

**Narrator:** Sebastian Parisi

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

**Transcript Team:** Molly Graham

**Date of Interview:** August 31, 2019

**Abstract:** This oral history interview with Sebastian Parisi, conducted by Molly Graham, provides a detailed account of Parisi's life, focusing on his experiences growing up in Gloucester, Massachusetts, his family's involvement in the fishing industry, and the social and economic changes in the community over the decades. Parisi was born on February 13, 1940, in Gloucester, where his family has deep roots. His narrative traces his lineage back to his grandparents, who emigrated from Italy and settled in Boston before moving to Gloucester due to better fishing opportunities during the Second World War. Parisi's family, particularly on his father's side, were predominantly fishermen, with most of his uncles and father engaged in commercial fishing. He vividly recalls the tight-knit nature of the fishing community, where many crew members were relatives. Throughout the interview, Parisi discusses the challenges faced by the fishing industry, including economic pressures, government regulations, and the decline of local fisheries. He provides personal anecdotes about the daily life of fishermen, the impact of the war on their livelihoods, and the evolution of the community as Gloucester transitioned from a fishing hub to a more diversified economy. Parisi also reflects on his own career shift from fishing to becoming a diesel mechanic and later a vocational school teacher, underscoring the adaptability required to cope with the declining fishing industry. Parisi highlights the cultural aspects of his upbringing, such as the importance of family, the role of food and traditions brought from Italy, and the sense of community that characterized Gloucester. He laments the loss of affordable housing and the changes brought by gentrification, which have

made it difficult for long-time residents and their descendants to remain in the area. The interview concludes with Parisi's reflections on the future of Gloucester, expressing concerns about overdevelopment and the sustainability of the local economy. He advocates for preserving the heritage and character of the town while balancing the needs of current residents and the pressures of modernization.

Molly Graham: This is an oral history interview with Sebastian Parisi. The interview is taking place on August 31, 2019, in Gloucester, Massachusetts. The interviewer is Molly Graham. We'll start at the very beginning. Could you say when and where you were born?

Sebastian Parisi: I was born in Gloucester, Massachusetts, February 13, 1940, approximately one mile from where we're at right now, in a house. I was born in a house.

MG: What was your address?

SP: When I was born? I want to say 16 Western Avenue. I'm not sure. It's not very far from here. As a matter of fact, the whole family, no one moved more than a mile from where they were born, most of everybody.

MG: That is something I've learned about Gloucester. There's very little turnover. There seem to be so many generations of families here.

SP: Yes, but they can't stay here anymore. We've become too expensive. You can't buy anything here. Everybody stayed basically around. My brothers and sisters all stayed here. All my father's brothers, they all lived here, except one, I think. One went to New Bedford. That was a different thing, why they went there – that's a different story altogether. Well, my grandfather came from the old country, from Italy. They settled in Boston. Everybody went to Boston because that's where everybody went to. They stayed in Boston until just prior to the Second World War. They couldn't go fishing because of the war. They had a net around Boston. So they all moved. There were no nets in Gloucester, so they all moved from Boston to Gloucester. They all fished out of Gloucester. Now, on my mother's side, there were twelve of them – twelve aunts and twelve uncles. All the uncles were fishermen. On my father's side, there were nine. Six boys, all commercial fishermen. How many aunts did I have? Three? Three aunts. So they all stayed in this area. No one went to – they either were commercial fishermen – in later life, some of my uncles on my father's side became lobstermen, went lobster fishing. Way back with my father – I didn't know my father until I was twenty-one years old because he was always fishing. They used to go to the Grand Banks. They used to be gone three weeks. I'd see him maybe three or four days, and they'd go back out again. I never got to know my father until I was almost twenty-one, and I went fishing with him. That's how we got to know him. Because when you're fishing and you're dragging the nets, there's a lot of downtime; you have time to talk. I learned a lot from him about my relatives, like the Novellos. I never knew them. I never knew them on my father's side. I didn't know that we were related until I was older, because, after the second generation, it started to split up. There's quite a few cousins. On my mother's side, her oldest brother had twelve children, and there were twelve in that family. On my mother's side, I think there's over two hundred cousins. We used to have Christmas – we used to have a party, just first cousins – two hundred. We had to rent a hall. They did. What else?

MG: Both sides of your family came from Italy. Where in Italy?

SP: From what I gather, Terrasini. That's what they tell me. That's what I always heard, but I never confirmed it with anybody. The only time I got to talk to my father about my grandfather

– now, I was fourteen when my grandfather died on my father’s side. I can remember my father telling me he was a fisherman in Italy, and he used to fish for octopus. That’s what they did over there, so that’s what he did. Other than that, went to the regular school system. Grammar school, I started to go fishing, just in the summers. These are dayboats. You go out just a day. I never really enjoyed fishing. That’s why I never continued with it. All my brothers are fishermen. I tried it a couple times and after, but it just was too monotonous and too long away from home. So I became a mechanic. That’s what I did. After high school, I went in the Air Force, and I was an aircraft mechanic. Then when I came back in ’64, 1964, I went to work in an automobile dealership that was across the street from where I lived. So I worked there, and then I went to work for a diesel outfit up in Woburn, [Massachusetts], Hubbs Engine. That’s where I got my background, and I stayed. I worked on the commercial fishing boats. In about 1967, I got married.

Leanora Parisi: No, we got married in ’65.

SP: ’65, okay. Then I started to work in town here. I worked on just commercial fishing boats. That’s all I worked on. I really didn’t care to work on the yachts. I concentrated on the commercial fishing boats. At one time, I had fifty-eight customers. I used to have fifty-eight engines. So I did that. Then, about 1972 or ’75, I started to go to school at nights and weekends. I got a certification to teach in the vocational school. So I taught in vocational schools for about twenty years. On the side, I used to still work on the boats. Then I taught twenty years – twenty years of different vocational schools. I taught down the Gloucester High School here. I taught in Beverly, Billerica, and after twenty years, I gave that up, and I became a supervisor of the local transit bus company in town here. I did that –

LP: Until you retired.

SP: Until I retired when I was sixty-two-and-a-half. We built a house in Florida, so we go to Florida every January to June. Even now, I still work on boats now and then. As a matter of fact, I did a little job yesterday. I’m eighty years old, so I can’t do too much anymore. Other than that, I think –

MG: Let me ask you some more about your family. You have so many relatives who have lived here for such a long time. It was your grandfathers’ generation that immigrated to Boston on both sides?

SP: Yes, most of the people from Gloucester originally was in Boston. What drove them out of Boston was the war because, during the war, you only could go out fishing daybreak, and you couldn’t come in until it was daybreak because they used to have a submarine net. So for you to go fishing, you had to go to the Custom House in Boston, and they would give you a code. So you would go out, and outside of Boston Harbor, there used to be what they called the Boston lightship; it was a navigation aid in the ’20s and ’30s. So you had to go to the – put the code up with flags, and they would okay it, and they would open it for you to get in or get out. It was a pain. It was two hours from the dock to get to it. So what they all did was say, “The hell with it.” They moved to Gloucester. There was no net. There were plenty of Coast Guard boats and stuff around. That’s why they came here. I think the last uncle on my mother’s side came here

in 1946. That was the last one. Slowly, they moved from Boston, Somerville, and they all moved in here. They were all commercial fishermen at one time or another. My father's side, they stayed right here, and they went fishing. Some of them went – there used to be different-sized boats. My father used to go to the Grand Banks. They were gone three weeks at a time. My other uncles, some of them, worked on medium-sized boats that went out for a week. Some of them worked on these dayboats that came in every day. That's basically what they all did, both sides. On my mother's side, just one uncle moved to New Bedford, but he went into the fish processing business. He was quite prosperous in New Bedford, so he stayed there. That was the only one. Other than the rest of them, they all stayed right here. They all lived here and died here, and they're all buried in the same cemetery. They [did] different fishing. Some of them were seiners, draggers, and then lobstermen. That's what basically they did. They didn't deviate from that. Then the next generation, the kids started – they didn't want their kids to go fishing, and most of them got out of it. That's what's happening now. Between the government shutting everything down – I got a little story about the whale. [inaudible] They had a moratorium on plastic bags here. So they have a ban on plastic bags. So I was in the market the other day, and I bought ten cans of corn. They put it in the paper bag. I came in the house, and I was walking with the bag. The bag broke. The can hit me right on the toe. If I had had a gun, I would have shot the first whale I saw because that was ridiculous what they did with the bags. Whales get more damage from ships running them down than the plastic bags. I think they're overreacting to it. But they got quite a gang. I went up there to see that – there were kids with signs, "Save the whales." They don't do me any good. I don't need them, as far as I'm concerned. But they're just overreacting. Like I say, even the fishing industry, the government destroyed it when they put in the 200-mile limit. People don't realize most of the fishing grounds that the guys from Gloucester went fishing, they took it away from them. It's in Canada. They would never really – that's the decline of it. Like I said, I used to have fifty-eight boats that I used to take care of. They're gone, and no replacement. No one wants to go fishing because they got such restrictions on the quotas of this fish and that type. It's going to be a tourist place. That's what it's going to be eventually. It's no longer a fishing place. I don't think there's more than a half a dozen fishing boats left anymore. Now they're putting restrictions on the lobstermen. There's all kinds of restrictions. They're complaining. The politicians are running the show, and they're not fishermen; they're politicians. It gets out of hand. Other than that, we just keep going. It's all you can do.

