

Narrator: Anthony Gross

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

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Abstract: The oral history interview with Anthony Gross, conducted by Molly Graham on August 28, 2019, in Gloucester, Massachusetts, provides a comprehensive overview of Gross's life and experiences as a fisherman. Gross recounts his early life, including his upbringing in Cincinnati, Ohio, and his family's move to Gloucester, where he became deeply involved in the local fishing industry. Throughout the interview, Gross discusses the evolution of the fishing industry, highlighting significant changes in practices, regulations, and environmental conditions over the years. Gross reflects on the impact of climate change on the fishing industry, noting shifts in fish populations and the appearance of southern species in northern waters. He also addresses the economic challenges faced by fishermen, including the effects of catch-share regulations and the decline of local fish processing facilities. Gross shares personal anecdotes about his career, including his experiences with different types of fishing gear, the camaraderie among fishermen, and the challenges of balancing work with personal life. The interview delves into Gross's perspectives on regulatory and environmental issues, as well as his hopes for the future of Gloucester's fishing community.

Molly Graham: This an oral history interview with Anthony Gross. The interview is taking place on August 28, 2019, in Gloucester, Massachusetts. The interviewer is Molly Graham. I like to start at the beginning. Could you tell me where and when you were born?

Anthony Gross: I was born in Cincinnati, Ohio, [on] December 30, 1952.

MG: Could you trace your family history starting on your father's side?

AG: All right. My father was born to immigrant parents; grandparents I never met, a grandfather from Germany and a grandmother from Ireland, in the tenements of Newark. He was one of, I want to say, probably, ten children. Some didn't make it out of childhood. He was in the middle of the pack. He never made it past – I always thought it was third grade, but then in discussions with my other family members, although I'm not sure – fifth grade was definitely the highest of formal education. He would be farmed out every summer to New Jersey – it's the "Garden State" – a lot of farms. So in order to make money for the family, he would be sent out; "farmed out," he called it. He was born in 1908. So the Depression – he was too young for World War I. World War II, he was the sole support for his diabetic blind mother. His brothers went off to war. Then he had sisters. Anyway, he was in between the two wars. He was actually in the horse cavalry. [laughter] It was the National Guard.

MG: Between World War I and World War II?

AG: Probably during World War II. He was in the National Guard, the horse cavalry.

MG: Did he serve stateside?

AG: Stateside, yes, in the National Guard. So he was self-taught, completely self-taught. I cannot remember the name of the company that he worked for in Jersey. I knew it, and I can't remember it now, and my other brother, who may have known that has passed. Anyway, Kroger found him, or they found each other. That's when we moved from Jersey. My oldest brother and sister were born in Jersey. My brother, who was three years older than me, and I were born in Cincinnati. So we went, and he worked for Kroger. He was their butcher/buyer. The other company that he worked for before was butchery. Also, [he] troubleshooter. So he did a lot of traveling, and he was tired of that. One of the accounts that he had was Empire Fish Company in Gloucester, which was a big fresh fish company. So they offered him the general managership. He said, "Okay." I was three. Young family, time to set up some roots, and not move around so much. So we came to Gloucester. What's interesting – he had very close bonds with the owners of Empire Fish Company because I have a telegram that was sent from one of the owners to my parents congratulating them on my birth. So that was three years before [we moved]. And my oldest brother used to come and spend time with one of the other families who had a beach house on Long Beach, and he would spend a month or so here in the summertime. So there was a relationship built between the families, and then they offered him the job to be general manager of the fish plant. So that's how we got here when I was three.

MG: Do you know your paternal grandfather's reasons for emigrating to the United States? Do you know if he came as an adult?

AG: I have no idea. Everything's been lost as far as all that. I haven't gone into any of the genealogy. I have no idea why. Those stories, we never got them [passed down]. Maybe on my mother – well, that would be my mother's side. We have not been close with the extended family at all. We really lost all of our past history. I'm not sure it's been a major – obviously, it's not been a major concern for me.

MG: Did your father ever tell you stories about his childhood?

AG: Just it was hard work all the time. [laughter] No, nothing really. My father died when I was seventeen. He died in 1970. It was during a very fractured time in the country, and my mother and father were on political opposing spectrums. Life in my house was not tame. It was like, "Why don't you two just split up?" I was the last one home. My other brother was three years older. So from sophomore year on, I was the only one in the house with them. Except, as an aside, my father was contacted during my freshman year in high school by a Catholic organization that was trying to find host homes for African American inner-city kids from Boston, who were getting scholarships to local Catholic schools, parochial schools, where I was attending. So we did take – we had an African American boy, Joe Delgado, who then became, basically, a member of the family. He stopped going back to Roxbury any times. He just stayed with us from then on. So he was there in the house, too, with me. I shouldn't say I was alone. He was there until my senior year. He was a year ahead of me. I was the main – my father spoke with me the most. I was the discard. I was the last. My middle brother was the golden boy for no particular reason. Then my oldest brother, they just had a falling out. So I was the one that he would talk to. When he passed away, I was the one who knew how to navigate through everything, even though I was only seventeen and everybody else was older. It was weird. I got the head of the table. It was odd. But anyway, that's what happened. My sister had her family. She had moved out. My other two brothers just weren't capable.

MG: What was your father's cause of death, if you don't mind me asking?

AG: He had COPD [chronic obstructive pulmonary disease]. He had heart trouble. He died at work. But he had been in and out of the hospital. He had a major stroke when I was in first grade, first or second grade, in the mid-'50s. I guess in the later '50s, and he was in his early fifties when he had it. But they did not expect him to live. He was forty-five when I was born. He made a pretty full recovery from it. I don't remember any lasting effects. What I remember about it is seeing the leg braces hanging in his closet. That's an odd memory, but that's what I remember. I was so young. My sister remembers that there was some diminished use of his arm, but she was older. His autopsy was many pages long.

MG: You brought up the political turmoil of that time. I was curious where your parents stood on the issues.

AG: He was "no change," and she was "tear it all down."

MG: She was more progressive?

AG: Yes, much. My mother was progressive all the way through. They were an odd match. She was college-educated, RN [registered nurse], grew up in a very affluent family. They owned a stonemason yard in Jersey. Her grandfather and great-uncles were quite wealthy, but they held the purse strings really close and used it as a tool against her father. Her mother died when she was really young. Her father remarried a woman that was only ten years older than my mother. My mother always resented that. She was the only quasi-grandparent I had growing up. So I would see the house that they lived in twice in my life, I think, but that was it.

MG: What was your mother's heritage?

AG: She was also German-Irish, I think twice removed from immigration. Mother, German. Father, Irish heritage. So half-German, half-Irish, supposedly.

MG: When did your family move to Ohio? I know it was before you were born.

AG: My brother before me was born in '49. So it probably was '47, '48.

MG: On your survey, you wrote your mother stayed home before your father passed away. What did she do after?

AG: My mother was an RN, as I said. She started working first as an RN in a nursing home. Then she got her public health certification, and then she became a public health inspector for the city.

MG: Do you have any memories of growing up in Ohio or living there?

AG: Very, very faint ones. My godparents, who lived behind us, stayed very, very close to the family. Romilda was her name – Elmer and Romilda Hartman. My mother and she were pregnant at the same time, and Ro lost her baby. So when I was born, I became the surrogate. As a toddler, I went across the yards and went to their house on my own. So they remained extremely close. I went out to visit them later, as an adult, and even went out to spend some time when they had medical issues that had to have people stay.

MG: Did she have more children?

AG: No.

MG: It must have been hard for both families when you moved to Gloucester.

AG: Much harder for them, probably, than for us. Yes.

MG: What are your first memories or impressions of Gloucester when you moved here?

AG: I remember my father and I flew out separately, and my mother and the other three drove out. I remember staying at the Tavern on the Harbor. Now it does some functions and stuff, but at the time, it was a full-service – rooms upstairs, restaurant and everything. I do remember –

it's really funny what you remember. I remember walking down the stairs and seeing a massive lobster framed as you turned on the landing. I remember that. It may not have been right on the landing, but I remember that. I remember my father saying, "Well, you're in Gloucester; you got to have fish." I said, "I'll have tuna fish, please." [laughter] Those I remember. Obviously, my father and I had some time alone then. It was before our house was ready, and before my mother got here.

MG: What was the neighborhood like where you moved?

AG: We moved to a pretty elite neighborhood. It's called Eastern Point. Now it's much more elite than it was then. It was like somewhat of a gated community. It had a guard on weekends. Roads were all private. We did not seek this out. It just happened to be the house that was available when we bought it at the price that my father could afford at the time. So that's how we wound up out there. We were probably the most working-class family there. In fact, the guard on weekends, [visitors] would [say], "Oh, I'm going to see the Grosses. I'm going to see the Grosses." It's like, "Yes, you let them through." Most of them weren't, but it was open season. It was all private roads. You paid for plowing. You paid for road maintenance and all that type of thing. There's a big pond out there, Niles Pond. A lot of skating got done. My father bought a dory because he was the chairman of the Dory Committee, and had one brought down from Nova Scotia. It was like, "There's your boat." It was like, "Dad, I'm a kid. That's an adult boat to row around. That's a little bit big." [laughter] That sat in the pond. We also had horses out there. There were summer people called the (Joyces), and they had a stable, and they had horses. So my father, with his cavalry background, wanted to get horses. So we had a horse named Baby Doll. She was a Quarter Horse. She was beautiful. But she got mean. She was a little mean-tempered, but we just dealt with it. Then we also took care of their thoroughbred and their Shetland pony. So before I went to school in the morning, we'd go and muck the stalls. That went on for a few years.

