

Narrator: Joseph Orlando

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.

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Transcript Team: Molly Graham

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Abstract: The oral history interview with Joseph Orlando, conducted by Molly Graham on August 23, 2019, in Gloucester, Massachusetts, focuses on Orlando's life and career in the fishing industry. Born in Porticello, Sicily, in 1954, Orlando recounts his family's fishing background and their immigration to the United States when he was nine. Initially settling in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, his family later moved to Gloucester, where they resumed their fishing activities. Orlando discusses the challenges his family faced in adapting to life in America, his early involvement in fishing, and the various changes in the industry over the years. He details the impact of technological advancements and regulatory policies, including the Magnuson-Stevens Act and sector management, on his career and the local fishing community. Orlando also shares personal anecdotes about the camaraderie among fishermen, the dangers of the profession, and the economic difficulties resulting from industry regulations. He expresses his views on the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) and its role in the fishing industry. The interview provides a detailed account of Orlando's experiences and perspectives, offering insights into the history and culture of Gloucester's fishing community.

Molly Graham: This is an oral history interview with Joseph Orlando. The interview is taking place on August 23, 2019, in Gloucester, Massachusetts. The interviewer is Molly Graham. We will start at the beginning. Could you say when and where you were born?

Joseph Orlando: I was born in Sicily. Porticello is the name of the town. I was born in 1954.

MG: Can you trace your family history in Sicily?

JO: We came from a fishing family. It's a fishing town. My father was a fisherman. His father was a fisherman. Everybody, practically, was a fisherman in that town at that time. Now it's changed. I haven't been back in twenty years, so I don't know what it would look like now.

MG: Did both sides of the family fish?

JO: Yes.

MG: Talk about what fishing looked like for them and what it was like there.

JO: It was smaller boats. Everything they did was all done by hand. There was really no – they had diesel engines, but it was very small. They were just coming out – especially in Sicily; you didn't have a lot of technology at that time. So it was just small boats with a little diesel engine. Everything they did there fishing was done by hand. There was no hydraulics like there is now, anything like that. It was a hard life, but they worked at it. They made money at the time. Well, money that fed their families. It's not like today where you make money, [and] you save money. Back then, you just went – whatever you caught, you sold. You just took care of your family, and that was enough for everybody. There wasn't what we have now – you got to pay for a cell phone, you got to pay for a car. There were no such things back then. It was a pretty easy life. I think it was a great life. I saw a little bit of it when I was small. Sometimes I wish we can go back to it. [laughter]

MG: To how it was in Sicily?

JO: How it was in Sicily. It was a lot of fun. There wasn't the pressure that we have today. There were no insurance payments, car payments, cell phone payments – nothing. So it was pretty cool.

MG: Do you know what year your father was born?

JO: I don't.

MG: I was curious about your ancestors' lives in Italy. Did any relatives serve in World War I or II?

JO: My father did. My father was a prisoner of the Germans for three years in World War II.

MG: Where was his camp?

JO: Yugoslavia at the time. He used to tell us stories about it all the time. The Nazis used to line them up, and every odd guy, they'd shoot him. He made it through a couple of those things. He really didn't talk a lot about it. He just talked about that part.

MG: So, as an Italian soldier, he was captured by the Nazis.

JO: Yes.

MG: Wow.

JO: He was engaged to my mother at the time. They weren't married yet. She thought he was dead. Then, one day, he just showed up at the train, and there he was.

MG: That must have been incredible.

JO: Oh, yes. That's what I'm saying. Everything's changed so much.

MG: Tell me about immigrating to America.

JO: My father owned three boats at the time we left Sicily. His brother was here before, but he was in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. My mother was a seamstress; she used to sew all the time. At the time, they needed seamstresses in Milwaukee. My father's brother, my uncle, sponsored us to go to Milwaukee. They weren't sure that they were going to really do it, but then I guess they talked it over, and they did it for us, for the kids. He sold everything, left everything, and traveled to America.

MG: How old were you then?

JO: Nine.

MG: You must remember that then.

JO: Oh, yes. I remember a lot.

MG: First, tell me about your life in Sicily until the age of nine. What was that like? What do you remember?

JO: It was nothing like here. Over there, you used to get up in the morning, you get a piece of bread, and you were gone for the whole freaking day. God knows where. We used to go everywhere – on the wharves, down by the water. We used to play in the water. We used to make swords out of wood, and we used to play with the swords, like the Romans, because back then – that was TV for us back then. We used to make boats out of tin cans and play in the water. It was a whole different life. I remember I'd come home a couple of times – we used to pick periwinkles on the rocks. That's what we lived on. I'd fill my pockets up and go home at

night, and my pants would be all ripped and full of periwinkles to bring home to cook. It was just a whole different way of life. Like I said, I wish that we could go back to it sometimes.

MG: Do you have siblings?

JO: Yes, I got three. I've got eight grandchildren, and they're wonderful.

MG: Are you the oldest?

JO: No, I have two sisters that are older than me, and then I have a brother that's younger than me. He was born here in the States, but he was born with Down Syndrome. Now he's fifty-four years old.

MG: Was that challenging for your family?

