to get out of the harbor. Never mind, find the fish. I was taught old school. I still go fishing without a computer if I choose to.

SS: It's the same people who have the GPSs in their cars, and they don't know how to read a map.

RC: Right.

SS: They're dead on the road, not in the water.

[Telephone rings. Recording paused.]

RC: But I can still go fishing without a computer. Technology is not always a good thing, especially – I think the easiest way to put this is when it comes to our natural resources, we, as human beings, have the technology to wipe any one of them out. So, in a lot of ways, technology isn't a good thing when it comes to that.

JW: Because it increases our capabilities too much?

RC: Right. We become too efficient. It ends up being that the resource cannot handle what we're capable of doing. I think that's with any natural resource on this earth. You just give man free rein to go out and do whatever he wants, that natural resource won't be here very long, not with the technology we have right now. [inaudible].

SS: Yeah, sure.

RC: But then also you have technology that works in a positive way. What I mean by that is what we've been able to do with our gear. I mean, the way we fished back in the day wasn't right. It's not their fault, really. I cannot blame that generation – my father, my grandfather's generation. I mean, they just thought it was an endless supply. They went out and did what they was taught to do you. We was brought up that we're doing a good thing. We're catching fish,

feeding people, and it's a healthy food source for people in general. So, you felt good about yourself, but the reality is how we was doing it. Back then, when I started, it was four-inch mesh. It was not unheard of – in some cases, we would come in with almost as much lobster [inaudible] for fish that was going to a processing plant to be –

JW: So, herring?

RC: – consumed by people. Right. Not herring. No, groundfish in general.

JW: Oh, groundfish.

RC: Yeah. I'm talking about the ground fishery. It was also the same case with shrimp because we had such a bycatch issue. We'd catch so many juvenile fish when we were shrimping. It was not unheard of to have fifty percent discards/bycatch, even upwards of a hundred percent in certain places. So, if you had two thousand pounds that went to market in one tow, you might sometimes have two thousand pounds that went to lobster bait or back overboard. Now, in that sense, we've come a long way. I'm really pleased with what we've been able to accomplish, especially in the last ten to fifteen years. I would give anything to have my father and grandfather be alive right now to witness what we've done to this fishery, how clean we made it now compared to where it was. I mean, my bycatch on shrimp – we did the research in 2009. That season, I had less than one pound. I mean, less than one percent. I think it was 0.8% bycatch. So, for every thousand pounds of shrimp I brought aboard my boat, there's only eight pounds of bycatch. It doesn't get much cleaner than that. That's a huge step compared to what I first saw when I first started. Now, the groundfish, it's been harder to do because we're working with multi-species, and every species is a different size and shape. You've got long, skinny ones. You got short, fat ones. But we've been able to reduce that down in the neighborhood of five percent or less. I had one trip this year that – we went out and fished three tows one day. I had, I think it was – I have it in my logbook, the logbook I had earlier. I think it was five pounds I had of discards – juvenile fish – for that day.

JW: In one whole trip?

RC: For one day fishing.

JW: How many tows is that?

RC: Three tows. Three tows.

SS: That's pretty good. So, in that sense, technology's a positive thing.

JW: Right.

RC: Now, if we had that years ago, we probably wouldn't be where we're at now. But the reality is we're heading in the right direction; we're doing the right thing. It's just been hard to get it out there. But we really cleaned this fishery – both fisheries, we've cleaned them up tremendously, and I feel good about that. As far as catch goes right now, what I see is no different than what I did see twenty years ago per day. The difference that I'm seeing – I'm seeing less discards and bycatch. Discards are your juvenile fish that you're actually targeting. Bycatch is species that you're not targeting. What I mean by that [is] we catch crabs, too, with our fish. We do keep them at certain times of year when they're hard shell, when they're harder, and that's what the market wants. We can save them. But right now, I'm throwing them back overboard. But they're going back overboard live. Shellfish are a tougher species.

JW: Lower mortality.

RC: Right. Lower mortality rate. When you throw them back overboard, they live. So, our bycatch issue with groundfish is crabs, which is not really a big issue.

JW: How have mentalities among fishermen that you know changed over the span of your career?

RC: Mentality?

JW: Mentalities about the fishery and about their role in it and the community's role in it? How has their thinking changed? Or not changed?

RC: It hasn't really changed. The things I was just telling you – it's such a positive thing, but we don't seem to really get recognized for it – any recognition for it. I feel that way. Maybe we do. But it just doesn't really seem to get out there. As far as my comrades, what ones are left, they get discouraged. I get discouraged. Every year, it's always – a lot of it is we get all these letters every year that I was talking about earlier from the National Marine Fisheries Service. You can average almost one a day all through the year, and very seldom is it positive. So eventually, over time, you keep opening up letters from your regulators that's regulating your fishery, and it's always negative, negative. You read the papers. When was the last time you heard anything positive about groundfishing? Exactly. I have to read this every day. When I come home from a trip, I'll have a stack on my stand over there, and it takes all my willpower to open up one of them and start reading.

SS: That whole pile is from NMFS?

RC: [inaudible] NMFS or Atlantic States or the State of Maine. Everybody's got their hands in it these days, seems like, one way or another. Any way you look at it, it's not very – very seldom is it a positive thing that you're reading. Lots of times, I get through the first paragraph and throw it in the garbage. [laughter] But if you live like that on a daily basis, it starts to build up. And eventually, you end up feeling negative about your business. That mentality that you're talking about that you're bringing up, I'm seeing more of that these days. And it's discouraging. You see it down at the docks. I mean, my generation, we grew up together doing this, and it was – we was making money, we was catching fish, and we had all good family lives. Everybody was happy. We wasn't getting rich, but we was making a living. That's all we ever ask, just to make a living. I can honestly say right now, I'm working three times harder than used to, making about a third what I used to, and that's the truth. And after you do that and you keep getting negative letters every day, it's not much positive going on down at the docks that makes sense.

SS: Continually getting knocked down isn't much fun.

