

Mike Kersula: So, to start off with, just a little background for the record. Could we have your full name?

John Williams: John Williams.

MK: Date of birth?

JW: 10/16/54.

MK: Place of birth?

JW: Stonington .

MK: Your current address?

JW: Oh, that's a good question. 15 Airport Road, Stonington.

MK: What year did you first start commercial fishing?

JW: 6, when I was with my father. But I started my own in high school. I was probably 13 years old, had my own skiff and my own traps. Fished with my father throughout high school and the year after I graduated. I had my own boat in [19]73. Went lobstering and halibut fishing for ten years. Built a new 40-foot boat and realized lobstering in the spring. One year, we had 75 pounds of lobster, has been our biggest haul. Lobster was a \$1.75 a pound. I wasn't going be paying my payments doing that, so I decided to go back groundfishing. I had been groundfishing with my father before. So, we bought some gillnets and tub trawlers that we had and fished for twelve years doing that. I bought a different boat, 46-footer. So, we went back groundfishing for twelve years. I decided when I was 40, I was going back into lobstering and I did it when I was 38. So, I took a summer off and spent with my son. We set a few traps out and I didn't go back offshore again. [laughter] But kind of planned life. But they're stopping groundfishing as far as not having any groundfish anymore is ridiculous. I mean, I don't know what happened. I don't think it was overfishing. The feed that was inshore here, the groundfish just came in every spring, disappeared and we didn't catch that. Something happened to it and I don't know what. The groundfish used to come inshore to the spawning areas. People don't understand when fish congregate, that's the only reason they congregate, is to feed and spawn. That's where you catch most of them. So, the rest of the time it's just hit or miss whether you're catching anything or not. But these traditional spawning areas was always good fishing areas and had been for over a hundred years.

MK: So, maybe we will talk more about your experience as a fisherman in a moment. First, maybe if you could tell me about your family. Where did your family originally come from?

JW: Great-grandparents, Scotland, Wales. I'm trying to think of my mother's grandmother's side. Name was Aprahamian and Middle Eastern and Europe. But my great-grandfather came here from – he was 12 years old – came here from Nova Scotia and worked on a stone quarry. He came in to Johns Harbor and we stayed an inn there. It was cold because they built the inn

for the stone workers. So, we happened to stay there about two months ago. It was interesting. But then he came to Vinalhaven and then came to here. My grandfather ran a boatyard, got ice, had horses. My father went fishing under protest from my mother because her family had been fishermen and they always been poor. She said, "If you're going to go fishing, we'll get a divorce. I'm not going to live like that." He stayed fishing and she stayed married for twenty-five years anyway. He's been very successful. I've enjoyed it.

MK: Got any uncles who fish?

JW: On my mother's side, one, two, three, four uncles that fished. But I have a brother that doesn't go fishing. Sells lobsters but he has been fishing before.

MK: Does your wife come from a fishing family?

JW: No, she didn't. Her father grew up here. He was a truck driver. He drove a truck of stone quarry for years all over the country. Any stone building you see a (Darrell Grand?) on it, he probably delivered some of it. I don't know if she ever had any preference of who she was marrying, but I don't think she planned on marrying a fisherman. I know other girls here that didn't grow up here, that are living here now as fishermen's wives. When they were teenagers, I don't think they had a clue, they had that in their plan for their life. But they're very happy. I think most of them are. It's pretty simple. It's a nice way of life. It's very comfortable. Everybody knows everybody, which is good and bad. But I've been happy. I couldn't imagine living anywhere else or doing anything else.

MK: Does your son fish too?

JW: No.

MK: Do you have a son?

JW: No, I have two sons.

MK: You have two sons?

JW: Yes, two sons. Neither one of them fish. My oldest son went fishing with me all through high school and college for the money. [laughter] He's mentioned since that he didn't mind it and he wished he'd hung around more. But they moved to Vermont. We're going out to see them. We're leaving in the morning.

MK: Whereabouts?

JW: North of Burlington and Colchester.

MK: I am from Vermont.

JW: Really?

MK: Yes.

JW: He lives around the lake in Malletts Bay. So, it's a three-minute walk to water. So, it's pretty nice. But my other son hates physical work of any kind. [laughter] Good with computers, likes people, everybody likes him. But he doesn't want to do any of that kind of work. He's been out with me very few times. Rarely lasted the day. He just doesn't like it at all. That's fine. I don't blame him.

MK: Any daughters?

JW: No.

Female Speaker: Does he live in Stonington?

JW: No, he lives in Ellsworth. Had several jobs working for a car rent enterprise now all over the place.

FS: For what?

JW: Enterprise.

FS: Oh, Enterprise Rent-A-Car?

JW: Yes. He realized the other day one of the perks of the job, these cruise ships coming to Bar Harbor. So, he got to drive a brand-new convertible Mustang to Bar Harbor yester morning and back last night. So, he said it was a good day. [laughter]

MK: Any grandkids?

JW: No. No grandchildren, no prospects of having grandchildren.

MK: Well, if you did have grandchildren or if you knew a young person, would you encourage them to go into fishing?

JW: Yes, I would, very much so. Try to help any of the kids who want to go fishing, yes. It's hard work and it's a lot to get started because everything costs so much now. But it's rewarding. But they got to be motivated. Most of the kids you see here fishing, there's a lot of them, they've been doing it since they were 6, 8 years old, most of them. They've known what they wanted to do from that time and have been focused and do it. It keeps them out of trouble. If you're going to go work twelve hours a day, you're not going to play a long time at night.

MK: So, on the other end of the spectrum from kids, do you remember any stories from before you were fishing? Any stories from the old-timers about groundfishing in the area?

JW: Oh yes, there's a lot of them. There was a small fleet of draggers that used to work out

here. But there was a lot of people in tub trawling, some of them for hake. They didn't sell them in here so much. We did truck fish to Boston. But we sold them in Vinalhaven, sold them by a sidewalk. These are small boats, 35-foot boats. They'd carry 5,000 pounds, not comfortably, but they would carry them. [laughter]

FS: Wait, how much, you said?

JW: Four, 5,000 pounds of fish. I know we would fish outside (Wichiniker's?) Rock and selling them by a sidewalk. It's a five-hour run and these were six-cylinder gas engines. We had to put pumps on them to force the salt water through them to cool because they would just get so hot. Of course, there was a whole fleet of scallop boats here in the winter. I bet more than half the boats would go scalloping that time.

MK: They would switch to groundfish in the summertime?

JW: Some, yes. Even when we were lobstering, we'd go lobstering through the spring and summer and go scalloping in late fall, early winter and think about groundfishing again. Sometimes in spring, if we started gillnetting, we'd start in April or May and then just keep going. But we sold out. I didn't go lobstering for ten, twelve years, we were groundfishing and scalloping. But then we were making more money groundfishing because price got up and we had bigger boats and we started fishing year-round. Then we diversified into different fishing. We were still catching groundfish, but we went dragging with auto trawls. We went longlining for three winters. That was pretty good work. Gillnetting in the wintertime, you've got to have a whole day to get there and set your nets. Then at least a minimum of eight hours to get them back. So, you were pretty constricted to what you did with the weather. These were all short trips just two, three days. So, we'd leave here and steam out 80, 90 miles in the wintertime, set your nets. If you got up at midnight and got the weather report and they were giving you warnings, the next morning you had no choice but to get your gear back and try to get home. You're still, like I said, eight hours get your gear back, another eight hours, get home. So, we got beat up pretty bad at times. But when we were longlining with wire, you could come and go more because you could steam out, set your gear, take an hour or two, three hours you were headed back. You could haul it right back just as soon as you set it. It was pretty good work. We could come and go a lot easier that way. We did that for three years. But every place we went to, most of the fish we caught were kola or cusk. Every piece of hard bottom we were working, once you took all the cusk off it, there wasn't enough volume or weight there to work on. You would go back there the next year and you get a few of them.

MK: Mostly cusk?

JW: Yes.

MK: Were you the only guy here who was pulling mostly cusk?

JW: No. There were five boats working during the winter and probably ten more out of Portland and Massachusetts. So, we fished offshore here. Now 50 to 75 percent of the catch was cusk.

MK: That was longlining?

JW: Yes.

MK: What years were that?

JW: Let me think. I did groundfishing in [19]90. [19]87, [19]88, [19]89.

MK: What year did you first start fishing for groundfish commercially?

JW: Let me see. It was [19]78.

MK: [19]78? Did you first start groundfishing on your own boat or did you work with someone else?

JW: No, someone else's boat. I had been tub trawling with my father when I was a kid, so I knew what we had to go through. We started out with fishing tub trawls. Just gillnetting was a lot easier because you didn't have to bait them. Fish don't have to eat; all they get is to swim. [laughter]. So, as long as they swim, we could catch them.

MK: In [19]78, how hard was it to get into the groundfishing industry?