MG: How did your father become chairman of the Dory Committee? What did that mean?

AG: My father was the manager of one of the bigger fresh fish plants. So he was a person of importance, I guess. I don't know if that's how you say it, but he was a person of consequence in the city. He was president of the Chamber of Commerce, I think, for a year. Different people served those terms. Doesn't mean anything. People who are paid do all the work. Well, he really liked it. He really liked it. So I think that was what piqued his interest. So he was chairman of the Dory Committee. It was a huge deal back then. The Canadian Coast Guard brought down their crews; it was a huge drunk [party] for all the adults because they all got – it was all duty-free booze on the Canadian boats. [laughter] But they used to buy duty-free booze for the fishing boats, too. My father used to get – we had cases of booze in our front hall closet. They'd buy it to give to the fishing captains at Christmas and to have in the office. There was plenty of booze available in my house. That was always a good time to go down to the Canadian [boats]. On Sunday morning, after church, go down to the Canadian boats and have breakfast, or Saturday morning and have breakfast on the ships, and tons of food. My father would drag me around.

MG: It sounds like he had a good relationship with the fishermen.

AG: He did. He was brutally honest and really would get upset at the owners if they were trying to slight – he was shrewd but fair. “They sell us a pound; we buy a pound. We don’t buy a pound and a quarter. Don’t be messing with the scales.”

MG: Can you describe the nature of his work and what he did at the Empire Fish Company?

AG: Well, Empire handled a lot. So he was general manager. He had foremen under him, office people. He was the big-picture guy. When the fish were available, they would process anywhere up to _ every other day a hundred-thousand [pounds] of whiting would come in; process that throughout the week. Then a redfish boat would come in once a week. They’d have two-hundred-thousand [pounds] of reds on them. Those would get all cut. Then you’d have the groundfish boats that would come in, and you’d unload the groundfish, and you’d cut all them. The whiting got packaged in five-pound or two-and-a-half pound or one-pound packages, and that got shipped all over the country frozen. They had a cooking room too. So they processed fish sticks, portions, all different types of cooked fish. They had a big contract with Kroger. They probably provided Kroger with an awful lot of their seafood. It was processed under Kroger’s name.

MG: How long did Empire stay open?

AG: I’m guessing Empire started probably in the early ’40s. It closed [in the] ’80s, ’90s. I can’t remember.

MG: Do you know why it closed?

AG: Fish became somewhat scarce. Leadership went away. The fresh fish business just has evolved away from an awful lot of stuff. You have to have inventory in order to be able to process. The lack of product was part of the issue.

MG: Did something come in its place?

AG: A herring company came in its place. It was all beat. But the whole place has just started to fall down.

MG: The building itself?

AG: Yes, everything. Some of the buildings are gone now. It’s in a pretty decrepit space. I’ve been down there to buy bait. Sometimes it would take a while for somebody to show up, so I’d wander around; I’d go into all these old places that I haunted when I was a kid . On Saturday mornings, my father would take us down there. The place wouldn’t be working; he’d be in there just doing paperwork. We would go upstairs where all the cardboard case boxes were. They were all flat. We’d go up and make forts out of them. We’d mess up their entire inventory, and make forts out of them. So a lot of my childhood was spent running around that place.

MG: I also wanted to ask about the demographics of Gloucester when you first arrived. Were there any Italian or Portuguese families in your neighborhood?

AG: None in my neighborhood. None. There were only four families that lived there all year round when I first moved there that had kids. Were there other families out there at all? Yes, there was. There were other families. [Clarence] Birdseye, his house is out there. Up at the top of the street was the Swift Estate, which was Swift Premium Meats. [The] Browns lived across the street, and they were the big, big mercantile department store, multi-storied – the old Macy-style type of department store in town. They lived across the street. They had kids our age. Then a paint factory manufacturer lived across the street, too. A dentist lived down the street. Those were the four families that had kids in the neighborhood. Mostly it was summer residences out there.

MG: Was there family to reconnect with in New Jersey now that you were back on the East Coast?

AG: Yes. My father's sisters came every year. My mother's brothers came up and visited with us. So, yes, there was. But I was a kid; they were adults. Like I said, my father died when I was seventeen. My mother's brother, he died before my father, one of my mother's brothers. The other one died shortly thereafter. They're more interested in staying close to us. We're not quite politically aligned, and that can make for some uncomfortableness.

MG: Especially today.

AG: Yes, and it has been – even childrearing differences. It's been a little – we haven't really – they reach out more than I do, which is probably shame on me. I'm very private and like to hide.

MG: Sure.

AG: [laughter] I don't mind my life being out there, but I just like to spend my personal time how I want to spend my personal time. Fortunately, I married someone who is identical.

MG: Perfect.

AG: Yes, it is. We don't get out much. [laughter]

MG: Every time I leave my house, I just want to get back in it.

AG: Yes, and it's weird because I'm on the school committee, I'm chairman of the Waterways Board. I have these really thankless, high-profile positions. So it's amusing that I shun it.

MG: You mentioned there was weekend security in your neighborhood. Was he there out of necessity? Was crime an issue?

AG: No, crime was not an issue. We never had a lock for our house growing up. The keys were always left in the car. Even downtown, my father would leave the keys in his car. It was more about exclusivity, and it was only on weekends.

MG: Tell me about the school you went to. Was it a private school?

AG: I went to parochial schools. I went to St. Mel's Day School, which was right outside the gate across the street, which was right across the street from a beach. It was a mile from my house. So walked or rode bicycles; there was no bus. That's where I went [for grades] one through eight.

MG: This was a Catholic school.

AG: Catholic. Dominic nuns.

MG: How were they?

AG: They're okay. I didn't understand that I had a certain difficulty reading and comprehending what I read. I could read. I knew what the letters were, and I knew what the words were. But I wasn't retaining anything. My seventh-grade nun finally discovered that I was having difficulty. So, I developed many strategies to get through each year. That's probably one of the reasons why my father saw that I was an afterthought for any prodigy. [laughter] I also didn't want to get beat, so I took the cute route, and I was very accommodating to the sisters. I stayed after, swept the floor, clapped the erasers. My father said more than once, "I don't care how cute he is, will you please teach him something?" [laughter] So I developed strategies. She was a tough bird, too – Sister Mary Rose. She was the one who beat everybody. She was the disciplinarian in the school. She was the one who discovered my reading disability. He had bi-monthly meetings with my father. Every two weeks, they met to go through my process. It was bizarre. My mother was globally concerned at the expense of the micro.

MG: How did you feel that they were meeting so often?

AG: It was fine with me. I didn't care.

MG: Is your family Catholic?

AG: My family was Catholic. We were raised Catholic. But my father never went to church. I remember – I don't know if I was in high school or what – but one time I finally freaked out and said, "I'm not going to church." He said, "Yes, you are." I said, "No, I'm not. You don't." He got really angry. Then my mother said, "Look, I got to tell you something." She took me aside. She said, "Your father was married very briefly before we met. There was a divorce, so he can't go to church." I'm like, "Well, I don't want to go." Anyway, there again, strategies were created of standing back and being usher, go collect the money. Working way too hard to not do stuff was my M.O. [modus operandi] at the time.

MG: Do you know anything about your father's first marriage?

AG: No.

MG: That must have been big news to you.

AG: It was, yes. It was brief. She left him. That's what I was told. Then I went to Catholic high school, and it was during Catholic high school that that fight went on, during the summertime.

MG: Those were tumultuous years. What year did you graduate from high school?

AG: 1970. I had two brothers who were rebelling a lot.

MG: In what ways?

AG: Well, one got drafted. Before he got sent to Vietnam, he walked out of the airport. So he was AWOL [absent without leave] for six months before turning himself back in. Then my other brother dropped out, dropped acid, and burned his draft card. In my household, that was brought very up-close. Both of them doing a lot of drugs, too. I was introduced early.

MG: You don't have to talk about this on record, but did the drug culture impact you, as well?

AG: Oh, yes.

MG: It was of the time.

AG: It was of the times. I'll freely admit right now: I'm almost thirty-two years sober. So, yes, it impacted my life for a while.

MG: Also, during the 1960s, President Kennedy was assassinated. How did that impact you or your family? Was it a bigger deal because you were Catholic?

AG: I was very young. I was ten, eleven. It was heartbreaking, not because he was a Catholic. It was heartbreaking because he was JFK and our President. I remember laying in bed, going to bed that night and saying, "Oh, when I wake up in the morning, he's going to be alive. I know he's going to be alive." I remember that. That did impact me.

MG: Did you or your family participate or support any of the movements of the time?

