Narrator: Al Cottone

Interviewer: Molly Graham

Location: Gloucester, Massachusetts

Project Name: Strengthening Community Resilience in America's Oldest Seaport

Project Description: In partnership with the Northeast Fisheries Science Center, these oral history recordings capture the invaluable life experiences of long-lived members of Gloucester's working waterfront, one of the oldest fishing communities in the United States.

Principal Investigator: Caleb Gilbert and Peter Burns

Affiliation: NOAA Fisheries Greater Atlantic Regional Fisheries Office; Cape Ann Partnership for Science, Technology, and the Natural Environment

Transcript Team: Molly Graham

Date of Interview: August 2, 2019

Abstract: This oral history interview with Albert Cottone, conducted by Molly Graham on August 2, 2019, in Gloucester, Massachusetts, captures the life and experiences of a Gloucester fisherman deeply embedded in the local and familial fishing traditions. Born in 1965 in Gloucester to a Sicilian immigrant family, Cottone recounts his father's migration story from post-World War II Sicily through Australia to the United States, where he continued his fishing heritage. The interview explores the challenges and transformations within the fishing industry, including economic hardships, regulatory impacts, and community dynamics among local fishermen. Cottone also discusses his role as the executive director of the Gloucester Fisheries Commission, highlighting his efforts to advocate for and sustain the fishing community. Through personal anecdotes and reflections, the interview provides a comprehensive view of the historical and contemporary struggles of fishermen in Gloucester and the enduring connection to their cultural roots in Sicily.

Molly Graham: This begins an oral history interview with Albert Cottone. The interview is being conducted on August 2, 2019, in Gloucester, Massachusetts. The interviewer is Molly Graham. Well, let's start at the beginning. If you could just say when and where you were born.

Albert Cottone: I was born in Gloucester, December 12, 1965.

MG: Tell me a little bit about your family history, starting on your father's side.

AC: My father was born and raised in Sicily, and he fished his whole life. He started fishing at nine because of extreme poverty. In his mid-twenties, the outlook was really grim there, so he went on a work project. They were lacking workers in Australia, so they took immigrant workers, who were struggling, from all over Europe, and he was in that program. He spent three or four years in Australia working in a cement factory. One of his best friends in Italy, they had been writing back and forth while he was in Australia, moved to the United States, and told him you should come and visit. So he came to visit in, I think it was September of '64, and then he was married in January of '65, and I was born in December of '65. So his life pretty much got turned upside down within a fourteen-month period.

MG: What do you know about his life growing up in Italy? What contributed to the hard times?

AC: Well, it was post World War II. He was nine or ten during the war, and the infrastructure was gone. It was extreme poverty. In Sicily, there wasn't much commerce community. You lived off the land, and a lot of it was destroyed, and fishing was tough back then. His grandfather fished, and his father fished, and there were struggles. So a lot of people left at that time.

MG: Tell me a little bit about the fishing that they did in Italy.

AC: They did a lot of – it was either seining for anchovies and herring, or they did dragging like we do here for lots of other different species. Obviously, in the Mediterranean, the species are a lot different. But it was a hard life there, just as it is here. There the only benefit was – a lot of guys didn't last here because of the cold. When they came, they fished one winter and then they ran back. But, most of them stayed because they knew they were running back to nothing. So the ones who went back just couldn't take the cold.

MG: Did your father's father serve in World War II?

AC: Yeah. He did. I really don't know much about it, but I just know he served. Like most of the Italian Army, he wasn't sympathetic to the Italian cause. There was a lot of desertion. I know he was part of the gang that welcomed the Allied invasion, actually fought alongside them afterward. They all jumped to the rebellion side. As the Allies moved up, he was one of the – the Allies landed from North Africa. They landed into my father's town. He's the southernmost point in Sicily. So he remembers bombing the hillside, the Allied bombs hitting the hillside, and everyone would hide in the caves. Then once the Allies came, they threw parades and stuff. He's told me a few stories, but a lot of this stuff for them is too painful to – he doesn't talk much

about it, especially now. He's up there in age. He doesn't talk at all about it. But a few years back, when he used to go fishing, he would tell me a few stories here and there.

MG: About his childhood?

AC: About his childhood and about growing up under fascism and all that stuff.

MG: Did you ever have a chance to meet your paternal grandparents?

AC: Yeah. They were really young when they died. I think I was nine the last time I saw them. So there aren't many memories.

MG: Did they stay in Sicily?

AC: Yeah. They moved here for about a year. That's when I was nine. Then they didn't like it, and they moved back. That's the last time I ever saw them.

MG: It sounds like you're pretty connected to that part of Sicily. You mentioned you're going back there for a vacation.

AC: Yeah. I haven't been there in thirty-two years.

MG: Wow. Tell me about the village that you're going to and where your family is from.

AC: My father is from Sciacca. That's really one of the four or five biggest fishing villages in Sicily. It's a town about the size of Gloucester, and actually, they're doing really well now. My father's brother that stayed there, he was a fisherman, too. He made it through the tough times, and he did well. So it's going to be interesting to see how different and similar it is from Gloucester because a lot of people who have never been to Gloucester and they come from, there, they can't believe how similar the towns are.

MG: What are some of those similarities?

AC: Especially the connection to the fishing heritage. We have a really protected harbor in here, and Sciacca has a really big harbor, and just the connection to the water, the beaches. It's very similar.

MG: What do you know about your father's experience in Australia?

AC: Not a lot. I know when he first got there – when I was a kid, he used to spit out German words once in a while because he lived with a German family; they sponsored him at first. He actually grew to be – he was in charge of his group of immigrants in the cement [factory]. He would work in a cement factory. When he booked his tickets to come here, his boss said, "You're not coming back." He goes, "No, no, I'll be back in a month." He had originally planned to go a month, but he never went back.

MG: How did he get from Australia to here?

AC: He took a ship to San Francisco, and then he flew here.

MG: Did he ever tell you what his first impressions of the United States were?

AC: No. I mean, everything happened fast for him. Back then, the Italian community, there were a lot of not so much arranged marriages but arranged meetings to see where it would go. When my father first came, his friend lived in Everett, and he had a cousin who lived in Gloucester, and he stayed with them. His cousin worked with my mother at a fabrication place. It was called Mighty Mac. They used to make clothes and jackets and stuff like that. His cousin said, "I got the girl for you." And they met. They went out a few times. Because he was an immigrant, things had to move fast, and six months later they were married.

MG: Tell me for the record what your father's name is.

AC: Frank.

MG: Tell me a little about your mother's history and how she came to Gloucester.

AC: She actually came on a World War II orphan plane. Her mother died when she was six. She had two older siblings, and her father couldn't afford to keep all three of them. Her grandparents lived here. So when she was six – after the war, obviously there were a lot of orphans, but you had to be adopted in order to get out here. You to be adopted by an American family to get on the plane. So her grandparents adopted her, and then she came here when she was six.

MG: How did her mother die?

AC: Ovarian cancer. That was 1948, '49, '50, or something like that. Especially in Sicily, there wasn't much treatment for anything like that.

MG: Right. Where did her family come from? Was she also from Italy?

AC: She was in Italy. She was in Sicily, also. It's a different town called Trappeto. It's about twenty minutes from Palermo, the capital. It's a very small town, like Gloucester's Rockport. You know what I mean? It was basically like that. It's little. There are only a couple thousand people.

MG: How did her grandparents come here, and what were their reasons for emigrating?

AC: Her grandfather came off and on to work because there was no work there. So I think he came here – I don't know the exact story. He came here two or three times. I know he worked – I think he worked on a railroad at one point, back in the early 1900s. Then he decided to stay, and he called for his wife to come over with his son, his youngest son, who was my uncle. He actually just passed away a few months ago.

MG: I'm sorry.

AC: He ended up [inaudible] – my mother lived with them until she got married. I never knew her grandparents because they passed before I was born. But her uncle, she lived with them, and they ended up being – I never had grandparents here. They were like my grandparents growing up.

MG: Whatever happened to your mother's father?

AC: He's an interesting story. He bounced around. From Italy, he moved to Buffalo, New York, and became a farmer there for a few years and remarried. Then when she passed away, he came and lived with us for a year when I was like twelve. He didn't really like it too much here, so he went back to Italy and remarried. Then he passed away about ten years ago.

MG: Is your mother still alive?

AC: Yeah. Both my parents are still alive.

MG: Did your father start fishing right away when he came to Gloucester?

AC: Yeah. Yeah, he went fishing – back then there was a big offshore fleet. They would fish for weeks off of Canada and stuff like that. After my sister was born – I'm the firstborn. After my sister was born, he would come back from trips, and she wouldn't even recognize him, and he didn't like that. So he started fishing with inshore boats with the intention of buying his own boat. It only took him a year or so, and then he bought his own boat. He bought his own boat in 1970, and he was a boat owner ever since.

MG: What was the name of the boat?

AC: His first boat was the *Peter and Josephine*, named after – because he bought it together with my mother's brother who lived here for a few years around that time. That was the only child at the time, Peter. Then my sister, who was younger than me, Josephine. So that was the name of the boat.

MG: Tell me a little bit about how his career unfolded.

