Narrator: Mark Ring

Interviewer: Molly Graham

Location: Gloucester, Massachusetts

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

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

Principal Investigator: Caleb Gilbert and Peter Burns

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

Transcript Team: Molly Graham

Date of Interview: December 16, 2019

Abstract: This oral history interview with Mark Ring, conducted by Molly Graham on December 16, 2019, in Gloucester, Massachusetts, provides an in-depth account of Mark Ring's life and career in the fishing industry. Born in 1957 in Beverly, Massachusetts, and raised in Manchester, Mark comes from a family with deep maritime roots. The interview covers his family's immigration history, with his maternal grandparents arriving from County Kerry, Ireland, and his paternal family from Prince Edward Island, Canada. Mark discusses his upbringing in Manchester, his early exposure to fishing through family and neighbors, and his decision to enter the fishing industry after high school. He describes his experiences lobstering and gillnetting in Gloucester and his winter expeditions for swordfishing in Florida. Mark reflects on the economic and regulatory challenges faced by fishermen, including the impact of the recession and changes in fisheries management policies. He also highlights his involvement with the Massachusetts Lobstermen's Association and the Gloucester Fisheries Commission, emphasizing his advocacy for sustainable fishing practices. Throughout the interview, Mark provides insights into the evolving nature of the fishing industry, the influence of technological advancements, and the importance of community and family support. He recounts personal anecdotes, including near-death experiences at sea, and discusses the impact of climate change on fishing practices.

Molly Graham: This begins an oral history interview with Mark Ring. The interview is taking place on December 11, 2019, in Gloucester, Massachusetts. The interviewer is Molly Graham. We'll start at the beginning. If you need a break at any point, just let me know. We can pause this.

Mark Ring: Okay.

MG: Can you tell me where and when you were born?

MR: Beverly, Mass [Massachusetts], November 9th, 1957.

MG: Tell me a little bit about how your family came to settle in that area.

MR: Well, I was born and brought up in Manchester. Beverly was the nearest hospital. On my mother's side, both of my grandparents came over from Ireland, started in Cambridge, and then settled in Manchester. My grandfather was a gardener on one of the big estates in town. So my mother's family actually had a house on the estate where he was the gardener of the estate, but it was also right on the harbor.

MG: What do you know about your grandparents' life in Ireland and their reasons for immigrating?

MR: It wasn't talked about very much because I know my grandmother used to say there were no fond memories of Ireland. So the only time there was ever a reference to Ireland in the house was on St. Patrick's Day. They didn't talk about Ireland at all, and that was the only day my mother could give them a little glass dish of four-leaf clovers or whatever from the florist. Other than that, she said they never discussed what they went through because they left when they were teenagers. I don't remember my grandfather that much. He died when I was pretty young. But we got to go over there a few years ago and found their old family homestead. It was interesting. There was one older guy; he was the caretaker of this estate in Ireland. He said, "Oh, come over here. I want to show you something." And we walked down this path to the ocean. It was right there. He's this big old guy. He starts crying, and he tells a story that his father and my grandfather left together. They had to walk to Cork, which was like maybe fifty miles, to get on the ship to come here. He said, "My father chickened out at the last minute, or I could have been American, too." I said, "Buddy, you didn't miss a thing." It was beautiful where he was. It looked just like where they came to in Manchester, almost identical – right on a cove and the whole bit. So it was interesting how people came to where they left, but they didn't want to talk about where they came from.

MG: They came from County Kerry.

MR: Yes.

MG: Can you describe that area a little bit?

MR: Actually, the town is Sneem, and it's the very beginning of the bottom end of the ring of Kerry. So it's beautiful. The Kenmare River comes up, but it's fairly wide there, so it's a big bay. I was only there for a couple of days, maybe three days, because my wife wouldn't let us leave until we did find the old homestead. But it's a small little town. It's still a tiny little village is what it is.

MG: I know that that area was impacted by the potato famine. Was that part of why they came over?

MR: I think so, yes. Yes. Because they came over in the early 1900s. I want to say maybe 1912 because my grandfather was in World War I. So it was the tail end of the famine, and they obviously, saw a lot of the turmoil from it – illness and starvation and all that.

MG: There was a lot of political turmoil there, as well, in the early part of the 20th century. Did you have family members that remained and got involved in the civil war?

MR: Over there?

MG: Yes.

MR Not that I know of. I got to meet – my mother's last cousin was still living on the property. Other relatives had been over there and never – my uncle had told me, "You won't get in his house. He won't let you in his house." But me and my wife showed up, and he had her in the house in about five minutes, and he was very excited. Then my wife went back over a couple of more times and saw him. He passed away a few years ago, but he never got into any of that kind of discussion. I think he was a little bit of a local character around town.

MG: Who would this have been to you?

MR: It was my mother's last cousin over there.

MG: Did you have any relatives from Ireland who were fishermen?

MR: Well, he had been fishing that morning and caught himself a salmon, and he had poaching on the stove for lunch, right in the creek behind his house. I don't know if relatives fished over there or not. I know my grandfather fished when he first came here with lobster traps in a

rowboat. My mother used to go out with him. Even though he was a gardener, he had a little boat and putted around.

MG: Did they come through Ellis Island? I know they settled in Cambridge, Massachusetts.

MR: I think they did. I think they did go through Ellis Island and then came to Cambridge because there were other probably cousins or uncles that had told them that was the place they should come to.

MG: Do you know how your grandfather got this job as a gardener?

MR: No, but I should. [laughter] I know that they came to Beverly Farms first from Cambridge, and they were there for a year or so. Then he got the job in Manchester, and that's where they stayed.

MG: This was before your mother was born?

MR: Oh, yes. Well before. Yes. They both came from Sneem, and I don't know how they got together in Cambridge, but, but they did

MG: Your grandmother and your grandfather on your mother's side?

MR: Yes. And came to Beverly Farms, and then settled in Manchester after a couple of years in Beverly Farms.

MG: That's where they started their family.

MR: Yes, yes.

MG: Your father's side of the family came through Canada.

MR: Prince Edward Island, yes, to Boston. Then they settled in Wilmington, Mass.

MG: I thought you had some English in your family, as well. I didn't know which part.

MR: I think my grandfather came from England. I think he was orphaned as a child. He was Irish, but he was orphaned to England, and then made it over to Prince Edward Island. I should have done my homework a little bit better, but I didn't. But that's definitely what the case was.

And they both came down from Prince Edward Island to Boston, and then ended up settling in Wilmington.

MG: What did your grandparents do for living in Wilmington?

MR: I think my grandfather had a pretty good job at the time because, through the Depression and all that, he worked for the gas company. I don't think they ever really had to struggle because of that. He was working for a utility.

MG: You mentioned you had a grandparent that served in World War I.

MR: Yes.

MG: Did you have other family members that served in the military?

MR: Oh, yes. I think my father – all five brothers served in World War II, and then two uncles on my mother's side from Manchester served in World War II.

MG: Did they all make it back?

MR: One didn't on my father's side; he died in Europe.

MG: It sounds like your father came from a big family.

MR: Five boys.

MG: No girls?

MR: No. [laughter] And I'm one of four boys.

MG: What do you know about your father's childhood and his experience growing up?

MR: I think they had a great childhood. They all played sports, and they hunted and trapped. Wilmington wasn't very well settled then. It was all farmland. I think they had a good time.

MG: What about your mother? Did she ever talk about her childhood?

MR: Yes. They had a great childhood growing up. They lived right on the harbor at an estate, even though they had their own house on the estate. Everything's centered around the ocean for them. They had boats. When they got a little bit older, they rented a cottage and stayed out on an island off of Manchester in the summertime. Everything for that side of the family-centered around the boats.