JO: Oh, yes. Very challenging. But he's been a great kid. He's not really that bad. He speaks two languages. Actually, he does really well. He's freaking great.

MG: Where is he living now?

JO: He lives with my older sister because my mother and dad passed away. So, he lives with her.

MG: What do you remember about that move?

JO: Like I said, my uncle sponsored us to go to there. It was funny because my father went from being a skipper, a boat owner, and everything, to practically being nothing over there. He went to work in a steel factory where they used to make bombs and stuff like that. My mother got a job as a seamstress because that's how we got sponsored to go there. He worked in the steel factory. The job he got was cleaning bathrooms, and that didn't go over very well. He used to make fifty bucks a week. My mother would make over sixty bucks a week. Well, that didn't go over well. She never worked before in Sicily, and he used to be the main guy. Then we come to America – there was supposed to be gold on the streets and everything else – to work in a steel factory cleaning bathrooms and his wife making more money than him. That didn't go over very well. I remember my mother and father really never fighting, but when we got to Milwaukee, sometimes they used to argue because of that, I think. Especially when he came home, and she was still working. That wasn't the way of life that we – I think they left a better way of life to get a way better [life], and it didn't work that way. So we stayed there for a year and a half. Then we ended up coming to Gloucester. Knock on wood. That was the greatest move that they made.

MG: What was that year and a half in Milwaukee like for you? Did you speak any English?

JO: Oh, yes. Actually, I liked it there. I made friends. It was a new country. I loved donuts, [inaudible] donuts. Then, one day, we were told that we were going to make a move. We weren't very happy, us kids – me and my sisters – because, like I said, we made friends there.

We were already established, and now we're going to make another move. So that didn't go over too well. It was funny the way it happened. My father had us – how do you say it in English? He baptized this guy. His name was (Tom Brancalone?). His family was already in Gloucester fishing. They were highliners of the industry in Gloucester. One of their sons was named (Tom Brancalone?). That was my father's godfather. He heard that we were in Milwaukee. Well, he was in the Navy, and he happened to come [down] the Saint Lawrence [Seaway] at the time, in Milwaukee, to tie up there. He called my father up. He goes, "Godfather, I'm here. I want to see you." They talked. They met. My father invited them over for dinner. They got to talking and everything, I guess. He told him, "What are you doing here?" My father told him what he was going through here. Said, "Why don't you come to Gloucester?" "What are you doing here?" He says, "I got no choice. I'm stuck here." We were sent here." He says, "Well, you should come to Gloucester and go back to do what you brought up to do, go fishing. That's all there is in Gloucester, and it's very good money." He says, "Well, we can't make the move right now," because we didn't have any money. I've been told [this] through my mother and my father before they passed. They said a couple of days went by, and Tom's father that was already living here, established and everything – we call them "Goombata" – called my father up in Milwaukee and says, "(Gumba?), what are you doing there? Come over to Gloucester." He says, "But we can't afford it." He goes, "Don't worry about it." They sent us all the money. They put him on a plane. They sent him to Gloucester. They got him a good sign on a boat to go fishing. I think they were out three days, and they made eight hundred bucks to do what he loved to do. When he came back home from that trip, he called my mother and told her, "Pack everything. I'm not even coming back there. You guys are coming to Gloucester." And that's what we did. We put everything on a truck, and we sent everything to Gloucester. The people that brought us here rented us a house. They bought my mother a washer and dryer – a really nice house that they rented for us. Like I said, knock on wood, it was the greatest move we ever made.

MG: How old were you when you came to Gloucester?

JO: I was eleven.

MG: What are some of your first memories of life in Gloucester?

JO: Driving on [Route] 128. It's nothing like now. I keep thinking about it all the time when I drove on 128. There was nothing there. It was all woods. I said, "Where the hell are we going?" Then, all of a sudden, we came right over the Empire Bridge up there, and we saw all the water of Gloucester and everything else. We said, "Wow." We lived on water. Yes. So that was a great feeling.

MG: You attended school in Gloucester.

JO: Yes. I graduated from Gloucester High School, 1974.

MG: When did you first go fishing?

JO: 1973, a little bit. Then, [in] 1974, my family bought their first boat, and I was the engineer on it. A year later, we bought another boat which I skippered. We had two boats. Then, I was together with my brother-in-law, my sister's husband, for four, five years together. Then we split up. I went on my own. He went on his own. Knock on wood. We've done pretty well.

MG: Is it unusual to be a skipper at such a young age?

JO: At that time, yes. Yes.

MG: What year would this have been when you graduated high school? I'm sorry.

JO: '74.

MG: Before we talk about your experience fishing, tell me a little bit more about how your dad's career unfolded here?

JO: Like I said, his (Goombata?) brought him here, and he went fishing on the big boat. He was pretty knowledgeable about fishing – how to make nets and mend nets. He was very well-respected right away and liked. He worked on the best boats in Gloucester – (*St. Nicholas?*) at the time was a highliner of the fleet, and was a big boat. He did very well. I never saw my mother and father so happy after we came to Gloucester. She wasn't working. She stayed home. He really wanted her to stay home, not going to work like she did in Milwaukee. After we came to Gloucester, she never worked again. He was the main guy that took care of his family. That was the way we were brought up at the time.