JW: Not at all. You sent a letter to Massachusetts, got your groundfish permit, and begged, borrowed, stole some money to buy some gear with. I always had a favorite comment I'd ask my father, "You want to invest in the fishing business?" [laughter] First time I asked him to borrow \$6,000 to buy some gillnet outfit. I had some tub gear, so was going to fish both of them. We did the first summer. Then that year we'd done fairly well. The first day we went out, we stocked \$1,000. We rarely ever stocked \$1,000 a day before. Lobsters went to \$4 a pound one winter and he'd get 250 pounds a day. We'd like to beat our boat apart trying to catch it because we'd never made that much money before. Lobstering was about a \$500-a-day business. If you stocked \$500, if you got a hundred of it, you took home maybe half, two-fifty of it because rest of it was for expenses. The boat ate most of that, but it gave you a job. It's just the whole process of trying to make a living or trying to make money. I'm not saying just a subsistence living, but try and make a profit at this business, is something else. Not everybody figures out how to do that. I've seen fishermen work all their lives and live very well, but when they got done, had nothing. That's pretty common. The boat and gear, whatever it's with to somebody. I've had people say we always took more than we needed. Some people want to live better than others. But we have been supporting three complete households at times, my mother-in-law's, which we own her house and have been taking care of her needs for pretty close to fifteen years now. Of course, our kids.

MK: Does she live here too?

JW: Yes, she lives right up around here. Our boys, we've helped those. Our youngest son got divorced. We took his house over. That was in the corporation, so that was good. So, we were

paying all the bills there for a while plus our own house. So, yes, some people have got different commitments than others.

MK: That is a lot of houses.

JW: Other people will work three or four months and make a good year's work and live very comfortable doing that. But a lot of them don't have any health insurance, no retirement. So, it depends on what you're looking for. But if you want everything else, you're got to work pretty hard to do it.

MK: Have you always fished out of Stonington?

JW: Yes. Oh, we've wound up in other places. We fished in South Bristol one summer but only because of the economics. We were fishing (the West End?). They had market for dogfish and we didn't here and we were getting a lot of dogfish. So, we wound up in there just supposedly for the night to sell, get some ice, get out to spend another night so we could come back in here. Well, supposedly, their ice machine broke down so we wound up in there seven or eight days and none of us had any money with us. A girl used to come and get the boys and take them over to Boothbay at night and window shopping. Walking around Boothbay in the bars isn't a lot of fun. [laughter] So, they'd take a halibut or a shark or whatever we had for extra money and sell at the fish market over there so you have something to do at night. But I had friends that lived down there, so I hung out at their houses. But mostly, we did a lot of day trips. We never stayed out too much until the last few years. When we were fishing offshore, we had to. But we would typically day fish 40, 50 miles offshore and run in every night. A lot of the Portland boats, none of them ever did that. They did when they were fishing inshore down there. But everywhere else, they always stayed overnight.

MK: Always long trips?

JW: Yes.

MK: Could you tell me about the first boat that you used for groundfishing?

JW: 34-foot Jonesporter. That's the best boat I ever had lobstering. We went tub trawling for halibut every spring. We caught a few groundfish all the time, always even when we were fishing inshore, enough fair expenses. I remember several times we had 2,500 pounds of codfish off a couple thousand hooks, which was pretty standard fishing, pound to a hook. When we were longlining, we were handling more hooks. If we set 15,000 hooks, we had 15,000 pounds.

MK: Did you ever set 15,000 hooks?

JW: Oh, yes. That's why we tried to fish every trip.

MK: How much would bait cost for that many?

JW: When we were longlining, we were using squid and it had to be top quality stuff. The

better the quality of the bait, the better we did on it. So, we were buying food grade stuff and paying up 50 cents a pound for it at times. Most of the time, 30, 35 cents and that hasn't changed. The bait price right now is still probably 30 to 35 cents for the poorer stuff and 50, 60 cents for the better stuff. So, they're still held pretty stable, if you can call that stable. It's still pretty expensive. But we use them lobstering now when we're buying. Oh, the last pellet I used was I think 45 cents and we were using 750 pounds a day. So, it was pretty expensive. I know some guys using hard bait rockfish right now and I think they're paying 70 cents for it. Then they're using more pounds than that because it's just a bigger fish.

MK: Just the racks?

JW: Yes.

FS: What grade is the squid that you are using for bait?

JW: Food quality.

FS: So, with your lobsters you are getting...

JW: No, no, no, no. We were hooking.

FS: Just the longlining?

JW: Yes. No, we were using mostly herring and lobsters.

MK: Could you tell me about the horsepower on that first boat?

JW: 6.0 Chevrolet?

MK: Yes.

JW: I don't know what they had for horsepower. No one cared as long as they went ahead.

MK: Gas engine though?

JW: Yes, gas engine maybe 200 horse.

MK: Did you use gillnets with that first boat you owned?

JW: No, no. My next boat, I bought a 40-foot with a cove. That had 671 in it. They used to run 185 horse and he used to run forever. They jacked him up 300 horse. I overhauled it every six months for three years.

MK: Not worth it?

JW: Went lobstering and scalloping and we started gillnetting in the second year I had that boat.

MK: That was a glass boat?

JW: Yes, fiberglass boat. I went two years in that boat.

MK: How much could you hold in the first boat in terms of fish?

JW: When my father was fishing with that boat, 5,000 pounds.

MK: 5,000 pounds. In the next boat?

JW: Probably closer to fifteen. We've had 15,000 a lot of times. That was just carrying them in (pens?) on deck, didn't have any fish holder.

MK: What year did you first start gillnetting?

JW: [19]78.

MK: [19]78?

JW: [19]77, [19]78.

MK: How many nets were you using when you started?

JW: Thirty.

MK: Thirty?

JW: Thirty, just because that's what I could afford to buy. Most the boats were fishing fifty, sixty nets by then, but they only started with a dozen probably, when they first started. But I fished sixty nets the second year I went. I built thirty more that went up and rehung the ones we had.

MK: You did groundfish from April through November and then just scalloped seasonally?

JW: When we were still lobstering, we didn't go much past September. But then we started making more money groundfishing than we were lobstering. It really was cost big to go back lobstering. So, we stayed later in the fall. Then it got so late that you weren't able to set traps. So, we would go from groundfishing to scalloping. Late in the fall was scallop season, so you started 1st November.

MK: You ever shrimp at all?

JW: Yes, we were dragging for shrimp. Probably five different years that we went dragging, very few shrimp. They were a dollar a pound, but if you got four, 500 pounds it was a big day. I know the last three days of the season when, yes, we had fourteen, fifteen and 1,600 pounds and

that was the best of the whole season. But I haven't been shrimping for a long time. I bought some traps last year and tried that here. Nobody's ever done anything with shrimp traps up here. But I got a lot of friends in South Bristol who have done very well at it. So, I picked their brain and they told me not to set them to them until mid of February. They wouldn't catch anything until after they dropped their eggs and get done spawning. So, we fished them in 1st of December. Just as soon as the season opened, we set some out and we hauled them and we barely got enough to eat for the first month. Got a lot of three-year-old shrimp, small ones. We hunted at different places at different areas and we finally got a hundred pounds one day. That was a big deal. So, then we got up to get 1,000 pounds one day. I said, "Oh."

MK: With the traps?

JW: Yes. I said, "We're getting closer to maybe making something." So, we kept fishing them. As soon as they started dropping their eggs, we started seeing more bigger shrimp. We had a lot of small ones. Everywhere we went, you'd get small shrimp. The draggers don't touch any part of the bottom out here so we got a lot of room to look. I said, "This is going to be easy." It wasn't. [laughter] Because they catch shrimp season down six weeks early. But the last five days we caught way over half our shrimp. We had 2,500 the day before the season closed.

MK: In traps?

JW: Out of one-thirty traps and we were done at 10:00 a.m. So, I realized, well if they let us go through March, this could do something. If we could go five, six weeks and get that kind of fish, then you could possibly make something. It's a pretty good way to stay inshore and still work and make something. I'm getting tired of running offshore. I haven't been outside lobstering for five years. I only go off about 20 miles now and we're allowed to go 40 and a lot of the most do. I bought some more shrimp traps this year off another guy in town that started and didn't do anything with them. But if we can't fish them, I'll sell them. But I think as a future, that the picking house up here loved them. One of the girls was shipping them to California. When shrimp come up when we were dragging, they're all red, most of them are dead. I always thought it was the auction that killed them. It's not. It's the light. You can bring them up, dump them in the traps, dump them in a fish box, keep them covered, put them in a cooler. You go two days later run your hands on them, they're all alive. She was shipping these. We got in 10:00 a.m., early couple mornings and we were out. She freighted them up, sent them to California. The next day I was in there and we brought her some more. She's boxing them up and the guy is talking her on the phone and I can hear him screaming in the background, "The things are still alive." He was ecstatic. They were selling them raw. So, it was a pretty good deal. She started a load at four bucks, we were getting a dollar, which was a decent price. The next lot she sent for five, the next one six, and the last one's \$7. So, it was pretty cool, I thought, to get that much money from just shrimp. It was unheard of. Then there was a good yield out of them compared to the dragged shrimp. Most of them you'd get 38 to 40 pounds. Biggest size was 44 pounds on a box. So, it was nice stuff. I'm not going to say you're going to catch a whole boatload of them, but it was pretty interesting. I think there's a future to doing it for five, six weeks a year. Not everybody's going to do it. Traps are \$85 apiece and they're a lot of work. They're not easy to build. They're not easy to handle. They're small mesh like this. You can't get your fingers in and pick them up. We string rope.

MK: Because they are heavy too?