MG: Dou know how your parents met?

MR: Yes, my father got to Manchester; he was working for another wealthy family, and they had a boat in Manchester. He ended up being around the boatyard, and my mother worked at the boatyard through high school and stuff like that. So that's how they got together.

MG: Was this the marina that your father owned, or did he come to own that later?

MR: He never owned it, but the marina that he worked at was a subsidiary of this bigger boatyard, Manchester Marine Corporation.

MG: Okay. Can you tell me a little bit more about the marina and the activity there?

MR: It was a busy – the big boatyard catered to the yachts, the big sailboats, and it had been in operation for years and years and years. During World War II, they built a lot of the PT boats. They built the boats there, and then they would tow them to Gloucester, and put the engines and the hardware in, in Gloucester. So it was a big working boatyard. After World War II, it catered to the fancy sailing yachts because it was considered an upper-crust town, Manchester and Marblehead. Over time, they developed this other smaller marina inside of the railroad bridge, which, as the recreational boating industry took off, they sold Boston Whalers and Makos and stuff. My father ran that part of the operation for the big boatyard.

MG: How did he get that experience, or how did he come into that kind of work?

MR: It was interesting. When we were little kids, he was the head bartender at a fancy restaurant in the area. I have a brother that's ten years younger than me. He came along, and my mother said, "You weren't around when the kids were growing up. So maybe get a day job, so you're not gone all the time at night." The owner of the boatyard was friends with the family. So it just evolved, and he took over running that marina for the whole time that we were coming through junior high school, high school. It was nice because we had the run of the place,

MG: So are you one of the youngest of four boys?

MR: Third. I'm the third. Well, I'm sixty-three. I have another brother that's sixty-four. Hold on. I'm sixty-two. He's sixty-three, my next brother up, and he fishes full time. Then there's

another older brother, who's sixty-five or six, and he got a career in the postal service. We always say he was the one that listened in school. My younger brother, who's nine years younger than me, he fishes also out of Manchester. He goes lobstering.

MG: That's a pretty big gap between you and your younger brother.

MR: Yes, it is. My mother would kill me. She used to say, "He wasn't an accident, but he sure was a surprise."

MG: [laughter] Tell me about what it was like growing up with so many brothers, and what you would do for fun.

MR: Manchester was a great little town to grow up in. We had a nice neighborhood and a lot of kids in the neighborhood. Neighbors of ours had kids that were – well, their youngest would have been the same age as my older brother, but they also owned a little restaurant in town. So at the age of eleven, twelve years old, we were already working in that restaurant, which is – not to be political – I think that's part of the problem today. Kids can't go to work when they're twelve years old; they have to wait until they're sixteen, and by then, they have different habits or interests. It was great for us. I mean, it was awesome. Then, with our father running the marina, we all had little boats, the skiffs and stuff to run around in and put some traps in, or make money. My two uncles in town were lobstermen.

So we had a little bit of insight into what was going on as far as what to do and what not to do on the waterfront.

MG: What was "not to do?"

MR: Well, if you were misbehaving, you were going to be found out in no time with two uncles that were fishing full time and a father that ran the marina. In those days, everybody knew everybody. So you had to mind your P's and Q's.

MG: Would you ever get in trouble?

MR: No. I left most of that to my brother. [laughter]

MG: Which two uncles were fishermen?

MR: My mother's older brother, and my mother's sister's husband. Actually, they moved to Maine in the '70s. He's ninety-one years old, and still lobstering up in Port Clyde.

MG: He sounds like someone we should interview.

MR: Yes, yes. Great guy.

MG: Talk a little bit about the era that they lobstered in.

MR: Well, they both started – my uncle started after World War II, and lobstered full time – my mother's brother. The other uncle was a little bit younger, and he came along, and they both kept their boats over in the cove by where the boatyard was. When they weren't fishing, both of them worked at the boatyard also. They were kind of separate from the rest of the lobsterman in town. All the other lobster boats are in the downtown harbor, but they kept theirs over by the boatyard. In those days, everything was a lot more secretive. Before all the faster boats came along and everything else, there was a lot more kept to themselves. Now with reporting and everything else, everyone knows everyone's business. There's no real secrets anymore.

MG: What kind of secrets could you keep? Where were the best lobsters? How many you caught?

MR: Yes, where they were fishing, and maybe they'd leave a little bit earlier because they didn't want everyone to know where they were going, and this and that. But those days are gone with all the technology and stuff that there is now.

MG: Why were your two uncles separate from everybody?

MR: Well, because they worked at the boatyard, and there were moorings available over on that side of the harbor. So in those days, it played into the fact that – well, they could unload their lobsters over there, and no one knew what they were catching. Everyone else was downtown under the spotlight. There was no place to hide. So, in their eyes, it was a little bit of an advantage. Whether it really was or not, I don't know, but people thought that.

MG: Were they successful as lobstermen?

MR: Yes.

MG: Did your mother ever work outside the home, or was she too busy with all the boys?

MR: While the three of us were growing up, before the younger brother came along, no, she was an at-home mom. Yes. Then, later on, thank god, after we got out of high school, she went to work in the guidance department at the high school. So she was actually working at the high school when my younger brother was in high school.

MG: Why do you say, "Thank god?"

MR: Well, I think it might've been a problem. [laughter]

MG: What do you mean?

MR: Because I never said that we were angels.

MG: Do you mean it was good to get her out of the house?

MR: No, it was good that she wasn't working at the high school while we were there.

MG: Okay. [laughter] How would you spend summers growing up?

MR: We'd be on the boat all the time. We'd be around the marina or on our boats all the time. We had skiffs and lobster traps. My older brother next to me and me, we both worked for my uncle lobstering, going through high school. So we'd work for him, and then we'd be out in our own skiffs in the afternoon, whether it was catching striped bass or whatever. We'd be out all night doing that. So everything revolved around the boats in the ocean. My mother thought it was more important to row a boat properly than ride a bicycle.

MG: Did you have fun doing that?

MR: Oh, yes, it was all fun. It was all about fun. Yes. The brother next to me that's still fishing, he was just a total fish-aholic. It was nonstop around the clock, even to this day. Twenty-five years ago, when we were fishing offshore, and we'd be down south in Florida, wherever, out for three weeks at a time, he would come in, get off the boat, and go straight to a bass shop and get bait and go bass fishing, catching these little things. I just didn't get it. I was more in it to make money. He just had the passion for fishing all the time. Even now, he commutes to Gloucester from New Hampshire to fish. And on days off, he'll be in a trout stream fishing up in New Hampshire and stuff. He's got it bad.

MG: You had a lot of family members that were in the fishing industry, but I read you had two neighbors that really got you into the business. Can you tell me who they were?

MR: Yes, there were two – boy, you did do your homework. There were two bachelors that lived across the street from us. One was an old Polish fellow; the other one was a World War II veteran, a real tough, rugged guy. He had been divorced from a wife. But they both fished out of the harbor downtown. They became close friends of the family. If my mother was out at night and when my father still worked at night in the restaurant, they became our babysitters. If my mother was gone – a sewing class or whatever. Then, at some point – when we were young,

they didn't have a cellar in their house. So my parents let them build lobster traps in our cellar. So it evolved. Lots of times, when we were too young to go with my other uncles, these guys would take us. They were almost like family.

MG: What were their names?

MR: John (Keeler?) and Stanley Thomas.

MG: You eventually named your first boat *Stanley Thomas*.

MR: Yes, still is.

MG: Did he know that?

MR: No, but relatives do, through a friend who ran into a relative in Florida one winter. This friend of mine said, "Oh, yeah. I'm from Rockport, and I go lobstering." This lady says, "Oh, I used to have an uncle that went lobstering in Manchester." "Who was it?" And she said, "Oh, Stanley Thomas." This guy goes, "Wait a second. Wait a second. That's too close to …" Through that, it all came about. We came up and took pictures one time. They were thrilled. They thought it was great because he was a good old guy.