AG: My mother was a suffragette from the get-go. My father [thought], "Children are to be seen, not heard." I don't know if – my father was shortchanged a lot, I've come to see now. That was really truly an effort, and he wanted to do best, and he did have love in his heart, but he was hard. It was: "Children are to be seen and not heard," and "A woman's place is in the home." Of course, my mother upset that apple cart completely with her objection to the Vietnam War and having friends who were Leftist Communist, that kind of thing. There were a lot of organizations. My mother was an activist, environmentalist. She signed me up for the Audubon

Society when I was a pre-teen, which was fine with me. I love the environment. So I got some of that. I got my father's work ethic. I probably got the best out of both of them.

MG: Did you oppose the Vietnam War?

AG: Of course. I didn't want to go to Vietnam.

MG: Were you worried about being drafted?

AG: I was of draft age. I turned eighteen [on] December 30, 1970. The war went on for a few more years.

MG: But you never were called up?

AG: No.

MG: I forgot to ask how your parents met.

AG: I don't know.

MG: It would have been in New Jersey somewhere.

AG: Would have been in New Jersey. They may have met [through] mutual friends at the lake. Lake Hopatcong is a place that they used to go, and we would go down there and visit down there. In fact, that's where we took my father's ashes. He enjoyed it there. We would go down and visit. It wasn't family that we would visit there. It was their friends.

MG: Where in New Jersey was this?

AG: That was Lake Hopatcong, which was in Northern Jersey. My mother grew up in East Orange.

MG: What other memories do you have from growing up?

AG: What do you mean?

MG: Things that stand out to you from being a child in Gloucester.

AG: Well, we had access to a beach out there from my house. We could easily walk by ourselves down to the beach, across a field or through some paths. We just had to cross one road. We had these little boats; I think they might have been six-feet long, but they were flat-bottom little boats that we called tippy boats. They had a double paddle like a kayak. Bill Morris, who worked at the yacht club, built them in the wintertime and sold them to the neighborhood people. That I remember – going to the beach a lot. Riding my bike. Playing the woods. Horses.

MG: Being close to Boston, would you visit the city?

AG: Not much. I did an appetite for – I guess it wound up to be Egypt. My mother would take me to the MFA [Museum of Fine Arts] once in a while to see exhibits. I saw King Tut on his first big, big tour when I was a kid. My mother and I went in. That was really exciting.

MG: Neat. So were you interested in history?

AG: I did like history. I do like history.

MG: When you were fifteen, and you started working at your father's company, was that your first job?

AG: Was that my first job? Basically, yes, my first real job. I think I was dishwashing, and then I was like, "Eh." My father said, "Come down to the wharf and work."

MG: How did you feel about that? Was that something you wanted to do?

AG: You had to make money. You had to work in the summertime. There were two other classmates of mine that worked there. They were the sons of the two foremen. We were all in the same class at the same Catholic high school. One of them worked in the freezer with me, and the other one, his father was the foreman of the rest of the plant, so he worked out on the wharf. It was a little bit of – at least you had young people. You had to work hard. In the freezer, the faster you worked – if you could beat the freezers in freezing the fish, you got a break. You could go hide and smoke a cigarette. It was legal to do that. You just had to hide. You couldn't have the other workers see you standing around. You had to go in the back of a freezer and have a smoke.

MG: What were you doing in the freezer?

AG: Packing frozen fish. Taking it out of the freezer and packing it into cases – going on pallets and going on the reefer truck, off to the rest of the world.

MG: Was that hard work?

AG: It was. Yes. We were working a lot. Yes, it was fast-paced. It wasn't super heavy, but it was fast-paced.

MG: How was your father as a boss or a supervisor?

AG: He wasn't my supervisor. He was the overall boss, but because of the COPD, he stopped at the freezer. The way the place was set up, the freezer office was at the beginning. It was very long and narrow, and the main office was down the other end. Well, he parked outside the freezer. He moved his office into the freezer.

MG: It helped with his breathing?

AG: No, he just didn't have to walk all the way down to the end, and didn't want to park his car all the way down to the end where all the gurry trucks were. You know what gurry is, right? So there were tons of seagulls. He didn't want his car down there. It was an industrial zone; you don't want your car parked there anyway. So he just parked right next to where he could walk into. He was right there. His desk was right there looking at us working, but he dropped me off, so I'd be to work on time. Then he would bring me a ham and egg sandwich. And everybody would [give me a hard time]. "Oh, shut up. Let me eat my sandwich." I'd just wolf it and go right back to work.

MG: How many summers did you work there?

AG: I worked three summers while he was alive. Then I worked there after he passed. Then I was out on the wharf mostly.

MG: Your job had changed?

AG: Yes, I didn't have that position anymore. The freezer was a gem, a plum. In fact, when you'd go after supper, if the cook room was shutting down, they'd come down, and they'd bump us kids, and they would get the hours. We wouldn't. We'd go home, horribly heartbroken. [laughter] We'd already worked our eight hours.

MG: Who took over after your father passed away?

AG: The son of one of the owners. I'll reserve judgment on that.

MG: When you graduated from high school, what did you hope to do?

AG: I was completely lost. I was totally lost. I had discovered drugs and alcohol. The familial situation helped it along. Parents being completely oblivious to it. At that time, they didn't know any of the signs or what was going on. Alcohol was actually okay. Between my junior and senior year, I crashed my mother's Volkswagen bus. I don't know if you know who Dom DiMaggio was, Joe DiMaggio's brother. He played for the Red Sox. Well, his daughter was in the car, and it broke her leg. She was actually pinned in the car, and the fire department had to get her out. The next night, my father and I are home. He says, "Let's go look at the vehicle." So we go look at the vehicle. I'm seventeen. He says, "You're driving. You got to get back on the horse. You're driving. Let's go look." [We] go to the junkyard; look at it. We come back, and he says, "Get me a drink, and get one for yourself." [laughter] I guess he was treating me like an adult. I wasn't going anywhere. I was home. He saw that I was upset. I wasn't freaking out, but he knew it had an effect, and he wanted me to feel normal again.

MG: Were you drinking and driving?

AG: I had a few beers.

MG: Were you on a date with Dom DiMaggio's daughter?

AG: There were a bunch of us in the van. We were heading back from a friend's house where we had had a couple of beers to a dance out at the yacht club in Eastern Point. I was looking over at her and talking. I just kept the wheel turning and drove right into a pole. It was ridiculous. The cop said, "I can smell [alcohol]." My father came and said, "Does he look okay?" "Yeah, he looks okay." Said, "All right. Well, thanks." My father knew the [chief of police]. We had a chief of police here who was – you're too young – like J. Edgar Hoover. This guy had been chief for life, forever and ever. He liked my father. So when one of the kids got in trouble, they got taken home. It was weird.

MG: So did it take you a little while to figure out what you wanted to do?

AG: I had terrible grades in school. So I applied at a college that everybody was getting in – Ricker College in Houlton, Maine. It no longer exists. I get in. So in order to go check it out – this is 1970, the summer of 1970. Fishing had declined. We had a few days off all the time because there wasn't any fish coming in. Other people were taking our jobs. So I flew up to Presque Isle, [Maine], and Houlton's about thirty miles south of Presque Isle on Route One. [Interstate] 95 stops at Houlton. So my father buys me a plane ticket to fly to Presque Isle. The plan is I hitchhike from Presque Isle to Houlton. This is the plan. The official family plan is I hitchhike to go visit the college that summer. [laughter] It's just the way it was. So I did. It was funny.

MG: Who were you getting rides from?

AG: Lots of people. I came home almost every weekend. I hitchhiked back and forth that eight-hour drive from Gloucester to Houlton. I'd get out there Friday afternoon, and you would get a ride almost direct to Massachusetts. You might get let off at [Interstate] 495. Three rides, I would be home. It was almost as fast as if I drove. But on that one, I was picked up by one of the chiefs of police from one of the local towns. I can't remember on the way back – just regular people. Everybody picked up hitchhikers then. It was the mode of transportation. It was highly accepted.

MG: Yes, my dad hitchhiked from New York to California around this same time.

AG: It's what you did. You got to get someplace? All right. Stick out the thumb. It was funny. I would never, ever conceive of doing that with my children. Never. So I went to Ricker College. It started in August because they had to break for potato picking. Then my father died [on] September 24th. So I came home. Went back up. All controls were off. [I] worked hard when I got back because I was tutored by the teachers and got good grades then. Then everything just went downhill. I just left.

MG: What were you planning to study?

AG: Liberal [studies]. I had no clue. I didn't know what. There was no plan. There was no plan at all. Came back, started working on the wharf again, bought a skiff. Ro and Elmer lent me a thousand dollars, I think, and I bought a skiff and some old lobster traps and started

lobstering. I went tub trawling with my girlfriend's brother at the time, [who] was working on a boat, and they needed somebody. That was it. That just got me into fishing.

MG: Had you thought about fishing as a career beforehand?

AG: Well, I had worked on the wharf. So I knew about it. I don't know if I thought about much. I really didn't. I did not think about much.

MG: Can you say what a tub trawler is?

AG: Longline. There's a hook tied on a shorter line that's tied to a line every six feet. So if you hung it out like a clothesline, these hooks would all hang down every six feet.