MG: That also seems very different from today, where I don't know if a fisherman could support a family on his own.

JO: Not anymore. We're having trouble now because of all the added costs. The fishing industry's – I still do okay, but it's very expensive to live today – car payments, house payments, insurance payments. I could go on, and on, and on – grandchildren payments. It gets worse as you get older.

MG: What years did your father fish here in Gloucester?

JO: He fished from 1974, I would say, to 2000.

MG: So he really saw a lot of changes, too.

JO: Yes. The fishing industry went through a lot of changes at the time, in those years. Even here, when we first came to Gloucester, there was a little bit of – still, there was no hydraulics in Gloucester. Hydraulics was introduced in Gloucester in the '80s when everybody started changing over to hydraulics. At that time, when they went fishing on the big boat, there were seven, eight men in each boat, all family guys. They were gone nine, ten, twelve days. Sometimes they'd get stuck in Canada for a whole month. Nobody does that no more, especially when the two-hundred-mile limit came. It's just completely changed from then to now.

MG: So would your father go off for weeks at a time?

JO: Oh, yes.

MG: How was that on your mother and the family?

JO: She was used to it a little bit, but not to that capacity where he was gone for so long. She had to really raise us mostly when he came to the States. I remember one story was funny. She met a group of friends and women – when you fished on the boat, all the women [and] all the guys, they would know each other and the families. I think they were gone for ten days at a time. All the women got together, and they would go out for Chinese food. They invited my mother to go with them. She goes, “No, no. We can’t go there.” My sister’s going, “Why, mom? Go.” “No, your father’s not even come home yet. He’s still fishing. You want me to go out?” But that was what they did back then. The women would get together and go out. But she wasn’t used to that kind of life. So she thought it was a bad thing to do. But she did go. We talked her into it. It was different than what we were used to.

MG: Right. It was a big deal to go out with other women.

JO: Right, right. It wasn’t right because her husband was away fishing, and here she is going out with a bunch of women. It didn’t [inaudible] what we were used to.

MG: Did you have other relatives come over from Italy? Grandparents, cousins, uncles?

JO: No. Just my uncle in Milwaukee. I lost track of – it’s funny. We had a lot of family there. My sisters kept in touch with a lot of them, but myself, I haven’t. I went back three or four times when I was little, but in the last twenty years, I just haven’t been back. I’d like to go. I really would. I think I might. [laughter]

MG: When you graduated high school, did you know you wanted to be a fisherman?

JO: No, [after] high school, I went to the automotive shop for four years, actually. I was doing pretty well. I really wanted to start my own garage, but when my family bought their first boat, they really didn’t – my father and my brother-in-law didn’t speak English very good, and they needed somebody to take care of the engine. Where I was knowledgeable already from going to the automotive shop for four years, I decided to give it a try. I think the first four trips I was puking my guts out. I said, “I ain’t going to go back. I quit.” I quit four times, then I’d get paid, and I’d go right back. After that, I just got used to it. I made a life of my own on it.

MG: You don’t get seasick anymore?

JO: No. But again, we don’t fish in the weather that we used to fish [in] back then either. Back then, we just went out – no weather reports, no cell phones. Away you went, and whenever you got home, you got home.

MG: You wouldn't check the weather before you went out?

JO: Yes, but it wasn't very accurate. At those times, we used to work in bad weather. We used to go out for five, six, seven days. So if we brought good weather for one or two days, and then you were out there, and it brought gale warnings, you were just stuck there. We used to go further out than where we are now. That's what's so sad about the fishing industry today. We used to go a hundred miles out for five or six days to catch twenty-thousand fish. Now I can do that all by myself right out here in my backyard, and NOAA [National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration] just shuts us down. So that's how much things have changed. I think we were the stewards of the fishing industry back then, the fishermen. But today, it seems like NOAA is. They just don't give a shit about us. They treat us like dirt. I'm just going to say what I [think]. It's completely changed. We have no control over this industry anymore. It's all about them – all the NGOs [Non-governmental organizations] and they're all making six-figure money. It's all about their jobs; not about us. They just don't care about us. They put ninety-nine percent of the fishermen out of business. I'm serious. All gone. We're all gone. But they're still all there, making, like I said, six figures, best health insurance, this and that, vacations. Here we are struggling, and the fish are dying from old age.

MG: What was NOAA's role in the fisheries back in the '60s, '70s, and '80s?

JO: There really wasn't much. There was really no [regulation]. Don't get me wrong. Regulations are great. You need them, but up to a certain point. I think they just went too far. The biggest thing is when the Magnuson Stevens Act came into play, and the two-hundred-mile limit, what happened was it drove all those big huge boats, like what my father used to go fishing on – they used to fish on Georges, the Grand Banks, and all those places – it drove them all inside a two-hundred-mile limit, which the Canadians own now all that water where they used to go. So now they [inaudible] everybody together in a small space. The stocks did go down the tubes there for a while. But at the time, so did all the boats. They just kept going and going and going until there was nobody left. Now the fish are coming out of the woodwork, and there's nobody to go fishing. So it's like a big, big circle.

MG: Just so I understand the timeline, you were doing automotive work after high school and then got into fishing fulltime.

