Narrator: Philip Powell

Interviewer: Molly Graham

Location: Gloucester, Massachusetts

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

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

Principal Investigator: Caleb Gilbert and Peter Burns

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

Transcript Team: Molly Graham

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Abstract: Philip Powell, born on June 11, 1965, in Woburn, Massachusetts, discusses his life and career in the fishing industry. He details his early years, including his family's move to Swampscott, Massachusetts, shortly after his birth. Powell recounts his family history, with paternal grandparents who immigrated from Poland and maternal grandparents from Germany. He shares memories of his upbringing, early interest in fishing, and the influence of his father, a banker who introduced him to fishing during family trips. Powell elaborates on his entry into the professional fishing industry, starting with part-time jobs on local boats during high school and purchasing his first boat at age nineteen. He describes his progression in the industry, working with experienced fishermen Gordon Nichols and Bob Grimes, and his transition to owning multiple fishing vessels. Powell navigates through regulatory changes, such as days-at-sea restrictions and area closures, and discusses how these impacted his operations and led him to acquire additional permits and boats. Personal aspects of Powell's life are also covered, including his marriage to Sally, who immigrated from China, and their two children. He reflects on the support from his in-laws and the challenges of balancing family life with his demanding profession. Powell discusses community support for fishermen, his involvement in advocacy efforts, and the ongoing struggles faced by the fishing industry in maintaining sustainable practices and securing fair regulations.

Molly Graham: This begins an oral history interview with Philip Powell. The interview is taking place on January 29, 2020, in Gloucester, Massachusetts. The interviewer is Molly Graham. We'll start at the beginning. Could you tell me where and when you were born?

Philip Powell: I was born in Woburn, Massachusetts, June 11, 1965, at the Choate [Memorial] Hospital. From there, within a few weeks, we moved to Swampscott, Massachusetts, where I currently reside.

MG: Can you tell me about your family history starting on your father's side?

PP: My father was born in Somerville, Mass. He was born May 23, 1935.

MG: Do you know how his family came to settle in that area?

PP: They immigrated from Poland to Boston. I'm not sure what year, but they came here as immigrants, and they settled in Somerville, Mass.

MG: Do you know anything about your grandparents' life in Poland?

PP: Back in Poland, I do not.

MG: Or their reasons for immigrating?

PP: That I don't even know either.

MG: What about your father's life in Somerville growing up?

PP: My father went to a Catholic school, and from there, he was drafted into the military. He served two years in the military – two or more – and he was released. That was around the Cold War times. I want to say 1955, somewhere about there. I think he served '55 and '56, came back to the Boston area, he went to work for the FBI [Federal Bureau of Investigation] for a while. Then he went into the banking system, which he did for his final career.

MG: Was he in the Army?

PP: Yes, my father was in the Army.

MG: Do you know where he was stationed?

PP: I know one of them was Fort Dix. I don't know what state down south. Then after that, part of that, he was up in Fairbanks, Alaska. He did military time up there, sharpshooting and rifles. They were worried about the Russians coming over the Alaskan border, so they actually had people stationed up there.

MG: Fort Dix is in New Jersey. Is that where he did his training?

PP: Most likely, yes.

MG: Did he ever talk about his service or share any stories?

PP: No, he just had a few pictures and everything like that. I just remember some of the Army stuff being in the basement. He just said the one thing that his ears are still ringing to this day from the guns going off.

MG: He wasn't called back in for the Vietnam War?

PP: No.

MG: What about your mother's side of the family?

PP: My mother's family came here from 1941. Her father came here from Germany. They came to Bar Harbor, Maine, on a ship. The whole ship came, and they all claimed asylum. There's actually a book on it. I have it at the house – with that ship that was six or seven-hundred-foot, they ended up leaving the ship in Maine. All of them jumped ship there. He settled in Winthrop, Massachusetts.

MG: Were they fleeing Germany?

PP: That was the start of World War I. That's when the war started. They were here, and he stayed.

MG: What do you mean they jumped ship?

PP: They came here asking for asylum in the United States, and he ended up staying here.

MG: Was he with other family members?

PP: I'm not sure. I know the family members that were here were my grandmother and my grandfather and uncle. The uncle was actually ended up being in the U.S. Navy. That uncle was in the U.S. Navy.

MG: What brought your grandfather to Winthrop?

PP: I'm not sure. That's where they decided to settle. Actually, my mom went to a school in South Boston, I'm pretty sure, also.

MG: A private school?

PP: Back then, they were mostly Catholic church schools.

MG: What do you know about your mother's childhood?

PP: I don't know much about it. I just knew she grew up in Winthrop and where I grew up. At the time when I was probably around eight or nine or ten, we'd go visit my grandmother, and then she ended up passing away. Then that house ended up being sold, and that was the end. My other grandparents on my father's side lived longer. My grandfather died at eighty-four. My grandmother on that side, she died at ninety-four. She came to reside in Swampscott, where I live. My father brought her there for four years, five years.

MG: Did she live with you?

PP: No, in a nursing home.

MG: How come your family moved to Swampscott?

PP: My father actually – they left Woburn the month I was born. There was a picture of me in front of the house. I was born in June. There's a picture of me in July, the beginning of July, at the new house, right in the front of the house.

MG: And what was the reason for the move?

PP: I'm not sure. It was just my father's pick.

MG: You mentioned before we started recording that you're one of three.

PP: I have a brother and sister. I have a brother that's four years older than me, and I have a sister who's six years older than me.

MG: What are their names?

PP: I have a sister Michelle and a brother Christopher.

MG: Tell me more about some of your early childhood memories?

PP: I remember doing a lot of family things, like going to the beach. My father had a boat. We did the boat. We did sport fishing on the boat. Weekends, I always went with my dad rod and reel fishing. We'd go out, and then during the summertime, I was trolling for stripers. In the fall, we were going for codfish. Then we did camping trips up north, up to Maine and in North Conway and the Kancamagus River. We did weekend ski trips in the wintertime.

MG: So was your father a fisherman?

PP: My father was a banker. My father worked for Eastern Bank in downtown Salem. He was vice president there.

MG: Right. But it sounds like he would take you fishing and maybe introduced you to it.

PP: Yes. He took me until I was fifteen years old. We had a small little sixteen-foot boat. About that time, I went off. My parents were divorced, and I ended up – at age sixteen, seventeen, I was living in an apartment and doing things on my own. Just going to school and going afternoons. Actually, it was more like the people in the neighborhood took care of me than my own dad did.

MG: Was that tricky for you?

PP: No. No. We had a great neighborhood I grew up in. There were a couple of older Italian families in the neighborhood. I always played with their children, and they always made sure, at the end of the day, I had a meal and something to eat. There were great kids in the neighborhood and great families. There was a Catholic hall near us, and everybody went there after school, and we played basketball and hockey, all the kids hung out.

MG: Was this before you were sixteen and on your own?

PP: It was in high school. It was the later years in high school. Then I was working – in my senior year, I was working three jobs.

MG: Can you talk more about what led you to move out on your own?

PP: My parents were divorced. My father ended up with the house. Then the parents were arguing. Then my father had an apartment. I stayed at the apartment for a while in town. That wasn't working out very well. I ended up going back to the house. I end up having to pay rent. I got two roommates, and we're all paying rent and living at the house.

MG: Were the other roommates younger kids, too?

PP: Yes. One was, one wasn't. But I was living in the family home. I saved up enough money working to end up – by age nineteen to twenty, to buy the house across the street.

MG: Wow. I want to back up just for a minute. You were talking about what you did for fun when you were growing up, and it sounded like you went on a lot of fishing trips. Could you tell me more about them? You would become a fisherman later on.

PP: On the weekend fishing trips, it was my father and one good old fellow named (Al Boyle?). We went out on the weekends just doing bottom fishing and stuff like that. But all summer it was a weekend thing. When the weekends came, we went out on the boat. Then, during the months of June, as soon as school let out, we took the boat down to the Cape for a few weeks and went down there striper fishing.

MG: Did you have a sense that you would do this for a living someday?

PP: At that time, no. Where I started to learn more about fishing was in my junior year of high school. I got offered a job on a lobster boat, working the stern of a lobster boat. I started that my junior year during the summer months, and that carried on into my senior year.

MG: Whose boat was that?

PP: That was [with] Gordon Nichols out of Swampscott on the boat, the (*Miriam Gail*?).

MG: Did you have any adults looking out for you during this time?

PP: A couple of people in the neighborhood and my older sister was around. If there was anything going on with me or anything like that, my older sister took over.

MG: Were both of your siblings also out of the house?

PP: They were at the time. My sister went off to college. My brother went off to college and the Navy. My mother was still around. My mother ended up getting her own place, but I ended up getting her own place. But it was that I just ended up staying at the family house.