MG: Were you going for lobster at this point?

AG: No, tub trawler was groundfish – codfish, haddock, cusk, hake, halibut. The skiff was lobster.

MG: You were doing both?

AG: One summer, I was, yes. I was tub trawling. Then, I went from there to offshore lobstering.

MG: Where were you going offshore?

AG: Georges [Bank], to the canyons, two-hundred miles.

MG: How long would you go out for?

AG: Four, five days.

MG: You mentioned that you had a girlfriend. Was it someone from Gloucester?

AG: Yes. We started living together very young. Then she left me when I was I was working offshore.

MG: I was curious about your mother and how her life changed in the years after your father died.

AG: Well, she was worked for the Board of Health. She was the health inspector for the restaurants, and different places that served food – nursing homes and different places. She was elected – she was on the school committee. She was the chair of the school committee for a little while. Then, after she retired, she got on the Board of Health and was chair of that. So she was very active that way. She remarried. She stayed in the familial home until she died.

MG: Were you close with her?

AG: Somewhat. I don't know. There's something wrong with me. I'm too private. I don't know. There never was – she wasn't cuddly. Then, after I had kids, it was like, "Oh my god, are you kidding me?" There's a lot that was wrong with that picture. [laughter] She stayed in bed in the morning when we got up to school. I would take bread sandwiches because she didn't make me lunch. It wasn't abuse. She was just so busy taking care of everything else that she didn't take care of us. It was just weird. I didn't feel neglected. Some of that stuff became an issue later in life for me. I grew a little bit apart from her.

MG: Tell me a little bit more about the boat you were lobstering on and the crew you worked with.

AG: Which? The offshore?

MG: Yes.

AG: They were basically my contemporaries. White Anglo-Saxons. Some college-educated, some not. There was good money to be made. People went where there's money. All liked to live hard and work hard. I haven't stayed close with any of them.

MG: Were you catching a lot of lobster?

AG: At times we were, yes. You'd catch a lot. Sometimes it was barren.

MG: I was curious if you were able to say how it was different then compared to now, in terms of –

AG: I think now they're – I really couldn't say now offshore. I watched a little bit of that show, *Lobster Wars*, and they weren't catching lobsters like we were. We were catching a lot of lobster. But in Maine, they were catching lobsters like we were. I wasn't there at the first wave where they were catching forty pounds of trap. I wasn't there for that. I was there for five, six pounds per trap. Maine, the last few years, has been doing that – the inshore fleet. Not this year.

MG: It's come back for them?

AG: The inshore fleet?

MG: Whoever.

AG: There's been a lot more lobsters landed in the last decade than ever before. So whether we're just – there is more pressure, so there's more attempt to capture than there was before. So that may account for a lot. There was also a very high peak of a cycle, where the population was quite abundant.

MG: Have you seen that change over time?

AG: Yes, it always does. Historically, even before us.

MG: What do you think that is due to?

AG: If I knew how to figure out a lobster – that’s one of the things I tried to maintain was [that] I don’t know anything. Just go with the trend at the moment was what I finally learned. You’re not smarter than this prehistoric creature.

MG: On your survey, you talked about how you had different roles on different vessels.

AG: Different boats.

MG: Can you talk a little bit about that?

AG: So offshore, when I first went offshore lobstering I was the cook. I really enjoyed it. I think I got twenty dollars extra a day. But you had a position, and there was some status. I was young. I was twenty-two, twenty-three when I was out there. I can’t remember. I did enjoy that. I took great pride in it. When my boat landed at the dock, it smelled fresh; everything was clean. I wiped down everything. I mopped the floor. The last couple of hours on the way in, I just cleaned the galley and the whole mess area. I was proud of the food I cooked. It was a source of pride. Then I was an engineer on one of the offshore boats, but the skipper was really the engineer; I just was filling that role. Then, on other boats, if I wasn’t the cook, I’d be the deck boss or the mate. So that worked out. One small day boat, the owner/skipper’s significant other’s daughter got killed in a tragic bicycle accident, and so I took over for a little while on that, small day boat dragger; took it out for him, so they had something coming in. I don’t know how much more you want me to elaborate.

MG: It sounds like you were bouncing around on a few different boats.

AG: You bounced around a lot. You bounced around a lot. That one particular boat that I took out to help him out, he hired me every year for about four or five years. My alcoholism would take over, and I’d burn my bridge. Then he’d fire me. Everybody would take [bets] – “How long is Tony going to be working for him this year?” That worked out. But he instigated a ton of it. When I quit drinking, he was like, “Oh, come on.” I was like, “No. What do you mean? You saw me. What’s wrong with you?” God rest his soul. He’s the one who – he caught that.

[TAPE PAUSED]

AG: When he passed away, his wife was sitting in the corner. She had me come over and get all his logbooks. She said, “You’re the only one that he wanted to have these. Now you have all his logbooks.” He was a pretty good fisherman. She said, “I don’t know what I’m going to [do with this].” I said, “I’ll take it.”

MG: What data goes into the logbooks?

AG: It was prior to the official logbooks, but you kept your own coordinates of where you were, how much you hauled, how long the tow was, what you caught. That's what goes in there – where you were, how long it took you.

MG: He sounds like a special person in your life.

AG: Yeah, he was.

MG: When you were twenty-two, you shipped out on a –

AG: Tallow tanker. That's an interesting one. The girl broke my heart. She broke my heart. I spent that summer – I was the engineer on that boat, offshore lobstering. I'd come back in, [and] would just get totally blind drunk. Then we'd go back out again. The whole crew, we were all drunk. Another crew member, his heart was broken too, so we had each other to commiserate. So I came home, and I finally said, "I can't go anymore." So my brother, my oldest brother, was working for this guy down in Florida. They had recommissioned this – it was an old Navy yard oiler. They got a contract to carry tallow from Miami to Honduras and Belize. Well, the first one was from Galveston, Texas, that they did. They wound up in Miami. They had done a couple of runs. So then I called them up and said, "Hey, can I come down?" He says, "Yeah. We don't have many experienced people." So I went down. So did that for about a year. But the captain there died. [laughter] A lot of death around me. So he died. I wasn't with them at the time. I had an ear infection. But because we had come back from – anyway, we carried tallow. The crew was mainly Guatemalan. There was a bunch of Americans who were the officers and cooks mostly and some of the engineering crew. But the deck crew were Guatemalans who cleaned the tanks and did all that stuff. So I became their boss. One very interesting piece happened over Christmas vacation when all the American crew, officers and engineers, they all left and went on vacation because we didn't have any loads to take for the month of January. So we were tied up in Belize Harbor, which was our home port. He also owned a minesweeper, a big minesweeper there that he was converting slowly into an ocean-going salvage tug – this guy, David Hahn. We loaded up with a whole bunch of extra Guatemalans when we went to Guatemala. I know that's probably not the correct way to say it, but we brought aboard a bunch of Guatemalan personnel to help clean. All the machinery and everything, when it had been mothballed, had been covered in this stuff called cosmoline, which is a tarry tacky thing that keeps everything from rusting. It's a great preservative, but it's really nasty to clean off. So brought extra crew, and it certainly was not environmentally friendly the way we did it. I don't know. We used methyl ethyl ketone, or whatever. It was really nasty stuff. So a big French cruise liner ran aground.

MG: That was the Mermoz?

AG: Yes. That was quite an interesting trip going out there, helping them refloat. First, we took a lot of the oil off of them. They pumped those into our tanks. Then we took a lot of their beer and wine; put all that on our deck. We were there for ten days. I kept a journal. It's rather interesting, very primitively written. But we would pull up alongside them, and then we would go aboard. We left without a whole lot of stores. They were in the middle of their cruise, so they had top rate stuff; food that we hadn't seen – pork loins and big roast beef. We were buying

that stuff dirt cheap from them – and vegetables. Although Belize has – I assume they still do – it's not Quaker. It's like Quaker. It begins with an "M." Menonite. Anyway, they have a settlement there, and they grow unbelievable produce and dairy, and all that stuff. In Belize City, you always had access to their stuff – Mennonites. But we hadn't packed for all these extra people. That was quite interesting.

MG: Were you on the Mermoz when it ran aground?

AG: No, we went there after they ran aground.

MG: What happened?

AG: They just drove it right into this reef. I went up to the navigation room, and the guy had X's on the chart, right into the reef. I was like, "What was going on here?" So we tie up alongside them and then run our engines with their engines, and they just wouldn't move until they got their salvage tugs there. I'm trying to think of what else went on. They had good pot, those guys.

MG: In Belize?

AG: Belize has crappy pot. They did. They had terrible pot, but you could buy pot right in the barroom. They sold them in bullets. They were like that long, wrapped in brown paper. They would open it up, break it up in their hand, and then roll it up in the brown paper, and then light it and hand it to you. It was a buck Belizean, fifty cents. You could smoke it right there in the barroom. Belize was wide open in 1975. Wide-open. It was unbelievable. We were under the protection of – we drank and were good friends with this guy, Chicago Slim, and he was the only Belizean to ever go to the Olympics as a boxer. So we were covered by him and the government. We were recognized as – "It's trouble if you mess with those guys." We probably were overly confident. We were just accepted.