MG: Did your grandparents ever share stories about Italy, and what fishing was like there?

SP: No, I never got to know my grandparents. The first thing is they didn't speak English. That was the thing. I never learned Italian, which I was sorry I didn't. I wish I would have. In my household, my father and mother could speak Italian, but they never used it in the house. They said, "You're in America." All of the aunts, all the same. None of the cousins that I can remember, with the exception of the ones that actually went fishing, learned Italian. I got to know a little bit, but never could I speak it fluently. I wish I would have. It's great to have language. That's basically what it is. Then, like I said, the second generation, they started to go to college, and they got further and further away. Out of all the relatives, I don't think – I'm trying to think. Sam Novello, I think, is the only one that stayed in it because his father had a boat. It's really ironic. Sam Novello's grandfather was my grandfather's brother. So we're related on both sides of the aisle. Like I said, I never knew it because once the family started to

– Sam Novello, his family, his uncles – there’s another dozen there. One thing that was ironic was they’re all boys – no girls. Sam doesn’t have any aunts on his father’s side. The mother had some sisters. Like I said, none of them went fishing – a few of them. But when the 200-mile come in and all the restrictions, then everybody got out of it because the government started to buy them out of business. Then they started to have a license. Then they had restrictions on the license. When you can’t make money, you’re not going to continue doing it, and that’s what happened. I think Sam Novello, all his uncles all had fishing boats, every one of them. I think there’s six of them. They’re all gone, and the boats are all gone. My father’s side, a few of them had fishing boats, two or three of them. Most of my father’s side were mostly engineers. They worked on the engines because, in those days, you had to have somebody right there running it to take care of it.

MG: Is that where you picked up that skill?

SP: Yes, yes. I used to work with my father when he had trouble. One of the advantages was I was small, so I could get into places where he couldn’t get. In those days, it was a different type of – it isn’t like the engines of today. They’re big, heavy, and it was a different time. Now everything is faster, more expensive, things like that. But they all made a living doing it. The offspring can’t afford to live here; can’t afford a house anymore. They priced it right out of the market.

MG: Can you say a little more about the engines? Describe them. What issues did they have? What would you have to repair?

SP: Well, when I started to work with my father, they had what they called heavy-duty engines that only turned up revolutions – three hundred revolutions – relatively slow, but real powerful. To make the boat back up, you had to stop the engine and make it turn the opposite way. That was what they called the direct reversible. Then you had to have a guy down in the engine room at all times. He had to stop it and start it, put the electrical panel online, and stuff like that. There were basically two different types of engines here. One was called Atlas-Imperial Diesel. The other one was Cooper Bessemer. Most of it was from the military. After the war, they had surplus engines. That’s what they put in the boats. That’s what they used. A lot of the guys that went in the service worked on them in the service. So when they came back, it was just to jump back from the military to civilian life. A lot of them – my father never went, never got drafted, because, during the war, certain fishermen were exempt. They used to have a card. My father showed it to me. He had it. It had his picture on it. What was the term? “Vital to the industry.” Because most of the fish that they were catching, the military bought it to feed the troops. My father was mad because he felt the ones that went in the military wound up with the GI Bill after. My father didn’t. He had to stay there. During the war, he was telling me you couldn’t stay home; you had to go. If you told the captain you wasn’t going, the FBI [Federal Bureau of Investigation] would come and get you and physically bring you to – and they had identification cards where you weren’t allowed to be on the docks because of saboteurs. All around Cape Ann, there was little Coast Guard stations, and they would check the boats, because, during the war, there were submarines right close here, because there’s quite a few got sunk right around here. What the Germans used to do was they would stop a fishing boat, take all the food, pump all the fuel oil out for themselves, and that’s what they did until the war got going, and then they could

patrol it. A lot of the fishing boats the Navy confiscated during the war. They actually took the fishing boats and told them, "Get all your stuff off of it," and they just took the boats because there were no boats available; they weren't building them. So they took quite a few fishing boats. After the war, they gave them back. You had a choice. You could buy them back. That was unique. There were guys that built brand-new boats prior to the war, and they would come down – the government would come down, give you a check, what they thought it was worth, and tell you, "Get your stuff off of it," and they took it. That was real common during the war. My father used to tell me – I was young then. The only thing I can remember about the war was they used to shut the shades for the lights. I remember that when I was a kid. When I was five, the war was just about getting over, so that's the only thing I can remember about it. There was all kind of military people around here. There's a restaurant, the Tavern; the Coast Guard took that over during the war. They actually just come in, take it, and they made it into a little station. Other than that, I went fishing briefly, and I never liked it. I never was comfortable at sea. My three brothers all went fishing, and they stayed fishing. They liked it.

MG: How old would your father have been during World War II?

SP: Well, he was born in 1910, so he was thirty-years-old.

MG: Was he born in the United States?

SP: Boston. My mother and father were born in Boston. The grandparents got over here somewhere in 1908, [1909], somewhere in there. I think he was born in 1910, and my mother was born in 1911 in Boston. They eventually came here. Everybody in my family, except my youngest brother, was born in the houses because it was really something. It was really unique. My mother had six sisters, and they were like midwives. All of them were having children. I can remember my mother telling me she used to help deliver the kids from her sister. Another thing that was unique about it was – and a lot of people couldn't understand this – when that aunt was having a baby, all the other kids would fan out and go to all the other aunts, stay there overnight. So I had a cousin live with me. That's how they did it. There was no daycare. That was it, the aunt. The mother's side was real close, the six sisters, all six sisters. Out of six of them, my mother lived the longest. She lived to be ninety-five. All the men, all my uncles, all died relatively young compared to the women. The women outlived them by twenty [years] at least – well, my mother outlived my father by twenty-five years. It was a different time. There wasn't a lot of automobiles involved. They were happy. On my mother's side, they were happy people. The father's side, they were a little grumpy. Other than that, it was a good time.

MG: What was your mother's name?

SP: My mother's name was Providenza. That was her name.

MG: Tell me more about her. When you talk about her, you smile.

SP: You couldn't ask for better. She could do anything. She could cook, sew. She was a fantastic baker. She taught my wife some of the things she makes. She still does it. They were quite a gang. My grandmother died when I was born – on my mother's side. So all my aunts,

every Sunday, would go to the grandfather's house. They would have dinner with the grandfather because he was the only one left. That was a ritual. Twelve o'clock, 12:30 Sunday, everybody – the grandfather only lived – they used to walk. It was only a half-mile, maybe. From where the grandfather lived, they all lived, like I said, no more than one mile from where they stayed. All of them. On the other side, on my father's side, he lived off of Washington Street. They were about the same. They didn't move too far. They stayed. They all were commercial fishermen, and they didn't deviate. The children all branched out. I don't even remember some of them what they actually did. Like I said, when the second generation [came], that's when it started to spread out. Then they started going here and there. The only time I left the state was when I was in the Air Force for four years. That was it. I stayed right here.

MG: Did most of the women stay home?

SP: Yes, at first. Then later on in life, they started to work a little bit because the fishing started to decline.

MG: When would that first decline have been?

SP: The decline was somewhere right around the late '50s – '57, '58. My mother worked for (O'Donnels?) – fried food. Out of the six aunts, I want to say maybe three of them worked. My mother worked for twenty years for (O'Donnels?). The other ones, I don't – what happened was everything declined. There were a lot of jobs processing fish, what women used to do. Well, that went out the window when the decline of – they used to go after the ocean perch. Well, the Army used to buy it during the war. Well, after the war, there was no real big demand. Now it was all this cooked fish. Those were fresh fish that the Army used to buy, and they used to cook it. So I want to say maybe three out of the six actually went to work outside the house. But they all had good-sized families, so they had a good time. They had enough work. Things were a little different than like it is today. The other ones on my father's side, I don't think any of them worked. There were three aunts. One was in New Bedford. The other two were right in town here, but they didn't work. See, that's what I'm saying. This next-generation, one of them became a mason. It completely changed over. The other day I was talking to my son. My son said to me, "I know this guy that goes fishing." I said, "Yeah." He said, "Yeah. I watched him come in from out at sea. I met him at the dock. That's the first time I ever met a boat at the dock." I looked at him. I said, "I worked on boats. You never had no interest in it. None whatsoever." They don't even go near it. Like I said, time's changing. That's all.

MG: Do you know how your parents met?

SP: [laughter] In those days, the mother used to pick them out, the husbands. I can remember one of my aunts – I never forgot this. I had one aunt that I was real close to, my Aunt Polly. I asked her one day, I said, "How did you pick your husband." She said, "My mother looked out the window and said, 'That's the guy you're going to marry.'" Yeah. They all knew each other. They grew up with each other. It worked out. It's something. Out of the six – my mother's side, twelve [marriages], no divorces. No divorces. Now on my father's side – let's see. On my father's side, I think one divorce, just one.