MG: How did you adapt to doing all these things on your own, like cooking and cleaning?

PP: At one time, I had a wonderful girl roommate. She was awesome. We had a great relationship. First, I had male roommates. That didn't work out too well because it was like party central. I didn't want that. Then, when I went down to having one girl roommate, that worked out perfectly fine.

MG: Did you finish high school?

PP: Yes, I did finish. I graduated from Swampscott High.

MG: What were those last couple of years of high school like?

PP: My grades fell off my senior year. I had very good grades until my junior year. My grades declined, but I was still doing well. I told my guidance counselor that I wanted to go off into the work program and go off fishing. In my senior year, I did the work program. I went off fishing and did my school.

MG: What was the work program?

PP: They had a work program that anybody who wanted to go – while you're in school, you got to leave early afternoons on certain days of the week to go pick a job that you wanted to do. Fishing was what I wanted to do for a career at that time. Other people would go with their father to the machine shop. Another friend of mine, his family had a printing company, and they went to work for the printing company. Another one had a shipping company and shipping stuff overseas.

MG: Was your work program the job you had fishing with Gordon Nichols?

PP: Mine? I worked the back of the boat.

MG: You said you had three jobs. One was on the lobster boat.

PP: I worked for a candy company, trucking and stocking the shelves with candy. And I worked, packing the *Boston Globe* trucks, loading trucks at three o'clock in the morning.

MG: What was your daily schedule like?

PP: All day doing things, all day just going. I was trying to save up enough money – I had a pickup truck in high school. Then I was saving for a boat. Then I saved enough money when I worked, and I got my boat. Then I made enough money right away to get a deposit for a house, and away I went.

MG: That's so impressive that you worked so hard and had so much to show for yourself at such a young age.

PP: Yes. My father said that his being so tough – he goes, "That's why you turned out so well."

MG: And you wanted to stay in the area?

PP: For some reason, I've grown up there, stayed there, and I still live there. I'm four houses away from where I was born.

MG: How did you find the house you bought when you were nineteen?

PP: It was the house directly across the street, of which I knew everybody in the neighborhood. They approached me that if I gave them a deposit on the house, within six months, I could buy the house. They went and built a new house. Then I ended up buying that house. I had enough for a deposit. My father worked in the banking system. That helped. He sent me to the right bank, where I was approved for loans on everything that I needed.

MG: Did you live in that house with roommates?

PP: I had one roommate, a girl named Lisa. I can't think of her last name, but my roommate Lisa. She was wonderful. She ended up marrying a friend of mine, and they have a family.

MG: I think you said that at age nineteen, you bought your first boat.

PP: Yes, at age nineteen, I bought my first boat. It was thirty-seven feet in length. It was a Maine-built boat. I bought it from Gordon Nichols, who I was working for. I bought the boat from him.

MG: Can you tell me a little more about Gordon Nichols?

PP: Yes. He was an older gentleman in his sixties, but he had, at the time, six-hundred lobster traps. He originally came from Maine, but he settled in the Swampscott area, and he fished off of the Fisherman's Beach, where I grew up and fished out of.

MG: Did he bring you up as a fisherman?

PP: No, I worked the back of the boat, but I was very interested in it. Besides, there was another boat out of there, the *Black Watch* – Bob Grimes. I worked for him gillnetting. I worked for him on certain days of the week. I'd go for any kind of work I could get my hands on.

MG: This would have been in the early '80s?

PP: Yes. I want to say around 1981 to '83.

MG: When you say you were working the back of the boat, you were hauling in the traps?

PP: Yes, I was stacking the traps, baiting the traps, taking the lobsters out.

MG: Was there other crew on the boat?

PP: His son Billy Nichols. His son was on there also.

MG: Did you enjoy that work?

PP: Yes, very much so.

MG: Tell me a little more about when you started gillnetting.

PP: I never did that before, but the net boat was out of that harbor, and that gentleman on that boat also asked me to work. I told him I'd go out and give it a try. I went out there, and I threw up quite a few times, but I liked it. I saw what the fishing was like. That got me liking the netting, so that was another thing I tried.

MG: Tell me more about that. First, what was making you especially seasick on this boat?

PP: Just the rough weather and being seasick and the older guys smoking cigarettes. I got over that after – I got over that seasickness quickly.

MG: Good. Then, tell me about the netting work and what intrigued you about it.

PP: What I liked about the netting was I saw how you catch the fish. I knew the value of the fish. Actually, I had the family boat, the sixteen-foot Amesbury skiff we had. I actually set that up for netting with a sixteen-foot skiff. I was going out February and March, in the middle of winter, and going out and catching blackback flounders, but hauling nets by hands.

MG: Just you?

PP: By myself, yes. Just going out by myself, hauling them in the early morning hours, come in, put them in my truck, and then truck them up to Boston.

MG: That sounds like hard work for one person.

PP: It was, but that's how I saved up enough money for my first house.

MG: Tell me again who you were gillnetting for around this time.

PP: I didn't do that many trips with the boat, but it was the *Black Watch*, Bob Grimes.

MG: That's right. Were those different shifts or seasons?

PP: Yes, because when the lobster season ended, I was still around, and they needed some help. I just filled in when he needed someone to fill in.

MG: When you bought your first boat, what were your plans for that boat?

PP: At first, I set it up for gillnetting. I went gillnetting, and I did very well at it. I did that for – I had that boat for about two seasons, and then I lost that boat in a February storm in 1985. It sunk and came up on the rocks in a February northeaster. Then I went to Canada and had a brand-new boat built. Within a couple of months, I got that boat back. That was my next boat.

MG: Were you on the boat when it sunk?

PP: No, it was during the night. The storm came through during the night. That night, four boats sank. Four boats came up with the storm.

MG: Can you say a little more about that? What's lost when you totally lose a boat?

PP: I came down and literally had nothing left. To come down in the morning – I saw another fisherman picking up all my planks from my boat and putting them in his truck. I look down the beach, and there's the antennas on the roof of my boat up in the wash, up in the waves, heading down to the rock piles with all the electronics on it. I had nothing left.

MG: How do you recover from that?

PP: I just dug in right there. I got a small insurance settlement for eighteen thousand dollars. That was all I ended up having left afterward. I hopped in a truck, went to Canada, went around looking for boats up in Canada, went to a shop. They had one. I went in the shop and talked to the boat builder. I asked him the timeline that I'd get the boat – "This is what I have. I have to go back and get financing." We came up with a price. I went back. I wired him a deposit and then wired him the money for the engine. I got that boat back in six weeks. I brought that down and immediately put it to work.

MG: How did you find this Canadian boat builder?

PP: I just hopped on the ferry up out of Portland. Or, actually, I think Bar Harbor, Maine, at that time – from Bar Harbor over to Canada. It was Bar Harbor over to Canada. Then I just went around the different islands of the shores over there. I went from harbor to harbor to harbor, then boat shop to boat shop to boat shop. I saw them with a boat – I went into the one boat, and the guy goes we've got a boat here just about finished, and the owner dropped out. He goes, "I could finish that one for you in this period of time." That one was the one that fit my needs.

MG: It was a bigger boat, right? Thirty-eight feet?

PP: It was thirty-eight, yes. But it was Canadian-built, wider.

MG: Canadian boats are wider?

PP: They're wider in beam. They're not built for speed; they're built for safety and carrying load weights.

MG: Did you name that boat?

PP: That one was called the (*Marita*?).

MG: Where does that name come from?

PP: My mother came up with that one.

MG: How did you get that boat down here?

PP: I was going to steam it across, but it was the middle of winter up there. The wind was blowing forty, fifty knots every day. I was sitting there stuck with the boat at the boat shop and not being able to get in the water, and the winds were whistling every day. I approached a tractor-trailer driver that goes on the ferry. I said, "Can you get my boat from here to the U.S.? How much is it going to cost me to get this boat from here to the U.S.?" He goes, "Two-thousand dollars, American, cash." I said, "Done deal. Let's get it on the truck." So we put it on the truck. We went over to Yarmouth, over to Bar Harbor, and then straight shot to Massachusetts with it. He dropped it off, and he turned around and hightailed it. We had it right in the water. Got it here quick.

MG: What do you have to do to get it furnished, equipped, and ready to go?

PP: I brought it back to Swampscott and put all the equipment I needed on it for the net hauling and all that and went right to work.

MG: Can you tell me more about the equipment? What's required? What's involved?

PP: Actually, up in Maine, I located a net lifter. But I had to make all the net pens, the setting bars, the tables for the nets to go down, put all the hydraulics in, and just set the deck up, so it's a working boat.