MG: Did you pick up any Spanish?

AG: They speak English. With the Guatemalans, we did a word before lunch and a word after lunch.

MG: Just one word?

AG: Just one word. [laughter] They liked me, the "Guats." Again, probably terribly politically incorrect. But I enjoyed them. We created bonds. I had no prejudice against them. I felt badly that we were paying them so little. The Mermoz was very interesting. Particularly where we laid bare of all of our senior offices; it was just me and the captain and his wife, and the engineer who was a Nicaraguan. That was it. Then all these other workers. So it was something. The same guy who was in charge of the Navigation was in charge of the lifeboats because they took them all off. When the tugs came, they took them off, and a storm came, which was actually what lifted them, the storm surge, with these tugs pulling on them, these ocean-going tugs. He was in charge of watching lifeboats, and lifeboats broke free and took off. So they sent us

looking for them, and we didn't have radar, and it's a storm. It's pouring driving rain. We're searching for them on one side of the reef, and then we get word they found them. So then we had to get inside the reef. So the captain's up on the masthead. I'm in the pilothouse. This is a two-hundred-and-something-foot tanker. He's like, "Get through the coral heads." [laughter] We didn't even have walkie-talkies.

MG: He was giving you hand directions?

AG: Hand directions to get through the coral heads to get inside the reef.

MG: That must have been harrowing.

AG: It was just business as usual. Well, when I got up that morning – because it was just he and I on the watches, and when I got up that morning, we're pounding. The deck was pretty low to the water. There were just stanchions with wire. So it was a flat deck to the sea. We had all this beer, wine, and Perrier. First time I ever saw Perrier in the little bottle; we had a ton of that on there in cardboard cases. There was no plastic or anything like that back then. I go up, and I look out the porthole over the deck of the pilothouse, and I said, "Oh my god. David, the alcoholic in me can't watch all this stuff wash overboard. Can I get some Guatemalans and put lifejackets and lifelines on them, and five-gallon buckets?" He said, "Go ahead." We filled my stateroom up with all this stuff. I still have one bottle downstairs of the wine. When we met them back up in Belize Harbor to pump the fuel back aboard, we brought the steward on. By then, we were fast friends. We said, "Here." He's like, "We're not bothering with that. We'll just take the stuff off the deck."

MG: They didn't want any of the alcohol.

AG: They didn't want the stuff that was in my stateroom. It was under my bunk, which was up here. It was about that high – probably my stateroom was just a little bit wider than here to that curtain, and then out to here. It was like that much.

MG: Wow.

AG: All stacked up, beer and wine. Mostly the wine because it stacked neatly.

MG: Did you get in trouble with the alcohol?

AG: We got in trouble with it entering in the U.S. once. I wasn't on board, though. I was home here.

MG: How long were you in Central America?

AG: About a year.

MG: I meant to ask what the tallow was being used for.

AG: They make candles and soap. Then the high-grade stuff would go into margarine.

MG: What was your plan after being down there for a year? Did you want to stay down there or were you eager to get home?

AG: David had died on another a salvage job in Puerto Barrios, Guatemala. I had gotten an ear infection, so I was in Belize when they took off. I had been on the other adventure. The other guys were all back. They were all bummed they had missed this big adventure, the first big salvage job. They were all bummed. They were all older. My older brother was seven years older than me. He was thirty; I was twenty-two or twenty-three. They were down there, and they got this banana boat off the mudflat that it was on, and then David dove down. He had a heart condition, and he shouldn't have been diving, but he dove down, and he had a massive coronary.

MG: This was the captain.

AG: This was the captain. It gets gorier. When they were bringing him back, they gave him a burial at sea. Sharks got at him, and his head washed ashore. So then they had to get his head. It was a comedy of errors. Oh my god. One of the friends, who was a carpenter in Belize, made a coffin. You can't make this stuff up. Without David keeping the egos at bay, things just fell apart.

MG: What was your plan after returning to Gloucester?

AG: I came back. I got paid pretty well by the time I left there. I came back with a cushion. I came back and went on a bigger tub trawler with some friends. I did that for – I forget how long I did that for. It may have been six, seven months. One day, I'm steaming out the harbor, and I'm like, "I don't want to do this anymore." I said, "I'm going to go to either Newport or Nantucket." So I went to Nantucket first. I found a place, found it hospitable down there, so that's where I went. Then, while I was there, somebody was selling their fishing boat. There was an old technology, but it was new around here – Scottish seining. So he was having a new boat built. One of my old acquaintances was in his crew and said, "You should buy this." So I bought the old boat. I did that for three years.

MG: Was that the *Patti Lee*?

AG: That was the *Patti Lee*.

MG: Did you name it *Patti Lee*?

AG: No, all my boats' names have remained the same, except for the last boat I bought.

MG: You named that one.

AG: It had a really weird name. It was all the initials of this family with five kids. It was all their first initials, so it was a nonsensical name. I felt that could be changed.

MG: What did you change it to?

AG: I changed it to *Sandollar* because that was the previous boat I had. “You don’t want *Sandollar II?*” No, it’s just *Sandollar*. It’s its own boat. [laughter]

MG: Can you talk a little bit about the Scottish seine net?

AG: Scottish seine, the way that worked was you set – it’s hard to explain, but you used weighted rope or big hemp. You set about four-thousand, five-thousand feet on one side, and then you threw over a net that looked very much like an otter trawl funnel net. You set that out. Then you set another four or five-thousand, six thousand feet of rope out. You set it all in a big circle. You start winching the rope in. As it comes in, it’s going along the bottom, making a cloud and driving the fish, herding the fish towards the net. You go faster and faster and faster as you get close. So at the very end, you got all these fish in front of the net, and then you just scoop them up.

MG: I read the Scottish seine is an environmentally friendly –

AG: Very.

MG: How?

AG: No doors, no furrows, no anything. It just tickles the bottom. It doesn’t do any damage whatsoever. Doesn’t tear up anything. Goes right over seaweed or eelgrass. Goes right over everything.

MG: Is that inshore or offshore? Or does it matter?

AG: Well, the best part about that industry is it was legal in state waters at the time. So you could get all these flounders that were living right up on the shore. They changed that law.

MG: For the Scottish seine nets?

AG: Yes, they made it like draggers; you had to be three miles off.

MG: How come?

AG: Because it was capturing all these fish that used to have a safe haven, and now they don’t.

MG: When was that?

AG: That was ’77 to ’80. So ’77, ’78, ’79.

MG: How come you sold the *Patti Lee*?

AG: Because I was a drunk. Didn't want to do stuff.

MG: Too much responsibility?

AG: Too much. Wasn't working hard enough. I was being foolish. I needed to either rebuild that boat, buy a new boat, or get serious. It was time to basically shit or get off the pot.

MG: What did you do then for the next six years?

AG: A day boat, worked for that guy who fired me off and on. He bought his boat almost the same week that I bought the Patti Lee. He went offshore lobstering first with it. I think he might have gone tub trawling. Then he decided to go dragging. I worked with him off and on. Worked on some other draggers. I worked here and there.

MG: You've talked a little bit about how after you'd come home from fishing, you'd go drinking. Did you have a particular place you liked to go to?

AG: That summer that we were offshore, we went to the Schooner Race. That was a bar at the time, the Schooner Race Lounge.

MG: It's no longer there?

AG: No.

MG: I read that you stopped fishing for a while. When would that have been?

AG: We may need to back up a little because it was probably only about four years that I went. Then I worked a couple of years – you know what? No. I would go banging nails. So during that same period that I was day-boating and doing different fishing, I was also working as a carpenter in-between times.

MG: This would have been in the early 1980s?

AG: This would have been early '80s. I got sober in '87, so I was only working fulltime banging nails from '86, '87.

MG: Was there a connection between fishing and drinking for you?

AG: No.

MG: If you don't mind, could you talk about that process? Was it around the time you met your wife?

AG: Well, that was what, September '87. I met my wife; we were both drinking. Met her late summer of '87. We started dating after Halloween. Between Halloween and Thanksgiving, we started dating. Then early December, she quit drinking and started going to AA [Alcoholics

Anonymous]. There had been some self-reflection – “This is not a healthy lifestyle. You’ve come from there down to here. You’re living in your mother’s house. You’ve gone from a self-made person into this basic shell of who you could be.” And I really liked her. One day, I was dropping her off, and she said, “Well, I’m going to a meeting. I’ll see you afterward.” I said, “You know what? I think I’ll come with you.” That was it.

MG: That’s really impressive.

AG: I haven’t had a drink since, but we had each other. That was a really huge piece. That takes a lot of need out of life.

MG: You were in your late thirties at this point?

AG: Yes. Late thirties? Mid-thirties. Yes, mid-thirties. Thirty-five.

MG: What was the recovery process like for you? Was it difficult?

AG: No, relatively easy.

MG: Did it help that you had a partner?

AG: Yes, I’ll tell you that was it. That was the entire key.

MG: Don’t they say two alcoholics shouldn’t be together? It can hinder recovery.