JW: Yes, the heaviest lobster traps. We string ropes for them just to get places to pick them up and you need two guys. You can't do it with just one man. It's just labor intensive. You could do a few of them that way. But if we're going to do any volume of them, you've got to have two guys and a pretty decent boat to fish that time of year.

MK: So, when you were still groundfishing, did you target different species from April to November?

JW: Whatever we could catch.

MK: Whatever you could catch.

JW: We had a few places we knew where we could go and get some codfish inside mostly. But there was always hake and pollock mixed in them. We didn't get a lot of haddock up around here. We did offshore.

MK: Flatfish?

JW: If we were dragging, we'd get a lot of flatfish. Probably half the trip was flatfish. But the winters that I went dragging, my boat carried 480 gallons of fuels, so I had enough for 48 hours. Codfish were 25 cents and the math wasn't doing it. So, [laughter] we spent 48 gallons of fuel in two days and we'd have four, 5,000 pounds of fish and \$2.50 cents a gallon for fuel and just didn't make anything. Always, the bigger boats did better at dragging. But we caught a lot of fish gillnetting. I had a 46-foot Hillman that my father had built and I bought that in, I think, 1980. We went all over the Gulf of Maine, anywhere we wanted to go on that thing and caught a lot of fish. We had 880,000 pounds one year. I don't think a lot of the draggers in Maine were probably doing that much volume. But they had a higher priced fish. They got more for their flats and haddock and stuff like that. But we had a lot of cod, a lot of pollock. We did 550,000 pounds of codfish that year. We went to council meetings in Boston and told them that and they said, "That's impossible. Nobody runs into codfish anymore." But we worked on a lot of codfish up here, especially in the summertime.

MK: What percent of your income do you think came from the groundfish?

JW: 100 percent. For some years we didn't do anything else even when we were doing other fisheries. I know a friend of mine the years we were groundfishing and scalloping – that's the only two things we were doing. We were probably stocking \$250,000 a year. Three quarters of my money came from groundfishing and a quarter from scalloping. His was opposite. We stocked the same amount of money, but three quarters of his came from scalloping and a quarter from groundfishing. Just because he was better at it, he liked it better and he put a lot of time into it. But most of the time, it was just scalloping on the good days and bad days were in the shop hanging nets, getting ready for the next season.

MK: Did you ever do any other work on the side apart from fishing?

JW: No. I had a captain's job three weekends in high school. They built camp. There was no road to it and I logged all the materials for it three weekends. Got paid the same as the rest of the crew, 3 bucks an hour, twenty-four hours a day. Hated every bit of it. They didn't seem like they were ever getting anything done. You start at work 7:00 a.m., quit at 9:00 a.m., have coffee. You stop at 11:30 a.m., have lunch. You stop at 2:00 p.m. and have coffee. At 3:30 you go home. I wasn't used to working like that. You go to work, when you get done work, then you stop. [laughter] Worked with my grandfather some. He had a boatyard. When I was 16 years old, we helped him build a cribwork for a wharf on one of the summer cottages and to drive in inch spikes down through 18-inch logs all day. My arms felt like they were going to drop right off.

MK: It is just like big mallets?

JW: Oh, yes, sledge hammers. Two of us, when one guy would get tired, he'd overstrike, just break the handles off the hammer. So, my grandfather had a big magnet so he can go lock the outboard and get them to put a new handle in it that night. This went on two, three days in a row. So, he showed up on work, he welded a piece of pipe to the hammerhead. He overstruck on that once and like took his arms right off. He didn't do that again. [laughter] I remember he threw the hammer up. My grandfather went along the magnet, got it back, passed it back to him. Like I said, I was 16 years old at the time. My grandfather was probably 60 and he would go to work three hours before us and work three, four hours after us and just didn't pay attention to it. So, he worked all his life. I had money to go to college. University of Maine was \$2,500 a year at the time when I graduated and I had 10 grand in the bank. Father asked me my senior year, about halfway through he said, "What are you going to do next year?" I said, "Well, I guess I'm going to get a bigger outboard and just do more traps." He said, "You want to buy my boat?" I says, "Yes, I do." He said, "All you've done is guaranteed yourself a job, not a living. Just you're going to have work." [laughter] He was right. Then he said, "Get down and tell your grandmother," because nobody in our family had ever gone to college. He said, "She was really adamant we were going to go to school." I went down and told her. She said, "I'll pay for it. It's not the money. I got the money." I said, "I have no idea what I want to study." I'd gone to University of Maine. We spent weekends up there with other students and we got out of school three days to go up there. That was kind of cool. So, you didn't have to go school. [laughter] They had a great time and I did too. But I couldn't see spending \$2,500 a year to go do that, I'd rather work. A lot of kids here I know their parents have been adamant they had to go to school first. If they want to go fishing, that was fine. A lot of them in the maritime academy or wherever, and came home, went fishing. But my opinion was all they did was spend four years they could have spent paying for their outfit. Not that they didn't learn something and not that it didn't help them rest of their life. But I talk to a lot of younger kids, there's a great course in (Witch Island?). It's got all, you can take electrical engineering, mechanical engineering, hydraulics. They got all kinds of stuff to do with commercial equipment. You use all the same equipment on a boat. If they could go take a couple of winters and go down there for six months a year and the first couple of years fishing, it would save them a fortune in their lifetime to know what they're using for equipment, because I didn't when I started. When you start going to a shipyard for every little thing you need, you can't afford it. So, you need to know what you're

using for equipment and how to take care of it. A lot of kids now are making enough money. They just go to the yard and get everything done. I can't say much. My boats, I just hauled out this morning and the shipyard is going to paint my boat. I'm taking off tomorrow morning for at least five days. When I get back, I hope most of it's done. But it's a luxury I hope I'm always able to afford. I've got a wooden boat now and they paint it every year I've had it. So, hope I can afford to and they can continue to do it. But I've had this boat since 1990, again, when I went back lobstering.

MK: That is the year you stopped groundfishing?

JW: Yes. I had another guy running it the last eighteen months I had my big boat. If he got sick or something and couldn't make a trip, I'd go. Once we came back inshore, I didn't have any desire to go back offshore again. I said I wasn't going outside the 700-line, which is off 25 miles from here. Three years later I had all my traps outside the 700-line and was doing good lobstering. But there was not a lot of wooden boats being built anymore. But Peter Kass in South Bristol still builds wooden boats and they're beautiful boats. There's four in town here and there's going to be five more. He's got five more orders from people in town. I'm going to build another one in eighteen months. So, I've had my boat – this one's sixteen years.

MK: Still going?

JW: Yes. Nothing wrong with it. I don't know why I need another one but [laughter] I'm going to build one anyway.

MK: How long were your trips when you were groundfishing when you first started?

JW: All of them day trips when we first started. Once in a while in the spring, we were running 45 miles and we'd stay overnight one night and haul twice and come in. But, like I said, all these boats didn't have any fish holds in then when we first started. So, my 46-footer did have a fish holder and we could ice ten, twelve thousand in the hold and carry another fifteen on deck. That's probably the most we've had in it. We had 28,000 pounds of fish and all of that's aboard and come in from Cassis which is a 90-mile run blowing about 45 Southeast one night. But the boat took it well. She carried fish good. She was comfortable.

MK: How many trips per year were you doing when you first started?

JW: 265 days one year we finished. I wished I'd kept my books. I gave them to the guy that bought the boat down from the Cape and I wished I'd kept them. Somebody at the historical site and maybe they'd like to have [inaudible], I don't know. I had a younger fisherman offer me \$5,000 for my books. I should have sold them to him because they were useless. [laughter] Just times a year we fished, where we were, what we were doing.

MK: Why did you not sell them?

JW: I don't know. I wish I'd hung on to them now, especially the years we did do a lot of fishing. Like I said, we were fishing twelve months a year. But we put a lot of time in, and we

stood up at the council meetings and told them because they said they were going to cut us 10 percent in days when we first come out with the days at sea. We said, "Oh, we can live with that." So, we put 265 days in last year. She said, "Nobody fishes that much." I said, "We did. I got books to prove it." So, we'd have to take off 26.5 days, we'd still have 200 and some days. He said, "No, it's not how it's going to work." Well, they came up with 188-day cap. They started with a 42-foot exemption. Very few boats here were bigger but two of them were, mine and another guys. I had my boat remeasured to 41 foot 11.5 inches to get over the 42-foot exemption. They argued about it, but boats for hundreds of years measurements were waterline length. Waterline length, that's what she was. She was 46.

FS: What kind of length?

JW: Waterline length.

FS: Water length.

JW: Waterline. So, she was a 46-foot boat on paper. But that's what they measured in and it's what the waterline length was, so we got an exception. Another guy had a beautiful 48-foot boat, sold it for the only reason to buy a 42, and wished he never had. He wasn't happy with the boat because he was more comfortable in the other boat. She carried fish better. She carried traps better when he was lobstering. When he was fishing offshore, he'd rather have the other boat. But he sold it only because of the exemption. All the lifestyle changes we've had has been from fisheries laws, not necessarily from fishing. The last two guys fished out of here are Bobby Jones and Scott McGuire, was catching plenty of fish. They were allowed of 400 pounds codfish a day. They were just throwing them offboard and nobody wants to do that. That is just ridiculous. I don't believe in individual quotas either or transferable quotas because then a few people wind up with everything. But to stop the waste of discards, then something's going to have to be done like that. I know other people who have been out dragging, they said there's no codfish around. One of the last trips Ronnie Shepard had made had 10,000 pounds in forty-five minutes. He was allowed a thousand. So, they picked out a thousand of the big ones, let the rest of them go. It was terrible. But that's one of the reasons they got done fishing, not because there wasn't any fish.