MG: What kind of net were you using at the time?

PP: That was all gillnets.

MG: What was the material?

PP: It was monofilament gillnets with floats, bottom nets.

MG: I know that gillnet materials have changed over time. It used to be cotton.

PP: Yes, it's been monofilament for all these years now.

MG: Tell me more about how you got started with this boat.

PP: I netted for, I want to say, two seasons with that boat. Then I approached another individual who was getting out of the lobster industry, and I bought all his eight-hundred traps. I bought the rope and his license. I'm not sure – I want to say it was 1987, I started lobstering. I lobstered all the way up until Christmas time. After Christmas, I put the net set-up back on the boat and went netting. When that season was over, the end of June – as soon as the dogfish showed up in June, we switched over and went lobstering.

MG: That's what I wanted to ask you about. What were you catching? What were the stocks like?

PP: The stocks were plentiful. There weren't that many regulations to where you could fish. Then, slowly, the state of Massachusetts started closing areas to us, taking areas away, pushing us further and further offshore. Then I stopped doing the – I didn't fish state waters as much. I started fishing the federal waters and moving further off. I was still doing the lobstering. Then I lobstered state, and I lobstered federal. The later years, I stayed strictly federal netting in federal waters.

MG: Can you say what the means? The difference between state and federal waters?

PP: Federal waters, there's a three-mile nautical boundary from all channel markers. Some areas are reaching six miles, but it's typically three and a half miles away from land. That's all federal waters.

MG: There are fewer restrictions there?

PP: No, there were still restrictions there. But it was better fishing, fishing that I liked.

MG: Did it mean you were out longer?

PP: It was longer day trips. I did actually a lot of – in the late '80s, into the '90s, I went multiple day trips – three, four-day trips at a time, staying out for three or four days. I traveled to a lot of places with the boat. I went as far as Georges [Bank], Lindenkohl Knoll way up in the – that's out to the eastern part of Georges. I fished Chatham, all the way up into the Gulf of Maine. I just kept trying different things and learning more and more.

MG: What were you catching?

PP: Cod and pollock during those times.

MG: You said there were more and more regulations during this time. Which ones and how were they coming down?

PP: State-wise, they closed a lot of areas, but then certain areas only opened for so many months of the year. To stay there for those few months – I decided to stay with the federal. Then federal started with the same thing. Then they started – they made four or five areas, a hundred-square-mile area – they took those away, I want to say in 1989. I'm not sure if that's the exact year they did the closures. They closed those areas permanently. Then they had rolling closures trying to protect the cod. That affected us. So I went monkfishing, dogfishing, doing alternative fisheries. I've traveled as far as Ocean City, Maryland. I did that for four winters. I'd move the boat all the way down to Maryland, fish out of there, which was fun, different. I learned a lot down there. Then '96 was my last year going to Maryland. I came home when my daughter was born.

MG: When you say you were learning a lot in Maryland, what do you mean?

PP: I learned all the different bottom down there. When we first went there, the locals didn't even fish for the two species we were going for. When they came to see us guys from the north coming down, we came down with different kinds of net hauls they've never seen before, different boats. They hauled nets down there, but by the stern, and we had a side hauler. We can go on any – what they thought was rough weather, we thought was just any old normal day.

MG: Can you say more about that? Their nets were –?

PP: They had similar nets as ours, but they hauled over the stern on net reels, and it was very dangerous. So they had to pick their days as far as weather.

MG: What makes it dangerous?

PP: They're backing down into the waves stern-first, where we're hauling onto the side with the bow into the waves.

MG: But still catching the same stuff?

PP: Yes, and we were very more effective.

MG: Did you have a crew at some point?

PP: I had two – for the longest time, for all the years, I ended up having – when I first started, I had one crew member, and then I went to two, always having two – two plus myself.

MG: What was everybody's role onboard?

PP: I captained the boat. I had a guy in the middle of the boat and then one working the stern. Sometimes they alternated front to back.

MG: How come you didn't keep going back to Maryland?

PP: My daughter was born. My wife was going to have nothing to do with that. [laughter]

MG: Was your daughter your second child?

PP: First. My daughter was my first. My son was born eighteen months later.

MG: Let's talk now about your family and how you met your wife.

PP: I met my wife through friends, and then was probably dating her for two years, maybe a little longer. Then I asked her to marry me. Then, a couple of years after that, we had our first child, my daughter. Eighteen months after that, we had my son.

MG: What is your daughter's name?

PP: (Solina Sue?).

MG: That's an interesting name. Where does it come from?

PP: My daughter's first name is (Solina?). My wife is Chinese. That means "little sunshine." (Sue?) is her mother's middle name.

MG: What is your wife's name?

PP: My wife's name is Sally.

MG: Tell me about Sally's family background.

PP: She was born and raised in Marblehead, Massachusetts. But her family immigrated here from Canton, China. Her father first came here in 1951. Her mother came here ten years later. Then they started their family.

MG: What is your son's name?

PP: My son's name is Philip Anthony, Jr.

MG: Tell me about starting your family.

PP: When the first one was born, it was amazing. It was in shock that day. It probably made me work even harder. Then it wasn't long after that my son was born. My wife would always say, "He was never home. He worked and worked and worked." The other times I wasn't out fishing, I was down working on the boat or fixing the house up.

MG: Was that hard on the family?

PP: I had great in-laws. My in-laws helped raise my children very much so. They were there all the time, and they're wonderful.

MG: So it sounds like you made some changes in terms of how you fished after your daughter was born.

PP: Yes. Pretty much at that time, I went just to strictly day fishing, either day lobstering or day gillnetting, and came home every afternoon to spend time with the kids. Typically, my mother in law would be there. Sometimes I fell asleep, [laughter] but I had them there to help me with the chores or taking care of the kids.

MG: Was your wife working, too?

PP: My wife worked for the first year and a half, two years. Then she didn't work for, I'm going to say, seventeen years. She raised the children. Now she's back working.

MG: Tell me again what your schedule would be like throughout the year?

PP: My lobster season started on the first of August. Then it ended right about Christmas. I started to wrap it up and tried to be wrapped up by the first week of January, be all wrapped up. Then I switched over as quickly as possible and put the nets on.

MG: What were the different seasons for what you were going for?

PP: We netted when we first started. In the start of the season, we start on flounders, codfish. Then we switched over to – the summer months come; we fished monkfish, dogfish. Then if I stayed netting in the fall, we'd go for cod and pollock.

MG: Do any stories stand out to you from this time, at the beginning of your fishing career?

PP: I met a lot of people along the way, but I've learned a lot from other fishermen and stuff like that. I was always one – my thing was I always wanted to make the news and catch the fish. I don't want to hear about it. I don't want to go chasing someone else's news. I just want to go out. I always liked catching the fish and finding the fish first. I don't know. It's not being number one, but I like my hard work ethic.

MG: How did the crew get along?

PP: One of my crew members worked for me for twenty-five years. Some of the guys have worked for me for ten-year periods. They always stuck by me. I worked hard, so I made a year-round salary for them, so I was very happy. One of my friends, after twenty-five years, we parted ways, but he was tired. Now he works on a tugboat, but we're still best of friends.

MG: Can you say more about how fishing has changed for you over the years?

PP: 1998, that was the last year I lobstered. My body – I went through one operation, and my shoulders were tired. That's why I just ended up after that just strictly staying netting and decided to stay with one fishery and do it the best. I stayed with the gillnet fishery. I did the gillnet fishery, and that was going well. Then the government cut us by fifty percent on our days at sea. That messed up my plans. So then, in turn, I bought another boat with another license to make up for the other off-season for that period of time. Then I had two boats tied to the dock. I did that probably for ten years – I had the two boats. At one time, I actually had three boats. Three boats were too much.

MG: Because each boat was getting a certain number of days at sea?

PP: Yes. After the first draft, NMFS [National Marine Fisheries Service] came up with a plan of eighty-eight days. That wasn't good enough for them, so they cut it to forty-eight days, 48.4 days, which worked out to twenty-four hour days. But we would burn those up. Then they did additional cuts. So then I had to buy more permits to lease more days in, to keep staying in the picture. So I was working to buy permits to get more leased days to match my boat.

MG: How much was that costing you?

PP: A lot of the permits I bought were anywhere from eighty-thousand. The highest was about 230,000, of which I purchased six of them, or seven.

MG: That's an enormous investment.

PP: It was close to a million dollars to stay in.

MG: Did you feel like it was worth it?

PP: I think it was worth it, but now we've got more cuts now, which made the value of my permits go down – probably lost about sixty percent [of their value]. So the same permits I spent a million dollars on then, which were only paper – they are paper – are now probably – I could maybe get four hundred thousand for them. They devalued them. By lowering the allocations of fish, they devalued the permits.