AC: He was very aggressive. A lot of the established people, even established Italians in town, resented the newcomers coming in, but he pushed his way in and he was very successful. He wasn't young. I mean, he was in his thirties when he bought his boat, but he was very successful early. He learned quick, and he earned a lot of respect.

MG: Tell me a little bit more about that. What made him successful?

AC: Just learning. He was very innovative when it came to gear and stuff like that. He was good at what he did. I mean, he had fished his whole life, so it's not like he was doing something different. It was just a different style of fishing, and he was good at it.

MG: When you say innovative with gear, what do you mean?

AC: He would modify his nets a certain way, the doors a certain way to work better. All that stuff was really before my time because then when I started fishing, gear was changing, and he liked the old ways, and we'd butt heads a lot. But after a few years, he realized that as gear changes, you have to change with it. The first couple of years I was fishing, we'd butt heads a lot, but then after that, it smoothed out. He was giving in more to the modern ways, but back in the early '70s and mid-'70s, the gear wasn't as finetuned as it is now, and you had to really be on top of it to get it to work right, and he was really on top of it.

MG: I keep hearing about the 1950s to the 1980s being sort of this golden age of fishing here in Gloucester. Was he part of that?

AC: Yeah, he was right in the middle of it. He was a dayboat fisherman. So he would go out at two – same thing I do – go out at two in the morning and be home at three, four or five in the afternoon. Back in those days, you had a full crew. His boat, at one point, he had five men, whereas I fish by myself. But back then you fished every day because there were no quotas or limits or anything like that. So in the summertime, it was a six and a half days a week. You fished every day. Friday you took it off, but you worked on the boat half the day. That was your whole summer. It was very labor-intensive. You had to be dedicated to it, but that was their life. If my father could turn back the clock now, he would go fishing every day if he could, but physically it's not possible for him.

MG: What was he like as a dad to you?

AC: It's like a tale of two dads. Before I started fishing, he was the guy I saw at night. Then I started fishing every day [during] summers when I was fourteen, and I saw a different side of him. So we got really close. By the time I was fifteen, he was my best friend, all the way until he retired fifteen years ago.

MG: What was he like on the boat?

AC: He was tough but fair. Most of the guys will scream at you when you do something wrong, but when you did something right, they wouldn't [say anything], and he would always tell me when I did something [right]. You know what I mean? So it was 50/50. He would always praise me when I did something right, whereas I talked to other kids [about] their fathers: "My father never gives me any credit." My father wasn't like that.

MG: Tell me a little bit about your mother's life here, and the job she was doing before you were born.

AC: Yeah. She went through high school. She got to high school, but her grandfather died when she was a sophomore in high school, I think. So she ended up quitting school and then going to work at Mighty Mac. Then it was just a couple of years later that she met my dad. She stopped working. I was born eleven months later, so she stayed home. Actually, when my youngest sister got old enough, she actually opened up a clothing store. She worked at a clothing

store first, and then decided, "I can do it better," and she opened up her own clothing store. She ran that for a few years, at least five or six years. When my kids were young, she had the store. Then, from there she opened up a gift shop right in the heart of downtown at the Gloucester House. She had that for about ten years until she just got bored of that and that was it. She got a little older too, it was a lot of work, but she's one of the smartest people I know. All the immigrants would go to her when they came here if they got letters from the government, or they needed to write letters, or they needed something translated. I always remember coming home as a kid, and there'd be someone sitting at my kitchen table, and my mother would be [helping] because she could read and write English well and she could speak Sicilian fluently, and she would be the interpreter for most people.

MG: How did she learn English?

AC: She went to school. She made it to high school.

MG: You have to be pretty resilient when your husband is away six and a half days a week.

AC: Yeah. Yeah, but that's what everybody did. That was normal. That's just the way it was.

MG: What year was your sister born?

AC: That's a good question.

MG: How much younger is she?

AC: Both my [siblings] – three and a half and seven years apart. I think one was '69 and one was '72.

MG: Did they get into fishing at all?

AC: No. No. They've never even set foot aboard the boat; I don't think so.

MG: What made you interested in fishing?

AC: I still remember the first day I ever fished. I was ten. My father took me out for the day, and then I would cry every day that I wanted to go, I wanted to go. He said, "No, no." Then the next year when I was eleven, I went maybe four or five times. Then when I was twelve, maybe fifteen times during the summer. Then by the time I was thirteen, it was almost every [day]. Then he needed [me]. He was like, "All right, I can use this kid now. He's old enough." By the time I was thirteen, I was bigger than him. My father was a small man. From then on, as soon as I got done with school, the last day of school, the next day I went fishing, and I fished all summer, six and a half days a week. I missed a lot of fun with my friends, but I learned everything the hard way.

MG: How did your role or jobs on the boat change over those first few years?

AC: When I was in high school, I really didn't have any attention in the wheelhouse, learning stuff like that, and he didn't push me. He did it the right way. He made me learn the deck first, learn what it was like to recognize a fish, to pack the fish, to bring in quality fish. If [there were] mishaps on deck, how to troubleshoot through them and all that. But once I graduated and I started going full time, he put me right behind the wheel right away and said, "All right, this is your future here." By the time I was nineteen, I was a skipper.

MG: Tell me more about how you negotiated growing up and being on the boat so much.

AC: When I was younger it was easier, I guess, because when you're younger – your idea of fun is different when you get older. But once I was twenty, twenty-one, there was about a three or four year period where I would go all weekend without sleeping. My friends still say, "I don't know how you did it." They would drive to drop me off in my driveway. They knew which light [would be on when] my father would be waiting for me. They said, "Oh, light's on. You're in trouble," because I'd be late. I'd go in the house, change, and then we'd go fishing, and then do that again Saturday. Then Sunday, I'd get home, eat dinner, and go to bed. It was tough, but I wasn't the only one doing it. Most kids my age did the same thing because you wanted the best of both worlds.

MG: Have you maintained that schedule ever since?

AC: No. We fish a lot less now because of the quotas. A lot of us fish by ourselves now, the size boat that we have. I mean, if you go fishing two or three days a week, that's a lot. It's nothing like the – we don't put even a quarter of the time in that we did back when I was a kid.

MG: We'll jump around a little bit, but since we're on the subject, talk a little bit about that, when things started to change when it went to days-at-sea.

AC: When it went to days-at-sea in the mid-'90s – I mean, you could fish any day you wanted. Then when it went to days-at-sea in the mid-'90s, '96 I think. When we first went to days-at-sea, we had enough days to fish normally. Then when they started to cut them, back in '96, then you had to start – all right, we have to be a little bit more strategic, and that's when me my father started butting heads again because he wanted to go fishing every day. He was starting to age out of it, too, at that point. If we go fishing every day all summer, by Thanksgiving, we're going to be out of days. I tried to get him to realize that. I always played ball. I played baseball in high school, and I played softball. I would always play in the night leagues, and there was a big Sunday morning league. Everyone said, "You got to play [Sunday]." "I can't play Sunday morning. I go fishing every Sunday." Then the days-at-sea cut, I said, "All right, I'll just take Sundays off." I didn't start playing in that league until I was like thirty or thirty-one, because that's when the first big cut came. I'm like, "All right, I'll just take Sundays off and play ball."

MG: The Magnuson-Stevens Act was before days-at-sea.

AC: Magnuson Stevens was in '76. But it's been reauthorized two or three times since then.

MG: How did that change things?

AC: Well, back then, it didn't so much change it. What changed it back then was a lawsuit from the Conservation Law Foundation, saying that the government wasn't doing enough to protect a few of the stocks that were supposedly in danger at the time. So that's where the days-at-sea system came from. It was called Amendment Five. I think Amendment Five was 1994. By the time they started cutting days, it was '96, and that's when everyone started scrambling. "All right, what are we going to do here?" Then there was a buyout, the federal government buyout in '97, and that's when a big chunk of the fleet just left because they didn't see the amount of days that they had and the amount of days they used to work, and they didn't see it happening. So after that, then we had a period where we started seeing fish coming back in droves. But under that management regime, if one stock was doing bad, they had to cut days. So you would see cod and all the flounders, and you would say, "Wow, we're doing great." "Oh, we have to cut days because pollack is in trouble. We have to cut days because hake is in trouble," species that weren't really that marketable back then, where all the high priced stuff was all plentiful, but they would just keep cutting days. So it was a system where yeah, the effort has been curtailed to the point where we're making headway, but there's always one stock in trouble. The way that system was ran where always one stock was in trouble [meant] we were in trouble.

MG: What were those conversations like? Is when you started advocating for fishermen and hoping to make changes?

AC: Yeah, I came into it a little bit later. In '97, it was just me and my father. We had a bigger boat at the time. It was a seventy-foot boat. I don't have any brothers. None of my cousins are here or first relatives. They're all in Italy. He was in his sixties, and I said, "I can't run this boat by myself." So we actually sold that boat in the buyout, and then I bought a smaller boat in '97, and that's when I started doing real small boat fishing. A couple of years after that, when they started cutting more days, one fisherman who you'll be interviewing – he's on the interview list – he started going to meetings, and he said, "You know what I meeting I was at?" I said, "Yeah." He goes, "Well, there was a few guys." I'm like, "Yeah, well, you know." He said, "Well, everybody gets up and talks. So if you don't go, somebody's speaking for you. That's when I realized, "He's right." Then I started going to meetings after that, and I got educated in fisheries politics, and that's where I am today.