MK: Where was he out of?

JW: Fishing out of here.

MK: Fishing out of here?

JW: Fishing out of here.

FS: I am talking to him after.

MK: Oh.

JW: How many people are you interviewing total?

FS: Thirty.

JW: Oh, really?

FS: Yes.

JW: Cool. You're going to get most of everybody, I think. [laughter] They're not here.

FS: Well, it is all in Eastern Maine. We are going to have a lot from here.

JW: There were twenty-three boats fishing out of here one summer, all selling in Webbs Cove. They landed 6.5 million pounds of fish in three months.

FS: What year?

JW: It was probably [19]84.

MK: What were the prices like when you first started fishing?

JW: 10 cents was a pretty average price.

MK: For what species?

JW: Everything.

MK: For everything?

JW: Well, we were selling to Vinalhaven, hake, cod, pollock didn't really matter. Once in a while, the codfish would line up, but they were splitting salt, everything. Everything went in the same market so it really didn't matter.

MK: Who were you selling to?

JW: Burnham & Morrill in Vinalhaven. They ran an operation there for all the years my father went tub trawling.

MK: Is that B&M?

JW: Yes.

MK: Burnham & Morrill?

JW: Yes.

MK: I never heard the whole thing.

JW: A lot of the fish went to South America, some went to Africa, but they used to ship salt fish all over the world. They built a processing plant over there. I don't know how much processing they ever did with it, but we sold there very little after that. Most of the fish we trucked to Boston. Oh, I don't know when it was, we started selling to John Nagle. He was great to work with and always took a fish, always paid us decent, I thought. He sold a lot of small paddlers in the area and we were all day boats. Once they realized where the fish was coming from, what kind of quality it was, they started paying more for them. We started taking better care of them. We never used to carry ice until the last five, six years we went. We'd go out hauling nets, throw them over the boat, we cut them on the way home. Once we started getting more money for them, and realized we could get more money for them, we'd stop every string and take care of a fish, clean them, wash them, put some ice on them. It took another couple hours a day, but we could almost double the money on them. We started getting, instead of 25 cents, we'd get 50 cents. It was a big deal especially if we would get 10,000 pounds. So, you see the incentive do it and the crew did too. A lot of years we were paying the crew fifteen, eighteen, \$20,000. It was a just a living, that's all. When we started getting more money for fish, they started getting up 45, \$50,000 a year. They all had better traps and plenty of toys to play with, but they forgot to pay their income tax. [laughter] That was pretty common. Because most of the time if you're making twenty thousand, you got to give them two, \$3,000. Well, when you're making forty-five, fifty thousand, you got to pay pretty close to a third of it. So, you got to pay fifteen, \$18,000 in taxes and nobody saved it for that reason. But my father made sure I knew how to pay my taxes. 16 years old filled up my first income tax and, knock on wood, I have been able to pay it every year at some point in the year. [laughter]

MK: What was the mesh size on the gillnets when you first started?

JW: We fished 9-inch mesh when we started, everybody did. I don't think anybody fished any different. We got playing around with mesh size. We've been going five, six years. Probably when I had my bigger boat, it was five, six. I bought some 5.5-inch gear one year. It was early in the spring and we were fishing in an area, getting 2,500 pounds of fish every day. They were a pretty good price at that time of year. But every fish was this big. I called a friend of mine in New Hampshire and he fished around the Isles of Shoals when he started. I said, "I know what happened to you fish down there." He said, "What's that?" I said, "You caught them all when they were this big. Because they used to fish as small as 4.5 inches in the wintertime."

FS: Your friend did?

JW: Yes. They just fished off 10 miles. It was pretty good work. But you can't have any big fish if you catch them all when they're this big. So, we tried to go to the council when they started the days at sea for the draggers to get us exempted from that program. We would fish bigger mesh nets, go back to 6.5-inch mesh nets and put a cap on the nets, eighty, ninety, whatever it was. Give place to start because some of the bigger boats when they were trip fishing, were fishing a hundred nets and some fish, one-fifty. I said, "You got fish you can control. Don't put us out of business, just we want to do this ourselves." They said, "No, couldn't separate the species from different fisheries."

FS: When?

JW: That was probably [19]85 when we started going to council meetings. But they basically ignored us. We'd sit there and talk to two of them at lunch one time and came up with this plan that we wanted to do and they said, "Wow, this is a great idea." Then the guy stood up after lunch when the meeting opened up and said, "We're going to do this because we have had no input from the industry whatsoever." I haven't been to a council meeting since and I have no desire to ever go to one again. But I think it was a good business especially the day boats that were coming in every night. We went to Iceland four years ago. They got a whole fleet of them that do it up there out. They have gillnets, hookers. But most of them are home every night and they got a good quality product and it was a great fishery.

MK: Did you notice changes in landings at a certain point while you were working?

JW: No. We were fishing further offshore.

MK: Why?

JW: Because the inside area, we were fishing in it less and last every year. But like I said, most of the boats weren't capable of going outside at 25, 30 miles. We didn't fish inside of that very much, five, six weeks in the summertime, June through the middle of July. September we'll be back offshore again. There were so many dogfish around too and so you couldn't set most of the time if you didn't have market for them. A lot of the western boats did have market for dogfish and they made pretty decent money at it. But with trucking everything up, it cost us 10 cents a pound to truck our fish. If you're only getting 12, 15 cents, you can't do it. There was a guy who would come up here from Gloucester, good fisherman, still fishing, and lived for four or five years. He said, "I'm going to starve to death." Because he said he'd go out here and get two, 3,000 pounds of fish, which down there selling weight in Gloucester was good living. He came up here and get 3,000 pounds of fish. He literally starved to death because you go to pay 10 cents a pound for trekking and wharfage. He said, "I can't survive doing this. I don't know how you guys do it." I said, "Well, you got to have more than 3,000 pounds a day." That was basically break-even. If you didn't get five to 8,000 pounds, you weren't going to make any money that week. I know all the weeks we probably caught 20,000 pounds a week, boys never got a check. Expenses, fuel, everything was used. So, I lost one crew. We went seven weeks one spring with no money, no check.

MK: Even though you were catching a ton of fish.

JW: No, we weren't catching a ton, but we were looking and we were catching some every day. Four of them quit. His first check I gave him was \$7.56 and three out of the four guys quit that day. I couldn't blame them. I scrambled up another crew and one of the guys stayed with me and made 15,000 pounds the next day. But that's the way fishing was. There's no guarantee you're going to make anything. But I decided at that point, because I had a good crew, if I was going to keep a decent crew, I had to pay them. I sat at home the next time I had a day off with a calculator and averaged out three or four years, plantings, prices, what we'd paid for wages, and come up with a percentage to pay them off the top. So, if we caught a hundred dollars' worth of

fish, they got something. I've basically paid that way ever since. Basic share then was 50 percent for the boat, take all the expenses out and then split it. Captain usually got 5 percent more. But when I started paying off the top, oh I think we paid between six and 9 percent. Some of the guys I had been with a while, they got up to ten. So, if we stocked a thousand dollars, they got a hundred bucks and we had a thousand dollars to operate. So, they got at least a hundred bucks a day. When we started catching more fish, they got more money.

MK: What was the fishing like the last year you went fishing?

JW: It was pretty steady. The last year I went fishing, I was getting tired of it and I was staying as close to home as I possibly could and still make something. So, I don't know if I was doing the boat or the crew any favors, but we were still catching 2,500, 3,000 pounds a day pretty steady. Fish were getting a decent price. Right times of year, you were getting a dollar for them. But I ran another boat for a guy for a short time, just three trips, but I had intentions of taking it all year. One of the guys on my boat ran my boat and he fell off the dock and broke his leg. So, one of the other guys took it. We were fishing offshore in the springtime and he was kind of staying off by himself and he was catching 2,500 pounds a day. I told him after about the third trip, I says, you've got to do more than this. I said, "My expenses last year were \$255,000. That's not going to change. So, you got to stock twice that much if you're going to make anything." He said, "You better get somebody else." I had to go back on the boat because if it didn't, it wasn't going to make it. But I made \$10,000 in six days on the other boat I was running and I was looking forward to more of that. But the guy was paying me a pretty good share and I guaranteed him so much stock for the year. I said, "You give me enough gear to work with." He was happy and so was I for a while, but it didn't last long. But same guy who broke his leg, is still fishing out of Florida in Long Island. My wife talks to him on the internet once in a while. I don't get on the computer; she's not going to teach me. I'll probably be arrested, so I'll stay off that. [laughter]

MK: [laughter]

JW: But she talks to him at least once a week and he's doing good. But same thing, all the laws, regulations, they're going to fish further, further offshore. They're fishing on the backside of the Gulf Stream now because they can't fish on the inside of it.

FS: Pew is trying to shut the longline fishery in Florida. So, how many boats is this, like twenty-four or something?