MG: What came after days-at-sea?

PP: After days-at-sea, what came in is sector fishing, which is ACLs [Annual Catch Limit], and it comes by your catch history. You have a certain percentage of the annual ACLs. In the first year of sectors, my ACL on codfish was 148,000 pounds, which was fine. Then, every year after that, they kept cutting it and cutting it and cutting it, and that was a percentage. Say, if 1.1% was 148,000 pounds at that time, that 1.1% right now is eight-thousand pounds after eight years of cuts. Every year it was fifty percent – they just kept cutting, cutting, cutting, and the whole fleet has dropped.

MG: How do you adjust when that happens?

PP: You make changes. You change where you fish. What it's done to me now is I end up selling boats off. I got back down to one boat, put all the allocation with one boat, and I did alternative fisheries. I did the monkfish fishery. I did the dogfish fishery. Right through this present day, I'm actually looking to probably go back lobstering for the final years.

MG: How do you feel about that?

PP: I'm not happy doing it because I think that my body condition has already taken its toll through thirty-five years of fishing. My shoulders are feeling it. My knees are feeling it. But I think I can tough it out for another five, six years. If NMFS has more cuts – it's just to a point right now – is it really worth it?

MG: Have the restrictions ever loosened when stocks start to return?

PP: No. They keep coming up with excuses for why they can't bring the ACLs back. They keep working their algebra equations around, too, which is not good.

MG: I thought I read that in the '90s, gillnets came under some scrutiny.

PP: Mammal takes were probably twenty years ago. We were having interactions with – at first, it was harbor porpoise. Then we put pingers on the nets, which worked. But what's happened is now – in 2001, in Canada, seal hunting was stopped. That was stopped by Paul McCartney and his wife. They stopped that, the seal hunt in Canada. So they figured about that time, ten-thousand head of gray seals came down to the U.S. waters. That was gray seals that migrated down here because of stopping the seal hunt – is what we have, this nuisance all the way up and down the seacoast. They've overpopulated, and now those seals have taken the fish out of our nets. We've only got a two-and-a-half-month period per year now that the seals, during the warmer months – July, August, and into the first of September – that the seals don't eat on our nets. Now it's just gotten to the point that it's just monotonous going out and seeing your catch eaten.

MG: It's like you're catching the fish for the seals to eat.

PP: Yes, but they're also eating my quota. They're eating my quota. They're eating my quota. Nothing is getting down with the escalating seal population, and it's just going to get worse. It's getting worse every year.

MG: How much of your quota are they eating?

PP: Some days, they could eat ninety percent of the catch. I've had days they've eaten ninety percent of the catch. Some days, they eat thirty percent of the catch. Some days, ten percent. But you go out, and you have a day where they eat ninety percent of your catch, you look at your crew, and it's like, "What do we got left? A box of fish?" And all the expenses, everything falls on me. At the end of the day, was it really worth it?

MG: I know there's been a number of modifications made to gillnets.

PP: The nets really haven't changed much. They limited us on the amount of nets that we fish. I try to fish the nets so they – I don't go and set my nets where I'm going to cause harm to the marine mammals; I go to catch the fish. I've been trying to figure out the eating habits of the seals and work around them. To a certain point, I've got some of that down pat. The harbor porpoises, you know to stay away from certain areas. If you have interactions with harbor porpoises in a certain area, move away and go someplace else, or go deep. The harbor porpoises are located towards the shores. Stay away from the shores. Stay away from the shoal water. Go to the deep water, and you don't get them.

MG: What have you learned about their eating habits?

PP: Typically, you won't see the harbor porpoise. You won't have interactions with them until their food source gets sparse. Then they'll actually go to the nets. Some people might not think they go to the nets. They do go to the nets to forage. The seals go to our nets to forage. The porpoise will go to the nets to forage. They need to eat. There's a fish sitting there hanging in the net; they're going to go get it.

MG: Are other fishermen having the same kinds of problems? Ones who aren't gillnetting?

PP: No, they don't have the interactions with the harbor porpoise or the seals. But it also is – it's what the seals have been doing now, which I've seen – they're changing the migration routes and the fish habitats, where they go. The codfish and pollock are almost nonexistent on the Cape. I used to fish Chatham, in the back shores down there. You can't even find a fish there. The fish won't go there. They're just literally chased out of there. The fish have moved off – the fish move off deeper. They move to different areas. They keep getting pestered by the seals. The cod have rebounded. I don't how many years back, but NOAA [National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration] said there was no cod left, which was totally wrong. When they came out, and they said, "No cod. There's no cod," it wasn't there was no cod; they just migrated to a different area. They moved to where their food supply was, and they moved to the water temperature they wanted. Three years later, all the cod came back, and NOAA says, "There's still no cod." They said, "Oh, there's no juvenile ones," one year. "Oh, no. There's no large size fish," another year – they come up with an excuse. The codfish came back. They're still back to this day, but we try not to work on the codfish. We've been staying away from the codfish because we have to lease them. The cost to lease a codfish in is too high, and you're

actually landing a fish that you're going to lose money on. So guys are not targeting the cod. We're targeting other species.

MG: Can you talk about the bycatch with a gillnet?

PP: We catch other fish in the nets. We catch flats. We catch dogfish. We catch that. We catch sharks. But, actually, gillnet fishery is a pretty clean fishery overall.

MG: I had asked you about pushback against the gillnets in the '90s. Weren't they banned in the Gulf states?

PP: Down South, they were. Further down the Gulf states, they were banned because of sea turtles, interactions with sea turtles. That was the environmentalists. They saw the impact on sea turtles, so that's why they stopped it down there. They made regulations further coming up the coast toward Virginia and further up. They limit the months on when they – when they know they're starting to get interactions. The fishermen themselves don't want the interactions. Besides the regulations, the fishermen stop on their own. If you have interactions with these marine mammal species, move. Go someplace else. The other thing is the populations of harbor porpoise have escalated with even the nets being there, the populations – they're up like the wild turkeys around your house and the coyotes around your house. Seals, porpoises, everything – the population is going up and up every year. They're not going down, even with the nets that are there. And there are so few netters left. Seven years ago, there were thirty gillnetters in Gloucester. Now it's down to two.

MG: Can you say the reasons for that decline again?

PP: It was fisheries regulations and ACL fish cuts and the new system in play, the sector fishing. Sectors, to me – at the start of sectors, I voted against it. I didn't want it. It still was voted in. The one thing about sectors – I call it the have and have nots. If you don't have money to stay in, you're out. All the families that were just getting by that were still in the fishing industry had to sell out for pennies on the dollar to get out. They had no people – it was Cape Elizabeth, Maine, all the way down Portland, all that was bought out. Even their beautiful family waterfront property all the way up and down the coast, they lost. They were forced out. If you don't have the money to stay in – I worked hard, so I had the ability to stay in.

MG: How did you adapt to sector management? Which sector are you in?

PP: I'm in Sector 2, but originally I was in Sector 3, which was gillnets. Sector 3 was a dayboat sector in Gloucester. Sector 2 was a dragger sector. I saw the fall of – the boats were dwindling in Sector 3. They were dwindling. I was on the original board, but the people who were on the board, I wasn't happy with their decision making. It wasn't very good.

MG: The board of?

PP: We had our own five-member board, six-member board, that ran sector three. It wasn't run very well. Certain individuals were on there for their own greed. I'm not a greedy person. I end

up leaving, and I went over to see Sector 2. I asked them about joining their sector and bringing my fish over to that sector, and they were very happy to take me in. I leased them my fish at fair market value, instead of trying to take too much money for the fish. I make it so they can make money on it. So it's at a fair price.

MG: How many people are in Sector 2?

PP: Presently, I'm going to say there are forty-one boats last I knew, but that number is going to go down. Sector 3 is totally dissolved now. Sector 3 is gone. There is no more – the dayboats, all the Gloucester fleet now is in one sector.

MG: How does this all get organized? So NOAA comes in and says we're moving to sector management.

PP: NOAA just shoved the whole plan over to the sectors, and we've got to do all the homework. So we're doing all the data keeping, everything like that. After the end of the thing, sector management submits everything to NOAA, and all the slips come up here to the NOAA building.

MG: Are there other industries that are managed this way?

PP: I don't know anyone around that is treated this way. This came, I think, from Canada – the system they put into play – and without much thought what the damages were going to be. And it's still going on. It's gone down to, I bet – I don't know exactly what the numbers are now or who owns it, but there are big entities now that own multiple amounts of boats, and there are very few individually-owned boats. Those are going to dwindle fast. Everybody is coming up in age, and they're going to sell out to the highest bidder. I'm looking at the same picture right now to see if I can just get something out of it to a certain point – sell my permits off and move it over to the lobster industry.

