

Nantucket Lighthouse Middle School Interviews
Robert DeCosta Oral History
Date of Interview: April 8, 2011
Location: Nantucket, Massachusetts
Length of Interview: 36:40
Interviewer: GC – Georgen Charnes
Transcriber: NCC

Georgen Charnes: Well, my name is Georgen Charnes. These are students of the Nantucket Lighthouse Middle School. Your names are? Nona?

Nona Westerlund: Nona Westerlund.

Virginia Bullington: Virginia Bullington.

GC: Today is the 8th of April 2011. We're speaking with Bob DeCosta in his home. Bob is an experienced fisherman. We're here to hear a little about your experiences. Mr. DeCosta, do you understand that this interview is going to be available to the general public as part of NOAA's Voices of the Fisheries Project?

Robert DeCosta: Sure. Sounds good to me. Meaning NOAA, National Marine Fisheries?

GC: Yes. There's an online database with a lot of interviews of fishermen, scallopers, just everything to do with fisheries. There are no Nantucket interviews. So, we're going to put these up there.

RD: Change that.

GC: That's right. Can you imagine?

RD: All right. Well, fire away girls.

NW: All right. So, we have been studying how to create open-ended questions. So, we have a list of things to ask. But it's just a guideline. So, feel free to be off topic. What is your full name?

RD: My full name is Robert R. DeCosta.

NW: Where and when were you born?

RD: I was born May 17th, 1959, in Miami, Florida. I'm not a Native.

GC: [laughter].

NW: So, you grew up in Florida?

RD: No, I grew up here. I've been here since I was three weeks old.

GC: It doesn't count though.

RD: Yes.

NW: So, what would you say is your occupation?

RD: Fisherman, primarily. I do construction work in the winter when the fish are gone. But I fish 8 months to 10 months a year.

VB: When and where did you first work on a fishing boat?

RD: My first official job on a fishing boat was here in Nantucket. I was nine years old. It was the first year my father started the charter business, the Albacore. I went to work for him on the boat as his mate.

VB: Have you always worked on boats?

RD: Pretty much. Yes, I did take some years off where I did construction full time. I also sold real estate here. But even during that time period, I still ran boats for fishing tournaments and scalloped in the winter and kept my hand in it all the time. Yes.

VB: When did you become the captain of the Albacore?

RD: Officially, seventeen years ago, which would be what? 1994 maybe.

VB: Three?

RD: 1994, I think, that summer.

GC: You took over from your dad?

RD: Yes. My dad passed away of cancer. Then when he died, I took the business over. Prior to that, I used to run private boats all up and down the coast, mostly here in the summer. But I did work out of Florida in the winter and fish tournaments in The Bahamas and that kind of stuff.

VB: Could you tell us about your typical day on the water on the Albacore?

RD: Now, my typical day on the Albacore when we're busy, starts – depending on what we're doing that day – anywhere between 4:00 a.m. and 6:00 a.m. Most days, I get down the boat around 5:00 a.m., 5:30 a.m. Our first charter leaves the dock at 6:00 a.m. When we're busy, on a full day, I get done about 9:00 p.m.

VB: How do you think your experience as the captain of the Albacore differs from your father's experiences?

RD: I fish for a lot of different types of fish that he didn't fish for. My dad primarily just did bluefish trips to Great Point with families. I take bluefish trips to Great Point. But we also do half-day striped bass trips and full-day trips offshore for sharks and tuna.

GC: So, this is in summer, obviously.

RD: In the summer, yes. My season starts Memorial Day weekend. I charter until around the

first part of October. Then I commercial tuna fish until the end of November.

NW: Have you ever had any close calls on the water?

RD: No. Well, I guess somebody else would probably consider them close calls. For me, they never seemed like close calls because I pay very close attention to the weather, and we're very safety conscious. I've had some pretty scary – I guess not scary but pretty long rides home because the weather came up. One night, it took us seven hours to go 30 miles. It was so rough. But it wasn't dangerous. It was just that the sea conditions. We had to go slow.

GC: It's better to go slow and be safe.

RD: Right.

VB: What's the most or biggest fish you've ever caught?