MG: Not bad.

SP: Not bad. I got three kids. They're all divorced. [laughter] How do you figure it? I don't know. It was just something they didn't do.

MG: So, were your parents set up?

SP: No, I don't know about my parents. I never found out about my parents. I only knew that one aunt told me about her husband. I don't know how it ever came to be. I never really asked. I don't know. Well, I'll tell you what it was. My father was friends with one of my mother's brothers. That's how they met. So they went fishing together. That's what it was. The uncle introduced my father to his sister. That's how that goes. You know something? We never talked about that. I never even thought about it, now that you bring it up. But I know my aunt [told] me that was the guy – she had nine children. They had nine children. That was quite a deal. They all had big families. One had twelve. On my mother's side, one had twelve; one had nine. There was one uncle who only had one child, my mother's youngest [brother]. That was it. The rest of them all had – let's see. My mother had – the first one was twelve, nine – oh, yes. I think that was because the wife – something was wrong with the wife. That's why.

MG: Why such big families?

SP: That's a good question. I don't think they had television. They used to go away for two weeks. I think that was the only enjoyment, having kids. They all liked kids, I think. The grandfather, I can remember – when we used to, every Sunday, go down there, the grandfather never spoke English. I never even had a talk with him. He was so happy when he used to see – let me see. One second. Standby.

[TAPE PAUSED]

[Editor's note: Mr. Parisi is sharing some family photographs.]

SP: I would have to say that was taken probably in the '50s. Yes.

MG: Are those all the sisters in that picture?

SP: That's all of them. Yes. All six of them. One, two, three, four, five, six. Mary, Jenny, (Katherine?), Providenza, Rose – and who was the other one way on the end there? Polly. Jenny and Polly, yes.

MG: It's nice that they were all so close.

SP: Now that you mention it, I was just wondering how old they were, the range. I never did get that. Like I said, out of the six, my mother lived the longest. This one here had medical problems. She died in 1960. When I went in the Air Force, my mother sent me a card that she had passed away. She was sixty years old. That was the youngest. All the rest of them lived into their seventies, even a little more than that – seventy-five. Some of them might have even

hit eighty. I couldn't tell you. I never really gave it a lot of thought. I went to every one of their funerals. I can tell you that, except this one here when I wasn't here.

MG: You talked a little bit about World War II. Did you have other relatives that served?

SP: Yes. On my father's side, three of his brothers served in the Second World War – Jack, Paul, and Tom. They were all in the Second World War. My father didn't go. My Uncle Sam didn't go because they were both engineers, and they were vital. They had no choice. They were deferred, not for medical reasons, even though my father had no fingers. He lost his fingers fishing. They used to call him "Three-finger Joe." [laughter] Yes. He could do anything you could do with these three, like that.

MG: So he was missing his ring and middle fingers.

SP: Yes, these two. When he was a kid, he was with his father, and he got hooked up on something, and he lost them. I never knew him without that. You know something? I don't know if I got a picture. No, he's got his hand around the other side. Oh, no. You can see it. [laughter] Yes. That's really something. See, look, right here. His right hand – look at his hand. You can see it. He lost some on a fishing boat with his father. He said he did it when he was seven years old.

MG: Is this your mother in the picture?

SP: Yes, that's my mother. That was at their anniversary.

MG: Their forty-fifth anniversary. That's amazing. He looks really happy.

SP: Yes, they were happy. They were. Oh, yes. They have the date on there. That was in my house on Washington Street, not too far from here.

MG: Did all of your uncles return from the war?

SP: Yes. Everybody returned. They came back and went fishing. That's what they did when they came back. Like I said, during the war, the loss of the crew members – that was really devastated. They had to recruit the old-timers to go. They didn't want to, but they had no choice. See, my father, like I said, he was thirty years old or right around there – twenty-nine – and he used to be the engineer for his uncle. His uncle was married to my grandfather's sister. So that's how he was tied with the Novellos. Like I said, I never knew that because after – what happened was, after – the Novellos, I told you they had all boys. The father, he'd take all the sons fishing with him. That's how it went. They're the ones that went first. The sons went on the boat. They were all different ages. My father was thirty, and his uncle was probably ten or fifteen years older. They had six boys. As a matter of fact, my father taught Sam Novello's father how to be an engineer because what happened was, just prior to the war, he was building a brand-new boat. So my father went where they were building the boat and saw where [inaudible] and Sam Novello's father became the engineer with his father. Then he had a bunch of brothers. Eventually, the whole family – there was nobody. It was the father and sons, if they ever got

along, I guess. But that's what it was. While they were building the boat, the boat wasn't even finished, and the government took it away from them because of the war. Then they gave it back to them.

MG: What did they do in the meantime without their boats?

SP: Well, they still had an old boat. They still had an old boat. But when they took the brand new one away from them, what they did was they painted it gray, and they were putting numbers on it until they found out it had no engine. So they gave it back to them. What they had done was they had bought an engine prior to the war, and they stored it, but it wasn't where the boat was. So when the government gave them the boat back, they towed the boat around – my father was telling me – and they put the engine in, and they used it. So the government didn't touch them after that. If it was producing, they wouldn't bother it because it was for their benefit to have it fishing for the fish because there was no question, the government bought all the fish. I guess, during the war, they made good money from what I gathered. Certain people made good money, the people that owned the boat and stuff like that. That was just the time. There was no question about – today, if the government came and took your car, you'd have fourteen lawsuits. They didn't even – they just took the money. A lot of them that they did take, they returned them after the war. Some of them did take them, and some didn't. Because a lot of them had built – in the meantime, when the war got over, then they started building boats. The thing about it was the building process was [inaudible]. So now, when the government came along and stopped when the war ended, they had boats already started building, and they made them into commercial fishing boats. There was a bunch of them here that were actually minesweepers that were being built for the war, but they never were used. The guys bought them, and they used them. But that was a time. All that I can only tell you what my father told me because, like I said, I don't remember any of that stuff. I remember when they would say that boat was a minesweeper. That's what it was built for, but they converted it to a dragger. At that time, the fishing was good. There were plenty of fish around. The prices were good. Like everything else, it went downhill from there. The end of it, in 1980, when they put the two-hundred-mile limit, that just about killed the offshore boats. No one really realized until after they got to the World's Court, and they decided the two-hundred-mile limit – and this all stems from – prior to the two-hundred-mile limit, there were more Russian and Czechoslovakian boats – I got movies my father took of them right here, ten miles offshore. They used to fish. So the government wanted them out of their country. I got a picture of a boat going by with the hammer and sickle on the stack. There was one of them, and it was really something – even though we were in trouble with the Russians – we were always fighting – commercially, fishermen were just commercial fishermen. We didn't give a shit whether it was Russian or whatever. Well, when the weather got bad, they would ask permission to come inside the harbor and anchor. So I got one time to go close to it, and everybody on the Russian boat was prisoners. That's what they did for them. They put them on as commercial fishermen. A couple of them jumped ship and stayed here, [seeking] asylum. In the '80s, that's when they put the two-hundred-mile limit. That's when the Russians just about cleaned the oceans off Georges [Bank] because there were more foreign fishing boats on the East Coast in 1980 than any American East Coast fishing boats. They took it over. That's when they thought the two-hundred-mile would be helpful. But they never thought that Georges – they took all of it. It was all in Canadian waters, and that's where everybody went. That's when it really went downhill from then, from the '80s on. Other

than that, it's been either that or the restrictions and everything else that they get involved with the government. They just fouled it up even worse.

MG: Did a lot of people get out of fishing in the '80s when that decision was made?

SP: Oh, yes. What they did was – because it wasn't profitable. You had to go further. Because now you had to be outside two-hundred miles. The boats weren't good enough to be there. That's what happened. I attribute probably a half a dozen boats sinking because they were driven further out to fish, and they couldn't get back. The movie *The Perfect Storm* was a good example.

MG: Tell me more about that.

SP: You never saw the movie?

MG: No, I know about it.

SP: *The Perfect Storm*, the boats – I knew the guys. I worked on their boat, so I knew all the guys that were on it. That was just a – well, where they were swordfishing is six-hundred miles off. They were closer to England, but they were coming home, and they got caught between two storms, and there was no place to go. They were caught in the middle of it.

MG: Were they breaking the rules by being out that far?

SP: No, that's where they had to go. They had to get in the Gulf Stream, and you had to stay outside two-hundred miles because of the limit that the Canadian government had. So when they got there, now the storm comes. They were thirty-six hours from the United States. If they could go a little faster, they were closer to England. So they just got caught in the middle of it, and there was no place to go. They got lost. Yes, I worked on that boat prior to it going swordfishing. Nice guys. There were four on it. I knew three of them because I had worked on it prior to that.

MG: That loss was a big deal.