MG: Did these guys live together, or were they just both single neighbors?

MR: No, they lived together. Stanley Thomas owned the house, and this other guy that had moved down from somewhere right outside of Revere or somewhere, and had gotten divorced but fished out of Manchester, so he was a tenant.

MG: What did they teach you about the fishing industry?

MR: They just went every day. More than anything else – they went every day, and they were characters. They were real characters. Stanley Thomas said he had been a – I think he had had his fair share of adventure when he was younger. So by the time we knew him, he had settled down. He was up there; he was getting up there in age. John (Keeler), the other guy, he was a rough and tumble guy. He had been at Iwo Jima in World War II. He was no kid, but he was high energy all the time. We played around. They'd give us traps to fish and stuff like that. I don't know. Maybe we could blame them for some of what we do now. [laughter]

MG: What do you mean?

MR: Well, they made it easier for us –just knowing the people to get into the business. If you knew people, you're always accepted a little bit more than – "Who's this kid coming along? He doesn't know anything." So when you have two uncles that are doing it and two neighbors that are doing it and a father that's running a marina in town, it gave you a little bit of an advantage.

MG: That's interesting. If someone wanted to move here and start fishing, is it harder to get going if they aren't known or connected?

MR: Then it would have been. I think it would always be easier now for people. It's not nearly as territorial, I don't think, as it used to be.

MG: Is that because there are fewer guys doing it?

MR: I don't think there's a whole lot less in the lobster industry. Well, take Gloucester, for instance, where there's a state pier facility. You didn't have to live in Gloucester to keep your boat at that facility. So it became a sanctuary pier, where there's people from Lynn, Saugus, Beverly, Rockport – from all over. And the boats are a lot faster than they used to be. So these old territory boundary lines and stuff that were imaginary have gone away with the advent of the fast and more powerful boats.

MG: Do you feel like there are new or different boundaries? I saw that a little bit in the film *Lobster War*.

MR: Not so much around here. Not so much around – no, not to the degree – I saw *Lobster War*, too. Even in *Lobster War*, Maine portrayed themselves as causing more of the lobster war than with the Canadians, where the guys from Jonesport say, "Well, we can't go that way because the Maine guys will cut us off," and they were the Maine guys. [laughter] So we don't have that issue to that degree at all. I don't know. Maybe sometimes when these films are made, things are overplayed anyway.

MG: Is that how you felt about that movie?

MR: Well, I haven't talked to any of the actual guys that were in the movie, but I just know there's a big mix of different ports [that] fish in that area. Seeing a lot of these different reality shows and working with some of the people that were involved in that movie, they have to create some kind of a storyline. Otherwise, there's no interest. Maybe I'm a cynic.

MG: What was school like for you growing up?

MR: It was enjoyable for me. I didn't have any issues at all in school. We went to a school where you didn't know everyone in your class; you knew everyone in the school, from grade one

to grade twelve. It was a small school system. It was a great school system. I wouldn't say I applied myself too much.

MG: You were in high school during an interesting time in our history, and the Vietnam War was going on. Were you following along the events of the war?

MR: We were following the events of the war in high school. We had a civics class; it must've been my sophomore year, and we watched the Watergate hearings every day in school, every single day. So I can still rattle off the names of some of the guys that ran the hearings and everything else. It's funny how it's like instant replay, except it's just so much more partisan now than it was then, it seems.

MG: Did you know guys that were going off to Vietnam?

MR: They were older than me. Yes, I knew people from town that did. But if I was twelve years old, they were nineteen years old. Luckily, my oldest brother just missed out on it by the last couple of years. Luckily, it had come to an end. Yes, we were paying attention, that's for sure.

MG: You graduated from high school in 1975.

MR: Yes.

MG: What did you hope to do after you graduated from high school?

MR: Well, I wasn't interested in going to school because we had this image – and I don't know – I certainly could have. My grades were fine and everything else, but it was just get out and make money; it seemed like to me. I don't know if that was the right choice or not, but that's what we did. Within a year or two, we weren't fishing in Manchester anymore. We had started fishing in Gloucester, me and my brother. Then another year later, by '78, we were in Florida fishing. In those days, there was never a shortage of making money in the industry. So there was no real need to think about getting out and going to do something else. I can remember when we were probably nineteen years old, I'm driving a brand new truck, my brother's driving a Z28 Camaro, and my father had never had a new car in his life. So everything came easy in those days. It was hard work, but when you're young like that, it was easy.

MG: What brought you to Gloucester?

MR: The brother that's a year ahead of me ended up getting a job on one of the Gloucester boats with a guy that grew up in Manchester, had a bigger boat in Gloucester that was trawling offshore. He started fishing with him. Then he went to Alabama and had a boat built, so my

brother went to Alabama and brought the boat back. Then there was another fisherman from Beverly that moved to Gloucester. My brother ended up fishing with him. [As the] younger brother, I get to follow in his footprints. He got off that boat; I got on. It was a progression, and that's just the way it went.

MG: How far is Manchester from Gloucester?

MR: Four miles. So it's the next harbor, but it was a world of difference. It was a world of difference fishing-wise. When we were kids, and we'd come down to Gloucester with Stanley Thomas or that other fellow to get bait, for us, it was like going to Disney World. There was so much activity. The state pier had thirty different fish plants, and there was just activity everywhere. We were wide-eyed. And they would let us go with them every day. We'd come home stinking, but we'd get to go for the ride to get bait in the afternoon, and we just thought it was – and financially, that was the place to go. When we were fishing with my uncle were getting paid ten dollars a day. Next thing you know, a year later, you're in Gloucester, and we were making fifteen or eighteen hundred dollars a week. So it was a natural progression.

MG: That's a lot of money.

MR: It was. It was a lot of money. It was hard work, but it was a lot of money.

MG: Can you say why you were making so much money? What was so lucrative about it?

MR: You know what? We were lucky enough to hook up with good guys, and they were really good fishermen. We worked hard, played hard, but in a sense, we were lucky. We had good teachers. Those guys, they were good. The progression went on. My brother started swordfishing. I ended up in Florida when I was probably nineteen years old. I had a friend down there; they needed a guy on a boat. Now I'm in Fort Lauderdale, nineteen years old, swordfishing. I came back the next summer. Next thing you know, you're going to the Grand Banks swordfishing. After that, in the early '80s, every winter, we would go to Florida and go swordfishing. When we went to Florida swordfishing, there were probably fifteen boats out of this facility where we fished; they would almost fight over us because we had been to the Grand Banks. They would talk to you like you were an astronaut that had been to the moon. We were probably no better workers than the rest of these guys. But just the fact that you had come from Gloucester and you had been to the Grand Banks, it was a big deal to them because they knew you could do the job.

MG: It was a big deal for people to hire you.

MR: Yes. We always had established jobs when we got there, but there would always be plenty of guys with other boats saying, "Come on over here if you want to make a move," and stuff like

that. It was a great racket. We were here all summer and down there all winter. So it was good. We were young. No supervision. [laughter]

MG: When you first started fishing out of Gloucester, what kind of fishing were you doing?

MR: I was lobstering and gillnetting with a guy.

MG: Okay. Who were you doing that with?

MR: Tony Marquis was his name, and he's a real good fisherman. He still fishes out of Kittery in Maine. Then I got off his boat, probably 1978. We were gillnetting in the fall. I said, "After Christmas, I'm going to Florida. I'm going fishing down there." So he showed up down there with another friend during the winter. He said, "Look, I can't take you back. You left, and you went." I said, "Yeah, that's no problem. I'm doing fine." And the other guy with him had a boat in Gloucester, and he said, "When you come back in the spring if you want to go with me, you can come with me." So I came back up in the spring when the season ended down there, after April, and got on with him. I was with him for probably eight years.