MG: What would it take for someone to get started in commercial fishing here? What's the investment required? What kind of living could one make?

PP: To go into the industry right now, a person just starting out, I don't think you can afford to get in. Because you have to buy the boat, the electronics on the boat, your monitoring system, all the safety gear you need. Then you have to buy the fisheries permit, which is going to be expensive. You've got to join the sector. Then all the fees that come out of your daily catch. You've got sector fees, coalition fees. You've got your tracking box fee. Then when you come in to offload your fish, there's another fee. That fee has gotten outrageous. Now it's thirty-five cents a pound to offload a fish. If you get paid seventy-cents a pound for your fish, half your off-load fee just went out in unloading fees. So you're getting thirty-five cents return in the year 2020.

MG: What was it in 1983?

PP: 1983, the offload fee was a nickel. We had no sector fees, no black boxes. What you went out and caught – you didn't have to lease fish. Whatever you caught, you kept, you sold it, and that was your day. But now it's just – everybody gets a piece of the pie. So that's the fishing industry. I can see them doing this to the lobster industry here coming up. They're already talking. The state of Maine right now is talking about going to black boxes. Anybody with a federal permit put the black box on. But they're not telling the guys in the federal waters who lobster what the final cost is. Then they'll be putting observers on the boat. Who's going to pay for the cost? I can see the writing on the wall. It's a way of – they're going to say it's to monitor the fishing, but it's just a way of another company making money. The environmentalists say – who owns the stock in these companies? Who owns the stock in AIS [automatic identification system]? Who owns the stock in MRAG [Americas]. Who's the final one profiting? They're the ones saying, "Oh, you have to have this coverage." At the end of the day, someone is ending up with the – who owns the tracking box company? These tracking boxes are in everything now from – they're in tractor-trailers. They're in national grid trucks. They're on boats. By the end of the day, there's one big corporation making money, and they're forcing it on every industry. Right now, my bill is three hundred dollars a month. Extrapolate that over the fleet, over everything else. At the end of the day, someone is making money.

MG: What does the black box tracker do?

PP: It tracks your hull speed, where you're fishing, where your boat's been, whether it's on the dock or out at sea. It makes sure you're not going into closed areas, actively fishing in closed areas. That's perfectly fine as far as that. The initial cost when we started out, it was supposed to be forty, seventy-five dollars a day, and now it's [more than] tripled. Originally, NMFS was saying they were going to pay the cost, but at the end of the day, we pay the cost.

MG: Who are you paying it to?

PP: The tracking box company, which is either Boatrax, SkyMate, [inaudible].

MG: Can you say more about how the permit and lease process works?

PP: Okay. I have my permit. On my permit, it was my history. I have certain percentages of each quota. If you don't have a quota, you need to lease that quota in from someone else. You've got to sit there and make a deal on the price for that quota. At times, it can be worth – what you lease it in for is going to be more than what you're going to get paid for it, and you're going to lose money on it. A lot of years – like the last few years, I've had thirty trips a year that I call brokers. I've gone out fishing, landed product, and landed fish. At the end of the day, one trip, I lost a thousand dollars for the trip. I landed five thousand pounds of codfish and lost a thousand dollars on the codfish on the market value.

MG: What would happen if you eliminated the fees, the permit and lease fees, and just have catch quotas?

PP: You need to have the quotas. The thing is people own the quotas. At the present system they have in play, you have to lease them. It's the system that they have in place. We used to be

on days-at-sea before. When we were on the days-at-sea, you had to have the days-at-sea time, but also NMFS set the poundage you could land. Certain species were unlimited, but cod were limited to eight-hundred pounds a day. That system was working. Then they changed it. At eight-hundred pounds a day, we were discarding fish. We were throwing dead fish back in the sea, but cod stocks were going up. The fish stocks were gaining. They eliminated that, and we went to sector fishing now. The cod stocks have rebounded. Having to lease the fish in, we're not targeting the fish. When all the fish prices are up, when it's wintertime, the fish that we can't get – the codfish have moved off to where we can't access them. So we haven't been able to land our quotas every year. It's a broken system. If I had a hundred-and-fifty-thousand pounds of fish come May 1st this year, I could land a hundred-and-fifty-thousand pounds of cod no problem. I know how to land them and when to land them if they were my hundred-and-fifty-thousand pounds of fish.

MG: What's it going to take to get you back into lobstering?

PP: I would have to buy a lobster permit back. I have to buy a lobster permit. They took mine away from me because I did not buy trap tags. During the year 2005, I did not buy new trap tags. A lobster permit I had since I was eighteen, NMFS took it away just by not buying trap tags, they voted that in. Anyone who didn't buy them in a certain year, you're out. That cost me fifty-thousand dollars. So I'm going to have to the permit, buy the traps, the rope, and re-rig the boat to go back lobstering.

MG: You mentioned earlier how you voted against sector management.

PP: Yes, I went and spoke at the council.

MG: Who is involved, and who gets to vote?

PP: There was a council in play, which is still in play to this day. At that time, you could either do a written response or get up and speak. I went to the meeting the day they were voting on it. People got up and spoke against it. They spoke for it, whatever. It just seemed when you're there that the decision was already made. They had the decision already made. They just went out for public opinion. You go to a council meeting; the decision's already made. You're just there to speak for a few minutes and call it a day. Might as well not even show up. That's why you see a lot of meetings where fishermen don't even show up because we're tired of it.

MG: Have you stayed involved on the political side of things?

PP: Not at all. I just sit there and do what I always did – work hard, but I try to – actually, I was invited three years in a row to speak with NOAA people from Silver Spring, Maryland. They invited me to the meetings to ask for personal input on socioeconomic impact and everything. The last year I went and spoke with them, I said, "I've been saying these things to you for years. It all goes back to you guys." Then the people in Silver Spring said, "We get the passed-on information." But then they do nothing with it. Nothing is getting done from all the info that is collected from their interviews. In Silver Spring, Maryland, nothing gets done.

MG: Have these obstacles helped bring fishermen together?

PP: As far as Gloucester, pretty much, Gloucester has a great group of fishermen. All of us get along. We're all older in age. There's a lot of wisdom and thought. We're all here for the fishery, but we're all getting up in age now. We have no one to pass all our experience on to. There's no one new coming up the ranks to – a young kid to come along and buy my business out. There's no one. And there's no one that has the fishing experience and the skills. We haven't passed that on to anyone. I'm just starting to – my son's going to be graduating college in another year. He wants to go fishing. He's going to actually go into the lobster fishery. I'm going to help him with that. Also, he goes netting with me. I'm trying to teach him everything that goes along with the fishing.

MG: Do you want that for him?

PP: Yes, I do want it for him, but he's got to finish his fourth year of college. That's mandatory, which he's doing very well at that. Also, he's getting his captain's license. As far as that, he's got a good head on his shoulders. He's got a good education all the way until now, but he enjoys fishing. I just want to make sure he's got everything under his belt, that he has everything that he needs to proceed in life.

MG: Where is he going to school?

PP: My son's already done three years at Brown University, and he has one more to go.

MG: What is his degree in?

PP: Business and entrepreneurship.

MG: He sounds like a smart cookie.

PP: He is very smart. He attended St. John's Prep in Danvers, which is a Catholic School. They make men out of boys. It was a good skillset for him.

MG: So will he join you lobstering?

PP: No, he's going to go on his own. He's already been lobstering. He has his own skiff right now, and he lobsters on another boat with another gentleman. But he wants to – the minute he graduates college, he wants to have his feet in a boat of his own.

MG: What other changes in the fishery have you seen over the years?

PP: The fish stocks, they've all rebounded, but we can't access them a lot of times. We have these closed areas. The closed areas have been closed for over twenty years now. The fish stocks, if they're in the closed areas, we can't get to them. If they don't migrate out, then we're sitting there stuck outside a box that we can't get into. We sit there and starve, or just catch the smaller dribs and drabs that come out. I've got my thoughts about some of those closed areas.

I've fished in those closed areas before they were closed. I think in these closed areas – one, there's an enormous lobster population that's been untouched. I call it a fertilizer farm now. The fish stocks in these certain areas, the Gulf of Maine closure – I'm not familiar with the ones up above, but this Gulf of Maine closure that's off of Gloucester here, Stellwagen to the east, there's an area that I fished in. I fished all the deep water in there. We fished it with nine-inch, ten-inch mesh, eight-inch mesh, years ago, catching all fish that were forty-eight to fifty-six inch fish in length that are still there. The adult fish go into these certain areas. They go in there, I think, in their older age, and then they die off in there. They're dying off in there, the adult fish. They're not harvested. It's almost like the closed area for [inaudible], but the fish populations are in there. The populations of fish – the pollock are concentrated with the pollock, the haddock are concentrated with the haddock. In some areas, they mix. But if we get the easterly storms, some of the fish are kicked out. If we don't get the storms, they stay in the box. My fish catches go up every time there's an easterly. We get the easterly storms, we get a couple of days where we catch more fish, and then it drops off.