SP: It was a big deal. The "Perfect Storm" was a real weird storm. I can remember working that day. When that storm hit here, I was working on a boat. I'm going to get off to go home. I get on deck, and I look – the boat is above the dock. It was like four feet above the dock. I got out of the boat; I was up to my knees in water to get to my truck. That was a weird, weird storm. A bunch of boats got lost during that whole thing. They forecasted it, too. But you can't go nowhere. People don't understand. My son told me that. He said, "Why didn't he do this?" I said to him, "Brian, the boat goes nine knots, okay? They're three hundred and fifty miles from land. How long is it going to take? The storm is coming sixteen miles an hour, and you're going eight. You can't get there fast enough because it's not a fast boat." That was one of the things. Commercial fishing boats are not speedboats. When they used to go fishing for redfish in the Grand Banks, it used to take them four days from here to get there. Four days of doing nothing,

just to get to where they were fishing. Then when the two hundred mile limit [came], they couldn't go there anymore. They couldn't go because it was too far.

MG: Are there other big storms that stand out to you that had an impact on the Gloucester fleet?

SP: No, not that I can – no, because what happened was, as time got on, the weather reporting – even now with the hurricane coming [Hurricane Dorian], they're telling you a week [before]. You know it's coming. In those days, they didn't have the weather forecasting. Now they got plenty of warning, and they can stay clear of things. But like I said, it's still a risky business. The sea is cruel.

MG: Tell me more about your immediate family. Do you have siblings?

SP: Yes, I have three children.

MG: Do you have brothers and sisters?

SP: Oh, my brothers and sisters. I have one, two, three – my oldest brother, Nicholas; he's passed. He had five children. One's a lobsterman, I think, out of them. Another one's a mason. One worked for the post office, and his daughter was a nurse. My sister, she's got four or five kids. The nephews, I don't know what they do, to tell you the truth.

MG: Is your sister younger?

SP: No, my sister's older than I am. Let's see. I have a brother John. I had three brothers – Nick, Jr., John, and myself. I had an older brother that passed away when I was a kid, medical reason. All the children, I don't know what they do to tell you the truth.

MG: That's okay. I was curious about what it was like for your family growing up here in Gloucester when you were young.

SP: Well, they all would come over my mother's. She would bake something all the time. They would all go to their grandmother's. She was fantastic. She could bake all kinds of cookies. My wife makes them like she does.

MG: Good. You went to the Gloucester school system here.

SP: Yes.

MG: Do you have any memories that stand out from school?

SP: No, not really. Nothing there. Nothing spectacular. When I decided I didn't want to be a mechanic anymore, that's when I started to go to school. I started to go to community college.

MG: Was that right after high school?

SP: No, after I came out of the Air Force. So I was thirty-something. I said, “There’s got to be something different than working,” because it’s heavy work. So I started to go to school nights and weekends. I got enough credits so I could teach. I had a Massachusetts certification in vocational education. So when you get a certification, you start off at a bachelor’s scale. So every time you got twenty-five credits, you went from a bachelor’s degree and master’s degree. Well, I wound up at the end, when I stopped going to school, I had eighty-six credits. I never got a degree because I only did it to get an increment on the pay scale. So I was actually at the doctor’s level pay-wise. Well, the Voc. schools paid better than academic teachers. So there was no advantage for me to keep going. So I would get a degree. Well, I had to get a hundred and twenty credits. I had eighty-six. I said, “No, I’ll never live long enough.” It took me twenty years to get there, but I did it mostly in blocks. I used to take an end of session course and two in the summer. That would give me three, six, nine – in two years, I’d have enough for one step. That’s what I did with that. I thought about getting a degree, and I said, “Well, if it’s not going to do me any good.” Well, it would have been nice. When I started teaching, I didn’t like it at first. So I didn’t start going to school until [after] four years [of] teaching. After that, I said, “Geez, I’m doing the same thing, but if I get twenty credits, I get X-amount of dollars for doing the same thing.” It wasn’t that much. I used to take a couple courses. They used to have them on Saturdays. They used to have these super courses. Saturday and Sunday, you’d have thirty hours, all day, eight hours. So I did that a few times. I did it mostly for the money. After the first four years, then I started to enjoy it. I really enjoyed it. I had a hell of a time. As a matter of fact, the first year I taught was ’75-’76, the school year. Well, two weeks ago, I bumped into somebody. I didn’t even know who he was. He stuck his hand out, and he said to me, “Hello, Mr. Parisi.” So when I [heard] that, I remembered he was my student. I got to talk to him, and he was saying, “I remember you used to tell us all the time when we were in high school.” He said, “You used told us that we would be all friends for the rest of our life,” and they were. They still communicated. So he called me the next day, and he says, “A dozen of us are coming down. We want to take you for breakfast.” So they took me for breakfast about three weeks ago, down at a restaurant down here. They all come in, and I’m looking at them. Now, this is thirty years gone by. They all come in, and as they came in after they told me who they were, I recognized them. I had taught in different schools. I couldn’t keep track of them. But we had breakfast. We stayed there [for] three hours. We had a hell of a time. At the end, they said to me, “We’ll do this again next year.” I said, “You better hurry up because I may not be around.” [laughter] But it was a good time. I enjoyed that. I had a hell of a time teaching. I really did. I really enjoyed it. Out of the dozen that came, I said, “All of you are more successful than me.” One had his own business. One did this. They did better than I did. They enjoyed it.

MG: What kinds of things were you teaching?

SP: Diesel engine, basically – repairing them, troubleshooting them, all that stuff like that. One of them is the instructor for the MBTA [Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority]. He’s got a beautiful job. Like I said, all of them did well. One of them had his own – I sat her down, and I said, “What did you learn?” They all started. One [said], “Well, you taught us how to use tools. How to do this, do that.” Then one of them says, “And you never used to hassle us.” And I didn’t. I used to tell them, “I’m not here to fight with you.” I got along better with the kids than the administration. Really and truly, I did. I had a good time with them. The only question is trying to remember what school they’re at.

MG: You taught at different schools.

SP: Yes.

MG: Would you be in a different place every year or change every few years?

SP: No, no. I started in Beverly, and that was a new school – didn't pay any money. I stayed there [for] three years. An ad came up, so I went to Shawsheen [Valley Technical High School] in Billerica, which was a long drive. It paid considerable more money, but it was quite a ride. I didn't really like the ride. I had to get up early in the morning to get to Billerica. Then, when I'd leave here, it'd be snowing. I'd get over there, the sun would be out, or vice versa. I'd get over there; they'd cancel school. I didn't like that. So that was good. I stayed there, I think, three or four years. Then the job right down here in the [Gloucester] High school. I used to walk down. I used to get ten minutes to eight. I'd get to school. That didn't work out too well because [it was] too close.

MG: This was Gloucester High School.

SP: Yes. What happened was you knew the father and the mother. [laughter] So you couldn't be too objective – certain things you had to be careful. I didn't like it. Then I stayed here, I don't know, three years. The last school I taught, I taught in Everett, Everett Vocational School, same as this. Then they went on strike, and they closed the Voc. school. So I came back down to the [Gloucester] high school, and I substituted. I didn't want it to be [a] full-time commitment, so I substituted for a few years. Then my grandkids started to go [to school]. So my wife says you can't be with them, so I didn't. When I was down here – I have three children – they were all in high school at the same time with me, and that didn't work out too well. They used to come with me – “Can you give me a pass, dad?” “No, get out. You ain't going to get me in trouble. Get out of here.” [laughter] That was good. I enjoyed that they were there. One was a freshman. One was a junior. One was a senior, I think, all at the same time. She was a cheerleader. The two boys played football. That was good. They enjoyed that.

MG: Were you teaching the whole school or a particular set of students that were in the vocational school?

SP: No, Voc. was separate. There were vocational kids. There was carpentry, electrical, automotive, machine. So that was a group that would go into that. What they used to have is one week academic, and one week of vocational shop in the shop. So I would swap with the other guy. There were two of us. I would let him teach academics for one week, and I'd be in the shop, and vice versa. That was good. I didn't mind that.

MG: What students stand out to you?

SP: Students that stand out to me? The police chief's son. He works for the DEA [Drug Enforcement Administration] now. [laughter] Jimmy Marr, his name was. Let's see. Down here? It all comes together. It's hard to pick them out. The other day I went to Lake

Winnepesaukee on a boat ride. I'm having lunch with this guy, and he's just sitting across from me. I asked him what his name was, and he told me his name. I said, "Do you have a son named Mark?" He said, "Yeah." I said, "I had him in school." He said, "Yeah." The only way I can remember this guy was his name. His name was (Gelinas?). I said, "That's a real unique name. I never heard of it." He said, "No, there are very few." But when he told me his name, I remembered his son. Another kid, named (Rick Wood?), he lives over in East Gloucester. He works for Danvers Ford. Danvers Ford has a section for just heavy-duty trucks and diesel; he's in charge of that. Now, I had had him in the regional school in Beverly. Now I'm down there substituting one day. I got the roster. I'm calling the students' names off. I see this kid named (Rick Wood?). I said, "(Rick Wood?)." The kid gets up. He stands up, and I'm looking at him. He's a carbon copy of his father. It's twenty years difference. What was unique about it is his father – I can remember – was colorblind, and the son is colorblind. [laughter]

MG: So, you taught the father and the son.