MG: Can you say a little bit more about what that's been like for you, and what you feel you've accomplished?

AC: Well, initially, the more I learned, the more frustrating it became because – just the way things move slowly in government and the way the science is run. The science was the most frustrating part about it. Because it doesn't matter what you see out there. If the government doesn't see it the same way when they do their research, then it's best available science. That's their mantra, "best available science." So it's very frustrating.

MG: In a lot of the things I read in the last couple of weeks, there seems to be a disconnect between the science discoveries and what fishermen are seeing on a day to day basis. Where do you think that disconnect comes from?

AC: What frustrates us more than anything, especially the last few years, is we've been trying to incorporate new data points into stock assessment, industry-supported data. I've had the size boat I have now since '97. I make the same tows. I use essentially the same size gear. I mean, there have been no really big gear modifications in the last thirty years. I mean, everyone's using the same stuff. But every day I go out, I do better and better and better. Yet, you keep cutting the stocks, and you keep saying stocks are in more and more trouble. So that's where the disconnect is. I know how their science is conducted, and I know how they're coming to these numbers, but the guys who don't know it, say, "How can I go out and catch a thousand pounds of sole, and then the next year you cut sole by fifty percent." They just can't understand how they can get away with it, but that's just the way the laws are written. So we try to get the science center to incorporate these new points of data where the fish being landed should have some input in the abundance out there. But we're not at that point yet. We're getting a lot of resistance.

MG: Currently?

AC: Currently, yeah. A new person just took over as head of the science center about a year, year and a half ago, and he seems like he may want to change things, but like I said, change is really slow. There are a lot of guys who [have the] same size boat as me, they're late fifties, early sixties, and they can't wait three or four years. You know what I mean? They need to change now, but it just takes too long.

MG: Yeah. I saw an article where you caught your yearly quota of cod in five hours.

AC: Well, I could. My allocation this year was two thousand eight hundred pounds of cod. Two thousand eight hundred pounds of cod is a mistake. I could go out, make a mistake, and catch that. So now we've gotten really good at avoiding cod. So, [for example], I know I can catch more grey sole in this area, but there might be a chance of interacting with cod. So instead of going over here and catching seven, eight hundred pounds of grey sole, I'll go over here, be safe and catch three hundred pounds of grey sole. So that's the way we fish now. We actually sacrifice efficiency for the security of not catching cod. That's the way we fish right now. You have no choice because nobody has any cod allocation.

MG: Was this what sectors was supposed to address?

AC: Sectors were supposed to, according to the woman who was the head of NOAA [National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration] at the time, she was on the board at EDF [Environmental Defense Fund] – sectors were an Environmental Defense Fund creation that you were supposed to work less and make more money because we're going to give you a set amount of fish. You could fish at your leisure. A lot less fish was going to be landed. So when you landed your fish, you were going to get top dollar for it. Actually, the whole thing is flipped upside down now, because the markets have been destroyed. We can't even get rid of our fish because of the imports. The fish buyers are so used to the imports; they don't want our fish. You have to work twice as hard leasing other people's fishing, so your bottom line gets crushed just to make half the money you made before. That's what the problem is with the system right now. The only thing that can fix the system, the way it is now – it doesn't matter what system

you're in, the only thing that can fix the fishery is to get more fish into it, is to get truthful stock assessments, and get more quota to the boats that need it, because there aren't many left. It wouldn't take much. If you get a fifty percent increase in three or four key stocks, which they took three shots of ninety percent away, five or six years ago – just a fifty percent increase, seventy-five percent increase in a few key stocks, not only do you get more allocation, but then the people who lease you fish get more allocation, so the lease price becomes cheaper. One instance is grey sole. We actually were successful in getting a little bit more data into the grey sole assessment, and they doubled it. The price of leasing grey sole went from two dollars to sixty cents just by doubling it. So if you do that with all the other species, especially species like cod and dab and yellowtail flounder, which we work on a lot, you can get an industry where people will actually go out and make a half-decent living and not have all the stress that they're under.

MG: Right. That was something that was really clear to me in the research. The more changes in regulations, the harder your job becomes, but you're not making any more money.

AC: Not making any money. You're making a lot less money because you're paying for the right to fish now by leasing fish in. A lot of times, with the market's being the way they are, you can lease fish in and lose money. One day last year, I made a tow. Went out, made a three-hour tow, and I landed fifteen-hundred pounds of grey sole, and I lost money because they paid me eighty cents for my grey sole, which two years earlier was three dollars a pound, and the lease price was seventy-five cents. I was already out of grey sole, so I had to lease it in. By the time you pay the lease price, and then you pay your landing fees and everything like that, you went fishing for free.

MG: Who determines the pricing? How does that work?

AC: The pricing of?

MG: How you are paid.

AC: Oh, how we get paid? There are two auctions in town. So everyone lands their fish at the auction. Fish buyers come in, and they bid on each individual species. But the problem is – this is what they say – there's not a constant flow of fish. So they'll come in, and they'll see an extra thousand pounds of grey sole, which back ten years ago, everyone brought a thousand pounds each, and we all were getting big money. Now, if two boats bring in a thousand pounds – "Well, that's too much. We don't even want it. I'll give you 80 cents for it." Because they can get it from overseas for a lot cheaper.

MG: When did that trend appear where you saw more foreign imports?

AC: That happened after the first big round of cuts. Sectors started in 2010. I had a great allocation. All the boats my size, we pretty much have the same allocation around Gloucester because we all fished together. 2012 was when they first said, "Well, we got problems here," and they did little cuts. In 2013 they did major cuts. They cut cod by seventy-five percent. Grey sole was cut big. Dabs were cut big. Then the year after that was when we figured, "All

right, we can't bring in much fish, but we're going to be getting more money." Instead of the price going up, it kept going down. The buyers were buying a fish anymore because there was no constant flow of fish. They were just buying more and more imports. Now we're up to like ninety-five percent of the fish in this country is imported. We have millions of pounds of fish right here in our back door that if they opened it up tomorrow – not opened it up, but doubled all the quotas tomorrow and we could bring in all that fish, who would buy it? I mean, are they going to stop buying the cheap imports? So it's almost like you have to – not so much convincing the buyers to buy our fish. We have to convince the consumer to buy domestic, especially if you live in the area. Whatever area of the country you live in that has a fishery, buy locally-caught fish because you're not going to get any fresher. You might pay a dollar extra, but what are you sacrificing when you buy the imported fish that's been frozen and defrosted three times over and treated four or five times just to get here. That's the battle we're waging now is trying to get the consumer aware of what they're eating and what they could be eating for a little bit more money

MG: Are the recent tariffs impacting any of this and how that works?

AC: The tariffs have affected the monk fishery a lot. There are a few boats that go monk fishing off of New Bedford. They were told that it costs too much money to get the fish out of there. So they told them don't even go anymore because of the tariffs. But directly, besides the lobster industry, the ground fishery hasn't really been affected that much because we're almost like bit players in our own world. That's what we become.

MG: How have fishermen adapted to all these changes?

AC: Not well, especially the boats my size work; everybody's struggling because we don't have enough initial allocation, and to lease fishing, it's big money. Whereas, if you can get the bigger boats and go offshore, there are a few species like haddock and redfish that are doing really well, and they have isolated spots where they catch just haddock and redfish, so they can bring in those two species in large numbers and not have to pay lease price. Even if they get not a favorable price at the dock, they're bringing the volume, and they're turning around trips quick because there's a lot of haddock and redfish around. So they might go out, make a three-day trip, and get a hundred thousand. Then, two days later, go out, make a three-day trip, and get a hundred thousand. If they get thirty, forty cents, it's still the consistency of the product, and you're landing the volume. They're doing all right. But the small guys who bring in the high-quality fish were not getting paid for our fish, and it's become a struggle.

MG: Are people getting second jobs, leaving the industry?

AC: Yeah, both. I have a second job. I work with the city part-time as the fisheries commissioner. I know a couple of guys who work on tug boats. They go away for two weeks, work on tugboats, and come back. The two weeks they're home they fish. Some guys are cutting lawns, pounding nails, whatever they can do because just relying on fishing as a dayboat, fishermen, ground fishermen, you're not going to make it.

MG: You might've said this, but what size boat do you have?

AC: I have a forty-foot boat.

MG: It's just you on there?

AC: It's just me, yeah.

MG: Can you walk me through a week in your life when you're out at sea?

AC: A week in my life. If the fishing's good and the weather's good, I might fish three days in that week. But depending on how much fish I catch, then the next week, I might get gun-shy, and fish only one day because I caught too much fish. Then I'll have to lease fish. That one time I got burned where I lost money, I took a week off because I was scared to death to leave the dock because I thought I was going to lose money again. So every week is different. You can't make a business plan in our situation.

MG: It sounds really stressful.

AC: It's very stressful, but it's reality right now, and you just try to work through it. The reason why I'm still doing it and all my colleagues are still doing it is because when we go out there, what we see. I believe in the resource. I love what I do, and I believe in it. When I go out, I catch fish. So it's still hard for me to make the connection that I'm landing fish and I'm not making money, but it's happening, and it's happening more and more frequently. It's very frustrating.