RC: You get knocked down on a daily basis.

JW: Randy, go back to what you were saying before, in the early part of your career dragging, what was your routine like back then, in terms of when you would go to sea and when you would buy provisions?

RC: Well, before we went days-at-sea, you went hard. Back then, I can honestly say I never – we shouldn't have done it. I can remember just before we went days-at-sea – that's when we went days-at-sea. I hate to even say this because a lot of my comrades is like, "What is wrong with you?" But anyway, it was almost like a relief because we was going so hard. But back then, the money was good, and you was running boats for some owners [inaudible] multi boats – two, three, four boats. In my case, I was running a boat for [inaudible]. He had three boats, that owner.

JW: He owned the boat?

RC: Eddie Thorbjornson.

JW: How many boats did he own?

RC: He actually had two. I was running the (*Sirius?*), and he had the (*Annalina?*) then. He bought two or three more later on because he had three sons; he'd buy boats so they could run them. At first, I didn't own my boat groundfishing. When I started as a young fellow, I had that skiff. I went lobstering. I call it a skiff, but it was a twenty-foot boat. What happened was I

went to school for design school when I graduated high school. I was eighteen years of age when I got done doing that. I came back. I started jumping around. I went purse seining on the (*Jane Maria*?). I went dragging on the (*Jane Maria*?), and the two captains, (Blake?) [inaudible] and (Chet Davis?).

JW: Were those vessels owned by another Port Clyde fisherman?

RC: The (*Jane Maria*?) was owned by Victor Ames. He is from Tenants Harbor in Matinicus. He lived those two places. The name of the boat was (*Jane Maria*?). She's sixty-five feet. My father ran that boat, too, when I was in high school. He captained that boat. I was fortunate to go on trips with him on that boat. I learned from (Eddie Thorpe Johnson?). I learned from [multiple] captains growing up in my career. When I graduated from high school, I was able to run one of those boats at eighteen years old. I could step right aboard a sixty-foot dragger and start fishing. That's how young you was. My summers, my holidays, my weekends – fishing. That's what I did. My father had me docking boats like this. When I was twelve years old. My first tow was at twelve years old. I could build a net at twelve years old. I could splice wire at twelve years old, mending nets. Do the deck house. I was part of a deck – deckhand at twelve years old.

JW: Were there other people you're going to school with who –

RC: Who were doing the same thing?

JW: – were doing the same things?

RC: Yes.

SS: Your brothers, too.

RC: Not so much my brothers as much as I was. I was the oldest boy. But yes, they did do it. My brother Dennis, he's a year and a half younger than me. He graduated junior year early. He had all his credits. He was one of them whizzes, honor roll, A's and B's. Still amazes me. He done so well in school, and he ended up fishing. But anyway, he graduated in the eleventh grade and jumped right on a scallop boat. Ten, twelve-day boat – big boat. Started scalloping. He went from there to running one of the O'Hara boats. The last O'Hara boat up here in Rockland was the *Enterprise*. A hundred and twenty-five feet long. He was the last one to be captain of that boat, my brother Dennis.

JW: Was that a scallop vessel, as well?

RC: Groundfish boat. She went to the Grand Banks and Georges Bank. He fished Grand Banks.

JW: Really?

RC: He was the captain of that boat, I think, the last three or four years that boat was here in Rockland. She's out in Alaska now fishing. He's shorter than I am. He's going to get a little upset, but they put a milk crate up by the helm [inaudible]. Don't say it – well, my father did that to me when I was twelve.

SS: Gave you the milk crate?

RC: Yeah, had to. I couldn't see over the – I couldn't see out the window over the bow, so he – I never forget that. What a feeling that is. You're twelve years old, and you're coming up through the harbor. They don't even forewarn you – they didn't back then because they was teaching you as you go. I never forgot it. I still remember that day. Coming by the lighthouse, and he comes out on deck. He said, "Come here, Randy." So, I come in the wheelhouse. He put the milk crate right by the steering wheel, and he said, "There she is. Take her into the dock." And he walked right on back. That's all they did. That's how you was taught. [laughter]

JW: Were you nervous?

RC: You think? Twelve years old, standing on a milk crate, boat forty-five feet long, weighs fifty tons. Just imagine the damage you can do [laughter] if you hit the wrong throttle, wrong this, wrong that. But I brought her anyway. It just came naturally. I loved doing it. Anyway, that was old school. That's how they taught you. No better way of learning than actually hands on doing it.

JW: When you would come in from sea, how many days would you have ashore before you'd go out again [inaudible]?

RC: It varied from season to season, depending on your trip, your boat, what damage was done to the boat. I mean, a lot of it has to do with what you have under you, what you have for a boat. Right now, I can honestly say I work on my boat more than I fish it now. It's very discouraging, but the boat's older. She's thirty-eight years old. The life expectancy of one of these boats back in the day was twenty-five years dragging.

JW: Really?

RC: It takes its toll on the boat just as much – like your body. Well, the boat [is the] exact same thing. To maintain one of these boats is a lot of work to keep them going from year to year.

JW: Is that because of the stress of towing?

RC: Yeah, towing. Yeah. Towing. It's a complicated – well, if you look at the vessel, it's a lot of overhead. A lot of overhead above water. A lot of gear. A lot of rigging. So, there's a lot of hoses, a lot of wiring, a lot of everything. The more you have, the more work, more maintenance. It's that simple. It's not really simple. I mean, my worst trip so far this year, I had about six things that broke on this boat, and it was a whole notebook page of things I had to buy and do to that boat. It took me eight days straight to work on it from daylight to dark in order to get it to go on the next trip. That's when it's discouraging. So, even back in the day, you still had that, but not so much because the boats were younger back then, just like we was. Another thing is you hired people to work on them. [Telephone rings.] That might be my fuel person. Wait just a minute. [Recording paused.]. How much time you was ashore depended on that and whether you was really making – when you're making money, you want to get back out as soon as possible. When you're not doing very well at it, you're not catching many fish or getting paid well for them, one of the two or sometimes both at the same time – that happens a lot – you stay ashore longer. You spend more time ashore. But when you was really making the money, it was not unheard of back then make back-to-backs. What we mean by back-to-backs – we'd go out six, seven days, come in, offload, and as soon as the fish were off that boat, we're fueling up, ice, and grabbing the gear, and we're heading right back out that same night. You only saw home maybe two hours.