SP: Yes. [laughter] But the son is almost a clone to the father. [inaudible] He works with his father at the Ford place. So they did real well. I'm kind of proud of some of them, most of them. Some of them were just passing time, but they were young. They didn't know what they really wanted to do. But most of them, they got something out of it. Another guy that I had, he works for the government. He's a fish inspector. His father was a commercial fisherman. I don't know how he got it, but he got a good job with the government. So they all did well.

MG: It seems like you really enjoyed this work.

SP: I had a hell of a time. I could never understand how you couldn't enjoy them because they were young, they were full of – you knew what was going on. One thing I used to always tell them – "Don't come hassle me because you got the wrong guy. You got problems, come talk to me." We got along real good. I never had a problem with the students. I never did. As a matter of fact, yesterday I was working on a boat. One of the students I had has his own lobster boat, and I'm working for him. I was with him the other day. He was one of the [former students] that came down to the breakfast thing. He says to me, "You know, all them guys are emailing me now. We're all buddies again." I said, "Why not? You were in high school with them." "Yeah." But he has his own boat. He's successful. He wanted me to do something for him, and I did it. He was with me doing – but he was good. I had probably the most enjoyable twenty years. I used to say to the teachers when they would be complaining, I said, "I come here every day. I enjoy every minute of it, and they pay me." [laughter] That was the best part. The thing about it was when it became two o'clock if it wasn't done, "Hey, we'll do it tomorrow." I didn't have a demand that it had to be done. I always consider it saved my life. I think if I would have stayed in the trade twenty years, it would have killed me because it's a tough business. That's one of the things. There's no mechanics in Gloucester. All the boats, there's one guy. I used to have my kids – my older son. He told me point-blank, "Dad, this is too hard work for the money you get." So he works for a trucking [company]. He's a service writer. He just writes the complaints up. The other one, the daughter, works at a restaurant. They all have degrees. None of them used them. [laughter] I should have taken the money and spent it, went on vacation. But they got it, so what else can you say?



MG: I still have a few more questions. Do you need a break?

SP: No, no. Go ahead.

MG: I wanted to ask – I know you stopped working at Gloucester High School because your grandkids were starting to attend. Did you consider applying for a job elsewhere?

SP: No. No, I had retired at that point. As a matter of fact, when I stopped teaching school – I used to do a little work for the transit bus company here. When I retired from teaching school, I went to work. I became the supervisor, and I stayed there until I was sixty-two. Sixty-six? I can't remember. Sixty-six-and-a-half. I worked there [for] twelve years. We had fifty buses. The local transit is a good size now. I made it a point that I was going to quit at that time, and I retired. After that, we started to go to Florida. We go to Florida in January, and we come back in June. We've been doing that for ten years.

MG: Where in Florida do you go?

SP: Right where the hurricane's coming, Port St. Lucie on the East Coast, just north of West Palm Beach, about thirty miles north. So that's where it's going to be, right in there.

MG: Have you seen storm damage in that area?

SP: No. In 2006, they had two hurricanes there. The only thing that happened to my house down there was one of the trees in the backyard fell down. That was it. But there was devastation all over, which there's going to be now. There's no trees or anything to block the wind.

MG: Are you concerned about Hurricane Dorian?

SP: No. Too late. I'll buy another one if it goes away. That's the way I look at it.

MG: I meant to ask what year you graduated from high school.

SP: I didn't graduate. I was working. In my sophomore year, I was working. I had a little ice cream truck. I used to sell ice cream. I didn't go back. I didn't go back my junior year. But after the junior year, I went back as a junior, and I stayed, but now the students had passed me, so I didn't go back the senior year. I stopped right there as a junior. So I got a GED [General Educational Development], and then I started to go to college. It wasn't a big deal.

MG: What year would you have graduated?

SP: 1959. '58-'59 year, something like that.

MG: Tell me a little bit about going into the Air Force. Did you enlist?

SP: No, I got drafted.

MG: In 1960?

SP: Yes. The draft was still – well, it was September. Everybody that had the last name letter – and I could find out from everybody who was getting drafted in the newspaper. In those days, they used to come out [with] who's getting drafted. I said, "I best go join." So I didn't like the uniform of the sailor. I didn't like to walk too much, so I wasn't going to go in the Army. My brother was a Marine. I said I wasn't going to do that. So I went in the Air Force. I enjoyed it. I worked on the aircraft, and I stayed in four years. When I was getting out, Vietnam was really rolling, and I didn't want any part of that because I wasn't mad at anybody. So I put my four years in. They wanted me to reenlist. I said, "No. Declare a war or come back." And I just got out. I came back and worked in the car place. Then I went to Detroit Diesel. I worked there. That's when I took off from that work. At that time, just prior to that, there were a lot of small little boats. I used to work – well, that was one of the reasons I started to go to school. I was working sixteen hours a day. There was so much work. They had families. It's one of the things my mother told me when I went. This is something she said to me. She told me, and I tell everybody the same thing, "Make sure the guy that calls you and pays you the fastest, don't go work for him first because he pays you. The other guy over there that's a little slower, he has a family also." She said, "You make everybody make a living." Well, I tried to do that, but I was killing myself because it's sixteen hours. I can remember one time I had four boats tied right along – and I had to work on this one a couple [of] hours, that one. That's when I said, "I'll never survive like this." They can only give you money. That's all they can give you. You can't give time. So that's when I started to go to school on the weekends. Then when I started to teach, there's no pressure on your body. That was good. That's why I survived. That's one of the things today – no one wants to go into that. There's plenty of work. Like I said, there's only one guy in town here that works on boats. The other thing, too, was I was in the transition when they went to mechanical to electronic, like the cars. They did the same thing with the diesels. For me to stay in the business that I was in, I had to invest like three thousand dollars for the software. I could see that the industry was dying. I said, "I ain't going to invest that kind of money in it." So that's when I got out completely. Even today, with the electronic engines, you can't fix it. If you don't have the software to be able to troubleshoot it – the only thing you can do is if you can see if physically broken, leaking – you can physically see it, you can fix it. But other than that, you can't. I wasn't going to invest that kind of money at my age. It wasn't worth it. So I just slacked off of it. So now, I come back in June. I'll do a couple [of] little things that some of the old mechanical engines are still around. There's not many left. I've got maybe two or three, and that's it.

MG: Being connected to the working waterfront here through your work as a mechanic, but also all your relatives who fished, I imagine you've seen a lot of changes over the years. What other changes have you seen?

SP: Most of the restrictions that they put on it. That's the biggest thing. [If] you're going to go fishing, you got to call NOAA [National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration]. You have to call them up. You're telling them. Because they have so many days at sea, you go to call up to tell you're going to go fishing. You need a bookkeeper. You need actually a bookkeeper. The older guys that quit – no young people go into that. I got a kick out of – the government,

they had to buy this electronic monitoring thing that they can monitor where you are at all times. I said, "Is this country free?" They had to buy that.

MG: Are you talking about observers?

SP: Well, that's another thing. They take an observer out. They can only bring in so many different species. Now they have somebody there. The fish has to be a certain length. Okay, if it isn't, what do you think they do with it? They throw it back in the ocean, dead. So where's the conservation there? None of it makes sense to me. If you have a quota of fifteen hundred pounds, and you get two thousand, you have to throw the five [hundred] in the ocean, dead. I said, "Why don't you bring it in?" "No, that's the rules." Then you can only fish for this certain kind of fish. You can't go for that one. You can't catch codfish. You can't catch them anymore and a couple [of] other kinds of fish. I gave up even trying to figure out what they – then if you go for certain kind of fish, you can't have any bycatch anything. I said, "The net doesn't discriminate what it catches." If he happens to be there, things go by, [and] it catches them. So you're going to throw him back? No, that don't make any sense at all, none whatsoever. I used to go to the meetings they used to have. The guy up there would be talking about it. I'd say to him, "When's the last time you went fishing?" "I'm a scientist." "Oh, you're a scientist. What do you know about fishing?" "Nothing." "Oh, you're in charge?" They used to have – a big gang would go just to – it didn't do any good. They put the restrictions on them. Like I said, then they started buying back all the license to put them out of business. Well, some of the old guys sold their boats and went out of business. They just retired a bit. I got a kick out of [how] you got to call up – you have to call up, and then they would tell you if you needed an observer. Then the observer would come, and then the observer would go fishing. A lot of the observers used to be college girls. You're going fishing for ten days with eight guys? They had a couple [of] incidents with harassment. I'm just saying that don't make sense. Because in the old-time, women weren't allowed on the boats. They did things most people – it don't make any sense. I used to tell them, "What does the observer do?" "Well, they count what you catch and how much you throw back, so the next time you go fishing, you can't go in that area because there's too much mix." But the fish don't separate. They don't, like a family, all go together one kind here. They mix. There was just too many – after a while, it didn't make any sense. There was no sense in going to these meetings because nothing ever came of them. That's like now – I don't think there's a dozen – all the boats are [inaudible]. They're small boats. Then they're going now one man by themselves which is dangerous because there's too many restrictions. You can't have another crew member because you can't catch enough fish to sell to make enough money, so it's profitable. So they go by themselves – dangerous. Fishing boat's dangerous. Like I said, it's only a matter of time. There's only a few young people, not many. I don't know anybody that fishes that's under thirty-five. Even older than that. There's not many that go. I don't know.

