

Assessing Vulnerability and Resilience in Maine Fishing Communities

Roger Freeman Oral History

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Interviewer: CT – Cameron Thompson

Transcriber: NCC

Cameron Thompson: Could you please state your name, your birthdate, place of birth?

Roger Freeman: Okay. Roger Freeman, April 22nd, 1949, and Rockland, Maine.

CT: What is your current address?

RF: 7 Marks – M-A-R-K-S – Lane, Rockland.

CT: All right. How long have you lived here?

RF: Twenty-six years.

CT: Why do you live here and not someplace else?

RF: I love the state of Maine. I've been to other states. There's none like Maine.

CT: What about Rockland then?

RF: I like Rockland. I mean, there's things I don't like about Rockland, high taxes and stuff like that. But I like the area.

CT: Okay. So, I'm going to ask you some more details about your experience as a fisherman in a minute. But right now, we want to ask you some questions about your background. Can you tell me about your family? Do you come from a large family?

RF: Yes. I have three brothers and five sisters.

CT: Where did your family originally come from?

RF: All here in Rockland. Everybody brought up in Rockland. I've got them living all over now, but they were born here in Rockland.

CT: Do you know what generation you are?

RF: Mixed breed probably [laughter].

CT: Yes. All right. How, if at all, was your family involved in fisheries before you?

RF: None.

CT: None?

RF: Not a bit.

CT: You're the first one.

RF: The first and only one.

CT: So, you're married then I take it.

RF: Married, yes.

CT: Is your spouse and their family originally from this area?

RF: My wife was from Friendship.

CT: Okay. Is she involved in the fishing industry at all?

RF: No.

CT: Or is her family involved in fishing?

RF: Her father lobstered at the end of it. But he was a truck driver most of his life.

CT: Okay.

RF: Yes.

CT: But does she contribute to your business? Does she help you with your books or anything like that or even go out with you on occasion?

RF: No. She doesn't go out no more. She used to when she was younger. We don't have time anymore. See, we also own a business. She works. I mean, I lobster full time. She works pretty well full time, and we have a business. There's not a lot of things she [inaudible]. She can go with me.

CT: Not too much time in between.

RF: No. Not at all. No.

CT: So, you have children and grandchildren then?

RF: Yes. I have two kids, a son and a daughter, and two grandkids.

CT: How old are your children then?

RF: My son's 29. My daughter's 27.

CT: Where do they live?

RF: My daughter lives in Wallsboro. My son lives in Quincy, Mass.

CT: Are any of them involved in fishing or their spouses?

RF: No.

CT: If not, what do they do?

RF: My son works at a hospital in Quincy. My daughter just got a job, and she's working – I think it's with mentally handicapped and disabled.

CT: What about your grandkids? I realize they're not old enough yet. But do you expect them to be involved in fishing at all? Or do you hope –

RF: I hope not.

CT: You hope not.

RF: I hope not. There won't be none by the time they get old enough.

CT: Okay. So, we're also interested in the broader community. Can you tell me about this community when you were growing up? How was the overall economy at the time?

RF: When I was growing up?

CT: When you were a kid.

RF: This was a booming town when I grew up. This was really one of the major fishing towns in the state of Maine. Yes. God, when I was little, we had three sardine factories. We had two regular fish factories. Then you had Seapro, which made the fish meal from all the waste. I mean, this was – when it comes to fishing, this was one of the biggest towns, probably the biggest in the state, with all the people that was employed here. Between those five places, you're probably talking a thousand people that's employed, easy.

CT: How about the rest of the economy? Was it solely based on fishing?

RF: No. We have a couple of pretty good-sized businesses, like Fisher Engineering, [inaudible] making snowplows. We had Marine Colloids, which worked with seaweed, and they made byproducts that goes into cosmetics, ice cream. I mean, the seaweed cup goes into everything. They employ a lot of people. Then we had one big manufacturing place here for clothing, but they finally went out of business after 50-odd years.

CT: So, what was the waterfront like?

RF: The waterfront was booming. Oh, it's always – I mean, boats everywhere. Now, it's all sailboats. These were working boats. Because all the sardine factories, they all had, like, 2, 3, 4 boats. The redfish factories, one of them had, like, eleven boats fishing for them. The other one had probably six. Really, it was a booming town. Now, the sardine factories are all gone.

There's nothing in the state.

CT: Okay. So, now, getting into your fisheries experience, we'll get back to some community questions later on.