JW: There's not a lot of boats, no. But they're having some good trips. Prices doubled for swordfish right now and tuna from what it was three years ago.

MK: Saw less of them, I think. No?

JW: The happens to be the best trips we've ever had. So, that's debatable whether there's less of them or not. Some people are seeing less of them, yes.

MK: I guess the demand was probably up.

JW: I don't know. I've eaten more than I have in the last few years, but there's some of it.
[laughter]

MK: How many boats went groundfishing out of Eastern Maine ports when you first started?

JW: I wouldn't have any idea what the total was.

MK: But out of Stonington when you first started?

JW: Twenty-three boats just gillnetting here.

MK: In [19]78?

JW: Yes. That was probably in the early [19]80s, yes.

MK: How big were most of these boats?

JW: Oh, small lobster boats. Most of them between 35 and 45 feet.

MK: Were there any draggers or just all gillnetters?

JW: No. There were four draggers, maybe one at times. But Ronnie Shepard went, Donnie Jones, Bill Sargent, Reggie Thompson.

MK: What about other boats that were not from Eastern Maine ports? Were there were there any fishing around here from Gloucester or from Portland?

JW: Oh, yes. We fished with the Gloucester fleet. We liked to decimate the gillnet fleet on the falls about 40 miles off here. They'd come up here every spring and they didn't care who was there. If they were going to tow everything, they towed it. So, you either stayed out of the way or push gear.

MK: Did you ever do anything to...

FS: Stop them?

JW: I didn't. One of my crew did that had the boat one night. Ran some barbed wire around them [laughter] when they were towing. That makes a mess. I can just picture it.

FS: Oh, around the net whatever?

JW: Yes. They're towing, right, and they got the doors down and they just dropped in overboard with a weight on it and just circled them a couple times like this while they're towing. Well, that whole ball of stuff is just going to slide down onto the doors. When they haul it back, it's all going to come together like this. I don't know how you'd ever get it out of a net to them cut it up

little pieces. But I gave him hell. I said, "Don't. We got to fish the rest of our lives too." They did it around menhaden, shrimpers, and groundfishing boats because they fished lobsters during the winter there and they started dumping cars overboard, refrigerators with rebar and full of cement and all kinds of stuff in the tows and you can't go without a tow. It's ruined it forever. Kind of shot-sighted, but that's what happened. We didn't need that to happen here. Now, few people took out some rifles. I know a couple guys in Jonesport did. Went to Coast Guard Base and said, "You come out and stop these guys or we're going to stop them." The Coast Guard followed them out of the harbor. They didn't do anything to them because they weren't doing anything wrong. But they had boarded them and harassed them a little bit, but they did leave down then. But we had problems with them out here. I didn't have any problem fishing with most of the draggers other than a couple of them. Most of them were very good to talk to if you were decent and told them where the gear was. If there was a place they wanted to fish and you set the gear there, you'd probably lose it. But either you go someplace else or work up on an edge different or someplace they weren't fishing. You had to talk to them all time. We were offshore when we lost the boats. Came to where we were fishing and said, "You're not going to set here." I said, "I'm just setting my gear up." But he said, "We don't care. You want to haul it back and move it." I said, "It's going to take me eight hours to move it." He said, "You got two." I said, "Well —" so we started hauling. He got three of my ends and it was intentional. He didn't have to. He could wait six more hours I'd been out of there. But they didn't want us there. So, unless they were out, we didn't fish that area.

FS: Were you the only longliner from here?

JW: No. Probably half dozen went longlining during the winter. Scott McGuire was probably the first one to fish on a reel and he had monofilament gear on. One of the guys came up here from New York, Lance Alec, who had been longlining all his life. He used to go tub fishing and stuff. He helped us a hundred percent rigging up. We'd gone tub trawling and that was how we got longlining. I was fishing tub trawls during the winter rather than setting nets and trying to catch [inaudible] but we caught a few groundfish. Scott had some pretty good trips. So, he was fishing company and I was fishing fifteen tubs a gear, probably 3,000 hooks. Most of the time, we were setting them once or twice a day. We were getting 5,000 pounds every two, three days. He was getting 15,000 pretty steady every three days. So, I said, "Jesus, what's the difference?" So, the next trip we had talked with him and we went off and we were sitting right side by side each other all the time. I said, "Well, one thing, he's hauling more gear than we have." So, he was hauling about 7,500 hooks a day. I said, "That's some it." So, we took an extra man and we rolled somebody in the bunk every four hours and worked around the clock so that we could haul as many hooks as there was a day. He tripled me three trips in a row. I said, "Well, we got to be beat." They had too much longer. I went and bought a longline reel. Talking with Lance up here, he fished with wire instead of mono because mono was expensive at the time, it still is. But you could get six months out of the wire. Eight-inch wire was pretty reasonably priced. So, we bought a reel, put 10 miles of wire on it, bought all the snaps, and went up and set. It was better than the tub gear. You didn't have a whole boatload of stuff. Fifteen tubs of tub you get, you could hardly fit them in this room with all the inlines and the anchors and the end markers and stuff. With the reel, the wire was on the reel. We used the wire for the ends. All you had was your high flyers and your balloons and you snatch, you put them in a basket. Put two-fifty in a basket, so you had ten baskets, those stacked up the counter. So, it was a pretty interesting and

neat way to fish at the time. But some of the places that we fished wiring gear, you couldn't fish tub gear. Either with the coral or high bottom or whatever, or depths too. We didn't fish tub gear all of seventy, eighty-five most of the time. With the wire, we fished in 175,000 during the winter in places.

MK: Did you catch more large fish with the wire?

JW: That was because of where we were fishing.

FS: Because it was in the areas that there weren't people dragging.

JW: Right, yes. One of the areas off on the wall, I knew the hole was there, but I'd never fished it much because we didn't have the gear to fish it. It was the tree coral and stuff. It was hard on nets. The groundfishermen stayed away from it because they'd lose the gear in it. With a wire gear, we could judge in the tide, how far it was going to go because it didn't drift as far as the tub trawls. Tub trawls would go three, four lines, which from here to factory. So, quarter a mile sometimes in tide. That wire, wherever you dropped it, that's where it went. So, it was pretty good that way. We could fish once we figured out where the fish were and wherever we wanted to be. We could set that gear right there. The last winter I fished there we were only setting three hundred hooks to a tide. It was that concentrated area of fishing that we just set the three hundred hooks, go back and haul them, set them right back out and go back and haul them. We fished there for three winners, never fished anywhere else. So, it was pretty interesting.

MK: Just in three hundred hooks at a time?

JW: Yes. But we probably hauled ninety-seven spawning stock egg in the Gulf of Maine because that's all there was there, is large egg. Beautiful thirty, 35-pound fish. They were this big, every one of them. It was pretty cool. The first night we got in there, I don't know, it was 9:00 p.m. We had just finished up hauling and one of the crew jumped down the hole. I had 10 miles of gear out. So, we had been hauling towards this area and the last day they dropped down overboard into that hole. He jumped down the hole to put four, five boxes of fish down that we'd washed and it took him five minutes, threw some ice on them. He came back up and I had an 8-foot table we worked on that was full and they were running over on the floor. We had floating wire, tub gear I've seen it with father, with slack tide. They'd float the gear up and you'd just see the fish on top of water just flipping the tails back and forth. They were floating that white ditched wire up in 175 out of the water. I wish I had my camera with me at the time. But it was at night, you wouldn't have seen it anyway, but it was pretty cool.

MK: Did anything come and take it?

JW: No. We knew sharks didn't bother us that time of year because there weren't all the sharks around. The reason we went back then in the spring, just as soon as the feed showed up, we were done. You couldn't catch anything. We were offshore down off the Cape. (Wilket Noles?), 165 miles from here. We were getting a few fish late in the spring and last of March. A friend of mine from New Hampshire was on Cassis called me up. He said, "We're getting a few fish here, you ought to come up." I said, "All right." So, during the night we steamed up there.

Talked to him in the morning, he just passed me the bearings of his gear. I said, "Okay." So, I set right in between all of his nets back and forth. I hauled the gear back, 2,500 hooks and 250 pounds of fish. I went up alongside of him and he was getting 10,000 pounds a day. But the herring were running up his [inaudible] falling over the nets. So, they were after the feed. Once the feed showed up, they were done. So, we just came home and put the nets on them and went back and joined him. Everybody says that you could bring that fishery back, I don't know. There were so many fish around when everybody was tub trawling here that, yes, we caught something. But I'd love to see a hook fishery because it is a nice, clean, and easy fishery. But the people we talked to in Iceland are hook fishing, fishing tub trawls says we did. The boat we were talking to was a 36-footer. He'd tried automatic baiters, he'd tried gillnetting. He didn't care for gillnetting because he did more craw. He went back to tub gear just the way we'd always fished it for years. Six guys would show up at a bar and just him and one man on the boat and they just went every day.

MK: You ever heard of the Newfoundland cod traps?

JW: Yes. We fished some traps here. I don't know if that was that style. But the state gave us a trap to play with and we passed it around for a couple seasons.

MK: How did it do?