MG: Were you still going back and forth to Florida?

MR: Yes, I would arrange – for four or five winters, I arranged for guys to take my spot up here when they were gillnetting through the winter, and I skedaddle and go down there.

MG: Can you tell me a little bit more about what life was like in Florida for you? What were you doing for fun? What was the fishing was like?

MR: Well, I was living in Fort Lauderdale all through the 1980s. It was crazy. You could get in all the trouble you wanted, or you can stay out of trouble. But it was great. Like I said, you were making money, you're unsupervised, [and] it was warm. We're everywhere from Cozumel, [Mexico] to Louisiana to Key West, Florida, to Charleston, South Carolina. It was fun, but it's a young guy's game.

MG: Were you just swordfishing?

MR: Down there, yes.

MG: Can you talk about that kind of fishing describe it for someone who's never swordfished?

MR: It's longlining, where you set out a mainline. Every night, we used to set – well, a small boat would have twenty miles; a big boat would have forty miles. You'd snap the hooks on as it

went out at night, bait the hooks, and you let it set during the night. You'd haul it back. You'd start at four or five o'clock in the morning. You'd hope to be done by one or two o'clock in the afternoon, and then you'd start all over again because down there in the tide, when you fish the Straits of Florida, you'd be forty or fifty miles north of where you started the day before, so you'd have to steam back, [and] try to get back to where you were the night before if you caught fish. So there wasn't a lot of sleep involved. It was a little boat I was on for a few years down there. [laughter] That thing was only thirty-two feet long or something. At times, we had myself and two brothers on there with another kid that grew up with us in Manchester. He owned the boat. So it was fun times. It was fun times. We kept the boat in Key Largo [with] a relative of his. So we were at a private home, which was really an estate. We weren't tied up at some dingy fish pier. This guy that owned the house had built a lot of homes in Homestead, Florida, and around Miami. He just loved the idea of having a commercial fishing boat tied up at his house. Four feet from the boat was a tiki bar that would sit thirty people, and they'd have people over all the time. They became friends of my parents, and the families were friends. It was awesome until it gets old. Really, what happened around 1989, they outlawed longlining in the Straits of Florida, basically from Key West to Port Canaveral near the Space Center. So that kind of ended the longline industry on the East Coast of Florida. So half the guys on the boats went to Alaska; the other half went to Hawaii. A lot of the boats went to Hawaii. I came home and came back to fishing in Gloucester, and ended up getting my own boat and lobstering on my own then.

MG: Why was longlining outlawed?

MR: George Bush was a big fan of sportfishing. He used to spend a lot of time in the Florida Keys sportfishing, and it was the beginning of the marine protected areas – Channel Islands in California, Tortuga [in Haiti]. That's what happened. It took all of the longline fleet out of it for the East Coast of Florida. At that point, I wasn't really looking forward to going to Alaska or Hawaii. My brother went. He went to Hawaii for a few years. I came back up here and continued fishing.

MG: Who was the guy you were fishing off and on with for about eight years?

MR: Richard Aprans was his name. He's still fishing out at Gloucester. Name of the boat is the *Black Pearl*.

MG: You were lobstering?

MR: Lobstering and gillnetting. In the beginning, we were gillnetting offshore in the summertime, and lobstering in the fall. After a few years, he got out of the gillnetting, and he's just lobstering fulltime.

MG: Has the regulatory environment impacted lobsterman? If so, can you say how?

MR: Well, in recent years, what's really impacted the lobster industry is the amount of groundfishermen, [who] were all gillnetters, came back into the lobster industry, which I have no issue with what whatsoever. Some guys did. They had the permits. A lot of them started out as lobstermen, and they were – if you held their feet to the fire, every one of them would probably rather be groundfishing right now, but they can't because of the cod cuts and everything else. There's no way you could be gillnetting now because it's too indiscriminate when it comes to catching cod. So they were forced into the lobster industry, but the industry has held up. The industry's fine to this point. You hear all the talk about everything moving north and the global warming and everything else, but to this point, we really haven't seen too much of a decline in the catch at all.

MG: Are the lobsters behaving differently?

MR: The ones I talked to today seem to be behaving the same as the ones last week. [laughter] There have been little anomalies that have happened. Four or five years ago, there was a big shed of lobsters in the springtime, which was unheard of. For whatever reason, it happened, and it hasn't happened again since. So I don't think you can draw the conclusion – you certainly can't say, "Well, they're going to shed earlier every year because they did it that year," because they haven't. Do I think there's global warming and climate change? Definitely, but I look at more fifty-year blocks, not five-year blocks, like some people want to do – "Well, the water was warm this summer. It's probably going to be warmer next summer." I don't see any guarantee of that.

MG: And you don't see it impact lobstering?

MR: No, but it takes time to do these studies. We see lobster studies where they say, "Well, there's no settlement. They're not settling where they used to." I don't think that means there's a decline in lobsters; I think it might be that they're settling in deeper water because they want to find that temperature, and now that temperature is in twelve fathoms, not two fathoms. You see it in a lot of surveys and studies – "Well, the fish weren't there. The fish weren't there." But the fish are going to find what they want to find. If you always look in the same place, in this industry, you'd probably be the first one to fail because they don't do the same thing all the time. Things change, and they know. I mean, they're animals. They're going to find food. They're going to go where the food is, and that's just the way it is. Or the optimum temperature for where they want to spawn. So it's not always going to be in the same place, and it doesn't always mean it's a bad sign that they weren't where they were five years ago.

MG: Are there other ways you're noticing climate change out on the waters?

MR: Yes, we're seeing different species that we never used to see. We see a lot of sea bass now. I always talk to – there's one weird thing. It used to be: "Well, if the water gets warm, there'll be a lot of dogfish around." The water's been warm the last couple of summers, and we

don't see the dogfish where you would think we should. Do you know what I mean? Different things come into play. What you think you should see because the water is warmer, you don't see, but you are seeing other things that are here because the water is warmer. If we had it all figured out, we would have caught everything long ago. It's probably a good thing that we don't know what's going on all the time. People talk about the water temperature and everything else – ninety percent of the people that talk about the water temperature are just looking at the surface. It can be doing a lot of different things down below than it's doing on the surface of the water, and people don't even take that into consideration lots of times.

MG: Are you fishing any differently?

MR: Me, myself, no. But, a lot of the fleet is. A lot of the fleet is fishing a lot further off through the fall and the winter in deeper water than they ever used to. They are able t, because of the demise of the groundfish fleet. If the groundfish fleet was still as active as it used to be, there is no way you'd be able to have this lobster gear all over the ocean like you do now in the soft bottom. But there isn't enough other activity from the other fisheries to affect it. So, in a nutshell, the lobster industry has taken over the soft bottom.

MG: Some of the other fishermen I've talked to just don't seem concerned at all about climate change. I don't know if it's because they have bigger concerns, or it is not impacting them in major ways.

MR: Well, like I said, I don't think it's really impacted me, but there's no way you can deny that there's something going on. We create a lot of heat.

MG: What do you mean?

MR: Just the human race creates a lot of heat with all the technology and everything else. I mean, look at each one of these [cell phones], how hot they are when they're running, and everyone in the world has one now.

MG: Yes. Are there other challenges brought on by climate change in your work or in your life?

MR: Paying the heating bill at home. [laughter]

MG: Is it cheaper to heat your house?

MR: No, it's about the same. It's about the same. Like I said, I think, for me, this has all come about in the last ten years or so. I think over time it's measured in maybe fifty or hundred-year blocks, not five-year blocks, where people make knee-jerk reactions.