JW: How often did you do that?

RC: You would do that probably two to three times a year back-to-back. I can remember a couple times I did it and didn't even have a chance to take a shower.

SS: I bet you were pretty ripe by the end of those two weeks.

RC: I was good. If you want to keep your crew at bay, just don't shower. [laughter]

SS: They won't get close to you.

RC: If you get tired of your crew being in your face, just don't shower. [laughter]

JW: How big was your crew back then?

RC: I had two guys on deck. These boats, usually, back then, had two men working on deck. Around fifty-foot boats.

JW: How did they divide their labor?

RC: What do you mean? Work-wise or money-wise?

JW: Yes, just work-wise.

RC: Work-wise, well, they both worked on deck and the captain, like me, stayed in the wheelhouse unless you had the big tows, the big haul-backs with a lot of fish. Even the captain – I'd go out on deck to do what I had to do to get them down as quick as possible. The quicker you get your fish in the fish hole – everything's done in a temperature/time sequence. It's very important [to] not allow these fish to be above forty degrees for any longer – not over three hours. Four hours, you're talking bad bacteria. So, it's important to pay attention [to] what you're doing with these fish, make sure you're getting them chilled and put in the hole as quick as possible. So, most of the time, the two guys on deck could handle what you was catching, except the rare day when you got the big tows that you always hear about that you thought was happening all the time, which wasn't. Then I'd have to go out. It wasn't unheard of when you had good fishing. When you had good fishing, you wouldn't get much sleep. My average sleep was usually five hours a day for me as a captain, five to six. Sometimes, even down at four hours.

JW: What about the deckhands?

RC: The deckhands would split. During the day, they split. I mean, they sleep during the day, then at night, they'd split a watch while I took my sleep, so if I got a five-hour [inaudible] at night, one would take two and a half, and the other one would take two and a half hours' sleep. The boat fished twenty-four hours a day. It never stops, 24/7, when you're out. Anyway, they sleep between tows during the day, too. If they could get an hour here, an hour there, an hour and a half, they took advantage of it.

JW: What was the duration of the average tow?

RC: Four to five hours. [Telephone rings. Recording paused.] There was times even I went with just – when I was making long trips – that was the third boat I was taking. I was taking for (David O?); it was a [inaudible] six, seven-day trip. Those were my longest trips in my career when I was running that boat, and I had that boat for six years. The last two years I had it, we started to get the cutbacks; we went to days-at-sea. So, I had to let one guy go, so it was just me

and another guy. And what that does, that takes – I start putting more work on deck. I start spending more time on deck, which is where I'm at now. This is why I'm busted up. [laughter]

SS: Just one man now?

RC: Yeah. My job half-time is on deck, helping him because one man deck – that's an awful load; he's not going to get much bunk time.

JW: So, when you had two deckhand crew, for the average tow, how long did it take to gut and ice the fish usually?

RC: Depends on how many fish you had. Sometimes you'd have it done in an hour; sometimes, it'd take three. It all depends how much weight you had. The biggest trip I ever had had to be when they started giving us cuts. When I had just one man on deck. He's like a brother to me, by the way. He fished with me for eight years. My family brought him up the last four years he was in high school. He's like a brother to us. My parents more or less adopted him and brought him into the home. We had the big fishing that you hear about – real big. Too much. But we stayed up for forty-eight hours straight. We only had three hot dogs, I think, to eat. We worked forty-eight hours straight and only ate once in the forty-eight hours.

JW: How far [inaudible]?

RC: Non-stop work forty-eight hours.

JW: Wow.

RC: The two of us.

SS: Drinking coffee, though, I would imagine.

RC: Yeah. You was catching so many fish. My biggest tow was eleven thousand pounds of cod fish during that duration. But that takes a toll on you with two guys. [laughter] Yeah, you're working. You're busting your hump. You average fifteen hundred pounds an hour, putting fish down [inaudible] two of you – groundfish. Fifteen hundred.

JW: Was that mostly codfish?

RC: It was all codfish. I happened to find this big pot of them. Yeah. I caught 42,000 pounds that week – codfish.

SS: What year was that?

RC: I got to think. I got to think. 1990, I think. '90 or '91. I can't remember. I can't remember, to be honest with you. Everything starts to go together. I didn't document anything, and I haven't really taken any pictures. I regret that, and I still don't do it.

SS: Take pictures of the big hauls, you mean?

RC: Yeah. Pictures of this and that, things I've seen over the years. Most fishermen that's been doing it like me old school, you'll find out – I mean, you're out there working to make a living, too, but also, you're having fun doing it. You do get to see things that – you're like, “Wow. I'll never get to see that again.”

JW: What was the strangest thing you ever saw on the ocean?

RC: I don't think so much strange things, but I've had whales – I've literally gotten wet from whale splash – breaching beside me, them Humpbacks.

JW: Really?