JO: Yes.

MG: How did you make that decision?

JO: Again, when my family bought their first boat, they needed an engineer. Where I was knowledgeable about engines and stuff like that, I decided to go. After six months or so, they made me part-owner of the boat. That's the only way I would stay. Then I just got stuck there. It was good money. I saw the potential of what we could do. I've always been – how do you say – go-getter. You know what I'm saying? If I saw something, I just wanted to be better than you. I just wanted to catch more fish than you. I wanted a better boat than you. I've always been like that. I just got stuck. Sometimes now I wish it was the other way around. Again, I got no regrets whatsoever. Knock on wood.

MG: Around the time you got into fishing was when Magnuson-Stevens was enacted.

JO: It was just being talked about.

MG: Can you say again how that changed things for fishermen?

JO: Well, now you had area closures, which we never had before; bigger mesh size, which we never had before. Right after that, we started getting days-at-sea, where you had so many days to go fishing. They dropped that for two-to-one count. So if you went out for twelve hours, they counted it for twenty-four. We started out with a hundred and sixty days. They cut us down to sixty days. Then they cut us down to forty days at two to one count. Then we only had twenty-four days. You got a month, so I can explain this all to you? That's how bad it is. I ended up buying three extra permits. I spent over a half a million dollars on permits at the time because of days-at-sea. We bought them so we could have extra days. Then NOAA says, "Well, if you have one or two permits, as long as the baselines are the same or within ten percent of the horsepower and length of the boat, you can combine all those permits together, and have more days." So we did that, and then they cut us even more again. Then after spending all that money, we went to catch shares. What happened with catch shares is they changed from days-at-sea to quota. At the time I bought permits, I bought permits for the days-at-sea. They didn't have much quota on them. I bought permits from down South, but they didn't have the kind of groundfish permits that we have up here. So when they changed that all around, we all got screwed.

MG: Your permits were devalued.

JO: Yes.

MG: So it went from days-at-sea to sector management.

JO: Yes.

MG: That's what the quotas were.

JO: Yes.

MG: How did they work?

JO: They were working great. Well, they could be working great, but they're not. Because the first year of sectors in 2010, when it started, myself, I had over a hundred-thousand Gulf of Maine cod. Jane Lubchenco was the head of NOAA at the time, [and] promised us that we were going to make more money, work less, all this stuff. And it was – the first year of sectors it was great. Guess what? The second year into sectors, they started screwing around with all the quota, saying that they made mistakes, the science made mistakes, we're going to cut the quota. By 2013, they cut everything down [by] ninety percent. I went from a hundred-thousand of Gulf of Maine cod in 2010, down to six-thousand in 2013. Everything else, too – all my flounder

stocks, and everything else. Now we got to go lease fish from – now they put all those other guys that really didn't have a lot of fish in the sector system out of business. But they still have permits. So what they do with those permits, whatever fish they have on them, they put them on the open market, and they lease them. So guys like me – now I need Gulf of Maine cod, I go lease it from them. The system's just falling apart, and it's falling apart because they took the fish away, again. NOAA and the scientists, they took everything away from us. They promised us when we went into sectors that the fishery would be fully rebuilt in 2014. Boy, were they wrong. How could they make that kind of a mistake and ruin everybody's lives except their own? So that's where we're at today, and we're still fighting with them to try to get the quotas back up, but they won't budge. I don't know why. I think it's because the science is so freaking bad. I mean, we see fish. You were talking about global warming a little while ago. Well, if that were true, there'd be no fish around. I've never caught so much fish in my entire career as I have the last couple of years. How's that possible if it's global warming? That's why I'm saying you need two months to listen to me and Vito [Giacalone]. Vito especially. He's a professor at this stuff. We really look to him. He represents a lot of us. I'm in Sector II, which is next door. I don't know if you met Dave [Leveille] earlier. He's our manager. I'm president of Sector II. I've been president since we started in 2010. We had a lot of participants in 2010. We lost eighty percent of the guys. It's really sad.

MG: I guess I don't know how all of this works. NOAA said, "Okay, you need to go to sectors. This is our new plan."

JO: Right. Because we're going to make more money, we're going to work for less, and we're going to let you guys be the stewards of the fishery. That's what they told us. But it didn't work that way. I think we were suckered into it. That's why they gave us all that fish at the beginning, telling us in 2014 we were going to be fully rebuilt. I don't know if you know about the observer programs. In 2014, we were going to be fully rebuilt. We were going to pay for the observer coverage, which would have been no problem if we would have still had the fish that we had in 2010. But guess what? They lied to us. They took all the fish away. Now we're still stuck with observer coverage that we might have to still pay maybe next year. I don't know.

MG: Has NOAA offered an economical solution?

JO: No.

MG: For example, if your quotas are low with one species, you can fish for another?

JO: No. Because we don't have permits for that or boats for that.

MG: "We're concerned about the cod, but there's an abundance of monkfish," for example.