JW: Nothing, rarely see a fish in it. I took some of my father's lobster gear. I don't think they were 4-foot traps but 43 inches long. We hooked three of them together sideways. So, we had a 6-foot trap by 43 inches wide, probably 15 inches high. We just put two big heads in it, like you would a lobster trap. First time we set down on Cassis, we set forty-five minutes and had seven fish. I said, "Wait a minute, you have a big enough boat with a hundred of these, you could probably do all right." But same thing would have happened. You'd have cleaned up that small area and there'd been no place else to go. We lugged it around everywhere else and rarely see a fish in that one either. So, I don't know. As we get to the bottom of the area or the concentration of fish to work with trap here if you're fishing for groundfish,

FS: You ever feel it went back to historical levels?

JW: No. There was plenty of fish down then. We were getting twelve, 15,000 pounds a day some days. I get a kick out of that because they say lobstering too, about historical levels. There wasn't always fish here. There weren't always lobsters here. During the [19]40s, there were some older guys that was in back home where I grew up. They were lobstering, but they were starving to death. During the war, there was plenty of fish in the bay here. They went tub trawling in the [inaudible] because there was a factory in the [inaudible] salt and fish for the government in Canada paying them 10 cent a pound. 4,000 pounds a day was \$400. That was a huge amount of money in the [19]40s. They made a small fortune during that. But there weren't always lobsters there. There had been years before that. During the [19]20s, [19]30s, it was good fishing. Probably during the late [19]60s there was some good fishing again. But few small spurts, didn't last long. This time they've lasted since late [19]80s, 1990. Been astronomical catches.

MK: Just to talk about markets a little more. Did you use ice?

JW: Only the last five, six years we went fishing, we did.

MK: Who did you get the ice from?

JW: There is an ice plant down here.

MK: What was the...

JW: If we were dragging during the winter, we would sell it in Rockland, so we would get ice in Rockland.

MK: Who do you sell to in Rockland?

JW: O' Haras.

MK: Who did you sell to here?

JW: We were shipping the fish to Nagle most of the time.

MK: Nagle?

JW: Yes.

MK: Did you sell to Hardy at all?

JW: Yes. Hardy did the trucking for us.

MK: What was the freight charge when you started and when you ended?

JW: 5 cents when we started because he used to truck everything 5 cents. He trucked lobsters as far as [inaudible]. We used to sell a lot of our own lobsters in Boston and he trucked them for us. But he'd haul back bait. It's what it was. He's hauled back engine (formulas?) once it found. So, that was what his business was based on. But at the end of it, we had our own wharf. We were charging ourselves trucking and he still hauled fish for us some. It was probably up to 10 cents since the last, when I got done a pound.

MK: Did you ever sell to Portland Fish Exchange?

JW: Rarely.

FS: Why was that?

JW: The price was horrible most of the time. Some of the times we were fishing inshore. When we first started having to fill out log books, we were exempt fishing inside state waters for

codfish exemption. So, we could land however many we would catch. The other boats were on a 2,500-pound-a-day limit or something like that, I guess. So, we filled in the log books. We were sending fish to Portland. Five of the guys that were on the council owned groundfish boats in Portland and they landed up here where we were fishing. They said they were confidential, but obviously they weren't. [laughter] So, we stopped selling there. But then I was trying anyway I could think of to get out of filling out the log books because we couldn't, because they wouldn't renew our license. I never put a set of bearings on them since, and I still won't. We put to Northeast Port, Gulf of Maine. According to NOAA, that was all we needed to do. So, we put area one Northeast Port, Gulf of Maine. That's the only thing we put for position. While I was groundfishing, that's what I put on the log box.

MK: Council did not ask for more?

JW: No. They did, yes, but they didn't get more because NOAA said that was legal, that was okay. They didn't have to get any more specific than that.

MK: So, you preferred to sell in Rockland to O'Hara?

JW: It was good market for us when we were dragging, yes. Because with one boat or two boats and you didn't know who was going to be in what days, it was hard to coordinate a truck. If you only had 3,000 pounds of fish, he couldn't run to Boston with that. Of course, O'Hara bought fish for years. So, they had a huge fleet of boats draggers that worked over there at Rockland.

MK: When you were dragging, that was with your second boat?

JW: Yes, third. Well, 46-footer, yes.

FS: You would sell in Boston, too?

JW: Yes.

FS: Where in Boston?

JW: John Nagle.

MK: What percentage of the time would you say you landed in Stonington and elsewhere?

JW: 99 percent here landing fish. We landed fish very seldom if we went South Bristol for just a few days in summer. Some of the guys would go down there and stay for couple months. But everybody was here. One of the things I always said, I'd never take anybody that was married because I didn't want them to have to depend on me to make a living for their family. I had four guys with me, all of them married, three of them living off the island. So, they had to drive forty-five minutes after they got here. If the feed was coming up in anyway, we were coming home. I was married and we had kids. I don't remember all the years we were groundfishing. When we were fishing, fifteen hours was a short day. If we leave here at 12:00 a.m., we'd go out and haul nets. If nothing went wrong, we were back on our way by noontime. So, you got three

hours back in here and 3:00 p.m. to go unload if you didn't have a lot of boats ahead of you. So, you get back home at 4:30, you're leaving again midnight so you're not going to stay up for a long time. I don't remember my kids when they were little. I see pictures of them and I'm in the pictures, but I don't remember it. Honest to God, don't. If we were home, we weren't conscious. But that's the hard part of it. My wife made every decision when we were groundfishing. I know when we bought our house we're living in, she, she got the financing for it. She had the contract to dig the holes. Well, I wasn't here, so if she wanted it, she was going to have to get it. [laughter] She told if I wasn't going to look at it, and I said, "Yes, that's good if that's what you want. I don't care. I need to go fishing." We were that focused on that part of our lives. We had to be if we were going to make any money. I didn't feel we had the option to do anything different. My niece and her husband have kids and he goes fishing and she said, "I want him to be home to help raise the kids and enjoy them." I said, "When you're starting a business fishing, you don't have that luxury." They're going to starve to death, I'm afraid. But that's the way they want to run their lives. That's their business. But it's pretty intense and I think it has to be if you're going to make any money doing it. Lobstering, everybody says it's hard, it's not. It's just pretty relaxed fishing inside for me, compared to fishing offshore. I go out, haul my traps, eight hours I'm home, I'm pretty conscious. I could go do it every single day. It wouldn't bother me at all. It's pretty easy compared to fishing offshore.

MK: Let us see. Were there any processors in Eastern Maine?

JW: Oh, I don't know. Not that took any volume of fish. I'm trying to think. I know [inaudible 01:05:26] they kept for those who fished out in places in Portland. But I don't even know because O'Hara stopped processing groundfish a long time, probably just before I started. When we were halibut fishing, we used to go over there and they still had redfish boat fishing. Because we'd go and buy some of the flares for bait sometimes during the winter. But other than O'Hara, I don't know of anybody that processed fish around here. Years ago, there were places. Because all of them was salted fish, they did Marsh Harbor. I think there was a place in Jonesport, Vinalhaven that was splitting salt fish.

MK: Would you ever have any idea what the final price was going to be when you put it on the truck?

JW: None whatsoever. Never.

MK: How often do you feel like the price you got was fair?

JW: Half the time.

MK: Half the time?

JW: Yes, I did. If the price was 10 cents and everybody up and down the coast was getting 10 cents, then that was a fair price. Not that you were going to make a lot of money at it. Everybody would call us up and say, well, hake was a nickel on the board because they'd always get the Boston board. We rarely ever got what it said on the board. Sometimes it was over. If the price was a nickel on the board, we almost always get over that. But if it was 50 cents on the

board, we would rarely ever get that either. I had told John Nagle, I said, "If somebody could tell me they'd pay me 25 cents a pound," when we first started selling to him. I sold him every fish I could get my hands off because we wouldn't average that for the year, twelve, 15 cents, 18 cents, 20 cents. I always try to figure out the idea of what we did average. But when we did start getting twenty-five, thirty, forty, 50 cents a pound. Like I said, they had a lot of small fish cutters there who would supply local markets and restaurants and stuff in the Boston area. They were paying decent money for decent fish. A lot of the fish we sold in the early years were junk. They were soft. You couldn't do nothing with them other than salt them. But the stuff we had the last five, six years, we went, beautiful fish, every one of them. We took some kids up in University of Maine one time. They had an electronic machine that could test the moisture in a fish. They could actually tell how fresh it was. Even a piece of salt fish, they could detect the quality of it by how much moisture was in it. I said, "Wait a minute, salt fish is dried." She said, "Yes, but the tissue has still got moisture in it." It would read. We had some on the boat, she'd put it on there and it would have a reading on it. I said, "Okay." They wanted to go out with us and check the difference between the live fish we had caught and the dead fish we had caught. She needed twenty-five fish to do a sample. We had 3,500 pounds of fish that day. We didn't have twenty-five dead fish part of the check. She said, "Well, this isn't going to work." I said, "Well, everybody thinks all the fish we catch from a gillnet is dead." Very few of them were. They were all flopping when we'd come over the rail. I'm not saying they would have lived if we'd thrown them back, but they would still be alive at that point. I said, "Why don't you write that in your report. We're going to go back too."

MK: Could have plugged in one and then waited an hour.