MG: You bring up storms, and so I want to ask you about climate change.

PP: They said that we had the climate change, I don't know how many years back, when they said there was no cod. When I said I talked to the people from Silver Spring, Maryland, NOAA, and they had the info, of which was not used – through newspaper clippings, the 1600s, 1700s, when we first came to – through generations, there were years which the cod disappeared. It was in newspaper articles – cod are nowhere to be found. They went way east. They went way east. The fish went way east. The sailing ships had to travel a hundred miles way to the east to find the cod. It's in the newspaper articles. It's [gone] through trends. [inaudible] the fish came back. This was going on in the 1700s. We said the fish was going to – they come back. When the fish did come back, NMFS didn't let us catch them. Then the one year a bunch of us went out – with all of our experience, we went out. I thought I was the only one at first, but I went out, and in two days – I caught my whole year's quota in two days. Then some of the other guys – I was out there cutting fish, and I was drifting. I drifted six miles while we're cutting fish. I steamed back with the culling machine on. There were six miles of codfish. Six miles on top of Stellwagen. The next couple of days, a few fleets of boats showed up. Guys were catching their whole quota in one tow. Then NMFS goes, "That was a fluke." Really? They showed up on the (moon?) in November like they always did, and they settled down on top of the bank.

MG: So, you do not see any issues in terms of climate change? So, you do not see any issues in terms of climate change?

PP: I walk the beach in my town in Swampscott. There's a rock on the beach that has been there since I was a little kid. On the moon tide, that rock shows. The same beach that I've walked – on that same beach, the same gentlemen that I worked for, his house is still there on the beach. The winter storms still come up to that sea wall, to the same spot. Maybe now and then, they come up a little higher on a moon tide, but I walk down that same sandy beach, and it's still the same. Every now and then, the sand will come up the driveway at the fish house, and in the spring, they put it back down the beach. To me, I don't believe in that, to a point.

MG: Can you talk about what is at stake in terms of Gloucester's identity as a fishing community?

PP: Gloucester is really depleted right now as far as the fishing. I think it's going to even see a bigger drop-off here because of age, all the fishermen getting – I'm going to be turning fifty-fifty here coming up. But the majority of the guys here are between fifty and sixty-eight. There's a bunch of guys in the harbor near seventy. They just want to sell their boats and call it a day. Some of them, the boat owners, are getting old. So they're going to sell the boats off, and where are the boats going to go? Some of the boats are leaving here and going south to New Bedford. Maine is doing the same thing. Their fleet up there – Maine's fleet is actually here. Maine's fleet is offloading in Gloucester, their biggest boats. There's not much – their small dayboats are still left in Maine, pretty much, but that's about it. The Portland fish exchange is getting subsidized by the state of Maine to stay in business.

MG: And what about changes to the working waterfront?

PP: The waterfront in Gloucester in the last five years has gone tuna boat friendly and hotels. The properties are getting bought up. The city is trying to specify so many areas for the fishermen, but even myself – for a while, I had a hard time finding a spot for the boat because, during the summer months, they're all taken up by tuna boats for the *Wicked Tuna* show.

MG: Can you talk more about tourism in this area?

PP: Tourism has picked up quite a bit during the summertime. They've redone the stores, the restaurants. That's picked up quite a bit. It's been well-taken care of, as far as what the city of Gloucester looks like. Same thing – Portland, Maine. Portland, Maine's waterfront – I knew that when I was younger. I used to drive up there. That was rundown, the waterfront. Now it's all for tourism. It's been built up for tourism. The fishing fleet has got a couple of piers. One is full of lobster boats, and one's full of fishing boats, and a couple of off-load facilities. That's it.

MG: Do you have relationships with those fishermen up and down the coast?

PP: I know a lot of guys from Chatham, older guys my age, from Chatham to New Bedford. I fished New Bedford. I've got a good friendship all the way up, and I'm trying to pass that onto my son.

MG: Can you talk about community support for fishermen in this area?

PP: In here in Gloucester, we've got what we call the [Fishing Partnership Support Services], which helps out fishermen [with] healthcare, which was set up by Angela Sanfilippo. It's wonderful – fishermen's needs. Then we also have our fishermen's coalition [Northeast Seafood Coalition?] here that helps us with the council meetings, and that's presently going on. They fight for our rights and trying to get us fish. Also, we have our money grouped together, so we have a lobbyist in Washington, lobbying for us, trying to get some of the things we need. I was almost thinking, as far as our coalition, if things don't change – because it's a cost to all the fishermen – if things don't change, I think the whole council and the coalition and the whole

thing should just be dissolved. Just get rid of it because it's not working. I've spent, I don't know how many hundreds of thousands of dollars of money I've put into these things for seven years trying to get my ACL on my codfish up, and every year it goes down. Why do we need these people? You're not making the right decisions. Someone's got to make some changes here. They're not listening.

MG: We haven't talked about the risks and hazards involved in this work.

PP: It can be – I've had friends who have died in this fishery in different things and through mishaps. All it takes is one little accident, one wave. We just lost another dragger, the *Hayley Ann*, out of Portland. When my son told me that, my thing was, "Oh, he sold the boat." He goes, "No, dad. The boat sunk." I was like, "What?" I knew the gentleman that owned it. I owned the same boat. They don't know what happened. I figure the boat rolled over. It was quick and catastrophic, and it can happen in a minute and a half, two minutes. My friend lost his son in the same way. It was catastrophic – one wave.

MG: When was that?

PP: I'd have to look back, but I'm going to say probably seven years ago. It was the *Foxy Lady II* on Stellwagen. His son was on his way home from scalloping with his crew member. They rolled over about fifteen, seventeen miles shy of Gloucester on a day that wasn't even that windy. They figured the load shifted.

MG: Maybe you can't talk about it, but I know that a number of years ago, you tried to rescue –

PP: I'm presently going through that. It was four years ago. I went to rescue a boat. I towed the boat for five hours. I called the Coast Guard assistance. The Coast Guard came out. I turned the tow over to the Coast Guard. They told me to go home. I steamed the boat in. Three hours later, they were still on the tow of the Coast Guard. That boat sank, and that gentleman, the captain, and crew went in the water, and the captain ended up dying of a heart attack. And I'm in year four of litigation.

MG: What's your involvement? Why are you in litigation?

PP: I'm the first person to go on the scene to help. I attach my rope to the boat. By attaching that rope to the boat, it attached me to the whole scene. Then people come afterward – they're trying to prove fault in me that by me towing the boat that – they're coming up with – did I tow it too fast? Did I use too short a rope? They're trying to make me look like a bad captain, that I did things wrong. I did anything like I do on any normal day. I've helped people in the past. This time here, a person died. Anytime something happens to someone, people come out looking for money.

MG: The person who passed away, wasn't he recorded saying, "Thank you for saving my life," to you?

PP: Yes, exactly. Right in the statements. He said, "Thank you. You saved my life."

MG: This must be so frustrating to go through. You lost somebody, and then you have to –

PP: And what you have to spend financially to defend yourself, to keep going to court, lawyers' bills and everything. They could financially break me. It keeps carrying on and carrying on, and more hours, and more hours, and thousands and thousands of dollars. It ended up being two-hundred-thousand dollars in lawyers' fees. I've got a lot of people behind me, helping me. The Coast Guard is getting sued, too. We're both getting sued for helping. It just shows you – the Good Samaritan law. Is it there or not there? Do you go help someone? If you see someone having a heart attack, do you go over and give them CPR? If you give a person who's not having a heart attack CPR, could you hurt them? It's fifty-fifty.

MG: When will you get through all of this?

PP: Hopefully, by June. I got a deposition thing today after here.

MG: A tough day. A lot of talking.

PP: No, no worries. [laughter] It will be quick.

MG: Okay.

PP: I want to finish this case, and I want to win it. But it's going to cost me money at the end of the day. I have to keep shelling out money to win.

MG: I'm sorry you're going through that, and I'm sorry about the man who passed away.

PP: Yes. If he was here today, though – he's not here to speak for himself – I bet he would be bent on what's going on.

MG: Are you worried for your son that he's getting into an industry that has these hazards?