JO: Right, or redfish. Well, to fish for those, you need a big boat. The big boats are doing very well actually because of the redfish quota. The redfish quota was really down to nothing at one time. Now you can catch all you want. I remember at a certain point where we only had four hundred pounds of Gulf of Maine haddock for the trip. You can't bring in no more than that. Now it's unlimited; you can catch all you want. So things have changed. That's what we're

living on right now, Gulf of Maine haddock, and staying away from the cod, even though there's a lot of cod. I completely changed my ways of fishing in the last three years than I did the rest of my career. Yeah, you could do that, but you need to be set up for it. You need to go spend a million dollars for a big boat, which we don't have. Then you got to have the permits for it. We don't have those permits, either. We have no redfish quota. We have no pollack quota. I got a little bit of a monkfish quota, but it's a different animal. They don't realize that. They think you just go fish for this. But where're the guys? We can't even find guys to go fishing today. Big boats, you need three, four, five men, and you can't find nobody.

MG: You'd think a good solution for overfishing would be fewer boats and fewer fishermen, and the pricing –

JO: The pricing hasn't been that great. We're getting less money for fish now than when I first started fishing.

MG: I know.

JO: It's freaking crazy. I'm getting fifty cents a pound for haddock. My father was getting fifty cents a pound when he first started fishing.

MG: And what's the cost to lease?

JO: Cost to lease right now – actually, it's only a couple pennies. But if you're looking to lease Gulf of Maine cod, you're going to pay over two bucks a pound. We're only getting two bucks at the market. So we're losing money on it, but we have to have it to catch our other stuff. The choke species are very expensive to lease. Species that they say are fully rebuilt, it's very cheap to lease. But you got to combine them. You got to try to stay away from those choke species and try to make a living at the other stuff. But some of the other stuff that you're talking about, you have to go further out to catch. Redfish, you can't be a dayboat. I'm a dayboat [inaudible]. I get up at two o'clock in the morning. I come home by five or six in the afternoon. To go redfish fishing, I got to get up at midnight and maybe get there the next day. How do you do it? You just can't.

MG: It sounds exhausting.

JO: Yes. That's what NOAA doesn't understand. They just sit behind their desks and computers and make up all these stories, and everything's great for them, but not for us.

MG: Is there any hope on the horizon to improve the relationship, for some kind of understanding?

JO: No. We've tried in the past many times. Like I was telling you, Jane Lubchenco came to Gloucester, sat with our two-hundred fishermen, saying, "Listen, guys. You got to go through the system. You're going to make more money. You're going to work less. You're going to be rebuilt in 2014." Guess what? Two years later, they put everybody out of business. They get away with it. There's no – how do you say it? There's a word for it.

MG: Accountability?

JO: Accountability. There's no accountability on their part whatsoever. But on our part, it's a hundred percent. I don't get it.

MG: We can talk more about regulations. But let's back up. You bought your first boat when you were twenty-two-years-old.

JO: Twenty-two.

MG: What was the name of that boat?

JO: It was *Padre Pio II*. My brother-in-law was still partners with me on that boat at the time, John Sanfilippo. Then we split up. He went his way; I went mine. He got a smaller boat, and I kept that one. I had that one for over thirty years. When we went to sectors, I still had that boat. I had my son working with me. Well, I had two sons working with me, Anthony and Mario. I lost both of them to sector management because of all the changes in the quota. We just couldn't make it as a family anymore.

MG: You had to fire them.

JO: I had to fire them.

MG: What was that like?

JO: It wasn't very good. It was very stressful, especially Mario, who had three kids already, a house mortgage. It was a very tough time to go through. We bought permits to make our business better. Then, all of a sudden, everything changed. I ended up selling that boat. It was my baby for a long time. A guy in Boston bought it. Still there. He rebuilt the whole thing. Spent a lot of money, actually, on it. I went to Quebec to buy a smaller boat, brought it to Gloucester. At that time, in 2013, they were doing the cuts, but we still had 39,000 of Gulf of Maine cod, and flounder stocks and stuff like that. When I got back to Gloucester with that boat, I spent over two-hundred grand. I started hearing rumors again that the codfish is really in trouble, the biomass is down to three percent. What the hell? We're going to lose all the cod and flounder and everything. What the hell do I do now? So I sold that boat, took a beating on that one. I bought another smaller boat which I got now. It's forty feet. I just go out, me and another guy. Just go day fishing and come home. There used to be, I don't know, over eighteen guys when we first started my sector – all gone. We called ourselves medium boats. There were big boats, medium boats, and small boats. Now there's only six big boats left, no medium boats, seven or eight small boats, and we're all part-timers; not even full-timers anymore. That's how everything's changed.

MG: Are you still president of Sector II?

JO: Yes.

MG: What does Sector II represent?

JO: Represents a bunch of guys that are left in the industry. They get together, and we share the quota. We actually get our own quota – the quota is given to the sector, and then the sector decided to split the quota by your past history, so whatever you had in your past history. I think it was 2006 – I don't remember the years. It was a ten-year period that they picked for [the] allocation period. So we get that quota back to us every year when NOAA gives us the fish. But it's nothing like it was in 2010. It's a tenth of what we had before. Now we have to lease it from all the other guys that are gone, that still have permits. They put their fish on the open market, and we got to buy it from them.

MG: It sounds so complicated.

JO: It is. I get confused myself sometimes. [laughter]

MG: Have you always fished out of Gloucester?