RC: Oh, yeah. They breach right beside the boat, coming out of the water. Flew right over us on the bow. [laughter] Soaked us down. Sounds like a cannon goes off when they hit the water. Man, what a noise that is. But to have one literally from here to that window from you do it is quite a site. It's a site that you'll never ever forget. I've them come up, and we have these [inaudible] right here, these booms go down because we have all this rigging up overhead. It's the buoyancy and the center of gravity issue. So, we have stabilizers to help keep the boat stable. I've had whales come up and rub on them birdies. They come up. They'll come up and hit them. They'll come up and hit them. I've had a killer whale do it. I've seen killer whales out there. You don't see them very often. I think I've only seen them probably – I got to think – one, two, three, four, five – five times in my life. Killer whales. We've had sharks. We've had all kinds of fun. Different scenarios. One time – I remember this when I was young – when I first started out on the (*Sirius?*). We used to fish during the daylight and lay up at night. When you fish way inshore, you didn't tow at night because the tows are just so small. You just didn't put the crew behind the wheel to do that. It was quite a job to fish these areas. They're a lot smaller than offshore, tighter, narrow cracks and crannies. We'd fish during the daylight, then we'd lay-up at night. We just let the boat drift. I remember one night, we had this ruckus on the water. We look, and we could see the herring rushing out of the water. The herring were literally just rushing right out of the water, and they're coming towards us. We're standing by the rail, and this boat's pretty low the water. It was the (*Sirius?*). It was probably about two and a half feet above the water – your knees. We're all standing there, looking, like, “What the hell's going

on?” These herring are coming at us. All of a sudden, a whale just comes right out of the water. It looked like he was going to land right on top of us. He went right down under, I kid you not, probably three feet from the [inaudible]. While we’re standing there, we’re like ... and his tail come out right in front of our faces when he breached, when he went to go down. Can you imagine that? You could almost reach out and touch his tail when he come out right in front of you. Now, that’s a sight. [laughter]

JW: What type of whale was that?

RC: I'm not sure what it was. We had our deck lights on. It was at night. I call it a close call. [laughter]

SS: Yeah, real close call.

RC: He sounded just the right time. I don’t know what it would have been another few seconds. He’d been sounding on our deck, I think. It was quite a sight. You jump back. You’re like, “Whoa.” I never forgot that.

SS: That’s holding your breath, hoping he makes the right [inaudible].

SS: Then I took my younger brother Michael with me. His first trip with me, he got sick. We (stove up?). We tore up the net. I remember it was our first day, and it was blowing. We had a fair breeze going, about twenty-five or so – a gust. So, we’re laying-to. We’re mending. The boat’s just drifting. It was nasty. We had six-to-eight-foot seas. He was sick. I remember when I was mending, he was on deck, and he was discouraged. He was a young man. I look, and there was sharks in the waves side-to. When you’re side-to, the waves are coming at the boat, and the top of the wave is about the height of your head or better, a little bit taller than your head [inaudible]. I can remember. I’m like, “Holy crap, look.” Because I was mending, and my other crewman was holding the twine while I was mending. Michael, I think he was trying to do the fish. But what he was doing was chumming the sharks, and he didn’t know it. He was right there by the rail, and I’m looking – that shark – you could see the shark in the wave [at] eye-level coming at the boat. It was really cool. I look, and it happened again. Michael’s not aware. I said, “Michael, look in that wave right there.” You could tell he didn’t want to pick his head – he picked his up and looked, and there was that shark. That made it right there. He wasn’t sick any longer after that. That was so cool. You never forgot that. He was so excited seeing them sharks. Seeing the sharks in the waves coming at the boat.

SS: That’s incredible.

RC: The boat would roll up, and the shark would – but when the boat rolled down, you're looking right at him eye-level, head-to-head. Pretty cool.

SS: Is this Michael here?

RC: That's my younger brother Michael right there. Yeah.

SS: That's Gerry.

RC: That's Gerry.

SS: And that's Dennis?

RC: Yeah. He's the one that ran the O'Hara boat that I was telling you about. Dennis.

JW: What does he do now?

RC: He's a lobsterman. Yep. He did scalloping and groundfishing on the big boats I think for – it must have been over ten years – ten to fifteen years – before he went lobstering. All three of them are lobstermen. I'm the only one left that does any of the dragging. I'm the black sheep, [laughter] I guess. I don't know.

SS: Did any of them drag at all with you at any point?

RC: Oh, yeah. All three of them. I've had them all sick. They're going to hate me. A lot of it has to do – just the motion of the boat is different with these boats.

SS: [inaudible]

RC: Yeah, it's different with these boats. Like I said, they have rigging overhead. They do roll deep at times. It's not like jumping on a lobster boat. It's not like jumping on a real big boat. These boats are in that medium range. When it blows twenty-five, thirty, they can give you a beating, as my three brothers found out. Now, my brother Dennis was running on these big boats, and he went out with me after the fact, and he got seasick with me. So, that gives you an idea. It's not him. It's just the type of boat.

JW: The differences in how they pitch?

RC: Difference in the boats, how they handle in the same conditions. Gerry. [laughter]

SS: He's a card, man.

RC: You know, Gerry, don't you?

SS: I sure do. Yeah. The couple interactions I've had have been pretty memorable.

RC: He's going to hate me for this. When we was on the (*Blue Waters?*), Greg, my crewman that fished with me for eight years [and] is like a brother to us, they'd run the winches setting out. They'd have to [inaudible]. You had to know how much length of cable you had out, and they're marked every twenty-five fathom. So, when twenty-five went out, they'd say, "Twenty-five." When a hundred fathom went out, they'd say, "A hundred," so they was in sync, keeping the gear even as you're setting out. Well, it was blowing about twenty-five, thirty. We're setting out into it, and a lot of spray was blowing. And little brother Gerald here was sick. Well, he's running the winch behind me, and where the wind was and the spray was coming down the side of the wheelhouse – water and the wind. Greg was running the winch on the opposite side, on the portside. Gerry's on the starboard. I'm steering the boat on the starboard side. I could look out the back window, look at Gerry. Every time Gerry hauled out the marking, he puked. So, I didn't know it at the time – after we start out, Greg come through the back of the wheelhouse door, and he said, "Look what brother did to me." I look. All down the side of him he's right covered. That wind and spray was taking Gerry's puke. Every time he hauled a mark, it'd all fly over to Greg, running the other winch. It covered the whole side of him. [laughter] It was obvious he just got done eating an orange.

M: [inaudible] orange.