AG: We met before. We were still drinking. In your first year, you should not enter a relationship. That’s what they say. But we were already in a relationship when we quit drinking, so we bucked that trend. That’s who just left. [laughter]

MG: It worked out.

AG: Yes. Very much. Very much. We’ve evolved together quite cannily. Is that saying it correctly? There’s many, many successful relationships in this world, but somehow, we’ve just followed the same path. Yes, we’re very fortunate.

MG: Tell me more about Abbie. You said she’s a third-generation Gloucesterite.

AG: Yes. So her grandparents were born here. Her grandparents? Yes. Her grandparents were born here on her father’s side. Her mother’s side came [from] Chicago. Her father became a surgeon and one of the leaders in [the] community. He, too, was Chairman of the Board of Health for a period so was my mother. They never met until – there’s really two alternate worlds in Gloucester that had never met. He was a highly respected surgeon in the city. Abbie was the youngest of five. I was the youngest of four. You’re getting my stomach rumbling on the tape.

MG: Do you want to take a break at all and get a snack?

AG: No, that's okay. I really, really liked my father in law. My mother in law was such a treasure. She was absolutely something. So [Abbie] grew up down here. She went to Trinity College. She went to Gloucester Public Schools, went to Trinity College as a journalist. She got married, went to New York, worked for *Family Weekly* down there. So she worked for some magazines down there. Then [she] got divorced, and *Family Weekly* gave her a buyout, so she went to Greece and Spain. Spent about a year over there just before we met. We met. She was living in her parents' house. I was living in my mother's house. I did own half of a three-family [home] with my mother during that period when I did have money. She had had a fire, and she didn't have enough money to finish it. So I gave her [money], and I said, "I want half of the house." That's what it was worth, what I gave her. So I owned half the house. My brother was living in the apartment that I wanted. He had a house that he was supposed to be fixing up that my mother had given him that she had been left by an old spinster. He had been working on it for years. But you start out the day working [by] smoking pot, [and] you don't get too far with your crew. So the house was not getting done. I got sober. Finally gave my brother – "You got to get out. I got to get in there and rehab this whole place." So we did. So I stopped working for anybody else, and I worked on that place. At the same time, I went back to school for wastewater management because my mother was getting job offers because she had her wastewater operator's license, and she was in her late sixties because the industry was desperate for it because they had to have it to comply. To be able to put stuff in the sewer, they had to have pre-treatment, and they didn't have operators. At the time, it was a very high paying job. By the time I got done with it, it was saturated; the market was saturated. Anyway, I was going to school for that while we're doing this, and then Abbie got pregnant. She went to work for *CIO Magazine*, chief information officer, as a copy editor, three days a week. It was a start-up. She just grew with it. She became the editor-in-chief of the magazine eventually. Very well-compensated for her job. It was during the tech boom. There was money flowing everywhere. They were writing about it. They were the first ones to sound the alarm and to do research on Y2K. [Editor's Note: Y2K was the fear that computers were not going to properly adjust to the year 2000 after 1999.] She was an expert on Y2K. She'd be on CNN. Very unassuming woman – you see her here – but she's had a very interesting career. Now she's working for herself. She does a lot of survey work for Harvard. Clients hire [the] *Harvard Business Review*, and then they hire her. She does a lot of that stuff, and interviews and writes up the papers and conclusions. She does speaking stuff. A couple of interesting things that she's been able to do is she had an hour-long interview on stage with Steve Wozniak. Three weeks before [Robert] Mueller became the special prosecutor, she was the one who introduced him at a speech. She's been with John McCain, [done] an hour-long interview with Madeleine Albright. She's had quite an interesting career. You wouldn't know it just to talk to her.

MG: Yes. I read about her. I was impressed by the scope of her work and what she has been able to accomplish.

AG: Yes. I was the man behind the greatest woman. Oh, and I stayed home. I was Mr. Mom after that.

[TAPE PAUSED]

MG: I know your daughter Lucy is doing some interesting work with Abbie for a program called Period Partners.

AG: Right, that has since been dissolved. Lucy's working a couple of jobs, [and] moved in with her boyfriend. Abbie just didn't have time to maintain it. It's been turned over to Open Door, who was the financial sponsor. They also [received] a cease-and-desist order on the name use because an organization that does similar things calls themselves Period Partner. We had the name first but didn't trademark it. So they got a cease and desist order. Then Abbie wrote them a letter – "This is not very good. You shouldn't do this. It will look bad on you." They sent back something that would have made Abbie do more work. It was Lucy's idea. There was so much emphasis on the need for different things for people, but nothing about feminine hygiene products that are needed for everyone. They were very clear that these are not just – they're hygiene products, not "feminine" hygiene because you got to honor the trans [transgender] world that requires them to do physical characteristics. They really filled a need, and I hope that, somehow, the Open Door manages to keep it going.

MG: Where is Lucy living now?

AG: Lucy is living in Beverly with her boyfriend.

MG: You stayed home when your children were born.

AG: I stayed home – well, no. Alex was born. I stayed home with Alex. Lucy was born eighteen months later. But shortly after Lucy was born, I got a job in wastewater. I worked there for five years, and we went through a series of au pairs. First, daycare. Then that didn't work very well. Then, au pair. We had one who quit. Then we got another one. We found this wonderful Gloucester girl, who came and stayed with the schools, who we've still maintained a relationship with her. She lives down the Cape now. She was Mary Poppins, just unbelievable. But after five years I really started to really not like my job. By then, I was in management, and I just didn't like it. I didn't like the people who worked for me. It was like going to a factory every day. I just didn't like it. I said, "Can I come home?" Abbie was doing – this is when we were living in the three-family [home] at the time. Our overhead was low. We were going to have to decide something about daycare because the kids were starting regular school. What do you do? You can't have someone hanging around all day. So that was when I came back home. It was from then, which would have been – Lucy was [born in] '91. So '96 to 2001, I was the hundred-percent-stay-at-home dad. We were looking at other houses, and I had a home inspection done. While I was at the treatment plant, I learned an awful lot of stuff. First, I was a mechanic. They sent me to courses and stuff. I learned so much about systems – plumbing, hydraulics, wiring, electrical systems. I had a home inspection done, and I was like, "You got to be kidding me? This is it? I know all that stuff." Plus, I'd done building for years off and on. I said, "I got to become a home inspector. I started building that up slowly. Meanwhile, I was PTO [parent-teacher organization] president and was in school all day. My kids' teachers loved me. My kids didn't need my help. It was preferable I wasn't with my kids. As they got older, it was preferable I wasn't with them. So I would be with the more difficult male kids. They needed a positive role model. I didn't pull any punches with them. There was a mutual respect. I did make a difference. I know because a couple of kids have said to me, later on, that I made a

difference in their lives. I treated them like a human being but also demanded to be treated like a human being. Anyway, that was interesting, being PTO president, in a woman's world. It was odd.

MG: Were you one of the only dads?

AG: Yes. That was full-time, yes. There were other involved dads. Anyway, I started doing some home inspections, and then they decided to pass a home inspection law. The home inspection lobby decided, "We need to protect ourselves," but they grandfathered – because there's been lousy home inspectors out there. But they protected them all. They protected all the lousy home inspectors out there because they all got grandfathered in. If you had over – I think it was – two-hundred-and-fifty inspections, you were grandfathered in. Well, I worked with the local senator to get language into the law that would protect me. I'll never forget. I was going to the Topsfield Fair, which is a big fair around here in the fall, with the kids because it was Columbus Day Weekend. I remember I had a cell phone early on back then because I needed to be able to be reached. But I'm talking to his office, and they're like, "Well, they put the ..." I'm like, "Are you freaking kidding me?" Oh, because I had called there. I called to get my license. They said, "Oh, no. You can't." I'm like, "What are you talking about? That was all changed?" So I called them. Like I said, I'll never forget the disappointment in my voice to the senator's office. Anyway, a couple of days later, I was at a friend of mine's house, who was a lobsterman, and I picked up the [Massachusetts] Lobstermen's newsletter. I'm looking through it. It's like, "Hmm, there's there a lobster business for sale here, and it's got a Gloucester number." I said, "Abbie, we got a float down here that nothing's tied up to it. I'd love to go back fishing. It's pretty reasonable." I had inherited some money from my godparents. I said, "It's not taking anything out of our savings." So that's what I did. That's what got me back in fishing in 2001.

MG: Was that a big transition? Or did you jump right back into it?

AG: No, I slowly went into it because I could afford to slowly do it. That year, I didn't start fishing until – I remember I set gear on July 4th. I only fished a hundred and fifty traps, and I stayed away from everybody. I didn't catch anything. I was so disappointed in myself. But the traps were junk. They were no good. I found out later that they just didn't fish very well. So I grew it. It was only a twenty-five-foot boat. I got other traps, and things got better. I got a little bit more familiar. I was fishing in Ipswich Bay over on this side. All of my experience was out of the harbor. So I didn't know over here at all. So the next year I might have fished three hundred. Then a few years after that, I started getting better and better and started catching, and people got familiar with me. I could go and compete for bottom. So then I bought a bigger boat because I saw the need. Then I transitioned to a trap that was fishing very well. So then I started becoming one of the top producers over here because it was mostly part-timers. Now, this has become lobster mecca because it struck. This place over here has been highly productive. I was, fortunately, by myself for a few years in the sand. Everybody was like, "What's he doing in the sand?" "Nothing. Don't worry about it."