MG: Are fishermen talking about climate change?

MR: Yes, guys talk about it. It comes up at meetings all the time. It comes up. One of the issues that gets talked about at whale meetings is climate change because the right whales aren't doing what they did because the plankton is blooming somewhere else up in the Gulf of Saint Lawrence instead of Mass Bay, which would be awesome if they stayed up there all the time. So, yes, it gets brought up at meetings a lot.

MG: Is that a controversial issue here? Are people upset about the whales?

MR: Well, yes. Nobody likes the fact that they have to change the way they fish or maybe not fish at all. The guys south of Gloucester that have the closure in Massachusetts Bay were certainly up in arms four or five years ago when that closure started. It is what it is. It's not going to go away. I feel their pain because I still feel ninety-nine percent of this is ship strikes. It's not fishing gear, especially in this country. They do have an issue in Canada, a big issue. But as far as down here, we've had very little interaction with the right whales in the last ten or twelve years, and we're getting asked to do more and more and more all the time. You see on the news what goes on in Canada, and we're supposed to share some of those deaths with Canada, and we had nothing to do with it. So yes, there are hard feelings, and it does come back to climate change. But is it really fishermen, or is it ship strikes? It could very well be the Navy is killing more than anyone, but you're never going to hear that.

MG: Do you have to adapt your tools and techniques because of the whales?

MR: Yes, we have to – how we attach the buoys and everything else. We have neutral, whale-safe rope. We haven't had any closures right here yet, but it could happen.

MG: What would that mean for you?

MR: It would mean you'd probably lose part of the month of May. Cape Cod Bay is closed February, March, and April. The last two years, it didn't open on May 1st because the whales were still there. I think it was May 14th last year. So those guys are losing three and a half months, which is tough because it's not just three and a half months. You're really three weeks or a month getting your gear in the water and fishing when it opens, and you can't bring it home the day before it closes in January either. So it's tough for them. It makes for a shorter season.

MG: What's your vision for the future? What do you think will happen to fishermen here?

MR: For us? I think we've done enough. That's been my stand for the last few years, I think. I think the Massachusetts fishermen have done more than anyone else in the whole world, more

than their share. We've had little or no interaction. I think we should just be – we should be the model for the other areas to say, "Look, do what Massachusetts has done, and maybe we can avoid all these problems that they're having up in the Gulf of Saint Lawrence. Go to the lighter rope. Get rid of the floating rope that's all over the surface of the water. Hold us up in the spotlight for what we have done, not for what we haven't done."

MR: Right. I want to hear a little bit more about your travels down the Atlantic coast and to Mexico.

MG: Some you can't; some you can. [laughter] I ended up with the same guy that I grew up with. He owned this small boat. We ended up – he was running a bigger boat, so I think it was two winters; we had three Ring brothers and him on the boat, and it was a nice boat. It was a sixty-five-foot boat, fairly new, running it for another owner. It was a lot of fun. You're young kids, and you're going into these ports or other people are paying to go on cruise ships and stuff, and it was all giggles. We made money. No one ever got hurt. I think it may have been the only time my mother didn't like – she didn't like all of us being on the same boat. She was always glued to the Weather Channel anyway, but I think she was always a little bit on edge when we're all in the same boat because if something happened, it would be a real disaster. But we were fine. [laughter]

MG: Did you ever have any close calls or severe storms?

MR: Oh, yes. There was plenty of bad weather. No one really likes to talk about it. All three of us have sunk on different occasions, but never together, all different boats. Everyone always made out all right, all three of them. So that was good.

MG: What happened when you sunk?

MR: Our incident, we were offshore gillnetting, and we had a fire at night, exhaust fire [on] the boat. I got up from watch. I had just got back from swordfishing in Florida, and this friend of mine – it was a new boat, maybe a year or two old, and he asked me if I wanted to take the boat. I'd been down south swordfishing for two years. I said, "I'll go, but give someone else the boat. Then, if you want me to take over, maybe in a couple of trips, I will." So three of us went. About four hours outside of Gloucester at night, thick fog, I got up from my watch, and I smelled fiberglass cooking. The guy on watch – I said, "George, what's that?" Well, he did some exhaust work, and it's probably just cooking off on the exhaust. I looked out the back of the wheelhouse, and the flames were coming out the vent. I said, "George, we've got a big problem here." We only had about a minute to get off the boat and didn't get a call off. Got them on a raft and threw everything I could overboard, and never got a call on the radio. Luckily, the kid that built the boat – this was in 1989. It was the beginning days of EPIRBs [Emergency Position Indicating Radio Beacon], which you're probably familiar with; it's a radio beacon, gives off a signal. He had packed one in the raft. So he had a handheld one on the raft, and we activated that. It was really thick fog. A passenger plane flying from Minnesota to New York picked up

the signal. They called the Coast Guard. The Coast Guard found us in about six hours. Everything worked out perfect. So the Coast Guard got there about noontime, and we kept paddling away from the boat because it was totally engulfed in flames. Then we paddled back to make sure we were nearby the boat in case any other ships going by smelled it or anything because we were in the shipping lanes. That's why I threw everything overboard to make more targets. When the Coast Guard got there, they found us. One of their jets found us first, pinpointed out position, and then, about an hour later, a forty-seven foot Coast Guard boat came to pick us up. And just as they got there, the boats sank. It worked out perfect because I don't think either one of the other two guys could even swim, which isn't unusual in this business. There's a lot of guys that can't swim. So it worked out. It worked out fine. My brother sank down in Florida. They were shark fishing at the time. The boat was probably overloaded. They were near the inlet. They got off okay. Then my younger brother was on a sport boat down – I think it was in St. Augustine, and they were tied up to pilings and stuff. Something happened with tide going up and down. In the middle of the night, they woke up, [and] the boat was sinking. They had a little baby on the boat, and he had to swim the baby across the inlet. She was like two or three years old, but it all worked out. All three occasions, it worked out fine. So we're lucky.

MG: What's lost when something like that happens? How far does it set you back?

MR: Some guys, it sets them back a lot. That's it for them. I don't know. I went to Portland and got on another boat a few weeks later and was fishing offshore again. In my eyes, you figure, "Well, it happened." Put it this way: you're more aware of what's going on all the time around you. And like I said, we had good training. We fished with good guys that had all good equipment and stuff, and we had fished offshore. Any guy that's fished offshore is always more aware of the safety issues than guys that just dayboat fish. That's not a knock on guys that dayboat fish, but you have to be.

MG: With the recession and the regulations introduced in the 1980s, did things slow down for you?