MG: It seems to really run counter to what fishermen love about their work, which is freedom.

SP: The freedom, right. Exactly. But they don't look at it that way. The thing with the whale gets me. They stopped putting the bag – I said to them, "The whale, once in a while, it will get snarled up. A whale will get snarled up." Yeah, that's true. But how many of them get killed when they get run over by a ship? That happens. They're looking at the plastic bag. I love that

commercial. You ever see the commercial on television with the plastic bag floating? You ever seen it?

MG: No.

SP: You're going to see it on television. It looks like a rabbit, the bag, the handle sticking up. I'm looking at it. I said, "What the hell is that?" Then they show it from underneath. It's a plastic bag, and they eat it. I can't see it – you ever see a whale?

MG: Not up close.

SP: They're forty tons. They're thirty-five feet long. That little bag is going to kill them? I don't believe so. I don't believe that. Then they stop putting plastic bags – time goes on. But it's not everywhere. I guess it's wherever there's water.

MG: What are fishermen doing to adapt to all of these changes?

SP: Most of them are giving up. There's no new boats being built. I'm trying to think of when the last new boat that was a fishing boat that I can remember being built was the *Acme* – that was the name of it – and that must have been thirty years ago. They used to build them in Essex, right here. That's where most of them came from. No one's building a boat. If they're building it, they're building these sailboats for pleasure.

MG: Is there a tension between tourists and year-round residents?

SP: I don't know. No, not really. They don't concern the ones that play. The ones that go whale watching, that's a big thing. No, I don't think there's any – now they're talking about restricting certain kinds of nets in Massachusetts Bay because the whales get snarled up in them. A couple have. There's no two ways about it. But you can't restrict where the whale goes. He goes where there's food. They put the net there, and it's in his way. No, I don't think that – no, I don't think anybody really gets too uptight about anything like that. The only thing I hear now is they put some kind of restriction on the lobstermen, the line from the buoy. What they first did is they made the line with lead in it, so it sinks. Now they don't want the buoy. Okay? So what they do is they have the traps tied to a big long string in series. So they put a buoy here up to the – right? So between each one of those traps, it has to be – the length of the rope has to be long enough so when they haul the first trap on the boat, that the second trap is still on the bottom. That rope has to sink. Now they want the line that's going up to the buoy, that's how they hook it to start it, to pull it in. They want to put some kind of (sensor?) in the trap, so they have some kind of electronic – and the lobster can find where it is and then hook it with some kind of – I can't believe it. I'm saying. "Who's going to pay for that?" I don't understand what the reason for it is. Years ago, the buoys used to be made of solid wood. The boats used to hit them, bang the propeller up. Now they're made of Styrofoam; the boat hits it, it dissolves. Now they claim that rope going up there – I don't know if they say it's entangling the whale. I don't know. Then the nets, they used to make it out of this transparent – like a nylon. In the water, you can't see it. So they say the whales run into it. I don't know. There's so many things that they're saying that I don't know if they can really prove it. But when they make a rule, that's it. You got to abide

by it. There's no deviating. If you don't like their rule, then you don't have a choice in it. You have to do it, or they take your license away from you. Or they take the fish away from you. If you catch too much, they'll take it from you. I try and get out of that kind of [inaudible]. Before, when I was working on the boats, I used to hear them talking all the time. When they came out with this box thing, I said to them, "You got to pay for that?" He said, "Yeah." I said, "I wouldn't buy it. If they want to know where you are, why don't they come and put something?" They have to call a day in advance when they're going to go out. They used to tell me they will get back to you if they want an observer on the boat. Now that thing I used to get a kick out of. When they used to be in the bigger boats, the observer would be – so who would pay for their food? That was another restriction. They ate with the crew, but the crew paid for the food. Why are we having –? That's like paying your own policeman to put a restriction on you. A lot of it don't make any sense. So I got to a point where I don't pay any attention to it. Once in awhile, they'll tell me something. Yesterday I was on the lobster boat. That's how I know about this contraption they're talking about. Then, the lobstermen compared to the guy that goes – do you know what a gillnet is? Yes. So the rope is one line going up to the buoy, and the gillnet's a big long set of nets. The whale will snarl up into that before that rope. I don't see why they're going after the lobstermen. It's just crazy. They're talking about some kind of thing on the trap where you can click it, and it will pop up, a rope will come up, and then you can – I said, "Where's that going to be?" They got no game plan. But they just say – it seems like they're always coming up with saving the whale or do this, all that kind of restrictions. The whale doesn't do me any – most fishermen, the whale doesn't help them one bit. The only thing they do is eat all the fish. Some of them do. Some kinds. Some don't. I don't know. Time will tell.

MG: It sounds like you want more efforts to protect fishermen.

SP: They don't. They're the last ones. They're the ones paying the – I used to get a kick out of telling the guys, "We're paying your salary, and you're trying to cut my throat, and I'm supplying the knife." It didn't make any difference. I don't know who makes the rules. I don't know. I never could find out who thought this up. Where did it come from? But there used to be a guy down here. His name was (Mason?). I never forgot him. He had something to do with the whales. So he had a boat that used to go out. I got a kick out of it. So I'm working on his boat. I said, "(Mason?), what are you doing?" He's got this paper he's reading. He said, "There's a whale snarled up off of Provincetown." "Yeah," I said, "what are you going to do about it?" He says, "We're going to go down there, and we're going to anesthetize the whale, so we can take the rope out of him." I said, "What? Are you crazy? That's a wild mammal. You're going to go down there, and you're going to anesthetize? How much are you going to give this thing? A person, they go by their weight. How do you weigh a whale? You're going to go down and get killed." A whale is thirty tons. It's bigger than the boat he's on. Well, he did. He did do it. I don't think he anesthetized it, but he did cut the rope off because it did get his tail. When he was telling me anesthetize, are you nuts? I couldn't believe that. I don't know how he was going to do it, but he was involved in save the whale type thing. He was in some organization, but I never did get – I just did the work and got paid and left him. [laughter]

MG: Are you concerned that Gloucester is going to lose its identity as –?

SP: Without a doubt. It's going to be like Marblehead, [Massachusetts] – sailboats, pleasure boats. You can see it coming. All they're building are condominiums. You can't get around in the city. They're putting all kinds of buildings up. But they've all kinds of restrictions that they're doing.

MG: Another piece of this project includes questions about how the environment has changed and climate change. Is that something you've thought about or talked about?

SP: I tell you what I see. The harbor's never been so clean in all my life. Sometimes we used to get the rope in the propeller. You could stand alongside the boat. You couldn't see the propeller. The other day I was standing there in the wharf. I said, "Look at that. I can see the propeller." The boat's in the water. I'm saying, "I can see the – look how nice and clean it is." The harbor's never been so clean in all the – because there's no fish processing plants like there was. What used to fall in the ocean – but there's really weird things that happen. We have a guy up here [at a] seafood place that he has. He gets these big clams. So they take the clams out. They make clam strips, and the shells, they put it on this boat. They take it outside and dump it. Right? I said, "You're not supposed to throw anything in the ocean." The answer to that was, "Well, that's where it came from." I said, "Yeah, okay. That's true. It did come from that." But because he has a processing plant, and they used to dump the shells in the ocean. The harbor's definitely cleaner. As far as the weather, I wouldn't have to say anything has changed. I don't think it's gotten any hotter. Well, I'd have to say yes, a little bit. In '76, we had the harbor freeze all the way to Tenpound Island. I don't know if you're familiar [with] where that is. There's an island out there. Well, it froze all the way in there. It got so bad that they had to get the Coast Guard icebreaker to break it up because the fishing boats couldn't get out because it froze. What it did to me, it made me a lot of work because when it froze, all the pipes on the bottom of the boats froze. That was the only – that's been since – '76, I think the year was it froze. It was two weeks of five below, for two weeks. That's what did it. But I've never seen it after that. So is it getting warmer? Without a doubt. Not much. But again, I believe everything is in cycles. Now, if you take the – in the late 1800s, it used to freeze all the way to the breakwater that ships used to have to be anchored. They stayed there until it thawed out. So I don't believe it's – personally, I don't believe that – they're talking about global warming. The thing that gets me, and I always bring this point up. I was in the Air Force. I used to fly on a B-52. I would sit between the pilot, and they had all gauges there. The exhaust temperature of each engine was ten thousand degrees at fifty thousand feet. You talk about global warming? You don't ever see anything about airplanes. They talk about airplanes. If anything's warming it, they're the ones that are warming it up in the atmosphere, but you never hear that because it's too big a business. I used to say to them, "Look at that." We had eight engines. That's ten thousand – the exhaust temperature, that was something you had to monitor. I said, "It's coming out up there." So definitely the Poles are melting, but I think it's a cycle.

MG: You think things will recover?

SP: Recover?

MG: The ice will stop melting?