RD: The biggest fish I've ever caught was a bluefin tuna that weighed just over 1,100 pounds.

GC: Wow. Where was that?

RD: Here.

GC: Really? When?

RD: Two years ago.

GC: Two years ago. I'm going fishing.

VB: [laughter]

RD: That was the biggest one. I've caught two now over a thousand pounds. Not a lot of people have done that.

GC: Now, was that when you were doing commercial tuna?

RD: Yes, in late fall. One was in October, and one was in November. That's the last fish that come through of the year are the really big ones.

VB: How did you reel it in?

GC: Yes. Was it on a line or –

RD: Yes, on a rod and reel. The 1,100-pounder took just over an hour. We didn't even think it was that big because we hooked it in the dark right at sunset. By the time we landed it, it was dark. We had caught an 850-pounder earlier in the day that took five hours. This fish came in like a 5- or 600-pounder and we thought, "Oh, we've got a good fish here." Then we went to pull

it in the boat. It just kept coming and coming. It was 126 inches long and almost 9 feet around.

VB: Wow.

GC: Nine feet around?

RD: Yes.

GC: Wow.

VB: How far out were you?

RD: We were about 35 miles.

GC: That's not so far.

RD: No.

GC: Wow. They're out there, I guess.

RD: Yes.

GC: [laughter]

VB: Can you tell us about some likes and dislikes about working on the water?

RD: I don't have too many dislikes of the water. I guess the only drawback is the long days. It's a lot of hours. In the summertime, I fish – like I said, my average day is about 12, 13 hours, maybe more. I do that seven days a week for three months. So, you build up stamina for it. But it's great. I love it. I love being on the water.

NW: So, what's the most difficult part about being a commercial fisherman?

RD: Today, all the regulations. When I first started fishing, you just fished. You caught your fish. You sold your fish. You went home at the end of the day. Now, the regulations change constantly. This is in season. This isn't in season. We go to meetings all winter long and fight for our rights to fish. We have to fight with everyone, NOAA, National Marine Fisheries, the Conservation Foundations. These are constant battles that we have to fight. That part of it, I don't like. I just want to go catch fish and come home.

VB: So, do you think that there's anything good about the regulations, so overfishing doesn't happen?

RD: Yes. You've got to have regulations. But the problem with the regulations is a lot of these regulations are put in place, in my mind, they're not set up with sound science. They're swayed by lobbyists and money groups and the Conservation Foundations, the big boats like long liners,

for example, midwater long liners that set gear for swordfish. I just got back from a meeting in Boston last week. They're giving them 160 metric tons of our tuna quota, which is about a third of the overall tuna quota for the entire United States. They're calling it regulative discards. What that means is they catch bluefin tuna when they set gear for swordfish, and they come up dead. That type of gear is not allowed to land bluefin tuna. So, they throw them away dead.

GC: It's not right.

RD: So, our fishery, we fish with a hook and a line and a rod and a reel. We don't get any bycatch. What we catch is what we target. These other fisheries, the draggers, and the longline gear, they indiscriminately kill juvenile fish.

GC: But you're giving your quota to them.

RD: They're giving our quota to them.

GC: Which they then throw back.

RD: That they throw back dead.

GC: So, it's real –

RD: So, they're taking fish from us.

GC: – big business favoring.

RD: No, it is. That's exactly why sixty-seven longline boats have a huge lobby. They pressure National Marine Fisheries to do something. National Marine Fisheries has guidelines that they have to follow under the Magnuson Act and the ICCAT regulations which govern tuna worldwide. So, the United States is allotted X amount of quota, and these dead discards have to be counted. So, they have to take it from somewhere instead of just telling the longliners, "Don't fish in these areas during this time of year because you know the tuna are there." Well, yes, the tunas are there, but there might be some swordfish. So, they let them go in there anyway. Where if we go into an area and we're targeting large bluefin tuna because that's all we can sell, and we start catching small bluefins, we'll leave and go to another area to try to find the bigger fish. They don't. They're setting 25 miles of hooks. They're setting ten thousand hooks every night. They don't just catch bluefin tuna, they catch turtles, sharks, everything.