MG: Yeah. In what I've read, it seems like the warming of the seas is really just one of many threats to the fishing industry. I didn't know where climate change stood in your hierarchy of obstacles.

AC: For me, the obstacle has already been solved because the seas, especially the Gulf of Maine, warmed two or three years ago. It's not that the fish have left the area. The fish are changing their habits. We see them at different times of the year. We see them at different depths, but they're still there. We found them in different spots, but they're still there. So global warming for us and the warming of the seas hasn't had a detrimental effect on the fish stocks. It just changed fish behavior. That's all it has. I mean, we're fishermen. We've found the only problem is with the cod quota so low that we have pretty much pinpointed where the cod is and how to avoid them. If the waters warm anymore, they may change their patterns again. That's when you might have a mistake here and there, where I can go out and catch two thousand pounds of cod in a toe, and then then I'd be in trouble.

MG: Can you say more specifically how you would get in trouble? Do you get fined?

AC: No. You have to land it. I haven't had more than a seven, eight hundred pound tow in the last four or five years because we've gotten really good at it. But you have to land it. Then the closer you get to the end of your initial allocation, then you have to go buy it. So the cod at the dock is not a lot of money. You're getting paid a $1.80 to $2.20. But to lease it, it's $2.50. So you're not going to make money on cod if you have to lease it. So the name of the game is to try

to make your initial allocation last a year because once you get into leasing, it's a losing proposition.

MG: Yeah. Something I read was that ten years ago, fishermen were told to catch fewer cod.

AC: Well, not just less cod. Less of everything. You're going to catch less fish and make more money.

MG: Did that happen?

AC: No. Like I said, it got turned upside down.

MG: Then, you had to buy permits.

AC: Well, if you want to buy a permit, initially, they were really expensive because depending on how much allocation they had. I mean, you could have bought a permit for $300,000, but then once those first initial round of cuts in allocation, three years later, that same permit that was $300,000 was $125,000. So a permit equivalent to mine sold the second year of sectors for $310,000. Another guy sold his two years later, pretty much equivalent to mine for $125,000. So that was how much the permits were devalued with the cuts.

MG: And observers on the boat.

AC: The observer coverage this year is thirty or thirty-one percent. So thirty-one percent of my trips will be monitored this fishing year. We're actually going through – the government is doing the monitoring amendment, where they're going to push for more of a permanent percentage of monitoring. Some people are actually pushing for a hundred percent.

MG: How come?

AC: Because they want to count every single fish that comes. They believe that some in the industry are discarding fish illegally because they don't have the allocation. But if they believe that, then how can you still believe that your stocks are in such bad shape and nobody's catching any fish? So we bring these points up all the time, but like I said, a lot of these people don't want to hear anything. So a lot of people pushing for a hundred percent observer coverage. The northeast fishery just got $10.8 million dollars from Congress to cover monitoring. Well, at thirty percent that'll last two or three years. At a hundred percent, it'll last eleven months. So once that money dries up, if Congress doesn't appropriate more money, then everyone's out of business at once because it's going to cost you five hundred dollars a day just to go fishing to cover the observer cost. So it's not going to be worth it.

MG: Yeah. I can't imagine you're making five hundred dollars a day.

AC: No. I mean you're going to be going fishing, paying the observer, and then hopefully having enough left over to – everyone will be out of business all at once.

MG: So, do you think things are getting worse?

AC: Depending on this monitoring amendment? Yes. It's happening. They're fast-tracking it. So if they picked a hundred percent and we're not going to get guaranteed – I mean, I'll take an observer every day if they pay for it. I have no problem with it. But if I have to pay for it eventually somewhere down the line, then I know that's the last day I'll go fishing.

MG: You mentioned there was a little bit of a crisis in 2013. I think I read that some disaster aid was allocated for fishermen then.

AC: Yes. Right.

MG: How did that work out?

AC: I mean, it worked. The state got a bunch of money. Everyone got the same amount of money. I think it was per permit. I'm not even sure how it went. But the cuts were so drastic. I mean, these businesses have a lot of overhead – dockage fuel, then the leasing of fish. A lot of guys went through that money [with] just regular maintenance. You can haul your boat up, and in a week get a $20,000-dollar bill from the dry dock, just doing regular maintenance. Giving these guys one check six years ago didn't help anybody. It would be better if they used that money to improve the science. That's just the way it went down.

MG: What's the mood on the dock like? Has it changed since regulations have sunk in?

AC: Oh, the mood of the dark is bad, especially the guys in their early sixties were hoping – they don't even think they're going to make it took to retirement the way it's going now because the price of fish keeps getting cheaper and cheaper and cheaper. The fishing year starts May 1st, and everyone's already out of grey sole. The inshore boats here, in the summertime we fish for grey sole, and the grey sole season hasn't even started yet. It starts for us September and October. Now they're leasing fish. They're getting a $1.25 at the dock, and they're leasing it for seventy, eighty cents. So you're working at forty, fifty cents a pound. It's like 1970's prices.

MG: Right. Is there competition or tension between the fishermen? Or do you feel like you're all –?

AC: No, especially in this town. Everyone's onboard, trying to help each other out. There aren't many of us left. There are six big boats; they all talk to each other. The small boats might be a dozen of us. Most of us coordinate because most of us fish by ourselves, especially on the weekend. No one really goes fishing on the weekend anymore because you might as well enjoy your weekend and not go out and conceivably lose money. So, I'll call a few guys. I go, "You going fishing?" "No." If nobody goes fishing, then you don't go because you can't be out there by yourself. There aren't any boats left.

MG: Have you ever in the last few decades left fishing and come back?

AC: No. It's the only job I've ever had.

MG: Tell me about this other work you're doing part-time for the city.

AC: I'm the executive director of the Gloucester Fisheries Commission. It's a commission of fishermen and shoreside people. We deal with all fishing-related issues that concern the city. We have a meeting once a month, but I'm doing stuff all the time. I'm involved in this [oral history] project. I just did a research project to try to open the whiting season earlier. There's a lot going on behind the scenes that don't really make it to the streets. But I enjoy it. I enjoy being in the middle of it. Not only just the work but knowing what's going on. You know what I mean? I kept my head in the sand long enough. If something's happening to me, I want to be there and try and stop it, or at least know why it's happening.

MG: I've read that fishermen feel there wasn't a lot of transparency between how the science was being done and then how it was being conveyed –

AC: There was zero. Zero. In 2015, one scientist took it upon himself to redo the numbers and did a secret stock assessment. Zero transparency. Didn't contact anyone. He informed the service that cod was in worse shape than it's ever been. It's at three percent of the spawning stock biomass. We need to do something. The fishery service bought it. It's just one man re-crunching the numbers, and they actually closed the whole inshore Gulf of Maine right before Thanksgiving. But they gave us two weeks. At that point, the prices were still half-decent for flounders, grey sole and stuff like that. So we would save money and buy cod, save money and buy cod to get ready for the winter. Well, they had this big meeting, and they said we're going to close the Gulf of Maine in two weeks. I had amassed five thousand pounds of cod through my initial allocation and leasing. Some guys had ten thousand. So what do they do? They force us all to go and catch our cod. I caught my car to two tows. One tow was an hour and a half. The next tow was an hour and a half. I got 2500 one day, and eighteen, nineteen hundred the other day. I said, "I can't do this anymore." By the time I landed my second time, I got ninety cents for codfish, which was what I paid for it because the government told everyone to go catch cod. So over, I don't know, 200,000 pounds of cod were landed in a two-week period, yet there's no cod. We just knew where they were. We were avoiding them, waiting for the winter months where you might get a better price. But there's no accountability for that. People lost tens of thousands of dollars on leased fish. The government shut it, and they said, "Well, that's your problem. You eat it." So that's what we're dealing with. Total lack of accountabilities is incredible. Absolutely incredible.

MG: Are you able to peek behind the curtain a little bit in your role in the city's Fisheries Commission?

AC: No, I'm not privy to any information there. No. I just go to meetings like everybody else. I'm involved in the Northeast Seafood Coalition also. We have a few people there working hard. They're behind the scenes, and they fill me in, but they're not deep enough behind the scenes to really influence something like that. You know what I mean?

MG: How has your personal and family life changed since the beginning of fishing where you were so excited, and it's what you wanted to do more than anything to now where it sounds like such a big struggle?

AC: It is, but the days that you're actually out there – if I get up and I go fishing, it's like I'm at peace. The days you stay home, that's where you feel the stress. When you're actually fishing, you are in your element. It's four or five guys out; you're joking around on the radio, this and that. "Hey, what did you catch?" But then when you're home and the day just takes forever to go by, that's when you feel it.

MG: So you do better when you're out at sea?

AC: I do much better when I'm out at sea. Ask anybody around me. [laughter]

MG: How has it been for your wife and your family, with you fishing all these years?

AC: Well, the stress now has been more than it's ever been. My wife has to work full time to make ends meet. They're not dumb. They read the papers. They know what's going on. They know that we could be one bad stock assessment away from oblivion. So it's definitely a lot more stressful now than it's ever been. But we had hard times. When my kids were born, it was right around the time that days-at-sea started and all the day cuts, we made the decision that my wife was going to stay home. For her to work and pay someone to raise our kids, it was a break-even thing, so might as well just stay home. So there were a few lean years, especially when they cut the days drastically, three or four years after that. But we survived it. The hope is we'll survive this, too.