SP: I don't know. I really don't. Like I said, it hasn't been recorded that long, but maybe it's in its downward swing. I don't know. That's how I look at it. But definitely, the water temperature's fairly warm. I remember I took a course in – when I was going to school – oceanography. I took a course. The world ocean temperature's average is forty-eight degrees. So Florida, the water's ninety. So definitely it's warming up somewhat, but is that in a cycle? Who knows? It might be a five hundred year cycle? Who knows? It hasn't been recorded long enough to know. I just know about the ocean around here. It's cleaner. There's more fish around than ever. There's plenty of fish around, whether you can catch them or not. That's a different story.

MG: Are you seeing different kinds of fish? Different species?

SP: No, everything's about the same, but a lot of times – years ago, there were certain kinds of fish they didn't use; they threw them out. Now they're using them. That's the only thing because they're restricted on the other. They have to make it up somehow.

MG: Like Dogfish?

SP: Dogfish, and there was this big – monkfish they used to call it. Now you go in a restaurant, [and] they got monkfish. All it is, is it looks like a big head, all meat. It's good to eat. Most of the fish out of the ocean you can eat are good.

MG: Is climate change something Gloucester fishermen are talking about or concerned about?

SP: No, they're not concerned with that at all. Not one bit. I've never heard the fishermen talk about the weather, the temperature. The only ones that ever were concerned with the temperature of the water were the boats that went swordfishing because the swordfish follow the Gulf Stream and certain temperatures of water, and they would set the hooks to certain depths of water. That's the only one I ever heard of temperature-wise. Other than that, most of the boats don't know what the temperature [is]. Only in the wintertime, when it's cold, your hands – that's all they would know. That's about it.

MG: What about other changes in Gloucester? Businesses on the waterfront, changes to the working waterfront?

SP: Well, they're all gone. Bird's Eye, all the ones that were here years ago, they're all gone because they don't – they could buy the fish cheaper somewhere else. That was one of the things. When they used to do the fish, most of the fish used to come from Canada. They could buy the same fish because everybody that lived in Gloucester at the turn of the century came from Canada. That's where they came from. But when the price of the same fish in Canada was twenty, thirty percent cheaper, so they – [John] Pew, [founder of Gorton's of Gloucester], they had a whole fleet of boats here in the '30s and '40s. They sent them all over to Canada. They used to fish in Canada. They would bring it on the freighter frozen. So they eliminated that. There were quite a few places that processed, cooked the fish, but they all died. The only one left in town here is Gorton's. That's a big outfit. Most of their fish comes from Alaska, but it's still the same country, I guess. There's no people that could fillet the fish; they're all dead. That

was a big deal in the fresh [fish business]. There used to be the cutters. Now those people are all gone. The only ones I see that's doing a little of that is the Vietnamese, Cambodians, the ones they bring from I don't know where down here. I got a kick out of it. A guy was telling me, "Those are unskilled laborers." I said, "Hey, you try to fillet the fish. You see if it's unskilled." There's a knack to doing it. My brother-in-law used to do it. I never could do it. It's quite a deal, but there's not a lot of fish. One time there used to be thousands and thousands of pounds of ocean perch. They had to cut each one of them. Not anymore.

MG: It seems to affect everybody. I see you have a Cape Pond Ice shirt on, so even the ice companies are impacted.

SP: I saw him the other day. I was talking to him. He said, "I make more money selling t-shirts than ice." As a matter of fact, he just changed it over, the process of making it, because he had an antiquated system that was there from the '30s. But most of his business is restaurant ice cubes and fishing boats. I can remember a boat my father was on. I used to go with him when they were taking ice. They take twenty tons of ice for every hundred thousand pounds of fish. That's how they iced it. That was the ratio. The boat would be two-hundred – they'd have forty tons of ice, and they would go four days. Then, as they put the fish in the boat, they used to ice it down. But that guy there, you couldn't get five tons of ice the way that the system works. I think he's going to wind up – there are going to be condos there. That's what's going to happen. The whole harbor is going to be condos eventually because there's no one [who is] going to invest in the fishing industry. It'd be crazy. You couldn't get the product. That's the first thing. There's too many restrictions. They build that hotel downtown.

MG: Beauport Hotel?

SP: Yes. I was against that. They took the beach away from the locals. That's where I grew up, on that beach. That's where I lived, right in that area there. So what did that place wind up doing? Maybe some chambermaids? There was no big employment there. I was against that. I think they should have – the building that was there was Birds Eye [Frozen Food Company]. That's where frozen fish started. That's where he was. Clarence Birdseye used to live here. Did you know that?

MG: Yes.

SP: Yes, he lived here. That building, that's where we used to hang out on the beach. That's where we spent our summers. Now they've got it restricted. There's no parking anymore. Those are the things.

MG: I have a few more questions, and then I want to ask you about your family. What do you think is going to happen to Gloucester? What do you hope will happen here?

SP: Well, I'd like to see them put a moratorium on building. There's too many – they're putting too many buildings up. They tag it with "affordable housing." Affordable to whom? A millionaire? I went to a couple of them – Cameron's [Restaurant] on Main Street, that's going to be a low income [housing development]. I went to the meeting. I said, "What are you going to



have?” He said there’s going to be thirty one-bedroom or two-bedroom affordable housing. Fine. Okay. That’s it. All right. “How many parking spaces you have for them thirty units?” “Twenty-eight.” I said, “Twenty-eight? Thirty? Everybody there that has two cars, where are they going to park these things? They can’t park in the street. There’s no room on the street next door to it.” This is the best part of it. The building was owned by a guy named (Jimmy Montanino?). He got fifty thousand dollars over what he wanted for it. So he sold it to this nonprofit outfit. He’s going to build this affordable housing. Then the next meeting we go to, he’s there complaining because the building they’re going to build is going to block the view of his townhouses next door. I said, “You’re the guy that sold it. [inaudible] money.” So now these affordable houses are not – affordable to whom? One bedroom, eighteen hundred dollars? That’s what I think. My kids can’t live here. They can’t afford a house. That’s the problem. Now I noticed – I was reading in the *Globe* that where the hilltop was in Saugus – is that Saugus? They tore it down. There’s four hundred condominiums in that same area, and they just put a moratorium – stop, no building. What’s happening here – the next thing that’s going to happen to this city is the tax is going to go way up because the sewer treatment plant can’t take care – it’s antiquated, and it’s going to be an eighty or ninety million dollar bill to the taxpayer. You’re going to have to leave. I anticipate leaving and staying in Florida, I would think. They were going to build one over there in East Gloucester that people just rejected it. They were going to build two buildings. I don’t know how many units. I can’t remember. But that’s more traffic, more everything – more demands on the city. The city can’t afford it. More schools. Now they’re going to build another three hundred [units] up at the Fuller School, did you know about that one?

MG: No.

SP: They had a school that they sold to the YMCA. Then these other outfits got in; they’re going to build three hundred units in there, three-hundred low income.

MG: More housing?

SP: Yes. For whom? There’s no jobs here to speak of. They’re just spinning their wheels. I’d like to see them stop. That’s it. You want to build a single-family house? Fine. Because everybody time you build, you build one with six units, you got four parking spaces, and everybody’s got two automobiles. There’s too much congestion. That’s all I can say. I think we’re heading for trouble eventually, and the tax rate.

MG: Tell me how you met your wife.

SP: I went to school with her. I met her in seventh grade. I knew her all the way through high school. So when I got back out of the service, we got together. What did she say? We got married in ’65? [laughter] I think so.

MG: I think so.

SP: ’65, yes. I got out in ’64. I was going with her while I was in the Air Force. Then we got married in ’65.

MG: When did you start your family?

SP: She wanted six kids. No way. We had three. They're eighteen months apart. That's where we wanted them. We wanted to have all our children by the time we were thirty, and we did that. We grew up with them. They went everywhere with us. They're all grown up now. They're not far. My daughter lives down the street. She rents a house that her cousin owns. The other one lives by McDonald's.

MG: You have seven grandkids.

SP: Seven, yes.

MG: Do they keep you busy?

SP: Well, my oldest son, he moved to New Hampshire. He has four kids. Let's see. How many did we say? Seven?

MG: I thought I saw that on your survey.

SP: Seven?

MG: Is that right?

SP: Brian has two. Dawn has two. Eight.

MG: Eight grandkids.

SP: Yes, eight. Fred has four. Brian has two. Dawn has two.

MG: I won't ask you for their birthdays.

SP: Oh, no. I don't even know my own kids' birthdays. I know mine.

MG: Is there anything I forgot to ask you about?

SP: I told you the reason they came – Boston had good facilities, fish processing. They had an auction there, and they could sell their fish. But the war restricted them, so they left. Like I said, my father used to tell me, “We had to go out when it was daylight, and come back before it was dark.” So that restricted the time they could fish. That's why they all moved. They didn't all move at once. They moved in groups [of] two and three. Finally, eventually, like I said, the last one I think was '46, the last one that left Boston. But they all have ties there. They all came from Italy to Boston, and then they came to Gloucester. A few of them went to Detroit and St. Louis because they worked on the railroad. But then, after that all petered out, they all wound up back fishing here. That was about the only thing I can think of. Anything else?

MG: No, I think that's it. If you think of anything, I'll be back this way a few more times throughout the fall, so we can always get together again.

SP: Yeah, okay. I don't think there's anything I can think of.