GC: Kill everything.

VB: So, why do they do this? Do they just not care?

RD: This is how they make a living.

GC: They're making money.

RD: They have a strong lobbyist. The bluefin tuna inshore where we fish out to 35, 40 miles – we consider that inshore. In 1998 to 2005, I had some of the best years I ever had in the fall. The last 6 years, the landings have dropped way down. It's not that the fish had been overfished. It's that the bait fish that these tuna feed on, they feed on the ocean herring. In the fall, the herring come into these areas to spawn, and the tuna come in to feed on them before they migrate. So, they all congregate together. A few years ago, the government opened up the herring fishery to midwater trawlers. These are 150-foot factory ships that tow a net that's a quarter of a mile across. They come down through, and they catch all these herring when they come there to spawn. They've decimated the herring population where there's hardly any herring there. So, now, the tuna comes through. There's no food for them. They just keep right on going. So, where we used to catch tuna for a month in this area, now we might catch them for a day or two. Then they leave. There's not enough food for them. There are only five herring boats on the East Coast, and they've decimated the herring population. They catch a million pounds of herring every other day. These are the food fish. They don't think about these things when – that's why I say I get frustrated with the science. Because they extrapolate formulas from landings and data and they really don't know what's there. These are people who are probably very smart and very educated, but they don't know fisheries. They try to use mathematical formulas to figure out how much fish are there. It doesn't work.

GC: They do the tag and release thing, which is similar. They try to find out from that.

RD: Right. We track tuna. We put satellite tags in tuna. They actually sew tags inside the fish that record water temperature, how deep they dive, where they go. The tags, whenever they get within a certain distance of the surface, will pick up the GPS satellites, and it'll mark where they are. They can track these fish where they go for six months to a year at a time. Then the tags, they're attached with a wire. At a certain point, the tag sends electronic charge to the wire, and it corrodes. The tag pops to the surface, and it downloads all the data into the satellite. Then they can put that in a computer. They can see where the fish went over the course of the year. So, they can track migratory routes. So, they do know where these fish are and where they go. They don't close these areas to the longliners, and it's frustrating. It's all part of it. That's what the fisheries have become now. We have to constantly fight for our share of the fish, where 20 years ago, we just went and caught fish, and that was it.

NW: So, the regulations are there, but not for all the right reasons?

RD: Yes. I guess that's the short answer. The regulations are there because for years, the government allowed overfishing of different species of fish. I shouldn't say overfishing. They allowed fisheries that weren't clean. They weren't sustainable. Now, there's this big thing where they look at each fishery individually, and you get your fishery declared a sustainable fishery, which means you don't have a lot of bycatches. You don't kill juvenile fish. You don't kill other fish in the process of catching your fish. People are looking for sustainable fish when they buy fish in restaurants and markets now. So, that movement is starting to happen. But the big boat industry has figured out ways to fudge the data to get their fishery considered a sustainable fishery. The longliners now are pushing for a sustainable fishery because they say that they do get bycatch. But the amount that they get is so minimal compared to the amount of hooks that they put in the water that they're trying to justify it.

GC: Is that right?

NW: So, is there anything else that has changed over the years since you've been fishing besides the regulations?

RD: The abundance of fish, I don't see as many as I used to. We go farther offshore now than we used to, to find fish. This fall, at one point I was going 140 miles in each direction to catch tuna. We were going almost to the Canadian waters.

GC: It only takes you a few hours to get out there, doesn't it?

RD: Twelve.

GC: Oh, man.

RD: It's like driving to Florida and back every day [laughter].

GC: [laughter]

RD: We'd go and spend the day and the night and come back the next day. So, we'd do a four-day trip or a three-day trip. But you have to watch the weather. Because you got far offshore, you can't get home quickly. I think a lot of that is overfishing of the food sources. The fish had been pushed farther offshore to find the bait. But we still have some of the best fishing anywhere in the world right here in Nantucket. The positive thing that I have seen change in the last thirty years is that when I first started charter fishing, every boat that caught fish killed everything they caught. Nothing went back. Tournaments, everything was a kill tournament. Now, 95 percent of the fish that we catch, we throw back. None of the tournaments are kill tournaments anymore. So, people have gotten much better about it. The technology's gotten better. We've gone to what's called a circle hook now that hooks the fish in the corner of the mouth. It doesn't hook them down in the belly, so it doesn't kill them. So, the survival rate on release fish is much higher than it was ten years ago. So, there is definitely positive things coming around. But everything changes slowly.