JO: Yes. Oh, yes. Years ago, when I first started, actually, we used to fish out of – sometimes, in bad weather, we used to go into Portland. We used to fish out of Portland, Maine. That was just at the beginning, that three or four years when we started. Then, all out of Gloucester.

MG: You mentioned your schedule, going to work around two or three in the morning, and then working until four or five in the afternoon.

JO: Yes. Right now, I go out – I get up at 2:30 [AM], go down to the boat – well, first, I got to see if I got an observer or not. If we got an observer, we got to take an observer with us. We go, and I get back between five and six every day in the afternoon.

MG: That's a really long day.

JO: Yes.

MG: Can you talk about what it takes to do this kind of work?

JO: Well, it's the only thing I know how to do anymore. I still need to work. It's hard work, but still making a living at it. Like I said, it's the only thing we know how to do. Take care of your family. Now we got to take care of the kids and the grandchildren, too. So I just keep going. I don't know what I would do with myself if I quit. I could probably quit right now, but I keep telling my wife, "What am I going to do?" I still got a boat. I still have a permit. I feel funny. I don't want to sell my permits. I don't want to lease my fish to guys that are struggling. This whole system's going to break apart anyway because the guys that are left right now are guys like me. I'm sixty-five, just turned sixty-five. We all got two or three years, [and] then we're all going to quit. I don't know who we're going to lease these fish to. There's going to be nobody left to lease to. The whole freaking thing is going to collapse. It's collapsing now. I say forty percent of the total quota is being left on the table every year because there's nobody to catch it.

Leasing prices are going down all the time, except the choke species because there's nobody, again, that wants that fish. Something's going to happen. But I don't know what's going to happen. It's all going to be owned – it's all going to go to big corporations. They're starting now, and all the NGOs and environmental groups are starting to buy permits. It's all going to go that way. There's going to be nobody left as far as guys like me, family guys, to go fishing. There ain't. It's all going to be corporations, put all the quotas on big boats, and hire people, and go fishing. We see it. We've seen it done all over the world. Alaska's done it. West Coast's done it. Go to Greenland or places like that; they've devastated those areas the same way. So we see it coming.

MG: How have those fishermen adapted? Have they just gotten out of the business?

JO: Yes. A lot of them lost everything, and a lot of them are working, doing different work.

MG: This might sound like a stupid question, but can you explain the difference between corporations hiring fishermen and fishermen working for themselves?

JO: Well, it's the way of life for us. We go out, like I said, in the morning. We come back with a fresh product to be sold to the consumer. Well, you're going to lose guys like me, and there's going to be corporations. It's going to be all big vessels, where they hire kids just for the day's work, freeze everything on board, and the public is not going to get that fresh fish that they were used to years ago. It's going to be a whole different ball game. They can't afford to fish like we do, bring fresh fish to the market because once you get a three, four-hundred-foot boat with fifteen, twenty guys working on it, they can't go in and out. They got to go out there, get their limits, freeze everything, cut everything, and then come to the dock. That's where it's going to go. We see it happening now.

MG: You mentioned your children that you hired, so I'm curious about your family. How did you meet your wife and start your family?

JO: I was working at the gas station one day. [inaudible] gas pump. I was selling gas. I was the attendant guy, and check the oil, all that stuff. I just happened to turn – I was giving gas to somebody. Got done with that, put the gas pump back on, started walking the other way, and all of sudden, I get run over. It was my [future] wife. I gave her hell. Then, I think two or three days later, I saw her somewhere else, I think down the boulevard, and [we] joked about it. That's how we met – she ran me over.

MG: Is she from Gloucester as well?

JO: Yes. Her father fished – fishing family. They came from the old country, too. But she was born here.

MG: How does she feel about what you do?

JO: Well, she was used to it because of her father, so she knew the way of life. She never really minded it. She knew what she was up against. We really didn't talk much about that because, like I said, she already knew the lifestyle.

MG: You have the two boys. Any other kids?

JO: I have two boys and a girl.

MG: What have your sons done instead, now that they're not fishing anymore?

JO: One of them works for DeMoulas, Market Basket, in one of the offices. The other one, he's a painter now. He started his own business painting. He's doing pretty good now, Mario. Wish he was still with me. That's what they took away from us. Like I said, they just don't give a shit. You know how many council meetings I've gone to and cried my eyes out because of that? Nobody from the council ever asked a question on anything; they just don't care. It's all about the fish and not the fishermen.

MG: It seems like your goals are aligned. You want there to be fish.

JO: Absolutely. That's what we live on. We are the stewards of the fish. We don't want to overfish. We want to keep fishing, and we want our children – that's why my kids were fishing with me, so they can keep fishing after I left. Take the boat over – that's what families do, they pass on whatever they got to their kids. That's what I was hoping to do, but I guess that ain't going to happen.

MG: Did you see species abundances change over time?

JO: Oh, yes. Absolutely.

MG: Were you adapting how you fished and what you fished for?