MG: Do you have a backup plan?

AC: At this point? No. I could sell my license and my boat and get out of the little bit of debt that the boat has, and have a little bit of money left over. But then what? So I'm going to stick it out for now.

MG: Is there anybody that you are passing the fishing skill on to?

AC: No, not right now. I would love, a few years from now if we could get the stock assessments to reflect reality, to be able to hire someone who's interested in it and maybe teach this person, "All right, this is how it's done," and pass the boat on to somebody else. My son, he just graduated [from] college, and I kept him away on purpose. I really don't want him doing it, but there might be somebody out there interested enough in it, who loves the sea, and I can pass it down to them, and maybe still own my boat and have them run it for me at some point. But right now the way things are situated, that's a long way off.

MG: We have an interview in our collection with Angela Sanfilippo. Do you know her well?

AC: Very well. Yeah. We work together a lot.

MG: Something she said in her interview struck. She said, "There's always something – fishing regulations, the ocean environment, ocean dumping, LNG tankers, oil drilling, wind towers, everything." So maybe talk about some of those.

AC: Well, I've been working with her closely on the new Vineyard Wind project. I've gone to all the meetings – and just the arrogance of these companies that come in. They come in, they schmooze everybody, and once they get permitted in certain areas, their next step is to devalue the users in the area. Well, the users in that area, it's all commercial fishing. They've spent the last six months just trying to devalue it to the point where no one's going to miss anything if we take this big chunk of ocean. But my concern is even though it's down the Cape, you can disrupt migratory patterns of fish that go up and down the coast, spawning practices. They have no idea what kind of damage this is going to cost. They say, "Well …" It's only there for twenty years or thirty years, and then they just leave them there. There's no exit strategy of how to get these things out of the water. It could be disastrous if those things were allowed to go in. That's very concerning to me.

MG: Yeah, that sounds like a contentious issue.

AC: It's very contentious right now. The way they did their economic impact statement about how much economic loss industry would incur with these areas being shut down, it was a joke. We went to the meeting, and they came up with a number like the whole commercial fishing industry was going to lose $198,000 a year in this, and that's how they based their mitigation package. I don't fish in that area, but there was one lobsterman who said, "I gross that in a year in that area." That's just one guy. But that's what they do. They try to devalue the user groups in that area to get what they want to minimize what kind of mitigation package that they have to payout. Then, once they're in, there's nothing you can do about it. Their permits have actually been delayed because there's a big right whale issue now too. That's helping delay it. But, like I said, the way their economic impact statement came down, it's rubbing a few people the wrong way, which is good.

MG: Can you talk about the right whale issue? I overheard a lot of people at breakfast talking about it.

AC: Well, it doesn't affect me because I'm a mobile gear guy, but the fixed care guys are – there may be an issue, but the way they go about it – "We're going to close this area because we saw one whale here." Well, then you're just taking all the gear that was spread out evenly, and you lump it all into one area. Well, what if the whales go into that area? It doesn't make any sense. Not only that, the amount of right whale entanglements off of our coast through commercial gear is not even one or two. Ninety percent of it happens in Canada where they have big heavy lines in the crab fishery. That's gear entanglement. But most of the deaths come from ship strikes, and they're not going after the ships to slow down or to change course. They just have their fishing channel, and that's it. So it's all who can defend [themselves]. If you can defend yourself, you can do well trying to avoid these type of things. If you don't have any money to defend yourself, you're a sitting duck.

MG: Do you feel like a sitting duck?

AC: Right now, I feel like a sitting duck. We don't have any money to defend ourselves. We have one lobbyist in Washington doing fishing issues. The NGOs [non-governmental

organizations] have hundreds. So every time something comes down, a big issue comes down, we have one guy knocking on doors. You know what I mean? They have unlimited resources.

MG: It's very unusual to have a job or be in an industry where you really have to fight to do your job.

AC: I know. I never thought it would get to this point, but this is where we're at. It's not that I don't want to put the time in or that I don't understand what's going on. It's just very frustrating when you know the potential of what – not only the potential of personal job and personal earning potential but the potential benefit to the community. The fish that we bring in is the highest quality fish anyone around here is going to eat, but now nobody even wants it. It's pretty sad.

MG: Have there been any regulations that have been useful or improved things for you?

AC: The only thing that ever did anything for the fishery was the mesh size. In the '90s, the mesh size jumped from four-inch to five-inch to five-and-a-half to six to six-and-a-half, and that's where we're at now. Six-and-a-half-inch mesh for a codend is, I believe, the perfect size. We used to catch a lot of small fish back in the day, a lot of undersized fish, a lot of juveniles. Now you don't see any. We haven't seen any of that in decades because of that mesh size regulation. I believe that was a big factor in the growth of the cod industry. In '93 and '94, there was no cod. I wouldn't be the first one to admit it. The cod were gone. Then we went to six-and-a-half-inch mesh. We went to a square-inch mesh to make more juvenile cod escape. By '98, you could walk on the codfish from here to Middle Bank; they were everywhere. Everyone [says], "Well, how did that happen? How did that happen?" I think it was all mesh size, and we've been using that same mesh size ever since. It's the perfect size for this area, and that was a government regulation. Once we used it, we realized that we were catching less volume but landing the same amount of fish. Everyone was onboard with it. Everyone was happy to see it. But that's really the only useful thing the government's done.

MG: It seems like for a lot of these issues, there is a win-win possibility.

AC: Yeah. I believe that there were certain people in certain positions who want to be the poster child for bringing back cod. Like, "I'm the guy who did this and did that to bring back cod. I'm the guy who did this or that to bring back this." But at what cost? If four years from now, they say, "Oh, the stock assessment is great. We're going to open up," but there's nobody left. What have you done? You brought back cod, but you've destroyed the industry, and the infrastructure is gone. So even if people wanted to get back into it, there's nothing they could do because the infrastructure is gone. So they're at a breaking point right now, where if we lose one more piece of infrastructure or three or four more boats, there's no turning back. It's just going to be a downward spiral into nothing. There will be nothing left.

MG: That's really disheartening.

AC: We're at a really critical point right now. So hopefully we can get things turned around.

MG: What are your feelings about aquaculture or hatcheries?

AC: Aquaculture for shellfish, I'm all for it. I think that can be done responsibly. But for a finfish around this area, I think it's almost impossible because of the potential pollution that they create. There's really no protection. Get outside the harbor, and it's all open water. There's only one direction – west – if you're close to shore that's not going to see wind direction, that's not going to see big seas and big tides. You put a hatchery, or you put a fish farm outside of Gloucester Harbor, the first big northeaster, it's just going to get destroyed. It's not a viable option for this area. But for shellfish, I'm all for it. I think it's a great idea. I think we're doing a good enough job protecting the fishery as is right now with the amount of boats we have left. But we're at the point where we have to start thinking about industry and having them survive to be able to harvest these fish, because, from our perspective, the fish stocks are getting better and better every year, but they're giving us less and less to catch, and we're getting less and less money for it. So that needs to be turned around, and everything will take care of itself.

MG: It sounds like fishing doesn't work for one-size-fits-all plan because every year is different; every species is different.

AC: There's always one species that has a downturn every year, and I've seen it ever since I've been fishing. One year, they go, "Last year, we had a lot of yellowtail, and that got us through." Then the next year, "Well, geez, the yellowtail didn't show up this year." "Yeah, but we're catching a ton of haddock now." There's always one species that's really on the downturn and one species that's overly abundant, so there's always been something to get you through. Whereas now we see more and more species that are on the upturn, but we can't bring them in because we don't have the allocation.

MG: What are the ups and downs that you see this summer, in terms of species?

AC: This summer? There's a lot of haddock around. The good thing about it is you've pinpointed a few areas where there's no interaction with cod. If you go north, like off in New Hampshire, I think they have interactions with cod up there every once in a while, but there aren't many boats fishing up there. But there's tons of grey sole all around. The grey sole's going to be a problem this year because there isn't enough allocation throughout the whole fishery to support the amount of grey sole there. So all these sectors are going to be bumping up against their allocation of grey sole when we get into the winter months, and that's going to be a problem. Once you get to ninety percent of any allocated species for a sector, that means you come to daily reporting. Your sector manager has to report every day every pound of fish that you land, so you don't go over that threshold, you don't get to a hundred percent. It gets harder and harder to lease because everybody's catching it, and the lease price goes up, and the price at the dock goes down. I almost hope that with one of these species, the whole fishery blows through the TAC [total allowable catch] just to – you're telling us there's none of this fish around, but within six months this fishery just blew through this TAC, guys fishing two days a week. Some light has to go off in someone's head soon enough that they're going to come to the realization that their numbers are wrong.

MG: Have you had to change what species you're going after or adjusted what you catch?

AC: All the time. It used to be whatever was available. Now it's all what you have for allocation. If you don't have the allocation, you can't target it. So if cod showed up one day and they were everywhere, nobody would go out because no one has any cod. That's the reality of the fishery right now; it's all allocation-based. It's not availability.