MR: I have to try and figure out where I was in the 1980s now. Well, I was still fishing in Florida. No, I'm going to say no. The '80s were fine. All the big regs [regulations] that really changed the whole industry was when the catch shares came in, ten years ago now. That was really the tipping point, I'd say, of the whole industry. I can remember sitting at a table with Jane Lubchenco, and telling ten people in the room that there was going to be consolidation. But I don't even know if she envisioned the amount of consolidation that there was, or how quick consolidation can come. Four years ago, when John Bullard said, "If I have a choice of saving the fishermen or the cod, I'm going to save the cod." When he put the seventy-eight percent cut in on the cod, that was the end of the – that was the end right there of the gillnet industry across the board. There was a sector in town that four years ago I had thirty-one boats fishing in it, and that sector is gone. It doesn't even exist anymore. Basically, all those thirty-one boats shifted over into the lobster industry because they had to; they had no choice. I think that one cut right there was probably the biggest change in the industry from day one. But you could go back to

boatowners all the way, like you said, through the mid-’80s to now; every business decision they’ve had to make has always been regulatory. It comes down to that all the time. We used to sit in meetings, and people would ask, “Well, what’s your long-term business plan?” I used to tell them, “Any guy in this room that has a long-term business plan will be the first one to go out of business. Because if he has the financing and the stuff to go buy equipment ahead of time and then has the government pull the rug out from under him and you’re sitting on equipment that’s now useless, how good was your long-term business plan?” In this business now, you have to have the shortest term business plan and be flexible enough if you can just to stay in it. It’s not a matter of thinking ahead because you don’t know what’s going to come down the turnpike the next day. The regulations are always so far ahead of the science. The science never seems to catch up to what the regulations are. Everything was supposed to be rebuilt and 2014. Then in 2014, what happened? All of a sudden, the cod isn’t rebuilt. The guys see the cod, and then as soon as they see cod, the regulators tell them, “Well, those are the only cod left. That’s why you’re seeing them. Those are it.” It’s like they come up with new words. Three years ago, when there was cod everywhere again, and they said there was no cod, the new word was hyperaggregation. That means those are the only ones left, and they’re all right there in that little pod. You can take this out, too. I’ve always said there’s a bigger agenda than just NOAA’s [National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration] agenda and trying to be flexible and letting guys fish. There’s an agenda above that, whatever it is. Whether it’s gas or oil, it’s above every administration that’s ever been in Washington because the agenda stays the same no matter what party has ever been in office in Washington. It’s always been cut, cut, cut, cut, cut. If they were really interested, maybe they should be in the Department of Agriculture, not Commerce. Take it out of NOAA. You may have to remove that, too. But it’s my feeling. It’s always their science. It’s never anyone else’s science. How can their science always be the best and only science that gets used?

MG: I keep feeling in these interviews that there’s got to be a win-win solution for the fish and the fishermen.

MR: The oceans are a real flexible thing. I can remember in the late ’70s, early ’80s, gillnetting. We might have ten thousand of large cod a day, and if you had three haddock, they were going home because we thought they were the last ones. Now you can walk on the haddock, and it’s the opposite [with] the cod. It’s the cod issue now. The ocean’s a pretty flexible thing for the amount of abuse that it’s taken over the years. So, thank god, there’s haddock right now because it’s keeping the big boats going, and the big boats are doing great. If you don’t have a boat that’s eighty-five feet long right now, you’re in trouble. But if you do have a big boat, the big boats are doing fine for probably the next three or four years because of the haddock. But it can change.

MG: It’s been interesting trying to schedule an interview with you because it seems like you’re working seven days a week. So what’s your schedule like?

MR: I don’t fish as hard as I used to at all. My days aren’t as long as [they] used to [be]. There’s a lot of guys in this harbor that are working a lot harder than me now, leaving at three o’clock in the morning, getting home at seven o’clock at night, lobstering. God bless them. But

they've got bigger operations and payments, and they're doing well, so good for them. I'm involved in different fisheries groups and stuff with the Mass Lobstermen and the Fisheries Commission in town. So there's always plenty going on.

MG: Can you talk about both of those organizations and your roles? How did you get involved?

MR: The Fisheries Commission in town was inactive or vacant, non-existent through the '70s and '80s. The previous mayor to this one decided to resurrect it, and she asked me if I'd be on it. I don't know who dropped my name, to be honest with you, but she wrote me a letter and asked me. So I said, "Yeah." So a core group of us got it resurrected. Then one guy that wasn't a fisherman was on it, and as the executive director or chairman, he got off. They asked me if I'd be the chairman, [and] I still am. It's a good group of guys. There's not a lot we can do, but we've gotten to the point where we just try to advocate for all the fisheries in town that you can catch and work on. The other mayor's attitude was: "Don't go to bat against NOAA and try to get down the regulatory battles. Leave that to the Northeast Seafood Coalition or the lobbyists in Washington. Just try to lobby on behalf of what we can catch, whether it's a lobsters or grey sole or haddock, and don't get down in the trenches and get involved in all the other stuff that. You don't have the financial wherewithal to do it." So we meet one night a month, and it's a good group of guys, mostly fishermen. Then the MLA [Massachusetts Lobstermen's Association], I'm involved in that. I'm on the executive board. Then as an offshoot of that, probably five years ago, we formed – it's called the Lobster Foundation of Massachusetts. So it's affiliated with the MLA, but we can now go after grant money and stuff to do educational outreach and our own science projects.

MG: Cool.

MR: Yes.

MG: So have you been doing –?

MR: Yes. We're doing a study right now with another group. It's called Innovate Gloucester, and we have probes that go on our traps that measure the pH in the water, which comes back to climate change and ocean acidification. So we have about seven or eight fishermen around the state that have these probes in their traps. Ocean acidification is the big new thing. It was new this year, but we got a grant for it. So it's going along. It's really the first major science project we've done. But there's been other issues with the water where we may modify these probes, and you could test the oxygen in the water at the bottom, too – and temperature and all that.

MG: Are you working with Tom Balf on that?

MR: Yes.

MG: Cool.

MR: You know Tom?

MG: Yes. I interviewed him for this project.

MR: Oh, you did?

MG: Yes. He's a great guy.

MR: He is. He's a great guy. Yes, good guy.

MG: I like the relationship the fishermen have with him. He's not a fisherman, but he seems to speak their language.

MR: Right. Right. And he ran the Heritage Center for a few years in town, and he always had us down there, speaking to college kids and stuff. Yes, he sees both sides of the fence. He's able to balance it.

MG: Yes. I saw something online that you did a boat tour a number of years ago. I think you brought people on your boat. What was that for?

MR: I've done a few of them. I've done a few of them. I don't know. We had the Weather Channel. We've had the Food Network. It's all educational. Last winter, I had a group here from China. One group one time came on the boat – that day, they couldn't, even though they wanted to. I think it was three degrees and they still wanted to go out in the boat. I just told them, "No, you're not going on the boat today." But yes, I've done quite a few of them. Everyone's always so interested. So we take them out. We haul a few traps in the harbor. Most of them have never even seen a trap before even on the dock. So they're just thrilled when they get to see one hauled. We've done other ones where we've had GoPro cameras, put them in the traps, so it's on the bottom with the lobsters, and then you haul it up. Some of it's been for the seafood show in Boston. We created videos for the city. So there's always little things going on, and I seem to get the calls.

MG: Why do you think you've become the spokesperson for lobstermen here?

MR: A lot of the filming – going back a few years, my brother fished on the *Hannah Bowden* with Linda Greenlaw for ten years. Then when she began writing the books and stuff, she'd get calls. They made the movie [*The Perfect Storm*]. So they used my boat in the movie.

MG: *The Perfect Storm*?

MR: Yes, and my brother was going to be the technical advisor. He finally said, "You know what? I just want to go fishing." I told you he's a complete fisherman. He did not want to get involved in standing around all day, telling them, "Stand here; it'll look real," and all that. They did do a good job. But after that, when Linda started writing books, she'd get calls from people that would want to do something in Gloucester, and she would just say, "Call the Ring boys and they'll take care of [it]." So that's how it started with the Food Network and the Weather Channel; they would just call us, and it's gone from there. I think once your name gets into a database or something, they just keep calling.

MG: Is that also an opportunity to talk about issues facing the seafood industry in Gloucester?

MR: Yes, lots of times they want to know – kist like you're asking – is it getting better? Is it getting worse? If it's getting worse, why? Is the price up? Or is the price down? It's always how many do you catch a day? That's always the first question they want to know.

MG: And are you seeing that number change?