RC: He had a little pulp [inaudible] side. He come in, gagging, "Look what your brother did to me. Look. Look what Gerry did." I was laughing. Oh, boy. Oh, Gerald. He still did his job. All three of them. If they did get sick – it was always just that first time. Not used to the boat. They're plenty able and more capable than I am as far as being on the water, that's for sure. It never stopped them from doing the job, I'll tell you that. They still did their job no matter what, no matter how they felt. So I give them [thumbs] up on that. I've been very fortunate. I've had really good crew. I've never had any of them complain to me. None of them ever questioned my judgment. I put Greg and (Jeff Poky?) through hell on the (*Blue Waters?*), I really did. I mean, they come off deck – ice stuck right to their oilskins, their coat covered in ice.

JW: Was that from being down in the hold?

RC: No, out on deck, working those conditions – rough weather and icing up. They come in. I said, "Oh, it's diminishing, (Poky?)." (Jeff Poky?) is one of my crewmen. "Yeah, it's demolishing." [laughter] Anyway, they never complain. They still go right out on deck. I've

been lucky that way. Very lucky. The guy that's going with me right now could give you a history of this fishery. He's done it all – groundfishing, dragging. He's been on the big boats, little boats. He's been from here all the way to Rhode Island. He's a native of this town, Port Clyde. His father ran one of the O'Hara boats. They had so much respect for him, they named one of his boats after him, Robert Powell. That was the name. His son's fishing with me right now, Bertie Powell. He's going to be sixty-four years old in September. Now, this man's still handling fish down through the fish hold – eighty-pound baskets at sixty-four years of age.

SS: That's tough.

RC: Drinks a lot of orange juice.

SS: Keep him strong.

RC: I think it's what goes with the orange juice that keeps him going.

SS: Yeah, yeah. Understood.

RC: Anyway, he's done it all. I mean, he's a really good worker. Still amazes me at his age that he's able to do what he's doing. He could really tell you some stories, I tell you.

SS: We'll have to talk to him.

RC: The memorial down at the lighthouse, the first name on it: Robert Bud Powell. That's his father. He died at sea. Grand Banks. Bertie, my crewman, found his father dead on the Grand Banks. Back then, you didn't have the equipment, the technology you have now, to bring somebody home, so they had to put him in the fish hold. They iced him in, brought him home. Four days. Bertie was behind the wheel when his father died.

SS: What happened?

RC: Heart attack. Bertie said he knew something was wrong because his father would always wake up when he's turning the boat towing, and the cable would hit the side of the hull – steel boat – it makes a wicked bang, a lot of noises. It travels, especially through steel boats, steel hull. You drop a hammer on a steel boat, everybody knows. [laughter] Sounds like a cannon went off no matter where you are on that boat. He knew that when that noise, every time it happened, his father would wake up and come up and see what was going on. He was that way. Some captains were. You're always sleeping with one eye open basically all the time. He didn't come up, so he knew something was wrong. He went down and found him. He passed away.

SS: [inaudible]

JW: [inaudible]

RC: Right in his bunk. Right in his bunk. Same age as my father. I think fifty-two. My father was fifty-two when he passed away. I'm one year from that.

JW: Well, you look like you're going strong.

RC: Thank you. It's the blueberries. [laughter]

SS: Antioxidants.

JW: It's the orange –

RC: Yeah, it's the orange juice and the blueberries. [laughter] Keeps you preserved. Keeps you pickled. [laughter] Anyway, he could tell you some stories. That's the story with him. He's that name down at the memorial. That's his father.

SS: There's quite a few names on that memorial, more than I figured.

RC: Yes, there is, but there really isn't when you think about – I mean, I'm proud of this community as a fishing village with the record that we have. What I mean by that is there is a lot of names there, but when you think about the amount of hours that's been put out there by everybody that's fishing in this community, that's a good record. There's a hell of a lot more deaths in other occupations than this with the amount of hours that are involved. There's a lot of careers out there – my career, Bertie – I have over a hundred thousand hours out there right now just as captain, never mind my total career. It's probably, without exaggerating, at least 120,000 hours out on the ocean. There's a lot of that. So when you think on that level, there's not that many, when you think of the amount of people [and] hours that have been involved out on the ocean. We have a pretty good record. I don't know. But you don't ever want to lose any soul. I mean, two of them were very close to me. It's hard for me to talk about. I don't know. I get choked up talking about it. I had to search for one for two days. Anyway, my generation seems to be the last generation, to be honest with you. You don't see very many young people doing this anymore. To me, it's a tradition, and it's like an art that's passed on from family member to family member and even friend to friend. I mean, we've had some people come into this fishery that's not even from this community but fit in, and it came to them naturally. I mean, you always know when you have a good crewman by this: you only have to show them once and tell them once, and they get it. If you have to tell them more than that or show them more than once, they're never going to get it. So [for] some people, it comes natural, others don't. Some have it,

some don't. It's in any occupation. It's the skill that's in you that comes out when you're doing something that you really enjoy doing. That's how you tell a good crewman. What worries me is there's a lot to this that you don't learn in school. Like I said, I could run one of these boats at eighteen. But by the time I was eighteen years of age, I had six solid years under me pretty much as a deckhand, even going to school, but I was doing it every weekend, all summer long, and every holiday. Sometimes, even at night after school. I was involved in one way or another in the fisheries. Not [inaudible] takes time. We used to have two men on deck, like I told you. The captain didn't teach the third guy. The new guy was usually the third guy. The guy, your seasoned deckhand or mate – whatever you want to call him – was the one that did the teaching, was teaching the new guy. That's how they learned. That's how you found out if they was going to make it or not. If your deckhand comes to you [and says], "He ain't going to make it. He don't get it." Of course, the captain's paying attention, watching, too. He's screwing up all the time.

SS: He can see it.

RC: Right. So, usually, you try to get rid of that guy when you get in. Eventually, you get a guy that did – you're always going to hire the guy that you already know that does get it when he came in. Back in the day, when this was really good, you was making money at it, I was getting phone calls every day I was in. When I was coming into the dock, the majority of the time, there was somebody up on dock, looking for a job.

JW: Were they mostly people from Port Clyde or from elsewhere?

RC: Mostly elsewhere.

JW: Really?