MG: We've been talking a lot about regulations and the regulatory environment. Is there anything else you want to say about that before I ask about some other things?

AC: No. I've been depressed enough. I think we can move on. [laughter]

MG: [laughter] Yeah, it sounds so frustrating.

AC: I've talked to multiple people about it, whether interviews on audio or in print, and I keep saying the same thing over and over again. People [say], "I can't believe this is happening to you." But it is. I don't know what the answer is. Our cries have been falling in deaf ears for five years now. Hopefully, someone somewhere will listen. Hopefully, this does good, and we'll see what happens.

MG: Right. Can you say a little bit about what it takes to do what you do? You get up at two in the morning and have such long, hard days.

AC: I always say that all of us that do this, we're almost genetically predisposed to be what we are. I mean, not just fishermen, but everything. I can't imagine doing anything else. I can't imagine having to – my wife sits behind a desk five days a week. I would last two weeks doing that. I just don't know how she does it, but that's the world she grew up in. This is the world I grew up in.

MG: You'd get bored?

AC: Yes. I'd get stir-crazy. I can't be indoors for that amount of time. I'm an outside person. Like I told you earlier, when we're out there everybody's happy, especially if everyone goes out, makes one or two tows, nobody has any mishaps. I call it an uneventful day. "How was your day?" "Uneventful." Uneventful is great. Everything went as planned. You caught fish, and you came home. If everyone has an uneventful day, we all have fun. But those days are few and far between because you can't fish as much anymore. When we're all home, we have coffee together. All we do is complain about why can't we go fishing today because we have no relocation. The days that we're out there are good days. It's a labor of love.

MG: Can you talk about eventful days, and what that would mean?

AC: You can hang up on a wreck. You can tear up your net. You can snarl your wires. There are times when your experience comes in, and it gets really physical, especially if the weather's rough. There's a lot of things that can go wrong. Too many things can go wrong on a boat. But most of us, to this point, we're still keeping up with maintenance. That's another downside of the boats not making a lot of money is when you start slacking off on maintenance. That's when bad things happen.

MG: Do any close calls or scary incidents come to mind?

AC: Not really, really bad close calls, but I've hung up on wrecks. I've snarled my wires so bad where it took me three hours back and forth to try to unsnarl it. Everyone who's ever been fishing has gone through everything I've gone through. So there's nothing unique to what I've done. Everyone's done it. It's just part of the business. You work on Wall Street and the market crashes and everyone scrambles. It's basically the same thing just in a different pair of pants.

MG: Were you fishing in 1991 during the Perfect Storm?

AC: Yeah. I wasn't out there, but I was fishing. We'd come in a couple of days [earlier] because that was a prolonged storm. So we hadn't fished in a couple of days, but we were in town. I can remember where I was when we found out the *Andrea Gail* was gone and the *Italian Gold* and the *Patriot*, and all the others. You know exactly where you are when you hear it.

MG: Where were you for those?

AC: The *Italian Gold*, I remember I was at the dock, and we were all just looking – "What do you mean?" "Yeah, they can't find it." The *Patriot*, I was sleeping because the day before, that's when we had days-at-sea, and we had an 800-pound trip limit. The day before we went out. Those days it was blowing. It was January. You would get two hours of half-decent weather, and then it was blowing thirty knots northeast. So we all ran out. I made a ten-minute tow. I'll never forget it. I got eight-hundred pounds of codfish and three-hundred pounds of yellowtail, and the yellowtail limit was 250 at a time because the fish were just right there. I started coming home, and halfway home, the wind came down. A couple of boats were going out, and I said, "Forget it, forget it. You're never going to get there." So they turn around. But everyone knew that the fish were there. So that night, I had a fantasy football draft. It was a playoff draft. I said, "As soon as this draft is over, I'm going jump aboard the boat. I'm going to run out, get my fish, and come back." At the draft, everyone starts talking. I had three beers. I got home, and my wife looked at me, she said, "You're not going anywhere." I say, "All right, I'll go to bed. Forget it." Because it [inaudible] that thirty-five knots again. I got a phone call at two o'clock in the morning that the boats had gone out, and that the *Patriot* was missing and they couldn't find it. The *Patriot* had gone out at the same time that I was planning on going out, caught his fish, and then everyone knows what happened. They got run over by a tugboat, but they flipped it. If I didn't have that fantasy football draft, I probably would have been there at that time too. Who knows what would have happened. But that haunts me all the time. But all the other guys, they went out at one in the morning after the call had come out that something was wrong. Then I started getting phone calls on my cellphone, and then I got up, and I actually went down to the dock. There was nothing anyone could do.

MG: How many men were lost?

AC: Two. Two men. That was sad.

MG: Yes. Did you have a crew at one point? I know you fish alone now.

AC: Yeah. When I started fishing fulltime, when I graduated high school, we were four guys. It was myself and two other guys. Then one of the guys, two years later, retired. He turned sixty-five and retired. Then it was just myself, my father, and another guy. Then, shortly after I got married, I think things got a little tight, and he ended up going fishing with his cousin, who was alone at the time. He had a crewman. He had his father him, and his father retired. So he went with him. Then, after that, it was just my father and myself. My father, shortly after that, started wintering in Florida. We had the bigger boat, and I was always scrambling to find someone to go fishing with me for January, February, and March because he was in Florida, and it started to get hard. Finally, I said, "We need to get rid of this boat and go smaller, so when you're in Florida, I can go by myself." Then when he finally retired, I just kept going by myself.

MG: That first crew you had, who were the guys?

AC: There was one guy, he was a couple of years older than me, four or five years older than me. I learned a lot from him. He was a great guy. I see him around once in a while, he ended up leaving the industry not long after that, got himself a good job ashore, and he's doing great. I learned probably more from him than anybody in those few years that I fished with him, besides my dad obviously. The other man was, he was an older man. He's probably the strongest man I've ever seen. In his sixties, he was still lifting boxes of fish, this and that. He liked fishing, and he was really good at it, but he never was a captain. He fished with my father for probably ten years. The day he turned sixty-five, he retired, and that was it. But he was a really good man too. I haven't really fished with a lot of different people. It's mostly just me and my dad.

MG: When these other guys also Italian?

AC: Yeah, both Sicilian.

MG: Does that help –?

AC: Yeah, when I was growing up, in my house, it was mostly English-speaking because my father wanted to learn English fast. So my mother could obviously speak English, so we spoke English in the house. The only time we got Sicilian was when we got yelled at. I knew a few words here and there, but once I started fishing, on the boat Sicilian was spoken, and that was it. So I learned how to speak it quick. That's one of the positive things that come out of fishing, for me anyway, just mastering that language. I mastered it aboard the boat. It wasn't anything I learned anywhere else.

MG: Is there sort of an ethnic divide down on the docks? Do the Portuguese guys all fish together?

AC: No, there are no Portuguese left anymore. They all left. They all left in the '70s actually.

MG: Tell me more about that.

AC: They all went to New Bedford.

MG: Right.

AC: The New Bedford fishery took off, the yellowtail fishery took off, and a lot of them just moved down there. There was actually one – there was one boat left here, one family boat, and that has been gone about fifteen, twenty years now. So I'd say there are no Portuguese fishermen, no ethnic Portuguese fishing anyway. Down in New Bedford, it's all Portuguese. I don't even think there are any Italians down there. I guess in the '70s it was all – everybody talked to each other, everybody got along. It's just for some reason they all went to New Bedford.

MG: Tell me how you met your wife.

AC: It was a blind date actually – semi-blind date. A really good friend of mine, his wife worked with her. We went out, and it didn't really go well.

MG: How come?

AC: I don't know. She had just broken up with her boyfriend a few months earlier, and she really wasn't looking for anything. It didn't really go well. I told my buddy, I said, "Listen, this really didn't go well." Then she sent me a card saying, "I'm really sorry about the way I acted. Give me another chance." Then I took her out, just the two of us, and it went a lot better. We're still here.

MG: Where were you living when you met her, and when you finished high school?

AC: I was living at home with my parents. Before I met her, a couple of months before – I met her and in March. That summer, I was going to move out. A couple of friends of mine, we had a – I was all set to move out. Then I met her, and my mother was like, "You can't go out living [on your own]." I was like, "All right." So I ended up not moving out. I got married young. I was twenty-six when I got married. But I just lived at home. I was never home, but that's where I lived, with my parents.

MG: When did you start your family?

AC: We got married in '91. My son was born in '94. So three years later.

MG You have a daughter as well?

AC: A daughter, yeah. She's born in '96. She just graduated from college last year. He graduated two years ago.

MG: What does your wife think you should do fishing-wise?

AC: She been really great through all this. She just trusts me so far. If it gets any worse, I don't know, but so far she trusts me. She says you know what you're doing, you do what you have to do, because she doesn't really know anything about the industry.

MG: Have you ever taken her fishing?

AC: No. She's never been fishing. I tried to get her to go out a couple of times, but not anything that interests her.

MG: Is that good or bad? Would you like her out on the boat?

AC: Especially in the summer, go for the day when it's really nice weather, but at this point, forget it now. But I'm talking about ten, fifteen years ago, I tried to get her out there, but she didn't seem very interested, so I didn't push it.