JW: Waited an hour, yes. I've had people come in and buy fish off us that said there's something wrong with our fish, it doesn't have any smell to it. Well, fish is not supposed to have any smell to it. We're spoiled. If we go to a restaurant and they bring fish out and you can smell it when it comes out through the door, we don't eat it and we don't suggest anybody else does. It's sad because most people don't think there's anything wrong with it, and there probably isn't. It's not going to hurt you. But fish isn't supposed to smell fresh. Fresh fish doesn't smell. There's no smell to it.

MK: Not many people ever eat really fresh fish?

JW: No, they don't have the chance to.

FS: Yes, that is why people do not think they like fish, some people.

JW: That's right. Yes, it is true. We went in Iceland. We went in a little fish shop and right in the Main Street we went in Reykjavik and just had fish and chips for dinner. Oh my god, I've never had any better fish in my life. I said, "If everybody in America could eat fish like this, we'd all be eating fish same as they do." It's just beautiful. It's just fresh and flaky and white and pure. It was great.

MK: Sounds good.

JW: Yes, it was good.

MK: Anyone kept a record of how much landings you had?

JW: No, I don't. I'm trying to think. We threw out all our old books probably ten years ago. My office was getting a full and my wife asked our attorney, she said, "How long are we going to keep our records?" She says, "Ten years." She said, "Good." I took all truckloads of stuff to dump, the landings. I didn't keep my personal books that we kept on the boat. Like I said, I sold to the guy that bought the boat. I got run into him six months later and she half sunk so they got ruined.

MK: Did you sell your permit with the boat?

JW: No. Well, it wound up on the boat. I sold the boat. The permit went with it.

MK: Was that an open-access or limited-access permit?

JW: Open access.

MK: Open access.

JW: I had a full-time scallop permit, full-time groundfish permit, and an offshore lobster permit. I tried to put the lobster permit on the new boat, the other two on the old boat. They called me up and said you can't do that. It's illegal. When he went to register in his name, he said, "They told me I have no licenses." I said, "Yes, you do." I said, "Pass the phone to me." She said, "I can't talk to you, sir. We're getting this in writing." I said, "I'm right here." I could hear her talking in the background. She finally did. She said, "You can't split your permits." I didn't realize that.

FS: So, you could have not given him any?

JW: The boat was useless to him with no permits on it. So, I said, "Okay, what have I got to do?" She said, "I'll tell you what, I'll send the paperwork back to you. I'll let you redo this. You transfer all your permits to him." I said, "I'll do that." So, I basically sold him the boat with three permits on it for \$85,000. I could have given the boat to anybody. Kept my permits. My friend of mine got more than I got from my boat for his groundfish permit. The open-access scallop permit, they're going for three hundred and \$350,000 right now. Lobster permit, probably fifteen thousand. I bought another boat with a lobster permit on it two years later to get the permit.

MK: To get that federal lobster permit, do you need to have a state permit too?

JW: Yes, I'm pretty sure you do. No, I don't know. No, I don't think so. You don't because the guys that were fishing offshore from Maine and wanted to land in New Hampshire, they could not hold a Maine license because they have to buy the Maine laws. Because before they changed the law, you could sell your big lobsters in New Hampshire. So, all the us that were fishing off

here, there were six at one time, they had a New Hampshire license and their federal permit. But they couldn't hold the Maine permit because then they had to buy the Maine laws. So, that's one thing I don't want to see, especially lobstering here. When they limit access, they put a value on top of it because the government licenses don't cost you a penny. You send after them, they send them back to you. You don't pay a fee for them or anything. But where the value comes in is when they limit them. Somebody else wants one and you've got one, they're going to offer you money for it. Why else are you going to sell it? That's why it started. It's because the scallop fleet's doing fabulous. Their prices escalated. The lobster payments were going up and they got about fifteen thousand. Some of them dropped it back now to ten or \$12,000. But if that ever happens on a state level, I think the same thing is going to happen and it happened in Canada. If you're going to spend two-fifty, \$300,000 for a boat that will barely float because you want the licenses on it. I know one guy in Prince Edward Island had five sons and he said, "My only goal in my lifetime is to be able for them to all have a license to go fishing." It took him his lifetime to do it, but they all wound up with boats. The last one he bought was – he said a boat that wouldn't float. It was on the bank but it had a permit on it. So, he traded that permit for one that had. It was three-way swap. The guy in Newfoundland had a permit for Prince Edward Island for some reason and he wanted to move to Yarmouth. Well, he had the permit for a boat in Yarmouth, so they all swapped licenses. The kid wound up with one, who still didn't have a boat, but he had a permit.

MK: For Prince Edward Island?

JW: For Prince Edward Island, yes.

MK: Do they live there?

JW: Yes. They go in the spring and lobster fish up there, sixty days.

MK: So, this is a theoretical exercise here. So, assuming groundfish stocks returned, what do you think would need to happen to revive the fleet in down East Maine?

JW: I don't know. The way the laws are right now, you got to buy a boat with a permit on it, I don't see anybody going out and spending several hundred thousand dollars to go try to go groundfishing. [inaudible 01:14:45] is trying to deal with the licensed banks. If the fish are there, the fishman will figure out a way to catch them. So, they're going to go get a license, they're going to get a boat regardless of what it costs. But to be able to have a few licenses to go try to catch a fish, yes, I think that's a great idea. But I don't see the boats back working the way they used to be working here, ever. Even if the fish were here, I don't see it.

FS: Because of those...

JW: Because of the cost just to get a license. The government's not really an issue anymore.

MK: So, if the fish came back and you wanted to have people fishing here, you need to access somehow for people to get into it again?

JW: Yes.

MK: What about services or infrastructure?

JW: They'd come pretty quickly, I think. I do. There are some pretty big outfits trucking here already. So, their business regulates on what they have to work with. So, if they've got stuff to haul, they'll buy trucks and drive us. But the processing part of it, that's pretty cost big with it too, just the price of land especially on the island here. I don't know where you'd get a place under a million dollars. That'd be just for the property.

MK: Well, if you could, would you like to fish for groundfish again?

JW: No.

MK: No?

FS: Why?

JW: Just the hours. I can't say I wouldn't. Yes, if we could go inshore and work a white man's wage. I guess I shouldn't say that. But the hours, if you could work eight, ten hours a day, yes, it probably would be fine. But I'd never want to go back to doing that again. I can't imagine we did it now that we're not doing it.

MK: I cannot imagine living on four hours of sleep.

JW: Did it for days.

MK: You have to be really alert because you cannot mess up out there.

JW: No. We did it for days. The boat went one stretch sixty-two days in a row. All of me and my crew, because I had another guy help me run it for a while, had been forty-two days at one point in straight stretch. There went no breaks.

MK: No Sundays off?

JW: Nothing. No, just seven days a week.

FS: Wait, how many days?

JW: Forty-two day stretches, all of us. Greg, I think held the record, the one that helped me run the boat. I think he went forty-four. But the boat went sixty-two days in a row, which is pretty amazing for a boat. There were no breakdowns, I mean nothing. We just pumped fuel in it, change the oil, and just go. One of the guys at the yard would come down at night. We'd just leave the boat there 3:00 p.m., 4:00 p.m. This was all after hours and double time for everything for pay. We'd just leave the boat there. If he saw the boat, he knew something was wrong with it. It was not on the bulk yet. He'd get it fixed for 1:00 a.m. He'd be down there still working

when we'd come show up a lot of mornings. He would just change the oil or doing whatever we needed done. So, that's another reason we had the support of the yard and the boys there working to deal with that. They knew what it was. If you're stocking a couple thousand dollars a day and you missed two, three days, that's half your weeks' pay.

MK: Do you think it could be an important part of the community again if groundfishing came back?

JW: Sure. There's a lot of guys in town, younger guys, that have said, "We wish we could have gone and done that." They should have had the opportunity to do it. Nobody can control what is on the ocean. There are people who think they can. I don't care if you've fished on the population or not. They came and go. Scallops have come and gone three times in all of father's lifetime, not mine, only twice. I'm not old enough yet. They will come back. I know they'll come back. They always have. When they do, the other boats ring up and catch them unless they're limited it. I wish the state had never limited any access to the fisheries. But they have.

MK: Including lobsters?

JW: Including lobsters. Yes. You can't go and get a lobster license now unless you go through the Apprentice Program. That's going to take a process about eight years. I don't see anybody doing it.

MK: There is the list, right?

JW: Yes.

MK: You got to put your name on the list and then a certain amount of people have to die.

JW: Who's going to make a business plan that takes that long before you're going to be able to actually make a living. I don't see anybody doing it. We're the only open zone in this state and we voted six times for that and it's still open.

MK: What does it mean open?

JW: All the other zones in the state have a 2-to-4 or 5-to-1 ratio where not just five fishermen have to get out. If you want fish eight hundred traps, five fishermen fishing for eight hundred traps have to leave the fishery. So, four thousand traps have to come out before 1-800-LICENSE can get back in.

MK: It is 1-to-1 here?

JW: No. We're open. Anybody can come in and get a license they want in the zones?

MK: Oh, really?