RC: But there was some people at Port – if there's people in Port, they'd call you; they didn't necessarily come down the dock. Once in a while, [inaudible], "If you need a man, give me a call" type of thing. You don't have that anymore. Nobody wants to go with you. [laughter] You're not making money anymore. It's a lot of work for what you're making.

JW: Were the people who wanted to work for you mostly from Maine, or were they even from out of state?

RC: Mostly from Maine. Not very far away from this community. Might be someone from Rockland or somebody from another fishing port up and down the coast either direction.

SS: And they might have been involved in different fisheries throughout the year.

RC: Right, right. They just got done lobstering or something. They want to go dragging instead. Something like that. Or they just graduated from school and been from fishing families somewhere else. They're looking for work. They want to make money. It was like that. Anyway, if you was a highliner, you was really making money. They was always trying to seek you out. [inaudible] seek that boat out. It's all reputation. It really is. In our business, it was always about reputation. Back in the day, when you was running boats for these boat owners, you pretty much was told – you wasn't told when to go; you was the captain of the boat. That was always a gray area between me and the boat owner. Sometimes there would be communications that – we won't go down that road. But if the boat owner didn't agree with what you was doing with the boat as far as making money or how often you was going out, he let you know, and it was not unheard of to say, "Well, you can be replaced. Somebody will do it." That's how you got your reputation. You tried to protect your job.

JW: Was there a lot of turnover in terms of crew for other vessels back then?

RC: Some boats, yeah. The turnover [inaudible] on any given boat, was usually because the captain was a hard-ass, not well-liked, a screamer.

SS: People would only last a little while.

RC: Or they wasn't making much money on that boat. So, it's usually those two issues that – you could always pretty much tell when a boat was doing well. It had the same crew members that stayed on for years [and] didn't want to leave. The crew member was happy with what he making. He was happy with the boat, and he was happy with the captain.

SS: You wouldn't want to lose a good man, either.

RC: Right. If you got a good crew, if you got a good captain – the boat owners knew this – you could be turning a dollar. A lot of didn't have to do – this is another thing that was judged back then and is still judged this day – it's not only so much as how much you're making with that boat; it's how much damage you're doing with that boat to make it. What I mean by that – it's one thing to go out and gross twenty-thousand dollars in the trip, but if you do twenty-thousand dollars in damage, it didn't do anybody any good.

SS: No, you're not turning a buck. [inaudible]

RC: Right. You're not turning a profit. But if you're going out [inaudible] twenty-thousand dollars and you only did five hundred dollars of damage, now you got it good. See what I mean?

JW: Yeah.

RC: So, it was a combination of everything. You had to take everything into consideration when it came down to captains and crews. I know some guys who [inaudible] more money than me, but they was breaking three times more than was.

JW: Breaking gear?

RC: Yeah. Boat and gear both. Hard on a boat. Beating the shit out of it, basically. Excuse me. [laughter]

JW: What would be most susceptible to breakage?

RC: Anything. The harder you use the boat – anything's susceptible to break. It depends how hard you're going to use it.

JW: Maybe a better question is what would you have to repair most?

RC: The gear itself. Like you said, the net, the fishing gear itself, but also, if you was really hard on the gear, it started to travel up to the boat. What I mean by that – your winches, your hydraulics, anything electrical on deck. If you was really pushing the boat in the weather – anything can break then. You could break antennas on your electronics, things of that nature. Break cables, [inaudible] wires.

JW: Anything's possible?

RC: Anything's possible. Everything on a boat, and anything in this world, has its limits. You're going to find that out on these boats real quick. You need to know when not to push beyond that limit. If you don't and you don't care, and you're just out there for the almighty dollar, you're going to break something and hurt somebody eventually. That's been proven more than once. But everything on that boat has its limit. I know that boat inside and out. I've had it seventeen years. I know its limits, and it's getting pretty limited the older it gets. [laughter]

SS: How about the [inaudible]? Do they stand up pretty well? Do you have to do some things?

RC: Everything needs to be maintained on a boat. Everything. I don't care. Every square inch of that boat, at one time or another during the year, needs to have – needs to be addressed. You paint the boats for a reason – wooden boats. Protect the wood. If you don't, then the wood will start [to] rot. It's wear and tear constantly. I'd have to sit down – we could write a list a mile long [about] what goes on a boat on a yearly basis. My wife's got a whole list in there, she can

show you on the tax returns. It'll scare you. But those are all the things that break in a year that need maintenance in a year. You got things that will break that need repairing, you got things that will break and needs to be replaced. You got general maintenance that needs to be done. If you don't, you're going to pay dearly the next year. The bottom is very important on these boats; you need to do them once a year, the bottom of that boat. [inaudible] bottom of this boat once a year is twenty-five hundred dollars just to do the bottom of the boat.

JW: To repaint?

RC: [inaudible] zincs and copper and any other little thing that needs to be done underneath there when you check it. Sometimes, your stuffing boxes need to be repacked, things of that nature. But just a general ground – ground it out and have the zinc put on, the copper put on, and hiring your crewman to help you is twenty-five hundred dollars just for that boat.

JW: When does that usually take place?

RC: You do it once a year. Any time during that year. I still have to do it this year. I haven't done it yet, Josh. It's on my mind. [laughter] You got things you have to replace on the average, like your main cables that go to the fishing gear, the main wire we call it that you actually tow from, that puts the gear on bottom, brings it, and retrieves it back. That cable has to be replaced every eighteen months. That's twenty-five hundred dollars. Your doors that you're talking about, shackles, and things of that nature all wear. The wear and tear on your fishing gear as far as shackles and that nature and your twine – depends on how often you're fishing and how hard of weather you fish. The harder weather you fish, the more often you fish, the more often you have to replace these things, and they all cost money. The net itself is a twelve thousand dollar net. If you lose that net, it'll cost you twelve thousand dollars if you have it built. The materials in it – it's over seven thousand dollars of material. I build my own nets. And then you have ground cables.

JW: How long does it take you to build your own net?