MG: You were doing well in the sand.

AG: I was doing well. Yes.

MG: Can you say where you were fishing?

AG: Right here. Right in Ipswich Bay. Yes, I can say it because it's well-known now. It took them a little while for them to – because people would catch me – I'd have to drive my lobsters over to East Gloucester, is where I sold them. I'd get caught a few times unloading a lot more than everybody else.

MG: What was the issue? Why were you concerned about getting caught driving your lobsters over?

AG: Oh, no issue. That's how I transported my lobsters – via truck, not by boat.

MG: When you say “caught,” they knew your lobsters were coming from somewhere else.

AG: They knew I was fishing over here. Yes. I'd pull up, and then somebody would pull up on the front of the wharf to unload, and they'd look at the truckload, and they'd go, “Oh my god.”

MG: Have you seen more people fishing in Ipswich Bay?

AG: Oh, yes. A lot. It's been ridiculous.

MG: What was different about lobstering when you got back into it?

AG: Wire traps. [laughter] Electronics. Mainly electronics, which is nuts now. They can make any moron navigate.

MG: The gear was different.

AG: Yes.

MG: What about how you fished? Did regulations impact lobstermen the way they –?

AG: No, it hasn't yet really.

MG: What challenges do you or other lobstermen face?

AG: What do you mean by challenges?

MG: Obstacles you had getting back into the business in terms of your work schedule, the money you were making, the population of lobsters.

AG: One of the difficulties has been – with the collapse of the ground fishery, all those groundfishermen had lobster licenses. So you're dumping tens of thousands more traps in the water. It's much more crowded. A lot of the fun got taken out of it because of the

overcrowding, particularly over here. We don't have any rocky bottom, so any little pieces of hard bottom that there is in the springtime and early summer is just nuts.

MG: Are you finding lobstermen are catching fewer lobsters?

AG: Like I said, we've been having some boom years, so people are living under a false pretense right now.

MG: What do you mean?

AG: We're in a boom cycle.

MG: There's a lot of lobster?

AG: Yes. The populations cycle up and down, and we're in a peak cycle.

MG: So even though more people are fishing for lobster, there's enough lobster for everybody.

AG: There has been, yes.

MG: Are you finding enough buyers?

AG: Oh, yes.

MG: Good. Did you ever fish for anything else?

AG: Oh, I also had a small – I also bought a small groundfish permit that allowed me – at one point, I was allowed to catch three hundred pounds of cod a day. So I'd go out and do that – rod and reel. I'd go out and do that in the winter.

MG: With rod and reel, is it hard or easy to get up to three hundred pounds?

AG: Well, if you're on them, you can get up there in three hours.

MG: But you can't accidentally overfish.

AG: No, it's not a bycatch; you're targeting them. If they shut the codfish down to zero, my permit's done. I'm not allowed to go catch anything else because I might catch a codfish.

MG: Are you staying informed about all the changes and regulations and stock assessments?

AG: I have been a little bit. But I'm letting that go by so I don't get – the anxiety doesn't bubble up.

MG: Are you witnessing that in other fishermen?

AG: Oh, yes. Unless you're numb or naïve.

MG: Can you say what they're concerned about?

AG: Their livelihood. Basically the way they've lived. How are they going to make a living? How are they going to feed their family? How are they going to pay for anything? A fair amount of guys got into fishing because that's what they could do. Their skills don't necessarily transfer. They may make good airline mechanics, but then they have to work for somebody. That's another problem. A lot of us do it because we can't work for anybody else. [laughter] It's the reason why I did it. I keep telling my kids, "You kids got to figure out what to do that you can be self-employed because you got my attitude, and you're too smart for your own good."

MG: It was just this year, in March, that you retired from fishing.

AG: Yes.

MG: Did you sell your business?

AG: Yes. Sold everything to my former crewman. He's still storing everything here. [We're] in contact multiple times a week, sometimes multiple times a day. He was with me for five years, a mentor situation. It was in the plan. I said, "Look, I'm old and broken. Stick around, and this will all be yours someday, kid, for a price."

MG: How old is he?

AG: He's twenty-five.

MG: He must be one of the few young guys out there.

AG: No, actually there's a few lobstering. We've been in a boom year. Guys are on sterns of boats, and they were making good money, and they're watching the captain making eighty percent of that money. They're like, "I want that eighty percent." So they went out and bought permits and boats. So there's been a few. There's been an insurgence. But they're all going to be in deep water when the crest of the wave breaks. Some of them are way overextended on boats, seven-hundred-thousand-dollar boats, and things. It's like, "What's wrong with you? You're not your counterparts up in Maine."

MG: How long have you served as secretary of the Gloucester school board?

AG: Secretary? I think it's only been a couple of years. Our charter says you have to have a secretary. I've served on the Gloucester school board from 2002 to 2006, and then for the last nine years. So from 2010 to now.

MG: What's your role on the board?

AG: I'm a member. I am secretary, but like I said, that's – oh, I'm also chairman of the Building and Finance Subcommittee, so I oversee the books, which is a forty-million-dollar budget. Every two weeks, I go in and sign the warrant, which can be anywhere from seven-hundred thousand to two-million. I try to look at – I know what to look for now. I recognize, "That's all the foodstuff. All right. I can right by that. That's special education. That's one kid? Oh my god." [laughter]

MG: That sounds like a big budget. Is it? Is the school doing well?

AG: We've done better.

MG: Now I'm wondering if you can look back and tell me how Gloucester has changed over the many years you have been here.

AG: I'm going to go to the bathroom first.

MG: Let's take a break.

[TAPE PAUSED]

AG: When I was a kid, you went swimming. Gloucester Harbor was pretty filthy. The sewer outfall went right in the middle of the harbor. We called it cloudy bank. You'd go in a skiff. You can catch pollock and mackerel and everything in there. Then we had these – there were a lot of pogies that were landing. They process it for meal in a dehydration plant. But there'd be these big balls of pogy oil that would wash up on the beach. A lot of the fishermen just threw everything overboard – all the trash. Everything went overboard – paint cans. So there was a lot of flotsam and jetsam washed up on the beach. So beachcombing was interesting. Every day when I walked to and from – usually from school – when I would walk home, I'd walk the beach and see what I could find. My backpack or school bag would have all this sandy stuff in it. [laughter] That was interesting. They used to say "Manchester by the Sea, Gloucester by the smell." You had fish plants everywhere. You had real significant employment throughout that. You had a very vibrant society of regular workers, blue-collar people who lived nearby the plant. So it was focused around that because that was everybody's livelihood, and that's what it had been for centuries. That has completely changed. One of the things that I've noticed as far as the fish populations go – so we've had, like I said, again, cycles. I think it might have been in the '50 there was a real down period. Then the '60s we're doing good. Then the '70s there was a down period. Then the '80s were so good that the federal government was buying boats for people. I mean, big draggers. So then there was a lot of pressure. Then there was the downturn. Now, you always had the rebound. You always had the rebound. Now they've introduced progressively more stringent regulation. Before there was no regulation when these rebounds happened. It was all self-policed by what was there. So this time there's something different. You've cut way back, and the amount of boats are a lot less. What's going on? But the NGOs [non-governmental organizations] just kept pounding on that it's overfishing. Just kept pounding on it. I was like, "No, there's something else happening here. We always saw rebound. What is going on?" Now they're like, "Oh, it's climate change." "No shit." I have been really, really disappointed and angry about these supposed environmentalists that have just done nothing but