MG: This was really a treat. I want to thank you for spending so much time with me. I really learned a lot. Thank you.

[TAPE PAUSED]

SP: My father, when they were young, and they all went to his funeral when he died – [laughter] that's the only time I ever saw them all together at the same time was there. I never knew that my father went fishing with them because we never talked about – when we'd go over to my mother's, we never talked about fishing because my mother didn't like it. [She] didn't like the whole thing about the head of the family away. That's why most of the Italian families, the wife did everything because the husband was fishing. I can remember in grammar school – I never forgot it – I was in a history class, and this kid was talking about, "Oh, my father took me to the baseball game." I looked at him. I said to the kid, "How did you get to go to the baseball [game]? Wasn't he fishing?" I didn't realize that was the only thing that I knew. Everybody I knew went fishing, but there was this kid – my father never took me to a baseball game. He didn't even know where it was. That was really weird that I can think back. I didn't realize that there were other things in the world other than fishing. It was a strange situation.

MG: That was something I forgot to ask you about. You said that when you were around twenty years old, and you fished with your father, you finally got to know him. I was curious about what you learned about him and what he was like.

SP: I learned that his father, in the old country, used to fish for octopus. I never knew that. He told me his father was in the Navy, in the Italian Navy – not here. That's what I'm saying. When we're together, that's when I started to find out about different – that guy there – my father would say, "That's your cousin." "My cousin? Cousin who?" He would tell me, "That's so-and-so, is married to this one." Because they all married – they're all intertwined. We'd be fishing, and a boat would be over there, and he would say, "That's so-and-so's boy." I said, "Who's he?" That's your cousin. He would tell me. I never knew that his uncle was Joe Novello's grandmother. I never knew that. I think it was in – see, Joe's grandfather had a boat called *The North Star*. My father went fishing with him because that was his uncle. In those days, it was relatives. They didn't have a stranger on the [boat]. They were all related somehow. You know what I mean? That was his uncle. All the crew was his cousins. Well, for instance, two of his sons that my father went fishing with built houses right here, right up the street. You see there's two brick houses. Those two were two of my [cousins]. I didn't know they were my cousins. I never knew that. They were alive when I lived here. I'd been living here [for] fifty years. They were still alive. I never knew it. I never knew they were – because what happened was, as I started to work on the fishing boats, in the mid-'60s, then I would bump into them because they all docked at the same place. So when they used to say "cousin," I would say, "Uh-oh, they want something." [laughter] I would look at them. My father was still alive. I'd go, "Dad, who's that guy? He's telling me [he's my] cousin." "Yeah," and he would give me the

rundown. Then I got to – at one point, I knew all of them, all of them: Joe’s father, all his uncles, all the brothers. Like I said, there were six of them. I think the last one – I know what I forgot to tell you. [laughter] My father’s uncle, his name was Novello. Mr. Novello’s wife was my grandfather’s sister, Parisi. So a Novello and a Parisi. So, the Parisi daughter is Joe and Sam’s mother.

MG: Lena.

SP: Lena, right. Her name was Parisi. Now we’re related on both sides of the aisle that way.

MG: You’re covered.

SP: After a while, I said, how the hell – then I come to find out the Novello man was adopted. He lived with my Grandfather Parisi. So now, he’s living with my grandfather, and his future wife is my grandfather’s sister. They’d be eating together, that’s how they knew each other. They got married and had a dozen kids. See, the thing I can remember now is Sam Novello’s grandfather was named (Bonaventure?), but no one knew his father because he was adopted. That’s where it ended right there. The Novello name was not a common name. There wasn’t a lot of them here. There were a bunch of – when they had influenza, they were a lot of kids that were adopted by the Italians because the state used to pay them to take these kids. For instance, across the street over there, the house over there, it was a good friend of mine. His name was (Sam Scola?). He could speak Italian and everything. They used to call him “Sam the Irish. He was an Irishman that the Italians had adopted. That’s another story. My grandmother on my father’s side was a Scola. That was her aunt. So we’re related any way you looked at them. Both sides of both grandparents were related. I used to say that’s why you’re all a little slow because they’re inbred. [laughter] They used to look at me. I said, “It has to be.” They were marrying cousins and everything. They didn’t know. How would you ever know, for Christ’s sake? The only thing that used to foul the thing up was that Sam, the Irish – half his kids, you don’t know what they were. You don’t know where he was from because there was a lot of that. Another guy they used to call Jack Brady – Irish. He was adopted by the Randazzas, and his name was Jack Randazza, but they called him Jack Brady because that was his Irish name. Sam Scola was Sam, the Irish. There was a whole bunch of them. That was common because the state would pay them. In those days, they were really [destitute]. They didn’t make any money. If it wasn’t for fish to eat, that was the thing. I can remember my mother used to tell me – because the six aunts, they lived right close to the beach. Do you know where the hotel is? They lived right there, right close to that. The grandmother used to send the six daughters down the beach. On the side used to be rocks, pick up the periwinkles. They used to cook them. They used to eat them. That’s what they used to do. That was Sunday meal. They put that in sauce. Everything they made was sauce. They couldn’t afford meat. In the backyard, chickens. When I was a kid, the grandparents had chickens. They had them in the back, and they’d go in the street. They’d be all over down in the Fort section. That section there, that was the low end of the – now it’s going to be a gated communicated in the not-too-distant future. You can’t buy a piece of property. That was the cheapest part of the town. Now you can’t even get close to it. It was right on the water. It’s a pretty place. I’ve got fond memories of down there, growing up – Pavilion Beach. That was it. That’s where we went. We didn’t go anywhere else. It didn’t cost

any money. We'd go to the beach. We'd go swimming. The fish plant was there in those days – a long time.

MG: Yes. I imagine going to the beach in the summer is a different experience now.

SP: Oh, yes. In those days, you used to live right there. I used to walk – do you know the St. Peter's Club? Washington Street, I lived right there. So we'd just go down the [street]. From where I was born to where I grew up was maybe, in a straight line, two hundred yards. That's where we stayed, right in that area. When we'd go to the beach, that's where we went. We didn't go to Good Harbor. We didn't have no car. If we went anywhere, we had to get on the bus. That was a different time.

MG: I'm glad I turned the recorder back on. I also wanted to ask you – your wife's maiden name is Orlando. Isn't that a big fishing family in Gloucester?

SP: Yes. My father-in-law had a couple [of] brothers. They had boats. From the old country, they came to St. Louis. He worked for the railroad. They worked on the railroad there. A bunch of them went to Detroit. Her father's side of the family lived in Detroit and St. Louis. She's got relatives, cousins, and third cousins in St. Louis. She went there a couple [of] years ago. They were in Detroit. As the railroad finished up building, then they came fishing. There were a couple [of] uncles that worked in the auto industry, but I only saw them a few times. I think she had three uncles. They didn't become fishermen. They came from the old country there. Her father came from the old country, but she can't speak Italian. He was a cook on the fishing boats because, [in] those days, they used to have a cook on the boat because they used to be gone three weeks. The most important guys were the cook and the engineer. Feed them and keep the engine running. That was the deal. I don't know how many – she had a couple of uncles and a couple of aunts. One of them was really active in the senior operation, but I don't remember what she used to do. She had her hand in everything. Her mother's name was (DeMaria?). I think they met in St. Louis or something. Then they came here because her husband's brother had a boat. It was all family. There were no strangers on the boat. Usually, it was related every which way. One time, there were over a hundred and fifty boats at one time. There was all kind of shops to repair them that made the nets and everything related to fishing. But it slowly diminished because of everything that happened, and now there's nothing really – no place to fix them. They used to have to take them out of the water to take the boats out to repair them. Everyone knew who came – took the thing the Coast Guard built, the Coast Guard station there. Now that's eliminated – but like I said, as the boats diminished, the demand for those things weren't needed anymore. Like I said, it was at one time a hundred and fifty boats. It was tons of boats and people coming from everywhere. They'd have a whole bunch of Nova Scotians, Newfoundlanders come. In those days, no one [had] papers. They used to just come in. I don't know. A lot of times, what used to happen was they would break down over there. A guy would get sick, and they needed another guy, they'd take a Canadian. They'd come back here, and they'd stay here. That's the way it was. Because most of the – if you go back to the history, most of them came from Newfoundland, Nova Scotia – big ties even to this day. It's diluted now in the third generation, but that's where most of – if you go over to the cemetery, the fishermen's cemetery, they have a fishermen section of it. You see the names, where they come from. They're all from up that way, and they stay there. I don't know how they did it in those days. If

you just stuck around here, you became a citizen apparently. I didn't know what it was – the same thing with the Italians that came. I don't think my grandfather on each side – I don't think they were citizens. I know my grandfathers on both sides; neither of them could speak English. I never could communicate with them. I would see them and say, "Hello," and that was it. I want to say they both passed away around the same time when I was fourteen, something like that. Anything else?

MG: No, I think I've taken enough of your time. Again, this has been such a treat. Thank you so much.

SP: Okay.

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

Reviewed by Molly Graham 10/20/2019

Reviewed by Sebastian Parisi 11/20/2019

Reviewed by Molly Graham 11/25/2019