RC: If I build it myself, two weeks. And those [are] long hours, ten-hour days or better. If I have my crewman help me, I can do it in probably eight, ten days. That's building one from scratch, the whole thing – frame, twin, cans, all the hardware.

JW: What knots do you use to make the mesh?

RC: The mesh the machine made. The twine comes in a bale. You cut them out. Then you sew the pieces together. Nets are made in sections. There's different sections that you piece together. There's tapes, and there's [inaudible]. I can go on forever with that. We have a tape

in there that shows that [inaudible] up in St John, Newfoundland, in the [inaudible] that net that I fish –

JW: Really?

RC: – that I built. Yeah. You can actually see what it looks like on the bottom of the ocean. I have it in – we have the tape in my wife's office. My office is down in the cellar. It's my workshop. [laughter] A lot of people don't realize – they think dragging – that we're destroying the bottom, that we're damaging the bottom. They've compared it to rototiller and things of that nature – bulldozing. I've heard every comment possible. The reality is these nets – they're like neutral buoyancy. They glide on the bottom just like a kite glides through the air, and we have rubber things – I don't know. You came up through the cellar?

SS: No, I came up [inaudible]

RC: Well, we get done, I'll take you downstairs and show you. But the rubber parts that we use on it are like tires that roll on the bottom. I drive them down the road. The materials that we use are from recycled tires. A lot of the tires that you see that are discarded end up going back into fisheries all over the world, like my type of fishery. Every size tire.

JW: What's that gear called?

RC: We call it the sweep, the part that rides on the bottom of the ocean. We call it the sweep. Now, that part rides on the bottom, and it's just because we're bottom fishing for flounders. But it's not digging like everybody thinks. They actually did research. My brother Gerry found this out, and I need to find out. I'm not positive. It might have been New Zealand, but they went out, and they took cameras down just to see what was being done to the bottom by this type of fishery. It surprised them. There was very little impact. What they found out was that a regular gale wind, forty, fifty-knot winds had more impact to the bottom of the ocean than what these bottom trawlers do. When you think about it, we wouldn't be able to do like what you hear a lot of times, like rototilling, bulldozing because these boats don't have that kind of power to be able to do that. [laughter] You're not going to bring up the whole bottom also; you're just bringing up fish. But to get back to that, the reality is these nets – it's really a lot of fine-tuning involved. It's a real balancing act. Make sure you're not having them too heavy, not too light, they got to be right at that right level.

JW: So that they're neutrally buoyant?

RC: Neutral buoyancy. A good example of this is I lost one of these nets hauling back one time. The doors came up, and when I was hauling the net back on the net reel, my cables parted. It was

in a gale wind, northeast thirty-five. My cables were old. She came up [inaudible, and they snapped like toothpicks. There goes my net. Your heart goes in your throat, and you start swearing and hollering because you know you just lost ten thousand dollars or whatever it is. But when you lose a net, you always try to retrieve it. So we went back to shore and got a grappling. We have a big grapple that we share amongst the fleet in town. Every community always had one – dragging fleet had one big grappling. So, I went back out to try to retrieve the net. You go back to where you parted it off. Now, you usually give yourself forty-eight hours. After forty-eight hours, if you haven't found the net – you got to know when to quit because you're burning fuel. Fuel is money. You're going to get to a point where you're going to have so much money out on fuel. Now, you're adding that into the cost of the lost net, so you might as well just go bite the bullet and go build one. So [the] rule of thumb I always gave myself – I've lost three nets in my career – give yourself forty-eight hours to try to retrieve it. When I went back out there, you start doing circles, or you start going where you knew the tide and wind was blowing. You start making oval circles, trying to find it. After twenty-four hours, nothing, and I was starting to get so discouraged. I'm like, "What the heck?" So, now you start widening it out further and further. I remember we was getting down to the end of [inaudible] like forty-four or forty-five hours we had into it. I gave the wheel to my crewman. I said, "Go that way. Straight line. If we get down to the end of there [and] we haven't retrieved it, we're going home." I wasn't in my bunk very long. I can't remember. I think it was a little over – I can't remember exactly. I wish I did. I don't know if it was an hour or maybe a little over an hour. Anyway, he woke me up, and he says, "I've come to a stop." It amazed me where we got that net. That net went over five miles. We was in six hundred feet of water when I parted that net off. We parted off on the surface. It took almost five and a half miles for that net to sink to the bottom. That's what you call neutral buoyancy. [laughter]

JW: So, it didn't have the doors attached to it? It was just the net.

RC: Right, right. The doors is what takes that net to bottom. Without them doors, that net is going to –

SS: Just floating for a while.

RC: It's just hovering in midair/space there, pretty much.

JW: The other two times you lost the net, were you able to find those times as well?

RC: I did one of the other times. The other one, no. It was in the wreck. I knew I wasn't going to get that one back. That was electronic error. Gave me the wrong numbers.

JW: Dangers of technology.

RC: That one cost me.

SS: Where did you end up?

RC: What?

SS: Where did you end up? Where did it take you?

RC: Well, we was on top of a wreck. We have wrecks out there all over the ocean.

SS: Oh, the top of a wreck. Yeah.

RC: My electronics that time – the reading off it was three microseconds off. Three mics, when you're fishing by wrecks, is a lot. When I turned the machine – when it happened – because we was three mics from the wreck when it happened. My crewman was behind the wheel that night. I'm looking at it. It's like, "We're not in that wreck. It's three mics away." So, I'm looking at it, looking at it, and I could see a skip in the line. It was an old paper plot, not the computer that we have now. It was on TDs. So, I turned off the LORAN [long-range navigation], turned it back on, and it put me right on top of the wreck. I'm like, "Okay..."

SS: Here we are.

RC: It was electronic error. It wasn't my crewman's fault. Human error by electronics, let's put it that way. [laughter] Anyway, I never got that one back. You're not going to get that one back. That happens. It's happened more than once. There's wrecks all over the Gulf of Maine. We know where most of them are, us fishermen. Anyhow, without those doors, your gear doesn't go to bottom, and it doesn't spread. Those doors serve two purposes: take the gear to bottom and open the net up. Without that, it don't happen. It just hovers there, doing nothing. Anyway, we're not rototilling the bottom.