JW: Yes. The state rep on the last commissioner, that was his pet peeve that we were still open

access because it negates everything else that's going on in the rest of the state. If you want to fish in zone B, which is next one east to us, you can register in zone C, in our zone. Fish 49 percent of your gear in Zone B. Whether you're fishing any anymore traps or not, they can't stop you. Lobstering especially, has always been pretty territorial. I'm not saying it's right, but that's the way it's always been. You've got to have an area of people who are going to let you go fishing if you're going to go to start with. Whether you've got to fight to get a license or not, that's got nothing to do with it.

MK: How did you feel about with groundfishing? Were there any territories with the groundfishing?

JW: No. I fished a hundred miles off shore and 150 miles up down the coast, rarely had a problem with anybody.

MK: What is the farthest you ever went?

JW: Georges.

MK: Georges?

JW: Yes, 125 miles. We went down off the Cape, which is 165 miles, but we were only 60 miles from land. In the wintertime, we were close to the Yarmouth than we were here where we were hooking.

FS: Did we ask about crew size?

JW: No.

FS: So, when you first started, how big was your crew? When you first started, you were gillnetting, right?

JW: Yes. Just one man, first one to fish.

FS: Besides you?

JW: Yes. We went out and set the gear. Started back at daylight the next morning and it was probably well after the dark when we got done that night hauling thirty nets because we had no idea what we were doing. [laughter] (Dick Visions? 01:11:29) was tied up. We were tied up on the stern of him. He had already made supper and we had some supper. My man went down and went to bed. Well, I knew the fish had to be taken care of, so I was out there and starting cutting. His crew come over the bar with the knives and oil closed and I was more than happy to see them. An hour later, the fish were out. But we kind of learned the process over time. I had been groundfishing with my father, so I knew what we basically had to do. But a lot of younger guys have never been fishing before. So, all they'd learned is how to cut fish, how to take care of them.

FS: So, what did you do to cut fish? What did that mean?

JW: Cut their throats, rip their guts. Take the guts out of them. We had to gill the cod, the pollock, haddocks, stuff like that. Hake, we'd cut the heads off. Hake has an enzyme in them in the heads that the body flesh starts to deteriorate after they die. So, you cut their heads off, it stops that process. But we used to sell them at the lobster bay too.

FS: The heads.

JW: My father loved it when I went gillnetting because we had plenty of lobster bait. [laughter] A lot of the guys went gillnetting with two guys plus the captain. I know Dick did a lot for years. But most of them took three and some of the boats took four. When we had a bigger crew in my bigger boat, I took four if I could, mostly, all the time. If we went shorthanded, we went with three. But four guys, two guys flaking the nets back, two guys picking, me hauling and picking. You could go through some gear pretty quick and take care of a fair amount of fish. A lot of days we've had 12, 15,000 pounds still be done at noontime on the clock and on the way home. [laughter] I always bought the boys a case of beer if they get the fish done before we got to dock. Because if you didn't, you had to wait. If there were boats ahead of you, you had to wait to unload. So, if you get to the bay here at 3:00 p.m. and there were ten boats ahead of you, you still weren't going to load until 7:00 p.m. So, you couldn't go home. But we ran our engines out. Coming in, if you see five, six boats ahead of you and you could pass them, you saved yourself two hours right there.

MK: What was your top speed, you think?

JW: With fish aboard?

MK: Yes.

JW: 12.5 knots probably. I could steam 15 on the way out. Boat would probably go 18 to 19 wide open. But with fish aboard, 12, 14 knots was about tops. Everybody's boat was pretty close to speed. So, Dick will tell you, we've raced from the out of falls, three and a half hours boats right in the corner, just as high as we could run them. You wouldn't even see a difference, but in three hours you would get by them finally. Whoever went by the green boys, sometimes they'd race right at the top. But it was kind of how the rest of the boats because the wake and stuff, we'd roll them upside down. So, we had a rule of thumb, whoever got by the green boy first, they were next in line. I know we passed Dick right there. He's passed me before right the crotch out. But it made a difference on when he was going to unload, especially when all the boats were selling at one place. But scalloping, a lot of boats fished with one man. I always took two. I hated to shell, not very good at it. So, once I got the scallops done, if you got a lot of scallops, you had to caught them at night or on the morning. So, another thing, it was just time. If you were fishing, you had to get your work done and you couldn't go home until it was. But if we get a lot of scallops, we have at times taken three or four guys. But that's the only thing limits the big boats. Now on the trips, it's they can only take seven guys. They catch all the scallops they want, but they got to cut them with seven guys. So, boy that's lobstering with me right now, just left this morning to go to Bedford. We're going to be hauled out for a week. So,

he is going down to make a trip on the boats he was working on before. That captain just landed the two largest scallop trips that's ever been landed in Bedford, 62,000 pounds of meat. Seven guys, I can't imagine it.

MK: Are they getting \$10 a pound down there too?

JW: 10.50.

MK: 10.50?

JW: Yes.

MK: Damn. The boat stocked a million dollars in the last month, two trips. He had 62,000. He had 59,000 the next trip. It's been amazing. Dennis, they had several trips. 42,000, when he was on there. He's been doing that for three years. He's got a five-year-old daughter. He wants to come home and spend some time with her, so he's back fishing with me, so that's good.

FS: When you were longlining, how big was your crew?

JW: She only took four guys, two baiting and two to take in the fish because we baited gear. At first, we hauled it so it was ready to set out again. When we got in, we used to just take it up, take the baskets up, put them in the freezer. So, when we left to go on the next trip and take the baskets back out, soak them on the way out and set them. So, everything was done as fast as they came on board the boat. But you're going to have pretty good crew, like I said, four guys to do it.

MK: Is there anything else you think that we should know?

JW: I don't know what you're going to do with all this. [laughter]

FS: Oh, wait, I have a question. When you went for the gillnet size of the mesh, when you went smaller, were there any local guys that gave you a hard time?

JW: Not at all, no. Matter of fact, some of them tried it and we all came to the same collusion; if we keep killing the fish when they're this big, we're not going to have any bigger ones. For the most part, we stopped fishing it. I probably fished them for a couple of years, maybe three years. But my opinion was those areas we didn't work that time of year, but we always went someplace else because there were small fish there. With a smaller mesh, we caught them, yes. But a friend of mine had 6.5-inch gear. He said we were getting 3,000 pounds a day. He came in and actually set his nets over top of mine so he could get right where I was. Didn't matter. He'd get five, 600 pounds. That's how selective the mesh size was. The hook is the same thing, they're pretty selective on what size fish they catch.

MK: What size were you using with the wire?

JW: Number twelves. Tens and twelves. We tried bigger ones, got less fish. Got bigger fish,

but we got less of them. The smaller ones, we couldn't keep the bigger fish on. I never realized that either because when we were tub trawling, we used all the same size, number sixes. It's a straight hook when we were haking. Fifteens or sixteens, were for halibut fishing. Nobody fished anything different until we got longlining and we started trying different sized hooks. I didn't realize the hooks were that selective. I don't know what you're doing with this, so I don't know what you need to know. But the economics of this business is a hard thing to teach. We got a fabulous fisheries class in high school up here. Tommy Duym teaches it. I've heard through budget cuts he's going on halftime this year, which is kind of sad. He's been here for twenty years. I've known him. He went to University of Rhode Island to a fisheries college. I don't know if it's the only one in the country, but it's the only one on East Coast, I think. But we've been lucky to have him up here. He teaches the kids the basic navigation. They know how to take course off a chart, which nobody does anymore, and they all wonder why they have to do it. Most of the kids fishing, they got a GPS in their outboards. They're working with more equipment than is used. But he teaches them all the basics, all the safety stuff, the math, the reading. Everybody thinks they're going to Fisher's class to slide by, they're not going to have to do the work. He makes them do the work. They need to. They need to know how to function. They need to be able to read. They need to understand what they're reading. I've gone to meetings and kids will look at these papers, "What the hell is this shit? I haven't got to do this." I said, "Yes, if you're going to go fishing anymore, this is how it's going to be." It's worse for us because we haven't had to deal with the regulations. But the younger guys, this is what their life's been since they've started. But they need to learn how to deal with it. We had a boy last year, his parents come see me and Tommy come see me too and tell the teacher, and said, "What are we going to do with this kid?" He's a sophomore in high school. He wants to get done and go fishing. He's got a power boat; a lot of kids do in high school. He's got a full-time license. He can fish on traps. He doesn't want to go to school. He's got to go to school. He's got to stay just the way he is. A lot of us talked to him. I think everybody convinced him. He's still in school. I hope he'll finish his senior year, but he finished his junior year. Supposed to go back next year. But it's hard. I did the same thing when I was a kid. I made \$10,000 a year every summer. Staff and pay freshman teachers in high school when I was a freshman was \$9,200. It's not a lot of money. [laughter] I didn't go nowhere if I didn't have a hundred-dollar bill in my pocket and there was no reason not to have. All you do is go to work. A hundred dollars to the old teachers then was a lot of money. I know one of the older fishermen told me the story is the English teacher getting off his feet up on the desk because he was asleep. He'd been clamming that morning and reaches in his wallet, flicks \$200 bills at him. Well, it doesn't go very good in class but what are you going to do? It's a common problem. Most the kids coming out of school, especially out of Tommy's class, they're extremely smart and they're some of the biggest fishermen in town, even though they're still in their twenties. They work hard. They compete. They know what they're doing. They get the best of equipment. When I was a kid, you bought an old boat most of the time, worked...

[end of transcript]