NW: So, speaking of tournaments, so what else? Tell us about some of the tournaments you've been in.

RD: Oh, I used to fish billfish tournaments up and down the Coast. I fished the Anglers Club Billfish Tournament. I fished shark tournaments. There's a very big shark tournament on the Vineyard called the Monster Shark Tournament. It used to be on TV. I won that tournament in 2007.

GC: How big was your shark?

RD: We caught two thresher sharks, one each day. The first day was 313 pounds. The second day, it was 327. I won the Nantucket Anglers Club Shark Tournament this year. We caught two

thresher sharks. One was right around 300, and the other one was 180 or something like that.

GC: I got a thresher off of Nantucket.

RD: Yes. They're a fun fish to catch.

GC: Yes. I didn't know what it was. I was like, "What is this thing?" I had no idea [laughter].

RD: A thresher shark, the tail is as long as the body. So, if the shark's 8 feet, the tail's 8 feet. So, when the fish comes to the surface, it looks like it's 16 feet long. It's a big fish.

GC: Looked like [inaudible].

NW: What does it feel like when you're in a tournament, and you're reeling in a fish that big?

RD: It's very exciting. There's a lot of adrenaline going on and shouting and hollering. Everybody's having fun. I love fishing tournaments. I get psyched to do it. So, I fish three or four a year. I fish the Nantucket Shark Tournament. I fish the Vineyard Monster Shark Tournament every year. I fish the Bluefin Blast, which is a tuna tournament here in the fall. Then I fish a couple of striped bass tournaments and bluefish tournaments. So, I'm on the Anglers Club board of directors, and I'm in charge of the tournaments. So, I help organize the tournaments there. We have about fifteen tournaments throughout the year, from anything from pond fish to swordfish and tuna.

GC: You probably grew up at the Anglers Club.

RD: Yes. I got my name on a bunch of plaques in there over the years.

NW: So, you've been on several town committees. What were they?

RD: I served on the SHAB Board, Shellfish and Harbor Advisory Board, for two terms. As far as town boards go, I think I served on the Harbor Advisory Committee, the Harbor Plan. That's pretty much it. Now, I'm running for selectmen, which the election is on Tuesday. So, I hope to be one of our next selectmen.

GC: You don't want to go there.

RD: I know. But they were asking, so I'm just telling them [laughter].

GC: [laughter]

RD: Then I've been on a lot of volunteer boards. I serve in the Anglers Club Board of Directors. This is my second time on the Anglers Club Board. I'm on a couple scholarship committees, tournament committees, wine.

NW: So, do you think that's all?

GC: Well, I used to live in Newfoundland, and that's maritime sanctioned. I used to walk down to the docks and buy fish off the boat. Now, I understand that people used to be able to do that here. Then they used to sell it on Main Street.

RD: When my father first got his charter boat in 1968, the charter season – the fish are here earlier than the charter season starts. Because tour season really doesn't start until Memorial Day weekend. We used to catch codfish and winter flounder right off the shore here, right under Sankaty. In April and May, we would fish Sunday. I would fish with him on Sunday. Then he would fish, Tuesday and Thursday. I would be in school. But he would fish Sunday, Tuesday, and Thursday and sell fish on Main Street, Monday, Wednesday, and Friday. It was during Lent when everyone would eat fish on Friday. He would bring the fish in. He would dress them, remove the guts out of them, pack them in ice in boxes. Then people would come down in the morning, pick out their fish, and he'd filet it for them, whatever way they wanted. He did that every spring. The Board of Health stopped that from happening because they said it's not sanitary to clean fish on the back of a truck, even though it was done for hundreds of years.

GC: We cleaned it with bleach, yes.