MR: I think this year is off. I'd say the last fifteen years has been pretty stable and good. I think this year is down a little bit. I don't go home at night and crunch numbers because I don't have any control over that. Once it's done, it's done. But I think this year will be off a little bit. Everyone in this industry has had that opinion that it could not keep going the way it's been. It has to at least level off or tail off. I did Ventless Trap Surveys ten years ago, and to the credit of the scientists from Massachusetts, they almost predicted the boom of lobsters that we've seen north of Gloucester four or five years before it happened. People don't always like to agree with scientists, but I think they were spot-on this time, and they caught a lot of lobsters up there in the last few years, but it's not traditional lobster bottom by any means. So how long it lasts, I don't know.

MG: What's not traditional about it?

MR: North of Cape Ann is just a lot of all sand bottom. There's not a lot of structure. It was never a prolific lobster area, but from north of Gloucester to the Isle of Shoals, they've caught a lot of lobsters in the last few years in the summertime, which [is] not normal. It's been great, great for them. It's taken pressure off the south side of Cape Ann, spread a lot of people out, but I don't think it's something that's going to be a long-term summertime fishery up on that side.

MG: Are some predicting that the bubble's going to burst?

MR: Well, I haven't heard them – it all depends on which scientist you want to listen to. There's a couple that I talk to, and they don't feel that the bubble is going to burst, but they think there's going to be a downturn because there's no way it could continue going the way it is. There's been a huge, huge increase in the number of traps in Maine, too. Where do you draw the – is it just a drop-off, or is it catch per unit because you're catching less out of each trap because there's so many traps. So there's a lot of different variables you could look at. But, I think, overall, it's not going to keep going up. I think we reached that probably a couple of years ago. And I didn't listen in school. [laughter]

MG: [laughter] How do you know there are more and more traps? How are you keeping track of what's going on in the lobster industry?

MR: At a whale meeting a few years ago, maybe two or three winters ago – we have a little convention in the wintertime down the Cape. There was a Maine person there, who was – I think he was a whale person, but he was from Maine. They had said in the previous ten years there was an increase of 325,000 traps a year in the water in Maine. Well, is that going to lead to the increasing catch? Sure it is. Maine always had little or no reporting. So as this increase was going every year, they were also reporting more, and they're going to have to report more because it's going to really hurt Maine. This could be off the record.

MG: Do you want me to turn the recorder off?

MR: No, it's okay. You can edit it out if you don't want it in there. As far as the whale issue goes, it could really come back to hurt Maine because they don't report. In federal waters in Maine, even all the big offshore boats, if you only have a federal lobster permit, you're not reporting. We have to report because we have groundfish permits. So we have to report to NMFS [National Marine Fisheries Service]. And now with the windmills coming and the whales and everything else, they're looking at these guys, and they're saying, "Well, we've got gear everywhere," and they're going, "We've got no proof that you've got gear everywhere." There is gear everywhere. Out to a hundred fathoms, there's gear everywhere in the Gulf of Maine. But you have to be able to document that, and they always snickered up there. You guys got a hundred percent reporting. They know what you're doing. Well, in the end, it might help us and hurt them.

MG: Why don't they report to NMFS?

MR: Because they don't have groundfish permits on their federal [permit]. If you only have a federal permit for lobsters and no other federal permits, you don't have to do VTIs [Vessel Transmitted Information].

MG: And how come you don't do that?

MR: I have groundfish permits on my boat. I have other permits.

MG: Can you talk about the permit system and the permit bank. It's a little bit confusing for someone –

MR: No, it's a little bit confusing for everyone. You mean the local permit bank or any permit bank?

MG: Sure. Both.

MR: I have no affiliation with the permit bank in town, but the permit bank sprang out of the natural gas pipeline projects that they put outside of Gloucester here a few years ago. The groundfish fleet got money from that, and instead of distributing the money to the fishermen, they started a permit bank and bought permits with people that were going out at the time. So they accumulated permits, and it's worked out. I have no idea the inner workings of it, but it has worked out for the guys that are still in; they can lease fish. Now, this year coming up, it's going to be a huge problem because there isn't going to be enough cod no matter what, even if you have to lease cod. So it's definitely been a benefit to the guys that are still in.

MG: How long has the permit system been in place? How long have you needed a permit to go fishing?

MR: A long time. A long time. You mean to go groundfishing or to go any kind of fishing?

MG: To go groundfishing. For a long time, you didn't need to pay or lease to go get fish. You needed a permit to go fishing.

MR: More recently than that that you didn't have to pay. Only since catch shares. They were never collateralized until the catch shares came in, and it became – all of a sudden, permits were worth money; they can be traded, and people needed more fish – "Well, I need more pollock because it might become a choke species." Then there's plenty of Pollock – "Now I need to buy grey sole because grey sole is a choke species, and there aren't enough of them." Now it's going to come down to cod is the one. There isn't going to be enough cod to lease, to go around for any of these guys. So it's going to be an interesting next year or two. Until cod comes back in some way [and] quotas are relaxed, the whole industry is choked, other than the big boats that can go outside the Georges [Bank] and stay clear of the cod to a degree and catch haddock and fish in the deeper water. I don't have a crystal ball, so I can't tell you when that's going to change.

MG: Right. What's your relationship with other lobstermen like?

MR: Oh, I get along with everyone. [laughter] You know what? In the whole scheme of things, with the amount of lobster boats that are in Gloucester and the amount of guys that are from different ports but they keep the boats in Gloucester, we have very little conflict. Very little conflict. I think it's always been a semi self-policing industry anyway. If there's a bad apple, he's been a bad apple doing something else before he got in the lobster industry, and they don't last very long. Usually, it's self-policing. If someone's doing something, they get brought up on charges by the guys that are fishing around them much quicker than the environmental police can ever do anything. I'm not saying it's vigilante violence or anything else. It doesn't get to that point. People, they're either spoken to, or they have a tendency to go away. If they're not running their lobster business right, chances are they didn't run their other business right, and they don't last very long.

MG: I saw a YouTube clip of you where you're talking about how Gloucester is the ultimate fishing area.

MR: YouTube told me they wouldn't do that to me. [laughter]

MG: [laughter] So what makes it the ultimate spot?

MR: Well, going back to the beginning of this country, it was colonized as a cod fishing colony. The whole industry of Massachusetts was, at that time, built on the fishing industry. There's still a cod that hangs in the State House in Massachusetts. This city was a twenty-four-hour city until probably the late '70s. There was activity twenty-four hours a day. There were diners that were open all night. There were coffee shops that were open all night. There were gas stations open all night. It was the place. I still get calls sometimes – "I'm a kid from Alaska. If I come to Gloucester, can I get a job?" I tell him, "Buddy, the work is in Alaska now. You're better off staying in Alaska. That's where the work is fishing-wise." But [Gloucester] still has that reputation from movies over the years. I mean, the city got twenty years' worth of free publicity out of that *Perfect Storm* movie.

MG: Good publicity?

MR: I don't think it was bad, and I did that for a living. Sure, at the end of the movie, it got very farfetched. But the actual footage of where they were fishing in that movie was as real as it could possibly be. So in that respect – and I had no stake in it. Right? I didn't want them to do a bad job. I wanted them to do a good job. And other than the artistic freedom that they had at the end.

MG: What happened at the end?

MR: Well, there was just foolishness with torches cutting off outriggers and stuff like that. They had to come up with something because nobody knows what happened. So it became a

Hollywood project. But as far as the actual footage when they were fishing and stuff, they did a good job.

MG: Did you know those guys?

MR: I knew four of the five. [Editor's Note: Six crew members of the *Andrea Gail* were lost at sea during the 1991 Perfect Storm.] We fished on that boat ten years before it happened. Me and my brother were on that boat from Panama City to Newfoundland one whole year, ten years before that. Billy Tyne wanted me to go on the boat that summer when I came back up from Florida. I told you I jumped on that other one and sank. He wanted me to go with him. I had had enough of it. I wanted to go two or three-day trips, not two-week trips, or month trips.