MG: I know you feel there's not a lot of government support for fishermen right now, but do you feel like there's community support?

AC: Yeah, especially the city government support. The mayor we have now is fantastic. All the people at City Hall, the council, everyone's supportive of the industry. Even friends, lifelong friends of mine, the first thing they say is, "How's fishing going?" Everybody always asks, and everybody's concerned. It's a tight-knit community. Most of the people, especially my age – I've known people for forty years, and they're still very dear friends. That's the first thing they always ask. So everyone's supportive and concerned at the same time because it's in the paper every day about what's going on. So everybody's engaged.

MG: Are you connected with other Gulf of Maine fishermen up the coast?

AC: Yeah. That's one positive thing that happened with the government regulations getting worse and worse. I never knew guys in Portland. I never knew guys in New Bedford of Boston, and then you go to meetings, you start making connections. Then we formed a fishing group that encompasses the whole region. We're all on a board of directors together, guys all the way from Rhode Island to the tip of Maine. Now we're one united fishery, and everybody knows each other, especially now through email and all that stuff. Everybody's a click away. So that's one positive that's come out of it. Everyone's talking to each other. We're brainstorming. Instead of having half a dozen guys come up with ideas, you got the whole coast.

MG: What activities or meetings have you gone to? Are there regular conferences?

AC: Yeah. Well, the council meets once a month or once every other month. Then there are science and statistical meetings. There are committee meetings. You don't get to all of them, but you try to get to the ones that you really need that – that are going to impact the hardest. The monitoring meeting is going to be in Gloucester next month at the Beauport Hotel, so that meeting should be well attended.

MG: I was going to ask you about that hotel and commercial development along the coast.

AC: Well, the hotel – I grew up down there. My father's boat was always docked down there. My boat's dock down there. Let's face it, what was there before was an eyesore. It wasn't doing anybody any good. I think the hotel has been a positive for the community myself, but not all

the people – not a lot of people think that way. I think most people do, but there are some that don't. That's my job basically is to preserve some of the waterfront for the industry. That's not only my goal, but that's my job with the city. As long as there's one boat, he should have a place to dock, a place to land his fish, a place to check his gear, a place to get ice. We're one of the last ports around that have everything infrastructure-wise in place. But the less boats we are, the more incentive there is for people to keep these businesses going. So right now we're in a good place. I think the hotel has been a positive for the city, but if more and more commercial dockage gets lost to things like that, then we're going to have a problem.

MG: You've lived in Gloucester your whole life, so I'm curious if you can just talk a little bit about what makes Gloucester unique and how you've seen it change.

AC: What makes Gloucester, to me – I've traveled, not a lot, but we used to go to Florida a lot. I've been to the Caribbean. I've been to beaches in here and there. For me, Good Harbor Beach is the best beach. Mother Nature has taken its toll on her the last few years, but I love that beach. I think it's one of the best beaches in the world. And just the community there. I grew up on that beach. As a kid, we used to ride there every day in the summer, play stickball. It was one of the best places to grow up. I wouldn't change my childhood for anything, living and growing up in this town. It's changed a lot. Before it was 100% white, let's face it. I was the darkest guy around back then. Growing up, if you were ethnic – in my neighborhood, there weren't a lot of ethnic people. I got picked on a little bit, but they're just kids. Now, the city has grown so much, and there are a lot of different ethnicities. There's a big Brazilian community. They have their own masses. You can only get better once you include other ethnicities. I think that it's only gotten better.

MG: Gloucester has sort of escaped some of the gentrification that coastal Massachusetts towns face.

AC: Yeah. It's funny becuase my wife and I just got the car and drove to – I don't want to mention the town's name, but it's a little bit more affluent than it is her. We walked around the waterfront. It used to be a big fishing port, but there are no fishing boats left there. After we were done, I'm like, "What did you notice about this whole time?" She goes, "I don't know." I said, "There wasn't one brown face in this whole city." We walked around the whole thing. She goes, "Oh, yeah." Because it was the weekend, and everybody who works there, cutting lawns takes off. Here, the people live here. The people become part of the community. They contribute to the community. It's a beautiful place to be right now.

MG: What was the beach you mentioned that you like?

AC: Good Harbor Beach.

MG: You said Mother Nature had taken its toll there. What's happened there?

AC: It's lost a lot of sand. At high tide there's a quarter of the beach there was when I was a kid. You can actually see it right out the window.

MG: Okay. I'll take a look when we're done. Another part of climate change is coastal erosion.

AC: Yeah. Well, Mother Nature put it there, and Mother Nature is going to take it away, and then maybe two hundred years, put it back. There's nothing you can do about it. You just need to adapt. People try to fight it. I know some communities come in with truckloads of sand to try to rebuild the beach, and then two storms later it's gone again. You just have to let nature take its course, I guess.

MG: So you think things will right itself or do you think it's just getting worse climate-wise?

AC: Climate change is definitely happening. The oceans are warming, but the Earth goes through how many cycles in a thousand-year period? Hot cycles, cold cycles, stormy cycles. I think it's just a cycle. How much of it is being contributed by CO2, I don't know. It's not helping, but I think what's happening now would have happened anyway, maybe not at the pace it's happening now, but I think it would've happened anyway. Back in the Revolutionary War times, the painting of [George] Washington crossing the Delaware. What's significant about that painting? The icebergs. When was the last time icebergs on the Delaware River? Right? I think that stopped freezing over before the Industrial Revolution. So that was all just a cycle of cold snaps; twenty years of cold or fifty years of cold just taking a toll, and then it warms up again. I don't think the earth is in trouble where life is going to cease to exist, but things are going to change.

MG: Earlier you mentioned the whiting and how you want to adjust when the season opens for them. Is that because of climate change?

MG: No. Well, traditionally, whiting season – boats started fishing for whiting mid-June. Then the cod crisis caused the government to form an area – banned whiting fishing, banned small mesh fishing, and just put us in areas. They started the area here in Ipswich Bay on July 15th because of the impact on cod; there would be less cod interaction on July 15th. Well, July 15th, you're already losing a month. In the last three or four years, the whiting had been leaving the area earlier. So we start July 15th, and now the few boats that are going now, the last day they went out, they got nothing. So the season lasted two weeks, whereas sometimes it would last midway through August. But if you started earlier, and we're trying to prove that [if] there's no interaction with cod in July, there isn't going to be interaction with cod in June. These guys know what they're doing. They've been working with modified gear that's going to try to stay away from it. So we try to start it earlier to get some data in there to show that there's no interaction with groundfish if we start earlier. So we'll see what the data shows and if we can get it opened earlier, if possible, to try to help some – that would be a small boat benefit because the small boats go whiting fishing. If they can go earlier and get two weeks in front of the season, instead of starting July 15th and then have it conceivably over by now, which it is this year, it will be a big help.

MG: Would that change be implemented for next year?

AC: We wrote a letter – the Fisheries Commission wrote a letter to get it on the council's priority list. But, like I say, the way government works – hopefully, this data can get compiled

and analyzed before – I think it probably would have to be finalized by February or March. If we can get it all done, if they have a meeting on it, we'll flood the room and see what we can do.

MG: So what changes are you seeing due to the warming and rising water levels?

AC: Like I mentioned earlier, it's not the abundance of fish, but just the way they react. They react differently. They are looking for warm pots of water in some times of the year and colder spots of water another [time]. So it's all different. It's all different, but the same. The fish are still there; you just got to find them in different spots.

MG: So nothing that's impacting you directly?

AC: Not abundance-wise. No.

MG: Do you see that storms are more intense and frequent?

AC: Yeah. Was it last year or two years ago –? No, I don't think it was two years ago. We had three or four storms that created over thirty-foot seas right off of – because we have a NOAA buoy six to eight miles off of Eastern Point in Gloucester here. It monitors wind speed, wave height. I remember one winter we had four storms with thirty-foot seas. Coincidentally, people were talking about, "Yeah, we need fish farms." "Where are you going to put a fish farm when four storms with thirty-foot seas come? They're all going to end up on the beach." So that's what we've been seeing. The storms are a lot stronger.

MG: How are fishermen dealing with that? You just don't go out that day?

AC: Oh, yeah. Today's technology, they're tracking these storms weeks in advance, so we know something's coming. I got the app on my phone; I can see a low coming – "All right. It's time to haul back. The storm is passing Long Island now. Let's get home before it hits."

MG: So advances in technology have helped you in that way?

AC: Absolutely.

MG: Any others?

AC: Just these the buoy reports. I have all the buoys on my phone. First thing I do in the morning is click on the buoy and report. If the buoy says twenty-knot winds and six-foot sea, I go back to bed. Whereas in the old days you actually had to – you looked outside, "Well, it doesn't look too bad," and then you go outside the breakwater and you're getting your butt handed to you. Now we can avoid that by monitoring the buoy reports and the weather reports.

MG: That sounds helpful.

AC: It's very helpful.

MG: What does your dad think of all of it?

AC: Like I said, that part of technology he liked because he was part of the generation that they had to go out and try it. Everyone gets up, let's go. One guy goes out; everybody ran out. Then they'd get three or four miles out, "It's no good," and they all came home. Fuel was thirty cents a gallon then, but that's the way they did it. The wear and tear on the boat and all that stuff. Whereas now we can get the buoy report and – "Yeah, that's no good for me."