RD: The same thing with scallops. We used to open scallops right in our shanties on the house. We sold scallops right out of the shanty. I grew up here. In high school, in the spring, I would go fishing at night and sell my fish in the morning before I went to school, to either one of the local fish markets or a restaurant or something like that. We used to catch bass and bluefish off the beach and sell them at night. I could make, in a good night – if I had a really good night in 1976, [19]77 – some nights I made 3-, 4-, \$500 if the fishing was good.

GC: That's good, yes.

VB: So, don't you think that it's the same if you're cleaning fish out the back of your truck? What about selling fruit out of the back of your truck and vegetables?

RD: I don't see the big deal about it. You'd have to ask the health inspector why he doesn't allow it.

GC: Same here with Richard Ray going on.

RD: We have to have three base sinks in the shanties now and 180-degree hot water and stainless-steel counters. I know what he's going to say. It's the law. But really what happened is somebody probably bought a piece of fish somewhere and got sick and decided to sue everyone. So, now the lawyers got involved. Then you can't sell fish off the truck anymore. We used to sell the filet off the dock in the summer. We have filet stands behind the charter boats. We clean our fish there for our charters, which is legal to do. Richard allows that because we're not selling the fish. We had a lot of people that would come down. They'd buy a fresh fish for \$5. The mates would put the money in their pocket. They'd be beer money at the end of the day. They came down, and they stopped that. We can't do that anymore. So, now I just give fish away. I checked. I can still give them away.

GC: Give them away.

RD: So, when we little, old ladies want a bluefish, I clean it up for them and give it to them.

GC: I guess we could claim it was our cultural heritage and was therefore protected by the federal laws, right?

RD: We so overregulate everything. You can't do anything without a permit or permission anymore. Yes. So, it's a sign of the times.

GC: It's hard on the small fishermen.

RD: It is. The fish have to be tagged. They have to be sold to licensed dealers. You can't sell directly to the restaurants anymore. They have seasons. This is in season. Striped bass, you're only allowed to catch commercially, three days a week, and you have to sell to a licensed dealer. So, you can't go and sell directly to the restaurants anymore. Then the restaurants can't say they're local-caught bass because they're buying the fish from the fish market. He might have had them shipped in from Chatham or Gloucester or somewhere. You never know. You don't really know you're getting local fish anymore when you go into a restaurant. That's the reality of it. You hope they are. Most of the time they are, especially striped bass and tuna and things like that nature.

GC: I wouldn't assume they were.

RD: The stripe you get here in the summer, I'd say 90 percent of it is locally caught.

GC: So, what do you think about the future of the fishery industry for this small –

RD: I don't know [laughter]. I'll put it to you this way, my son is a sophomore in college. He would love to be a fisherman more than anything in the world. I told him to go to school and study hard. Because I don't think there's going to be any type of fishery left in another twenty years at that rate, not for small fisheries.

GC: It's going to be charter.

RD: There'll be some charter business. But everything else is going to be all big corporations with giant ships. They're pushing the small guy out of business.

GC: Getting welfare from the government for the corporations. Yes.

RD: That's the reality of what's going on. Unfortunately, most of the guys that fish for a living fish because they like the independence. They like the solitude. We don't organize well as a group, not as well as we should. The same thing happened to the farmers. The small farmers have all been pushed out by the big corporations. These big corporations have lots of money. They have lobbyists on their payroll. They have lawyers in their payroll. They just whittle away

on the regs until you can't make a living anymore, and you go do something else. The average age of a cod fisherman in the state of Massachusetts right now is 51 years old. There are no young guys getting into the fishery anymore. They can't because the only way to do it now, they've limited the amount of permits. So, you have to buy a permit from an existing business. Buy a boat with a permit. The cost of the permits has been driven up so much by the corporations that they're just buying them up. What they'll do is if my boat has a cod permit and I'm allowed to land 30,000 pounds of codfish a year, the government -- say, ten years ago I was allowed a hundred thousand pounds -- they whittled it down, whittled it down, whittled it down. But now, I'm allowed 30,000. Well, I can't really make a living with 30,000 pounds anymore. So, either I lease my tonnage to somebody else who has 30,000, and then he buys it all up. Well, what's happening now is the big factory boats that have contracts with Stop & Shop or Whole Foods -- where they know they've got an order for a million pounds of fish -- they can drive the price up on these permits, and they buy them from these little guys. They buy their days at sea, and they buy their tonnage. So, all the little guys now are just saying, "Well, I can get 80 cents a pound for my 30,000 pounds of fish. I don't have to leave the dock and buy fuel at \$6 a gallon and pay insurance on my boat and maintenance and everything else." So, they just take the money. But now, some young kid who wants to do it can't get that permit because the corporations have all the money, and they're buying up the permits.