PP: No, not worried at all. I'm hoping to give him the best teaching and the best skills to do what he wants to do. I'm trying to pass on all my experiences to him. He's seen everything from a young child, going all the way up. He's seen everything that I've gone through. My daughter has, too. My daughter says, "That's why I'm so thick-skinned." When it came to sports, both kids played sports. My daughter never liked being second place. She always wanted to be number one, and she always wanted to win.

MG: Remind me how old your daughter is.

PP: My daughter, presently she's twenty-four. She lives and works in Michigan. She graduated from Brown University. She took up international business and affairs.

MG: Oh, neat. Have you had moments in your career where you wanted to do something completely different?

PP: No. I always wanted to go fishing. I still want to stay fishing until the end. I like doing it. I have a lot of knowledge. I enjoy doing what I'm doing. It's all the regulation, all the different stuff you need at the end of the day. I think I averaged it out now that it's cost me forty dollars or fifty dollars a day every day my boat sits at the dock. If my boat doesn't go fishing, it costs me that much per day just to sit at the dock – insurance, the tracking box, the dockage, the depreciation, and upkeep on all the safety equipment that has to be replaced. All these different things are a cost. It's a fee – everything at the end of the day. To have that boat physically sit at the dock – if I want to take a month off, it's going to cost me four-thousand dollars to leave a boat tied to the wharf, but everything else is going to depreciate. It's crazy. You either have to keep the business going or shut it down.

MG: Can you talk a little bit about having observers onboard?

PP: Yes, I've had observers for twenty years, but now the coverage rates are going up higher and higher. The observers are fine. They don't do good enough screening on some of the people they hire. You never know what you're going to get for a person coming on board, so you can tell if they're last or not going to last or if they get seasick. When they screen them, they don't do some of the background checks on the people. I can find out more about a person on the first trip with me – what their family or school background [is]. They've taken a job that was made to sound so good. The job is advertised – it sounds so great. You're going to make this kind of money. Then, when they get there, it's not exactly what they were planning on.

MG: Aren't young women often hired in this role?

PP: Lately, it's been almost seventy percent women, thirty percent boys. But at the end the of day, when you figure it out – when you figure this out, I go, "You're getting less than minimum wage. When you figure out the amount of hours and everything, what you're getting paid out of a sea day is around ten dollars an hour. Is it really worth it? You went to college for a ten-dollar an hour job?" I showed my daughter before she went to college – I showed her an observer on the dock, sleeping on her baskets after a seven-day trip, waiting to get picked up to be driven back to Portland. "Is that what you want?" My daughter looked. I go, "Do not check off 'biology' in school. Do not check that one off."

MG: What is your relationship with the observers?

PP: I treat all the observers on my boat the [way] I treat my own children. I wish the rest of the fleet would do the same. They are someone's child. It might be their first job coming out [of school]. They were put there for the job, and they have a job to do. Don't hinder their job. Do they get in our way? Yes. Bottom line, yes. Does it make for a longer day? Yes. Is it a more stressful day? Yes. It's one more person I have to keep an eye on for safety purposes. You're tripping over their stuff; you're bumping into them. There's such a high turnover, so I call it training day every day. As soon as they have the job – I don't know what the ratio of people dropping out is. It's like eighty percent. So now you're getting new people again.

MG: Do you have them on every day?

PP: Presently, no. We're at thirty, forty percent coverage right now. And probably getting near fifty percent coverage myself right now. They pick my boat quite a bit because I'm nice to the people on the boat. I don't mind it to a certain point. It is whatever it is. It's not going to stop me from going shipping. Because I'm picked for an observer tomorrow, it's not going to stop me from going. I'm going.

MG: Does it stop some people?

PP: Yes. It actually discourages some people. They don't want it. Some of the older generation guys don't want it. Actually, a couple of boats have sunk recently. It's been lucky observers weren't on board because they would have been dead. Both a scalloper went down there a couple of months ago, and then the *Hayley Ann* that just went down. It was lucky that day. Some of the observers asked, "Was there an observer on?" Luckily, there wasn't.

MG: That's so scary.

PP: Yes, because someone would have lost a child. It's going to happen. It will happen. Through all my thirty-five years of fishing – I used to count it up every year. There were twelve people on the Eastern Shore that were lost on the East Coast here a year. I think it was eighteen on the West Coast. Because out there on the West Coast, they usually lose them six at a time; whole crab boats rolling over, losing whole crews. I'd say three boats is eighteen people.

MG: What keeps you going in this work?

PP: I enjoy going to my job fishing every day. I've enjoyed it. I'm trying to get in my later years here – I'm trying to just keep on going for so many more years, and then just slowly wean out of it and go a little smaller to where I get a happy little smaller boat.

MG: So you won't leave completely?

PP: No, I'll probably have a hundred traps at the end, for the last show. [laughter]

MG: What have I forgotten to ask you about?

PP: I don't know. You went through some of the childhood. I don't know. My wife?

MG: Tell me more about your wife. How does she feel about what you do?

PP: My wife always worries about me, the stress I deal with – everything. She waits for me to get home every day. Now she's stressing out because my son wants to go fishing, and she's like, "I'm going to be going through the same thing." She really doesn't want him to go fishing, but if it's in his heart – at the end of the day.

MG: How did you feel about fishing when you first met? Did she have fishers in her family?

PP: No, her father worked at Sylvania, a lighting company. She realized the dangers after a while of everything that I'm doing. Then different things through all the years when the bad storms come and the weather and I'm out during the weather. I watch the weather now. I only go in certain amount of winds. Anything over forty, thirty-five knots, I don't even bother going. I just stay home. Where I used to go – most of the time we went when there was too much wind, at the end of the thing, there was either damage done to the boat, we didn't make money. It's really not worth it. Just be home. Don't make drastic decisions. I do go in some hard weather to a certain point, but I have a good sturdy sea boat for doing it. But I don't want to get anyone hurt.

MG: What would help in terms of building trust between the fishermen and NOAA?

PP: What would help? We've had some good liaisons. Caleb [Gilbert] was one of them for a while, which was nice. I would like to see them listen to us. [laughter] Bottomline. There's a meeting going on right now. There's some decision-making, and they're going to be jumping to conclusions here pretty soon about cameras on boats and putting cameras on boats without listening to the fishermen's input on the stuff. They're not listening to the – they have no idea what they're going to run into now with all these cameras and this picture-taking and all these pictures, and who's going to review all these pictures. These observers now that are observing with us have had chances to review the pictures. They say it's hurtful to the eyes – looking at the same – they say after you look at so many pictures, you're looking at the same background with a different fish on it, and you're looking at thousands of them. They go, "It gets to you. I don't want to do this for a job." Now they're going to do this to the whole fleet. They haven't even heard this end of it. That's a question I asked an observer, the people who have looked at the pictures. They haven't actually done any pilot programs on ninety-footers. When you have a big pile of fish on deck, there's a big pile of fish. They got a twenty-thousand pound of fish; they're going to dump it on deck. These draggers are out on Georges, and the wind's blowing thirty, forty miles an hour. Waves are rolling over the rail and flooding the decks with water. How are you going to get any accurate data? All fine and good on a flat, calm sunny day. Sorry, it's not like that every day. Yes. Same thing they're going to do on my net boat – all fine and good on the [inaudible] days. What happens when the waves are coming over the roof, the snowflakes are coming down sideways, snow is covering every camera on the boat. Ice is covering the boat. How are you going to get any photos when the ice is covering every camera?

MG: That's what they want photos of?

PP: The catch, everything that's going on on the boat. When I fish in February, there are two inches of ice on the boat. What are you going to have, defrosting cameras? I'd like to see this one. This is going to be great. They haven't thought of anything. Now we got all the LED [light-emitting diode] lights on the boat. The latest thing is everyone is switching over to LED lights. LED lights freeze over with ice. There's no heat to them. The old sodium lights had heat, so it keeps the ice off the light. LED lights on cars, if they go down the highway, the car ices over in the front, the headlights just get dimmer and dimmer and dimmer. People haven't figured that out yet. It's the truth.

MG: Would it help to have folks from NOAA come on board and get a sense of –?

PP: It would be great if they listened to us. There's decision making coming out about the cameras. Guys are saying about the cameras – some of the guys who are speaking up, they're not very thoughtful when they're speaking – "Oh, we don't want cameras." They just say, "I don't want cameras." That's why the people from Silver Spring, Maryland, liked me when I went to meetings. Because they go, "You give ideas. You think things out." Same thing when I was a board member. I thought when it came down to the quotas – the first quota – we have a preservation fund here in Gloucester, of which we have quotas that goes out to the fishermen. We get them a lesser price. Then it came down to – say if there are forty fishermen in the sector and some of us own multiple boats, yet we're one entity. At one time, I owned three boats. I said at the meeting, "I own three boats. Us guys who own multiple boats only get one share." I said, "Younger guys who've got one boat and got children growing up, might need two shares." Three guys at the table – looked like fire was coming through their eyes. I go, "That's greed. This kid's got two kids coming up and a family. You guys are all well-off. All you care about is money and greed." That's where I was totally – all set with this.