MG: Are fishermen talking about climate change to each other?

AC: No. No one really talks about it.

MG: So you're not worried about it?

AC: No. Not when it comes to fishing. When it comes to losing the beach and stuff like that, it's a different story. Right now it hasn't impacted fishing to the point where it's affecting how we can harvest the fish. Because when they move – I'm not saying they're moving miles and miles away. When you have an edge where you used to catch fish at fifty fathoms, now you catch them at seventy fathoms, and that may be only a quarter of a mile away. So the difference isn't really that bad for us right now.

MG: We've talked about some of the challenges freshmen are facing in terms of regulations, but there's also a lot of other obstacles like drug addiction. There was an article last year in the *Portland Press Herald* about how the opioid epidemic has hit lobstermen really hard. Do you see any evidence of that here?

AC: Not more than it's ever been. Back in, I want to say, late '80s, early '90s, it was bad. But those people are all gone. There were a few spots where there were a few drug users on a couple of boats here and there that guys might have trouble getting crew, but I don't want to point fingers. I don't know if [inaudible], but a lot of that – for a long time, there was no drug use in this town in the industry. Then people started recruiting fishermen from other ports, and then it started to become a little bit more prevalent here. A lot of the fishermen that have problems are not originally from here. There might be two or three, but most of them are not from here. But it's not more than any other town or any other industry. The opioid addiction has a hold on communities, not just up and down the coast, but all over the country. I think proportionately we're pretty average, maybe even below average when you hear some of the stories when you talk about other industries in other communities. Especially the small boat industry, because we fish by ourselves and none of us are young anymore. You get a crewman here and there, you say, "Wow, I can't believe …" You hear about this guy and that guy and say, "Well, this guy's from here, or this guy's from there. This guy used to hang out with that guy, and he got …" But it's not nearly as bad as it's perceived to be.

MG: What about mental health issues and depression among fishermen?

AC: Most of us are old school type of guys, so no one's going to talk about it, but people are definitely depressed about the situation they're in. Coming from our backgrounds, it's all complain to somebody or try and make it better. So we're trying to make it better right now. H

MG: Is graying of the fleet an issue here?

AC: (laughter)

MG: As I look at your beard. (laughter)

AC: Yeah. Everyone's my age. All the captains are my age or older. There are only a couple younger than me. So that's another concern we have. Ten years from now, what's this fishery going to look like if nobody comes in behind us? And nobody can come in behind us because the prospects of being successful are not that great because of the way the government has the allocation set out. So we need not only more allocation to make money, but we need to entice more young people to come into it.

MG: The costs to get involved are very prohibitive, to buy a boat.

AC: Yeah, an average kid isn't going to come and buy a boat and a permit and go fishing. That's a problem. I could always sell my boat permit to an established person who's been in the business for thirty years. Now there are companies coming in and buying. That's really concerning. There's always going to be a landing spot for boats and permits that prices out the young guy trying to come in, as of now anyway.

MG: Would you say all your friends are fishermen?

AC: I'm friends with all the fishermen. I can say that, but not all my friends are fishermen. Everyone I grew up with as a kid, nobody's a fisherman. Most of my friends went to college, and all have jobs. Most of the time I hang out with people now, the people I hang out with every day, they're fishermen.

MG: One thing you've touched on is that you see stocks are coming back, but that fishermen are leaving. So what do you think is going to happen?

AC: I don't know. I don't know. I wish I had the answer for that. But we need to entice people to come back into this industry, and the only way you can entice them is to make money. You can't make money in the small boat industry right now with the way the allocation is right now. You just can't do it.

MG: What's your hope for the future? What do you think's going to happen next?

AC: Well, I'm always positive thinking. Eventually someone's going to come to the realization that they've been doing this wrong all these years and that we need to think outside the box and find ways to truly represent on paper what's happening on the water when it comes to fish stocks, and give us the allocation we need to make a go of it. No one's looking at – fishing was

never a job, especially small boat community-type fishing – communities like this, nobody got rich, but some people made a good living. Some more than others. If you were more aggressive or if you were a little bit luckier, but nobody got rich. You're just looking to live life. No one's looking to get rich.

MG: Are there other ways that organizations like NOAA could help fishermen?

AC: Other ways? The only thing that's going to help this situation is the stock assessments. The predicament they put us in here that we're in right now. That's the only thing that's going to get us out of it, is get more fish in the system.

MG: Would it help resolve that trust issue?

AC: Well, if some accountability would come into place. Say, "All right. Maybe we screwed up here. Let's think outside the box and try to find another way to estimate these fish stocks" That would go a long way into building the trust back because they lost a lot of trust.

MG: Would you have done anything different in your career?

AC: Boy, I have no idea. I don't know. I just upgraded my boat. I just bought a new boat two years ago. I probably would've done it a lot sooner because the boat I had previously, I ran it into the ground. In the last two years, it was in such bad shape. I was really timid, and I wasn't as aggressive as I could have been, you could say, I guess. But that's probably it. I don't regret many decisions that I've made.

MG: If you had to do it all over again, you'd still fish?

AC: Probably. I was an average student, just like all my friends, and they all went to college, and I could've gone to college. I didn't. I always wonder what my life would've been like. My mother wanted me to go, but I really loved to go fishing, and my father was like, "Come fish, and I'll teach you everything I know," and I took that route. I probably wouldn't have met my wife. I wouldn't have had my kids. I wouldn't have this house. So right now, I have no regrets.

MG: There was a quote in something I read that fishermen are astute pupils of life.

AC: Yeah. I've learned a lot even though I didn't go to college. I've learned a lot. If I had gone to college, I wouldn't have the life I have right now. So I definitely wouldn't change anything.

MG: What advice would you give to someone who wants to get involved in fishing today?

AC: Get involved. If something's going to happen to you regulation-wise, you want to know why. If it happens and you pound your head against the wall – "Why is this happening? Why is this happening?" When you know why then you're going to get more and more involved because you're going to try and stop it from happening the next time. So you need to be

involved. You just can't bury your head in the sand and say, "All right, I'll try to survive this one." But then the next one's coming around the corner.

MG: Tell me again what the impetus was for getting involved. I know someone reached out to you and said, "Hey, you really got to come to these meetings."

AC: Because when the big days-at-sea cuts came, nobody could figure out why. We were catching so much fish; nobody could figure out why they were doing it. That's when someone said, "Well, come to a meeting and find out for yourself. Because if you're not going to talk there, somebody else is." You dip your toes in and you [get a feel for it]. At that time, I jumped in head-first and got really into it. I understood it, where a lot of guys have been coming to meetings forever, and they still don't understand it. It's not an easy thing to grasp when you go to a meeting, and your future is on the line. You know what I mean? You have no control over it. When you're sitting in that room, and that's happening, that's reality on steroids. But if you don't go, somebody else will go in your place.

MG: Is there anything about your fishing career that I haven't asked you about?

AC: I don't know. Like I said, I think some of us were just born to be what we are, and this is what I was chosen for. This is the only job I've ever had. When my friends were young, when we were young, who had a paper route, who was bagging groceries at the grocery store? If I needed money, I went fishing. I had the luxury of my father having his own boat. "Dad, I want to buy a new pair of sneakers." "Well, I'm not giving you the money. Come fishing for a couple of days." He gave me thirty bucks, and I went and bought a new pair of sneakers. That was my life growing up – only one job.

MG: Tell me a little bit about your own kids and how their lives have unfolded.

AC: They're just getting started. My daughter graduated with a degree in biology, and she just found out that she just got her first job. She was working part-time at a pharmacy, and she just got her first real job. My son's already been through one job heat, and he hated it. He fancies himself a writer, and he wrote a screenplay. He wanted to somehow see how movies were made. When he was leaving his job in June, an opportunity came up to work on a movie. So he's working on a movie set right now, the Adam Sandler movie. So he's working on that. Once we leave, – we leave next week; we're going to Italy. When we come back, then he'll have a week or two left on the movie. I said, "If you don't hook on, you got to find a real job. He said, "I know, I know."

MG: He's hoping to be behind the scenes.

AC: Yeah. He likes to write. He has a screenplay he's trying to get read. So he's trying to make contacts on the movie set to try to get the screenplay read. So we'll see how that works out, but he's still young.

MG: Well anything else you want to add to the record?

AC: No, I'm good. The thing I want to tell you, whether it's on the record or off the record, when you interview guys a little bit older than me, try to get them to talk about the old [days]. There are a lot of good old stories that I think should get on tape. So hopefully we can capture as many as we can get.

MG: Sure. Did you leave any out?

AC: No. I came into it during the boring time, the early '80. There wasn't much excitement there, but in the '50s, '60s, and '70s, there are still a few people around who have a lot of memories of that stuff. This was a bustling town. It was ninety percent fishing back then. Every dock had a processing facility. It was a lot of action. When I was starting was when that stuff was starting to dwindle away.

MG: Well, that makes me curious to ask those questions.

AC: Yeah.

MG: Well, I want to thank you for the time that you spent with me. I know sitting still isn't easy, and you've done it for almost two hours.

AC: Oh, Jeez.

MG: Thank you for your time and all your stories.

AC: All right. Thank you.

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