RF: Okay.

CT: But can you just tell me which fisheries you participated in?

RF: Just lobstering.

CT: Just lobstering?

RF: Yes.

CT: You said you and your wife have a business as well.

RF: Yes.

CT: What is that?

RF: It's a little gift shop and an engraving shop.

CT: Is that open all –

RF: Year-round.

CT: Year-round?

RF: Yes.

CT: So, you work there with your wife. She runs it. Or can you just sort of talk about that a little bit?

RF: Yes. What happens – the way we got it set up works pretty good. I go lobstering first thing in the morning. I get in about 1:00 p.m. She has to go to work as a nurse at 2:30 p.m. So, she runs the shop in the morning. I come in and take over so she can go to work. I run it the rest of the day. She works like a shift. That's the way we've done it, 9, 10 years together.

CT: So, it's been open for about ten years now?

RF: About ten years, almost ten years.

CT: Why did you open it up then?

RF: Because we like doing that.

CT: Yes?

RF: Yes.

CT: Okay.

RF: Figured maybe someday – which I thought a few years ago – maybe someday, I'd retire, but I probably won't. No.

CT: So, what would you consider to be your primary source of income? Is it the fishing? Is it the shop?

RF: The fishing and her as a nurse.

CT: Okay. So, what year did you first start working in the fishing industry?

RF: Let's see.

CT: Or how old were you?

RF: I was 19.

CT: You were 19?

RF: I was 19. Yes.

CT: How did you get your start?

RF: I went and built some lobster trap by hand and went and bought this little junkie old boat and went out and hauled them by hand, all by hand for quite a few years.

CT: So, did you get any help in getting started?

RF: No.

CT: What made you decide to get into it then?

RF: I don't know. That was me and three friends of mine, three brothers. We all decided it was all we were going to do. We all went and bought us a lobster license. We built some traps. We [inaudible]. We started fishing.

CT: How easy was it to get into it then?

RF: It was easy then. Anybody could get into [inaudible].

CT: Any learning in the process?

RF: Yes. Because you never made any money, but it was fun. That's mainly why we did. I mean, if we caught any lobster, we ate them. Or if we had too many, we'd just give them away. When we get into it, it was more or less for fun. It's two of us still in it. Since from way back then, still, two of us.

CT: So, you got into it for fun. But when did you start really fishing for your income?

RF: Oh, that would have probably been back in – let's see – probably 1973.

CT: How old were you then?

RF: Twenty-two probably – would be twenty-four, sorry, twenty-four.

CT: How did that shift occur?

RF: I just decided it was time that I wasn't going to work for anybody else. I'd work for myself. Yes. Then I bought me a lobster boat [inaudible]. So, it would be easier hauling them. I could haul a lot more to bet. Because that's when I was 24. Then I started fishing about 200 traps.

CT: Okay. So, you bought a new boat.

RF: Yes.

CT: This is your second boat. How many boats have you had over your career?

RF: Oh, probably ten, twelve.

CT: Wow.

RF: Yes.

CT: How big did they range?

RF: The one I got now is big. The one I got now is a 35-footer. This one here, I had this one. I fished this one here for ten years. This one is a 26 one. I had a 29-footer. Then I went down to a 17.

CT: Oh, yes?

RF: Yes.

CT: So, why all these different changes?

RF: I don't know [laughter]. Well, this last one, the reason I got this last one is because I got a

real good deal on it.

CT: Okay.

RF: Yes, a much better deal than – and it was bigger. Out here, prompts go bad in the fall. You need a pretty good-sized boat. It gets pretty nasty.

CT: All right.

RF: Yes, real nasty. Because in October, beginning October, when the wind swings around out of the Northeast, then it starts getting nasty out there. You get thrown around pretty bad if your boat is small like this one here. I fished many days with this one here, when it goes right – this will be in the water, and it goes. This one's in the water back. This one's in the water all day long. It's all day long.

CT: So, having a boat, a bigger boat is more stable.

RF: A bigger boat is a lot more stable, those big, heavy, wooden boats. She rides it good.

CT: Does this mean that you fish differently now?

RF: Yes. I fish a lot different now. Yes. More of my stuff now is concentrated more on fishing out in the deeper water.

CT: Okay.

RF: Yes.

CT: Can you go out more when the weather is [inaudible]?