MG: I keep thinking during these interviews that there's got to be a win-win solution for the fishermen to make a living and for the fish to thrive.

PP: They're going to have to come down with a set amount of fishermen that can fish. They're not going to see an influx get back into the industry. They go to say who can stay and who can't stay, so people don't come back into the industry and to protect the guys who are in it right now. Then they got to raise the ACLs. They can raise the ACLs right now four-fold on some fish stocks. They could raise the codfish stock four-fold. If they raise that ACL up four-fold, it would bring the lease cost of the fish down. You bring the lease cost down in. We can go out and catch fish. We can go out and catch fish. If NMFS says the codfish quota is going to be caught for the season, where they're going to be happy – instead, they give us five million pounds, but yet, we go out and catch 2.2 million, and they'll shut it down. But we caught the 2.2 million. Right now, they have it that we have a million pounds of cod, and we can't even catch the million pounds of cod because the lease price is too high. I would like to see this regional administrator do that, but it's not going to happen. It's the right thing to do. We get the lease cost to where people are going to make money. We're going to make sure that – then it comes down to the boat owners and what the boat owner takes out of what's a fair share for the lease cost and everything like that back to the crews. That's how you can get – by raising the ACL, there will be more fish to lease out, so the price will be down. It's a no-brainer. It will get rid of the high price, and we'll catch our quota. Even though it's here and NMFS only wants us to catch two million pounds, you give us five, and we'll catch the two because the lease cost is down.

MG: Right. That makes sense. Well, looking back on your fishing career and life in this area, what else stands out to you?

PP: I don't know. Just growing up in the area where I live – my neighbors, neighborhood, the town. I'm one of the townies in my neighborhood. I'm friends with everybody in the area. I live next to the high school. Where I live is a beautiful area. I actually built a dock on the pond for all the neighborhood kids to fish and ice skate on. Everyone appreciates that. When my son

was little, he went down to the pond fishing. So then me and my next-door neighbor, we went down there and built a dock for him to fish off of. That dock has been there since – we figured at least eleven years right now, maybe twelve. We actually met – I met a couple, a married couple, this year. They met on that dock, and they got married eight years ago. I just rebuilt the dock this past fall. I met them down at the dock. Another friend of mine went down. He goes, "This dock gives me peace." A friend of mine, he went down there for years. My friend is going to pass shortly; he's got cancer. He was down there with his son just for – he goes, "It gives me peace to come down here and go down to the pond." He just sits there in his chair.

MG: That sounds like a perfect place to be.

PP: Yes, we grew up together.

MG: Nice. Well, I think I've gotten to the end of my questions, but this has really been such a treat. I appreciate all the time you spent with me. If there's nothing else, I can turn this off.

PP: Yes, go ahead and turn that off. I'll show you my phone.

[Tape paused.]

PP: If there are any of these pictures that you wanted, you're welcome to – I'll send them to you.

MG: I want to ask you, on the record, about that rescue effort you just told me about. You showed me an article.

PP: It would have been September of that year.

MG: 1985?

PP: Yes.

MG: What happened?

PP: It was August. We were out fishing. The seas were about six feet. We were down off of Graves Light, east of Boston. We're in the shipping lanes. It was foggy, rainy. We were done lobstering in that area, and we were heading back to the Northeast. I was just jogging along on autopilot. Looking out the starboard door, I looked over at a wave, just one of the waves, and I saw something orange. Then, all of a sudden, I saw an arm come up out of the water. I turned the boat around. I went over, and there were two guys in the water. One guy was hugging the other guy, holding on to him. One guy had the life jacket on. The guy next to him was just swimming next to him, keeping the guy with the lifejacket up. The guy with the lifejacket was incapacitated. I looked at them. It was scary. They were purple, their skin color. They had hyperthermia. We pulled up alongside, and I – we pulled one on board and put him on deck. Then we went to pull the other guy on board, and he was big, too, like 265 pounds. My crew member was freaking out. My crew member, at the time, he was freaking out about the whole thing that was going on. We got the big guy. I was tearing his clothes off, trying to get him over

the rail. I remember tearing his belt off because his belt strap was just tearing through the back of his pants. They weren't very well dressed. They were dressed more in suit-clothes. The clothes didn't really belong on [a fishing boat]. I got them on the boat, but he wasn't speaking English. I didn't know what language. The funny thing was he ended up speaking Polish. He was Polish. He was speaking Polish. I knew not a word of what he was saying. I just asked him, "Was it two or three people?" He's like, "My friend, my friend, my friend." There were three of them. He had to let go – he let go of the other guy earlier. I went a ways away, and it looked like seaweed in the water. It was the back of a person's head. I gaffed him up, and I pulled him on the boat. I put him on deck. I covered him with my raingear. He goes, "My friend, my friend." I go, "I got your friend, but it wasn't good." He was rigor – he was stiff. I made the call to the Coast Guard. The Coast Guard was coming. The *Voyager* was a whale-watching boat out of Boston because we were in the shipping lane. They came up, pulling up alongside. I had the guy who was in the lifejacket. We put him in a Lifesling to the whale watch boat. We passed him up. He ended up going into cardiac arrest, but they gave him CPR [cardiopulmonary resuscitation], and he survived. They were yelling for me to give CPR to the guy on deck, but there was no bringing him back. I knew that. My crew member was really freaked out. He was young at the time, too, but it was the right thing to do. I talked to the big guy just a little bit. He said, "Big waves came, and came over the stern of the boat." They had a small little fifteen-foot boat. They were out in the shipping lane, anchored up, rod and reel fishing, and big waves came by and came over the stern and swamped the boat, and the boat went down four hours earlier. It was just luck that I went by at the time I went by because it was fog and the seas were rolling. The Coast Guard came out. They came out, and we transferred the – I took the big guy down in the cabin. We stripped his clothes off, put clothes on him. His skin color started to come back. I've never seen a person that purple. He was gray and purple like a zombie. They both were. It probably the other guy going. He said that he had to let the other guy go earlier. He let one guy go, and he put his life jacket on the guy who he was in the water with. He put his lifejacket on the other guy, and he treaded the big guy. He was the youngest. The other two gentlemen were older. The wife thanked me at Christmas time for bringing her husband's body. She sent me a thank you card. The funny thing was, back then, I got a letter from Mayor [Thomas] Menino [former mayor of Boston] at the time. Unfortunately, I never saved it. He was a city councilor at the time. He actually sent me a handwritten thank letter a week afterward. That was a nice thought there.

MG: It must haunt that one guy to have let his crewmember go.

PP: It was his friend. But at least we retrieved his body for the family. That brings closure.

MG: That sounds so scary.

PP: Yes. But I did something like that back then, and that's when good Samaritans come to help. Now this other time – it just, to me, not right. I had just talked with my insurance guy two days ago, and I go, "You don't even want to know, but in the last four years, I've towed in three boats. I just towed one in the other day." He's like, "You did what? You didn't tell me that." He doesn't even want to hear about it because I'm going through litigation and everything like that. He goes, "What are you thinking?" I'm like, "My buddy's boat broke down. He's my friend. I went over under certain circumstances, and I told him, 'You're not going to sue me.

We're going to use your rope. And we're not going to talk to anybody on the radio, the Coast Guard or nobody, and I'm going to tow you back to Gloucester. He's like, 'Good enough.'" I towed him in for five hours. I've helped out multiple boats through all the years. Another one out of Gloucester, Ray Hilshey, and his boat *Mary Alice*. I brought his boat home – same thing. Forty miles out in a northeaster, a pending storm, and I brought that boat home. He's sincerely grateful to me.

MG: Is the alternative leaving them there to potentially perish?

PP: Yes. Also, it's friendships, and it's going to help someone. Yes. Now it's like if you go by and see someone getting mugged somewhere, just keep on going, just turn your eye and keep on going. If you see someone with a flat tire on the side of the road, keep on going. It's none of your business.

MG: I'm not sure that's the world I want to live in.

PP: No.

MG: Well, again, I really appreciate your sharing that story and all the work you've done as a fisherman.

PP: Any of the other people you talked to hadn't mentioned my name. [laughter]

MG: Well, thank you so much.

PP: Alright.

----------END OF INTERVIEW----------
Reviewed by Molly Graham 4/3/2020
Reviewed by Philip Powell 5/8/2020
Reviewed by Molly Graham 5/9/2020