lie. I understand now how people feel when it's been these people who know nothing about any of what the industry is about and sit and use computer models. Data in is data out. If you're putting junk in, you're getting junk out. They were proving that the vessels they were using and the gear they were using – there's no laboratory in the world that you don't have to calibrate your equipment other than NOAA's Fisheries. They don't calibrate their equipment or have qualified people, or use the right sized vessels. They got these big research vessels towing these little tiny nets. I'm sorry. No. It doesn't work. It defies [physics]. It really has been – I'm sorry, I know I'm going off on a tangent here. It really has been very, very disappointing that they've allowed this policy to be created over agenda-driven tactics that have not been for the benefit of the fishery, for the fish. So when they implemented catch shares that just killed Gloucester. Just killed it. It was struggling before that. You didn't have the fish plants. You didn't have any of this stuff – processing. But that just was the end of the day boat fishery, which is really stupid because what you're doing now is you're consolidating all the fish stock that's available into these little pools that are then able to be purchased by the biggest money, which then puts us in factory boats, which have the worst carbon footprints because, for one thing, they have to run 24/7 by their generator. If nothing else, they have to have something running, rather than be tied up and shut off. Plus, the type of gear they tow – everything about them is – they also have to have a certain amount of catch for them to be viable. So their resiliency is non-existent as far as being able to handle downturns. They've taken everything that's environmentally proper and destroyed it for something that's the antithesis of what they're supposed to be about. It's really made me nuts. That's why I stopped following. [laughter] Then it makes you question, “What are they doing when they're talking about the logging industry? What are they doing when they're talking about this? What are they doing when they're talking about the mining industry? What are they doing when they're talking about nuclear energy? What are they doing? What is real and what isn't?” Because I know they're full of shit on this stuff. Not to say that regulation wasn't required. Not to say that we're not in a cyclical downturn. But what if it is global warming? Okay. What if our stock of codfish have moved? Why can't we catch the ones that are here? There's plenty of them there. Can we look at that? Can we just please look at a realistic view here? If we catch five codfish with five thousand haddock, who cares? Let them catch the haddock. Anyway, Gloucester – you had gurry dripping in the streets. My mother, she thought that it was – this was her example of the world going to hell is that there was less flies. I'm like, “Ma, of course, there's less flies because there's less maggots because they don't have any place to grow.” You close the dump. All the fish plants are closed. There's no little nooks and crannies that are growing millions of maggots daily. Of course, there's fewer flies. That's one of the things that happened is we got less flies. [laughter] Now it's getting very gentrified. Then it has some of the people who want to cling on, who never really had anything to do with the industry, but they want to cling on to that heritage, so they want to stop everything else from happening and not recognizing the reality. It's like, “You do understand that when Gloucester was Gloucester, you were processing in the summertime, if you included the pogies, probably over a million pounds a week in Gloucester. A minimum a million pounds a week, if not more. What are you talking about? What are you saving here? You can't save it. It's gone.” It's the last of the buffalo or whatever.

MG: You feel that way about fishermen in Gloucester?

AG: I feel that Gloucester cannot succeed relying on its workforce. It's got to look elsewhere. I think that there's a place for fishermen, the ones that can hold on. I think they'll do well. I think they'll do okay, but there's going to be so few. You don't have the processors. It's not just the boats. It's the processors. You don't have the skills. The skills are all gone. One of my jobs, when I was working at the plant, was weighing up all the cutters' pans because you had to know how much fish – you knew how much came in one door; you needed to know how much was going out the other. So you had to weigh up the fillets. Each pan had a number on it that was related to a cutter because at one point they used to get paid by how many pounds they cut, not by the hour. So that was a great job because you just stood there. These pans that weighed twenty pounds, you slid over on the scale, you dumped it, and you set the pan back down on the conveyer belt. That was a great job. I'm looking down this row – both sides, forty cutters, fifty cutters, and you probably can't find fifty cutters in a hundred-mile radius of here, let alone, this plant, that plant, that plant, that plant. How's it changed? The blue-collar, the blue industry – I don't know how blue you're going to get here. You got to get smarter to get better.

MG: So, do you think climate change has played a role in the fishing industry?

AG: Oh, yes. Yes, I do.

MG: Can you talk about that?

AG: Well, they're seeing major declines. The southern lobster industry is gone, south of the Cape. I don't know how much longer it will take, and I don't know if there will be a reversal or what will be here – climate change – whether the lobster industry up here will go too, and we're going to have seventy-degree water or eighty-degree water up here. When I was a kid, it was painful to go swimming in Gloucester. It always was nice and warm by the time you got back in school. If it was a nice day in September, when you got out of school and went swimming, the water was always the warmest. I think the codfish are a perfect example of what has happened. Last year, I caught nine seahorses.

MG: Can you say why that is notable?

AG: Well, before last year, I caught three. From 2001 to 2018, I caught three. Last year, I caught nine. Other guys were catching them, too, but I was the seahorse king. "Seahorse Whisperer" they called me in the newspaper. I gave them to the local aquarium. They're still there, actually. They've been having babies. We're getting a lot of seabass, a lot of seabass. I've been catching triggerfish, pretty much on a regular basis up here. What else are we seeing here? Bonito were up here last year in the harbor. We're seeing southern species up here that we haven't seen before.

MG: What other environmental changes are you noticing besides warming water temperatures?

AG: I don't know. We had a horrific snow winter a few years ago. Last summer was brutally hot. Climate and weather are two different things, which is what, unfortunately, the White House doesn't understand. So I really have to think about that and look at data to see. It would take more work than I feel like getting involved in to see. Last summer was brutal. I remember

that. It was the first time I ever really enjoyed the pool was last summer. So this summer I've been enjoying it because I had total knee replacement, and was doing some rehab in the pool. So I've enjoyed that. I'm not certain about what else I've really noticed.

MG: What about the seasonality of certain fish? I was reading about how some fishermen are suggesting moving the whiting season, for example. They were showing up earlier or later.

AG: They're probably showing up earlier and staying later. But we don't have any processes for whiting. They can't give them away. They ship them all to New York. Before, Empire processed a hundred-thousand of whiting a day. Ocean Crest probably processed a hundred-thousand of whiting a day. This was when I was a teenager. Wally Maggot processed probably fifty to a hundred-thousand. Captain Joe's probably processed between – so there's three-hundred to four-hundred-thousand pounds of whiting a day five days a week that got processed. Now maybe twenty-thousand a day is getting landed and shipped to New York. They were getting nothing for it. It was almost cheaper for them to sell it. It was probably more viable for them to sell it just as bait.

MG: What about flooding and severe storms?

AG: Last winter we had – was it last winter or the winter before? I think it was the winter before. We had two severe storms that we had massive flooding. The everyday tides are fine, but then you get that storm event that does it. If you got warmer water, it's lighter. So it can get moved easier.

MG: Right. Are you worried about climate change?

AG: I am. Yeah. I'm worried about it. What do I do about it? Probably next to nothing. I drive a behemoth of a truck. Probably, if I were a good boy, I'd just get rid of it. I do have my wife's old Avalon that I drive, which gets twice the gas mileage. But if I'm cold, I turn the thermostat up; I don't get a blanket. I'm as selfish as the next guy. So what do I do about it? Make me feel guilty.

MG: Sorry.

AG: [laughter] We just changed over our paper towels and toilet paper to all recycled.

MG: Good. There's something.

AG: [laughter] We definitely keep our waste stream minimal.

MG: Good. Is it something fishermen are talking about? What are they saying about climate change?

AG: They may be finally starting to stop saying that it's just a hoax. Other than that, it was always, "It ain't [happening]." "You might want to think about that." So I think they may be starting to think about it. Fishermen are notorious to blame everybody else. It's always

somebody else's fault – "I'm the victim." They spend their lives being victims and then coming up with stupid ideas about how to fix things.

MG: What would help the fisheries, in terms of climate change or regulations?

AG: I think common sense regulation maybe, to let guys go catch what species are actually there, and allow – just looking at the whole global or the whole northwest Atlantic position – they have codfish divided between Gulf of Maine and Georges Bank. It's like, "What do you think they don't swim back and forth?" Where's the fence? Yes, I know you have some spawning areas that are close by here that fish return to that you've seen them return to, but I don't think that – that's certainly not the Gulf of Maine population that comes out of those two spawning areas that you're talking about. So I don't know what – it's just such a complex – it's way beyond me.

MG: The fish that are here that have always been here, do they look any different?

AG: Sometimes, they look a little skinny. There's been a fair amount of feed around this year, been a lot of pogies. You know what they are, right?

MG: Yes.

AG: Menhaden. They get big. But there's been a lot of them this year. There was two years ago. Last year, there was a lot of mackerel. So the feed is coming back. The tuna fishermen were screaming about the herring going away because of the pressure on the herring, but they shut the herring off this year. They closed that down. Everybody was freaking out about that, but pogies have taken over to help fill that big void.

MG: It seems like there are alternate species to fish for, but the permit process is complicated.

AG: It's complicated. It's also only allowed the people who have [to] have, and nobody else is getting. It's in very limited hands.

MG: What's your hope for Gloucester fishermen?

AG: It would be nice if they got rid of the catch share system. If they scrapped that, and allowed day boats to go catch – that would bring back a few more boats. That would help out. Unfortunately, I think we're stuck in a boutique type industry right now. It's really sad.

MG: What do you mean by that?

AG: It's just specialized. Somebody comes in. The auction house might handle – instead of two-hundred-thousand pounds a day, they might handle twenty thousand. So the fillets go to different little cutting houses that supply restaurants, and not feeding the world like we did once. Once we were the number one. Number one in the world we were. When I was growing up, we were the biggest; we were the best.

MG: Is there anything else you want to say about what we've discussed so far today?

AG: No. I don't know if you have questions. If you have follow-up questions, feel free to call.

MG: Yes. I will listen back to this and see if there's something I forgot to ask, but I think you've covered everything really well.

AG: Trying to piece it together is going to be tricky, though. Do you have a transcription service?

MG: I'm the transcription service.

AG: [laughter] Oh, god. I hope they pay you okay, particularly if you add it up by hour.

MG: I really love what I do.

AG: Yes. You get to meet people like me. Who else are you interviewing in Gloucester, if I can ask?

MG: Sure. Let me turn this off first. I just want to thank you for all the time you spent with me and all the stories you shared.

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

Reviewed by Molly Graham 10/2/2019

Reviewed by Anthony Gross 1/25/2020

Reviewed by Molly Graham 1/27/2020