RF: Oh, yes. A lot of days, when it's blowing 30, we still go out, which, before, we never would go out. Some days, like I said, in October, it'd be 5, 6, 8, 10 days in a row you couldn't go. The wind would be out of the Northeast. You just couldn't haul. Now, we do.

CT: All right. So, we're going to get into the details of your lobstering experience. So, when you first started, this is for fun. Was that just a summer thing? Or what was your season like?

RF: Yes. I fished back then – well, actually, back then, we'd start fishing in March. Of course, there were no lobsters. But we went up all every day. We'd fish from March until usually the end of October.

CT: How has that changed over the years up until now?

RF: Now, see, I don't fish in March anymore. I don't fish in March, April, May.

CT: No?

RF: There's nothing to catch. We'll go aboard in June, fish from June through December.

CT: Okay.

RF: Because they don't really – fishing don't start early now anymore until July, but we used to get them over in June. But July through December is good. Then last year, I was a fool. I fished until February. That was cold. January, February was cold.

CT: Were you still catching lobsters?

RF: Yes. There were still some lobsters there. It was just too cold. Now, that's enough of that. Time to get the boat up on land.

CT: Okay. So, what was the fishery like when you first started?

RF: Terrible. I mean, back when I first started, if you went out there, you ever caught 100 pounds of lobsters, you were tickled to death to think that you caught 100 pounds of lobsters. Nowadays, if you had 100 pounds of lobsters, you'd be so disappointed. As a matter of fact, if caught 100 pounds of lobsters now, you couldn't pay expenses now. No.

CT: So, we talked about the seasons. But how does the gear change over the years? You said you started out with 200 traps when you first started getting into it.

RF: Yes. Now, I fish 800.

CT: You fish 800.

RF: Yes.

CT: So, you fish up to your –

RF: Up to the max, to the limit.

CT: Has that always been the case?

RF: No. I didn't fish the maximum until they started putting the laws on me, back – oh, God, that must have been 15, 18, years ago now, when they went to 18-under traps. When they decided the maximum was going to be 18 under, that was when the state, the government, everybody, thought they was going to get in on this lobstering industry. They were going to control that. When they first started, it was the biggest disaster they ever made.

CT: What happened when they set the 18-under?

RF: Well, see what happened here, you probably had -- oh, you might have 100 fishermen from out of state that had 3,000, 5,000 traps, right? But they didn't fish them. They just had them in

the water, but they didn't fish them like, you know, actually fishing them. So, they decided they're going to cut that down. But what they did was take all the little guys that had four hundred traps, five hundred traps, they went up to 1800. Because they could go to 1800. But if they waited a couple of years, they couldn't go up to 1800. So, everybody jumped. Because they thought they was going to get traps out of the water. Well, it did increase the traps in the water by plenty.

CT: Did you increase your traps too?

RF: Oh, yes. I went from 300 to 1200 when they did that. I figured 12 was enough, but they went from 18 down to 12. Like I said, I fished at 1200. But I didn't like that. That was too much.

CT: So, then when did you come back down?

RF: I come down to the eight, and then they went down to the eight.

CT: So, you preceded the 800. You came down before that.

RF: Yes. It was just too much.

CT: What do you think about that when they came back down to the 800?

RF: It wouldn't hurt me if they went down small.

CT: Oh, yeah?

RF: A lot of them wouldn't be able to make it. Their expenses are too high. The boat payment, the bait, fuel, the stern man. Some of these guys, they have to make a lot of money.

CT: In order to –

RF: Just to make their payments. I mean, you've got guys that have – probably, in the summer, they have 15,000, \$18,000-a-month boat payments. You better have some traps in the water just to make your payments. That and the bait, the baits are ridiculously priced. Fuel is ridiculous.

CT: What about you, I mean, dealing with all these expenses now?

RF: Well, I own the boat. I don't have a boat payment. You've still got the bait. You've got the fuel. [inaudible] But I don't have the boat payments. I still make it. Plus, a lot of these boats have two or three stern men. I have one.

CT: You typically always tried to own your own boat?

RF: Always owned my own boat. Yes. I don't think I've ever had a boat payment. I always paid for the boat first.

CT: Oh, yes?

RF: Yes.

CT: How does that compare to the rest of the lobstermen around?

RF: Oh, most lobstermen have boat payments for many years. By the time they get the boat paid off, they have another one. They have another one built to keep everything new. I mean, some of these guys, your guys offshore, they need it. I mean, now they found some nasty weather. But they don't want their boat breaking down or anything.