GC: It's a big investment, too, buying a boat and keeping it up and the price of gas.

RD: Yes. The fish prices have not kept the same curve as the cost of fishing prices. In 1995 -- I was just looking at some records -- the average tuna landing price was \$8.50 a pound. Fuel was \$1.83. Last year, the average tuna price was \$8.25 a pound and fuel was almost \$4. So, everything else has gone up, but the fish prices have leveled. The same thing's happening to the farmers. Everything costs more to grow corn, but the corn price doesn't go up accordingly.

GC: That's right. There's a lot of ramifications of eating local on just a lot of levels.

RD: Everybody wants to do the right thing, but they don't want to pay for it.

GC: That's right.

RD: That's the bottom line.

GC: Yes.

RD: You can't eat local because you can't sell a fish local. We would love to be able to sell our fish locally.

GC: Right. That's the problem here.

RD: But with all the permits and everything, well, I'd love to be able to bring tuna in and sell it to people on the dock or to the restaurants. I can't. It's a federal-regulated fishery. So, it has to go to a licensed tuna buyer who then takes the fish and does whatever he does with it.

GC: So, where's the nearest licensed tuna buyer?

RD: Up until this year, Chatham.

GC: Chatham.

RD: But we do have one in Nantucket starting this summer.

GC: Oh, yes. I didn't know that.

RD: Yes.

GC: It's just going to be tuna or other fish?

RD: All fish. He's been buying scallops for the last few years. He's expanding his business. He's going to buy striped bass and tuna and whatever else he can buy, I guess. Yes.

GC: Because I understood that's a real problem is there's no processing once it's done.

RD: Yes. When I catch a tuna fish, I go to Chatham, unload it, and then come home.

GC: It's crazy. Then they fly it here if a restaurant buys it.

RD: Yes.

GC: Makes my head hurt [laughter].

RD: An average tuna fishing day for me when I'm commercial tuna fishing, I leave the dock at 2:00 a.m. I run 30, 40 miles offshore. It takes about 2.5, 3 hours. We fish all day until dark. Then we take our fish. We run to Chatham. We sell the fish, we fuel, we ice, we bait – because we can't get any of that here – then we come home. If I'm lucky, I'm in bed by midnight. I get up at 2:00 a.m. and do it all over again the next day if the weather's good.

GC: You get two hours of sleep?

RD: I've gotten to the point now where I'll just sleep on the boat because I get an extra two hours of sleep. But you can only do that for a couple of days. Then you want to come home and take a shower and have a hot meal.

GC: [laughter]

RD: It's a young man's sport. I'm not getting any younger.

GC: [laughter]

RD: So, I don't do it as hard as –

GC: It makes me tired just hearing about it. So, the next question we have is what do you think is the most serious issue? But I guess that's pretty much covered there.

NW: So, have you ever considered another occupation besides fishing? Well, of course, you want to be the selectman. But has there ever been a time that you wanted –

[talking simultaneously]

RD: Well, I do the construction in the winter, and I bay scallop. I like to bay scallop. Bay scalloping, that's fun.

GC: The commercial dredging?

RD: Yes. I haven't done it in about 5 or 6 years. But I'm going to start again next winter. I will charter fish until I can't do it any longer. I love interacting with my customers. I'm very fortunate I have the oldest charter business on Nantucket. I will continue to do that. The commercial fishing aspect of it, I'm getting to the point where I don't think I'm going to be doing it for too much longer, especially if we have to start running a hundred miles offshore every trip. It's just I'm too old for it, to be honest.