SS: Not clear-cutting like [inaudible]

RC: No, no.

JW: Is there anything else that you think we've missed or that you might want to say in parting?

RC: I would really like to see this fishery stay in this community. And I'd like to see – I guess the state of Maine is stepping up somewhat; they have the Maine Permit Bank. We're losing fishermen every year in this fishery. And if they don't wake up here pretty quick, there's not

going to be any fishery for the state of Maine or this community. I mean, it's very disturbing, discouraging on my part and my fellow fishermen that have been doing this. We're disappearing. If anything, history will teach you is – I know lobstering is good right now. But for any state or any community to rely on one fishery alone, you're playing Russian roulette for the future generations of fishermen. Does that make sense? I don't like what's happening in the state of Maine. You look from Port Clyde East, what do you see? What do you see Port Clyde East?

SS: Lobsters like crazy.

RC: Do you see anything else?

SS: Not much.

RC: There you go. I don't need to say anymore. They need somehow to try to keep what few of us are left afloat. Keep us going so maybe it can be passed on later on when we're done. I look at it right now – if I'm done tomorrow, it's done. It's very discouraging. I know they bought permits, but what good are they going to do if nobody uses them, right? I think the fishery itself is rebuilding. I know it's not at the pace that regulators want – the National Marine Fisheries Service, the government. I don't know how they come out with these rebuilding periods of ten years for every stock. That's never going to happen, like I said earlier. I think we've come a long way. We've just got to take time and let it happen. It will happen. I think it will happen, personally. Not unless climate change does change it. But right now, we had one species that – I actually had my quote on dabs – flounder fish – cut in half. I don't understand that because we're seeing more dabs this year than we did last year. But this is something – you just never know. Everybody's like, "Where'd they come from?" Well, they came. They're here. And there's more this year than there was last year. So, that's a positive thing. So, I am seeing positive things happening with what we've done with the cutbacks that we've had and what we've done with the gear technology. That's been a combination due to regulations, and plus, we've done a lot of things as fishermen on our own. We have tried to clean this fishery up ourselves with our gear technology – what we've done with gear. At one point in my life, my career, before I die, I'd like to see some benefit from it. [laughter] So there will be a future. If I benefit from it, there will definitely be a future for the next generation. If I don't, my wife and I have been contemplating whether to get out of it. We really have. I've been doing this for a long time – thirty years as captain. I'm at a stage of my life – I'd love to stay in this community and live here because this is where my roots are. But the reality is if I stopped fishing right now, there's not many other options down here for work. I can't think of any right now. But I'm at the point in my life with this fishery that if I can earn twenty-five to thirty-thousand dollars a year with benefits ashore, I'm a lot further ahead than fishing that boat. A lot further ahead. The reality is I cannot get enough of that money on my permit right now to get out of debt with it – what I

have for debt with it. So, I'm in a position where I'm stuck. I can't move on, [laughter] I should say. I really don't want to move on. I still enjoy doing it, to be honest with you. I still enjoy doing it. You never know what you're going to see. You never know what's going to come up in that back.

SS: It's Christmas every tow.

RC: That's right. You never know what you're going to see. You never know what's going to come up in that bag. When you see so many things on a daily basis, too. You know what I mean? I love the water. If I ever did sell out, it's so final. That door's going to close, and I don't believe I'm ever going to be able to open it again. And that disturbs me because I don't know if I'm in a position – I don't really think I'm in that position in my life right now where I want to close that door. Even though I hurt every night, I still love doing it. [laughter] Plenty Advil and Tylenol. That's the secret. And orange juice

SS: Lots of orange juice.

RC: But as far as lobstering goes, I got three brothers and a nephew doing it right now down in Port. We do, as a family. I've lost some fellow fishermen. I've seen a lot of fishermen leave this fishery that I grew up with. It's just very few – right now, there's me, there's "Buzzer" – Justin Libby. We call him Buzzer. Steve Benner. Gary Libby. And Travis Thorbjornson. Right now, there's five active boats, and only three of them are groundfishing. The other two are scalloping down here now. So, we have five active boats right now in Port Clyde in dragging.

SS: The guys who are scalloping, do they have their boat outfitted for dragging –?

RC: Scallops.

SS: Just scallops?

RC: Yes. They just started doing it. They couldn't make it with the groundfishing. They kind of gave it up. My wife and I making it, but it's just – we're pretty much going trip to trip. We battle it every trip. It's a question [if] there's going to be money there to buy more quota. If there's going to be money there to fix the boat with what broke, and it's always – it's a week-to-week thing. It's always an issue. Sometimes it's really overbearing at times. When we sit down and crunch the numbers, we would say, "Why are we still doing this?" A lot of it has to do with we need more money. I'm actually, sometimes, getting paid the same prices I did when I started. Then, other times, you get paid what you think you should be getting paid this day and age. But those times happen more times than not when you're getting paid back what I was paid thirty-five years ago with my father. That's very discouraging this day and age when your overhead's

five times more than what it was back then. You're just not going to make it. So I don't understand that personally when you get forty-five cents for your fish one day. The next day, you get three dollars. I'll never figure that out as long as I live. Because I've heard every excuse in the world. We won't go down that road. [laughter] I've even had it said to me, "Because we can."

SS: Oh, man.

RC: That makes you feel real warm all over.

SS: Yeah, treating you with the utmost respect.

RC: Oh, yeah, they are. We're working together on this. You go out and catch them; I'll buy them for free because I can.

JW: Well, Randy, thanks so much for talking with us today. This was great. We wish you the best and safe passage at sea.

RC: Thank you.

JW: Thank you.

RC: You guys are more than welcome anytime.

-----END OF INTERVIEW-----

Transcribed by Fantastic Transcripts 10/31/2023

Reviewed by Molly Graham 11/6/2023