CT: So, what else do you see as being significant changes in the gear that you've used? I mean, obviously you went from the wooden traps to the wire traps at some point.

RF: Oh, I complained terrible when that first happened.

CT: Why?

RF: I hated the wire traps. But now, I wouldn't fish with a wooden trap.

CT: No?

RF: No. They're too heavy. I mean, putting them in the spring would be fine and fishing them. But when it's time to bring them home, them things are heavy. I used to bring them all. As a matter of fact, I fished probably 800 wooden traps. Boy, and that was a job. I used to keep them out there. That was a job, them big 4-foot wooden traps. It was too much.

CT: I imagine you also went to the hydraulic winches –

RF: Oh, yes.

CT: – and things like that.

RF: Yes.

CT: All this has just made things easier.

RF: Just making things a lot easier, right.

CT: Okay.

RF: Yes.

CT: You said you use one stern man?

RF: Yes. I have one stern man. I went many years I didn't have any.

CT: Oh, yes?

RF: No. I did it by myself for years and years and years. Because I always thought that was the way to go.

CT: When did you get a stern man then?

RF: Probably just after they went to the 1800 traps.

CT: What was the rationale for doing that then?

RF: My daughter was growing up. See, my daughter went with me while she was in school.

CT: Oh, yes? She used to come out with you?

RF: Yes. Then when she graduated, she was done. She started going when she was 5, probably 6.

CT: Is that typical now to have? What's a typical stern man situation in the Rockland? How many do most boats take?

RF: Most guys have one. A couple of boats have two, but most of them have just one. Yes. It's getting more and more now, the boats, they're family members, sons.

CT: They're taking more people now?

RF: No. They take their sons. More and more of the boats try to keep it in the family.

CT: So, can you describe a typical trip for me? About how far offshore do you – how far do you go? How deep do you go?

RF: This time of year, I've got traps probably between 8 miles out toward Vinalhaven – halfway, a little over halfway to Vinalhaven.

CT: Okay.

RF: Yes. Out there, I'll take them down Rockland without throwing – you know, everybody can fish out there. Because Vinalhaven, North Haven don't fish this side anyway. They fish on the other side to the [inaudible].

CT: So, that's open but then in the harbors or Rockland.

RF: Right. Rockland fishermen fish in the harbor. They're like, "Once we get out of the Rockland harbor –" now, Rockland actually doesn't have nothing that size [inaudible] this side of

Rockport. But we fish out there with ours. Like I say, right out past the lighthouse, you can't go that way. Because now, that's [inaudible] territory child. But we'd work this way toward Rockport, toward Camden.

CT: How often do you usually go out in a week?

RF: In the summertime, six. You go every day. Every day, you go, Monday to Saturday.

CT: Then once it gets colder.

RF: When it gets cold, then it drops down more, the weather, probably down to five days a week. Then this time of the year now, it's once a week.

CT: The number of traps that you fish throughout the year change then?

RF: Yes. Because they start bringing them in this time of the year. They start bringing in this time of the year. It's time to come in. Bring in a boatload of traps, a boatload of traps. Probably get it down to – I've got probably 150 left. I'll leave those three more weeks probably then call it good.

CT: So, from when you first started, you said you started about four other guys or something.

RF: Yes.

CT: Two of them are left.

RF: Me and one of the guys is left. The two guys, actually, they're (paddlers?).

CT: So, do you remember a lot of the other fishermen from when you first started? Are they still fishing?

RF: Very few. Most of them really have died off. But there's – we have one guy out here. Yes. He's probably 80 – God, he's got to be 84, 85. Yes. He's still fishing.

CT: So, another topic of sort of wondering about markets. So, where do you land the lobsters? How has that changed over the years, and how the price has changed over the years?

RF: The price – okay, let's go back to I land them down here at Rockland fish pier. There's another little pound up the north end, up Jamie Steeves. I sell to them during the summer. What was that next question after that one?

CT: So, what have the prices been like over the years? How's the fluctuation?

RF: They're terrible? What we get for a price right now, we got 25 years ago. But the bait prices and the fuel prices have gone from absolutely nothing to skyrocket.

CT: So, what do you do about that?

RF: There's nothing you can do. You just take that much more of the profit away.

CT: So, fuel prices have increased. That hasn't changed your fishing behavior at all?

RF: Not really. You've got to do it. You've got to go. You've got to have a boat, and you've got to go. You just keep doing it.