GC: Well, and the gas got to be so much.

RD: I'm not that old in your eyes, but I'm old. 50, 60 years old is too old to be fishing 20, 22 hours a day. You can't do it. Your body just can't take it. But no, I'll charter fish until I can't do it anymore.

NW: Has there ever been a time when you just wanted to stop fishing and doing some scalloping and all that?

RD: Yes. It happens every year about October 1st [laughter].

GC: [laughter] In scallop seasons.

RD: Then I get a couple of weeks to recharge the batteries, and I'm ready to go again. It's like anything. I don't care how much you love what you do, if you do it fifteen hours a day, seven days a week, after about two months, you need a break. I get burned out. Right around Labor Day, we start to count the days. Then right after Labor Day, it slows down quite a bit. So, we don't have to get up every morning. That first morning, after a thirty-day run that you get to sleep past 4:00 a.m., it feels pretty good. We usually start praying for rainy days in August because then we can cancel our charters and just take it easy.

GC: Well, any other questions? Anything else we need to know about the fisheries?

RD: No. I think that covers it. I was trying to think the other day how many guys I think actually fish here. There's probably a couple hundred. But I don't think there's too many that do

it full time anymore. There's a few of us that still fish all summer and then scallop in the winter. I would say there's probably maybe fifteen or twenty. There used to be a lot more because there were so many different fisheries to fish.

GC: Right. Every time I talk to somebody, they're like, "Well, there's commercial." I'll say scalloping. They'll say, "You mean bay scalloping?"

RD: Right. There used to be a fleet of codfish boats here, the hook fishermen that hooked codfish. Then there was the tuna fleet. Then everyone scalloped in the winter. At one point, there were four or five draggers like Billy Blount's that worked out here. Billy's the only one left. He really doesn't even fish.

GC: Does he even go out?

RD: No. He's lost most of his days at sea, and his permits have been taken away for not landing enough fish.

GC: Oh, really?

RRD: So, he bay scallops all winter. Then he does a little fishing in the summer.

GC: It must cost a fortune to fill that boat.

RD: Yes, and then the maintenance. That's what kills you, is the unforeseen breakdown. An engine costs \$50,000, stuff like that.

GC: Yes. It's sad. It's a big part of the maritime heritage here.

RD: Well, whaling went away. Hopefully, fishing is not following suit. But commercial fishing definitely has. There's no one really here that commercial fishes year-round anymore. Well, I shouldn't say that. There are two lobster guys that scallop in the winter and lobster in the summer. There are three conch fishermen that trap conchs in the summer and scallop in the winter. So, there's probably maybe five or six of us. I don't even know if NOAA classifies charter fishing anymore as a commercial fishery.

GC: I don't know. They have a sheet about what types, but I think it's a specific system.

RD: I have to fill out a lot of paperwork for them. I know that. So, you should still consider it.

GC: You want to get a message for NOAA here on the tape [laughter]?

RD: No, it's just it's part of it. We get these for-hire surveys that they're supposed to be random. I get one a week [laughter]. I'm like, okay [laughter].

GC: Well, yes, I guess there's only a few commercial fishermen, and they want to do a percentage.

RD: They're saying they're doing the northeast. But they're trying to get a handle on their landings. Because this is how they extrapolate their sciences. They'll call fifty boats, and they'll take those numbers. They'll put them into a computer. Then the computer will go, "These fifty boats caught X." There are five thousand boats. So, if these fifty caught X, then, well, they come up with some formula that says, "This is what the five thousand caught." It's very flawed science. Because one guy might have fished every day that week.

GC: That's right. Yes.

RD: One guy might not have fished at all. One guy might have killed every fish he caught. One guy might have thrown them all back. This guy might have fished for bass. This guy might have fished for tuna. So, when you start trying to extrapolate catch status or catch statistics out of this method, it doesn't really work. But it's the best we've got. We just deal with it.

GC: Well, thanks for talking to us today.

RD: No problem, girls.

GC: Really appreciate it.

RD: Good luck with your reports.

GC: Yes.

VB: Thank you.

GC: You.

[end of transcript]