JO: Right. That's what we do now. We were fishing for cod. I was a cod fisherman. I caught codfish. Now, I changed from codfish to flounders. Then, when they [inaudible] the Gulf of Maine haddock quota, I changed to catching haddock. There's fish out there. We adapt to it, but we can't adapt to it like the way we want to. Right now, we're pretty lucky that we're fishing in areas where there's not a lot of codfish. But certain times of the year, we do get codfish with the haddock. So now we have to go lease and buy codfish at two, 2.25 a pound. Sometimes you only get two bucks for them, but we have to buy them and have them to catch our other quota. That's what sucks. You try to tell that to your crewmember that we got to pay for this after he cleans them and puts them ice. He says, "Well, where's the money for that?" "Well, there ain't no money for that because we got to pay somebody else to get them from."

MG: I saw the film you were in, *Sacred Cod*.

JO: *Sacred Cod*.

MG: Talk to me about that experience on the film, and the cod crisis. What was going on?

JO: That's a perfect example, that thing with *Sacred Cod*. They kept telling us – PR [public relations] was a big thing. They're going to do this film. We did it. They showed it all over the world now. You know what? Nothing comes out of it. It was just a waste of time. That's the way I feel. You saw me spill my guts out to NOAA and John Bullard. They don't care. They go home at night. They're still making over a hundred-thousand a year, best health insurance, best whatever. "Those lousy fishermen. They're never happy." We should be working together. It should be about the fish, and it should be about the fishermen. Instead, it's just about the fish and the hell with the fishermen. That's what NOAA sucks at.

MG: You don't feel that that film made any impact?

JO: No.

MG: Has there been anybody, as part of NOAA or another organization, that you feel is on your side?

JO: No. Just the people that represent us only.

MG: The mayor is doing a great job.

JO: Yes. But our congressional people, they just gave up because NOAA is so powerful. It's not that our congressional people didn't try. They have tried in the past. They've come to meetings with us. They've yelled. They said, "How can you do this?" You know what? They just played [inaudible]. They have become a powerful body in this country that nobody can touch them. Then, they're scared shit about the NGOs, if they do something for us, or they got to get sued. I got to say the truth and say I think that's part of the problem, too, because they're scared shit. If they go easy on something, then the NGOs will come along and sue them. They have done it in the past.

MG: Well, talk about some of the other aspects of fishing. It's not easy work. It's also dangerous work. Have you had close calls?

JO: Oh, yes. We lost a boat years ago, me and my brother-in-law when we were fishing together. It was the *Padre Pio*, the second one before I bought the *Padre Pio* that I had for thirty years. We don't know what happened. We heard a big noise, and we started taking on water. We jumped in a life raft. We passed a boat – actually, we were pretty lucky – it came by and picked us up. It's very dangerous work, especially back then. It's still dangerous work, but today, there's a lot more technology for safety stuff. We got EPIRBs [emergency position-indicating radiobeacon], which we didn't have back then. We have great life rafts. Cell phones that twenty, thirty miles out, we can speak to my wife. It's changed a lot, but it's still dangerous as hell. Right now, a lot of guys are fishing alone. I'm sixty-five. The guy I'm fishing with is sixty-sixty. There's a lot of guys – half of the guys that we have, the small boats in my sector, are fishing alone, all by themselves. It's very dangerous for them, and it's very dangerous for us

because if something goes wrong, their boats are just going to keep going, and who knows what's going to happen.

MG: When was it that you lost your boat?

JO: I think it was in the '80s. Don't remember exactly the year.

MG: That sounds really scary.

JO: Yes, yes. A lot of people tell me, "I don't know how you guys do it," but that's what we do, so we're used to it. When we see something like that happen, we just play dumb, try to block it off because if you think about it, you're not going to [inaudible].

MG: I was struck watching *Sacred Cod*, that scene where you're pointing to a screen on your boat. I forget what the quote was, but you said the science was missing what you could see on your screen.

JO: The fish. I was showing them all the cod that we see on the machine, steaming through. We can't set out because there's too much cod there. That's why I said nothing came – you show them, you tell them, and nothing comes out. It's crazy. It's a crazy, crazy system. I'm glad it's almost over for me, to be honest with you. I feel sad for the kids that really wanted to – it's a great way of life. You have freedom. It's a great freedom. You work for yourself. You get up in the morning. There's nothing better than six o'clock in the morning, put your feet up on the dash, and you're watching all your equipment, you're towing, the sun's coming, there's isn't a breath of wind – it's beautiful. It's going to all be lost. I keep thinking about it. Why couldn't my sons Mario and T.J. do it? Or somebody else's kid do it? There's nobody else that can come into this industry and do it. If you wanted to come in as a kid, you need to buy a boat; you need to buy a permit and forget about it. You need a half a million dollars just to start off on the permit, and then a boat. Then you got to hire a crew. You got to buy insurance. Then you got to go lease fish to go fishing. You got to be nuts.

MG: You need a lot of money.