MG: You were almost on that boat?

MR: Well, I could have gone that summer if I wanted to, but I didn't want to turn the clock back ten years and start all over again.

MG: Tell me how things were different for you when you moved back to Gloucester more permanently. When would that have been?

MR: '89. I had been in Florida. When I came back, I started dating this girl that's now my wife. We had been friends the whole time I fished in Florida. She had been in Florida on a boat that winter, and we had stopped and seen her, me and my brothers. We kind of used her as leverage. We'd get in, and we'd tell her to call our parents and tell them that we got in, and we'll get ahold of them in a day or so because we'd be very busy when we first got in. So she would call them. She became friends with my parents over that previous winter. Then we started dating that summer in '89. You couldn't go back to Florida the next winter anyway because they had banned longlining. So I stayed in Gloucester and gillnetted and lobstered for another guy for a year or two. Then bought my own boat. What do they call that? Settling down? [laughter]

MG: Yes.

MR: My wife worked for me fishing for the first seven years I had the boat.

MG: Tell me what that dynamic was like.

MR: Oh, she's the luckiest girl in the world. [laughter] Without her, who knows if I would've even made it. I didn't have to hire help. She was awesome on the boat. We'd fish every day, and then I'd go and do what I had to do in the afternoon to keep things running. She would go home. She always used to say, "You wouldn't have even made it if it wasn't for me." She worked in a coffee shop in town, but she also made gillnets for all the guys. So she knew

everyone in the industry, too. So it was a seamless thing. But she did like to hold it over my head – "I told those guys to let you in." [laughter] Cara pts everyone ahead of whatever her own needs may be. Probably the most giving person I have ever met.

MG: And what's her name?

MR: Cara.

MG: Tell me a little bit about her family background.

MR: She's one of ten, big Irish family from Gloucester, grew up in Gloucester. They had lived up the line, but basically, she grew up in Gloucester. She's just a worker, workaholic. She fished with me for the first seven years, and then she had pretty much had enough of being out on the boat because we were going all winter. It wasn't much of a boat, my other boat. So she decided she ought to get a job with benefits. So one day she just – well, I'll tell you a funny story. Her final week on the boat – it was wintertime, and the gannets show up in the wintertime, the big white birds that dive for mackerel. It was probably after Christmastime, and they were diving everywhere. I turn around, and she's laying on the back of the boat like this, and she's got a herring across her oilskins. I go, "What are you doing?" She said, "I'm hoping one of these gannets dives on me and puts me out of my misery." And about a week later – I said, "That's all right. You don't have to go anymore" – she got a job at a counseling center in Beverly. Never worked in an office in her life, and stayed there for about a year and a half, and then got a job with the Massachusetts court system. She's been in Newburyport ever since, seventeen years now I think. Great job. She loves it.

MG: What does she do there?

MR: She's an office manager. So she's not in the courtroom every day. She's downstairs dealing with the people when they are going in and coming out. She likes dealing with the people. She's been there, I think, seventeen or eighteen years now. When she got off, my nephew got on, and he's been with me since.

MG: How old is he?

MR: I think he's forty. He's awesome. He could leave tomorrow, but he's there every day. Guys go through so much help, and it's so frustrating. You see them. They're down there to go fishing in the morning, and the guy doesn't show up, or I don't have anyone to go. And he's just been a joy. Says nothing. Keeps quiet. Never heard him complain. So [knocks on wood] hopefully, he'll last.

MG: Do you think he'll take over when you retire?

MR: I wish he'd take over tomorrow. [laughter] I don't know. I don't ask him. Like I said, he's not a talker. He doesn't say much, but he certainly has the option.

MG: When did you and your wife get married?

MR: 1991. You're going to make it tough now. March 9th. I had to think because her birthday is the fifth. [laughter]

MG: Did you ever start a family?

MR: No. Ton of nieces and nephews around all the time, though. So that made it a lot easier to take that out of the equation.

MG: What have I not asked you about?

MR: Well, we're going to stay out of the impeachment hearings. [Editor's Note: The impeachment inquiry of President Donald Trump in the House of Representatives took place from September 24, 2019 to December 3, 2019, with the Judiciary Committee approving two articles of impeachment, abuse of power and obstruction of justice. Trump was later acquitted by the United States Senate.]

MG: You don't want to talk about the impeachment?

MR: You don't want me to talk about it. [laughter]

MG: Well, if it's relevant.

MR: No, it isn't relevant, but I watch all that stuff. Like I said, because a history buff, and we watched it all when it went on before. [Editor's Note: Mr. Ring is referring to the Watergate scandal and impeachment process of Richard Nixon in 1973 and 1974.] So it's interesting to see the difference, that's for sure. It's not the same.

MG: What do you mean?

MR: The partisanship. Before, it was fine. It was Republicans that went to Nixon and told him he had to go. I'm Independent; I'm not either one. I don't understand how both sides – no one can cross the line on either side and look at it from a common-sense point of view and say something's wrong. I wouldn't want to be one of those people eight years from now that has to

explain what their thought process was to just stick with party lines on either side. Talk about sheep. I don't know. It doesn't make sense, but maybe the right guy next week will decide to talk. I doubt it.

MG: I don't know what's going to happen.

MR: I don't see it happening. I think there's people that could, but I don't think they will testify.

MG: We will see. Can you talk a little bit about how Gloucester has changed over the years, not just on the waterfront?

MR: Well it's changed a lot. You could start at the waterfront with all the different companies that used to be here that aren't here anymore. Even now, the fish that's coming in, all the haddock and stuff, the biggest change from the waterfront point of view is none of that fish gets processed in Gloucester anymore. It all goes to Boston and New Bedford. That's where a lot of the workforce got lost. It employed a lot of the wives in town, the whiting industry. They used to cut whiting. They used to cut redfish. All the fish got cut here. Then, it's another value-added thing. It's a whole other level where the money gets made. Now it just comes off the boat, gets on a truck, and leaves town. So basically, these wharves in town are just like all the little lobster co-ops in Maine that are just buying stations. When it goes up the chain, that's where the money gets made. Not even considering the amount of employment that's lost. So it's hard. I don't know if they'll ever get any of that back. You'd like to think that there may be a company [that will] come in [that's] three or four years ahead of us of catching all the haddock you want. But I'm not sure about that. So it's become more of a tourist city. There's plenty of older people in town that don't like to see that, but it's a tourist city because they come to see what it was. Do you know what I mean? When they come, they're coming down the docks, and they want to talk to you. They can't believe that you stop and talk to them, but all the guys do, which is great. So it's changed a lot. The new hotel in town was an old, dilapidated fish plant, and people railed against that; they didn't want that. Even most of the guys on the fisheries commission were all in favor of it because if you don't do anything, you're going backward. It was urban blight, taking up that nice beach down there. They did a beautiful job. There's still people in town that won't go in there because they built that damn hotel. But it's progress, and you and you need that. So it's tough. It's tough for the property owners that own property around the harbor. We advocate for fisheries, but it's hard to advocate when they own property and they can't – how can you put two or three million dollars into a wharf where you know there's no prospect of getting a return on it. In Massachusetts, they have what's called a DPA, designated port [area], and they're in that. They're locked into what they can do with that property. So I see both sides of it, and I feel for them. I don't have the answer, but hopefully, at some point, they can get some relief. For the sake of the city, they can upgrade it somehow.

[TAPE PAUSED]

MG: I really appreciate all your time. This has been a lot of fun.

MR: Yes.

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

Reviewed by Molly Graham 2/15/2020
Reviewed by Mark Ring 3/13/2020
Reviewed by Molly Graham 3/22/2020