JO: There's nobody out there that's going to do that. That's why I say they trapped us. There's some kind of secret service thing out there. They're just going to put us out of business, and it's all going to be corporations. "This is what we're going to give you. Go get it. We don't care." That's it. They don't want to deal with guys like me anymore. Although, when I first started fishing, the first boat we bought – I was still in with my brother-in-law – my sister comes down, and she says, "We got to go to City Hall and get our fishing permit," because we were changing everything over to buy this boat. She says, "Go to the post office." National Marine Fisheries Service, at the time, was at the post office. The post office up there was just two women, two bookkeepers, and one guy, who was the main guy of NOAA, of National Marine Fisheries Service at the time. So I went up there to get my permit. Here we are, forty years later, it's almost a billion dollars for them and nothing for us. All the people that work for NOAA – there's probably six people for every fisherman. When I first started, it was the other way around. It's right there. The taxpayers in this country should be up in arms. They get all the

toys. They get all the cars they want. They get brand new buildings – five, six, seven, eight, ten million dollars. It’s crazy. Why would you want to give up those jobs? The science people, they get all new boats, all new whatever they want, travel time, meetings. Come on. They ain’t going to give that up by saying, “No, everything’s good. Go out.” They’re going to lose their jobs. So they got to make it worse than it really is so they can keep their jobs. That’s what it’s about. If it were about the fish, they’d be gone. Like I said, there’s no accountability, and nobody cares. There’s no investigation. There’s no nothing. I would love to see somebody investigate NOAA about all the shit that’s happened to us over the years and all the money they’ve made, and we’ve put out as taxpayers for them to oversee a few boats now. Now they want us to pay seven, eight-hundred bucks a day for observers. I don’t even make that a day. How am I going to pay that a day? It’s another way of pushing you out, pushing more guys out. They don’t care. Nobody cares. I’m pissed. It is what it is.

MG: It would be a shame to end Gloucester’s famous fishing heritage.

JO: It’s already ended. When I first started fishing in ’74, ’73, like I told you, I used to tie up at the Gloucester House Wharf, we used to call it back then. Now it’s Seven Seas Wharf. We used to walk from that wharf all the way down across the way to (Felicia?) jumping over boats. That place where I tied up, there were twenty boats, big boats, when I first started fishing. Everybody’s gone. Not one boat there. It’s all sport fishermen. You go over wharf to wharf, [and] it’s the same thing; it’s a ghost town. All the wharves are falling apart because there’s no business. There’s just no money to maintain anything. All the fuel guys – we have fuel guys come down to the boat, fuel us up. We used to have special grocery people we’d get all our groceries from. We lost all of them. Gear guys. It just devastated the whole city. Look at New Bedford now. There’s nobody left in New Bedford. After that Carlos thing, it’s gone. It’s just scallopers, that’s it.

MG: Can you say a little more about what happened with Carlos Rafael and what’s going on in New Bedford? [Editor’s Note: Carlos Rafael, nicknamed “The Godfather,” was New Bedford-based seafood tycoon who managed multi-million dollar fishing fleet. He was arrested in 2016 and pled guilty to tax evasion and conspiracy. He is currently serving a 46-month prison sentence.]

JO: I’d rather not. I never really liked the guy, so I’m just going to leave it at that. I’m glad whatever happened, happened.

MG: We had started to talk about shipwrecks and close calls. Gloucester has had a number of well-known lost vessels and lost fishermen over the years. I didn’t know if you were related to John Orlando, who was lost on *The Patriot*.

JO: No, I wasn’t related, but we were very good friends, especially with Matt Russo, the skipper of the boat. We were very good friends, close friends.

MG: Can you say what happened?

JO: We don't know what happened. That morning when it happened, we got up to go fishing. His brother called me up because he was fishing, too, at the time. He says, "Joe, we can't get ahold of Matt." I go, "What do you mean you can't get ahold of Matt?" "We can't get ahold of Matt." I said, "Well, call the Coast Guard." He goes, "Well, his wife already did." We had a big to-do with the Coast Guard at the time because I don't think they followed procedure right. They didn't get out there fast enough, we don't think. We all went out looking for them. We were almost there before the Coast Guard was. That was a big to-do because I think they screwed up at some point. We found them. We found the boat. They found him. The whole fleet went out that morning looking for them. He was a character.

MG: That must have been so tough.

JO: Yes. Yes, it was.

MG: Do you remember when you found out about the *Andrea Gail*?

JO: Yeah, there was a big, big storm. I really didn't know those guys very good. As a fisherman, your heart goes out to them. We know who they were, but we weren't close friends. Something like that happens in the fishing industry, everybody was on alert. Anytime anything like that happens – I remember when they had the funeral at the church, St. Ann's Church, we couldn't even get in the place, that's how packed it was. Yes, I don't like to think about that stuff.

MG: I know that we're getting close on time. You have to be somewhere at two o'clock.

JO: Yes.

MG: I still have a number of questions I want to ask you. Are you able to get together again to finish up?

JO: Sure. Yes.

MG: I'll listen back to our conversation and see if there's anything I'm missing. We'll talk next time about the rest of your career and what changes you've seen in Gloucester and out at sea.

JO: Yes. I've seen a lot of changes, but I haven't seen any changes at NOAA. They keep getting bigger. It's unbelievable. It really is. They get paid for all these extra meetings, and everything else. It's only about fish, and there's plenty of them. Believe me; there's plenty of them.

MG: Yes. We'll leave it here for today and pick up here next time.

JO: Sure.

-----END OF INTERVIEW-----
Reviewed by Molly Graham 10/8/2019