CT: So, just use the same bait.

RF: Same bait.

CT: Same amount of bait trap.

RF: Like the bait used to be \$1 a bushel. Now, it's 28.50 a bushel, I think. You got better measure back then. Because a lot of times, back then, they'd give it to you. They don't want anymore. Now, there's no such thing as giving you anything. Let's say fuel was 25 cents a gallon. Now, it's – I paid 3.67 the other day. Quite an increase.

CT: Well, you mentioned before, you see increasing costs is going to force some people out. They can't keep fishing the same amounts.

RF: Yes. It will drive the industry out before it's going to go down, really.

CT: Sorry?

RF: It will drive the industry out.

CT: Yes?

RF: Yes. Because our lobster prices don't go up.

CT: So, you can't do anything about that?

RF: Nothing can be done. We've got no place to sell them. See, as it turns out, all of these lobster buyers now, they sell them all to Canada. Canada processes them, \$3, sends them back the United States, sells them for 20. That's where all the profit is made. Canadians make all the profit.

CT: So, you sell directly to a buyer at the fish pier at Jamie Steeves.

RF: That's right. I show them to the buyers.

CT: But you've never been involved in anything after that.

RF: No.

CT: You just go to the dock, and you sell.

RF: Yes. They come in out there.

CT: Could you see yourself ever being involved in, like, say, cooperative or anything like that?

RF: If they'd start a co-op, I definitely will get into it.

CT: So, why?

RF: I don't know why they've never started with – there have been very few co-ops. There's one in Spruce Head, I know, and that's the only one around, I believe, around here. I don't know why they've never started anymore, but they never have. But you take the problem we've got now with our pounds, they don't want to go look at my – I had one guy I sold to for six years. He'd call around every morning. Because there was all kinds of places to sell them lobsters for more money. He'd do it every morning. He'd call them all, see which one would pay the best for the day. His price, a lot of days, it would change. This guy, one day. This guy, he would need to work tomorrow. I made a lot more money. I sold to him for 6, 7 years.

CT: So, you did that. You would call up?

RF: No. I wouldn't call him. I'd go to him. He'd do all the calling. He did that first thing in the morning. He would call because he was making me money by doing that. Say, he'd make a little bit more. I'd make a lot more. I mean, I had years, I could make \$1, \$1.25, \$1.50 a pound more than everybody else.

CT: So, what have you done when the price has really gone down, say in like 2008, when there's –

RF: Stop fishing.

CT: You just stop?

RF: Brought them home. As a matter of fact, the neighborhood, they ate good. Buy all the lobsters you want. I told them at the pound. I'm going to give them to all the neighbors, I said. I'm not going to give them to you. I'll give them to my neighbors. I'll give them to my friends. That's the way I put it. I'd give them to my friends. I told my wife, I said, "I'm just going to stop. It's not worth it."

CT: Were you completely dependent then on the lobster coming in that year? Because you had the other business, and you had your wife's income.

RF: Yes. We still had that little business, and my wife was still working. I mean, she's been a

nurse for 25 years. We got by. Made it a little rough because, like I say, it made for a short season. Because it was all done in – God, by the middle of October, I think I had them all in. So, it did. It made – like, say it cut two months off the season, two and a half months. But, I mean, it really, really hurt a lot of people.

CT: I'm wondering if you could talk about how you've seen the changes in stocks over the years. Because you mentioned, all right, so at one time you get 100 pounds, and you think, "Oh, that's great." But now –

RF: Lobsters, there's getting more and more and more every year, but it's a cycle. It's going to turn, probably within another year or so. It will turn, and it'll start going back the other way again. Because I can't see it keep getting better and better and better every year. Because two years ago, it was really good. Last year was excellent. This year was good. This year was better than last year, except the price was worse. So, the price was a lot worse. Probably buy \$1.

CT: So, what did you do this year then?

RF: But like I say, last year, at this time, I get 4.65 a pound. This year, I get 3.25. I was getting 2.95, when I was getting 4.65 last year.

CT: Wow.

RF: So, that's a lot of difference.

CT: You say it just eats into your profit.

RF: Eats into the profits. But it really hurts the guys that fish offshore. I mean, this is the time year when they make all their money for the season, is November, December, January.

CT: So, what do they do?

RF: Same thing I did, live with that.

CT: Okay.

RF: But it seems weird to me, lobster is the only thing in seafood that the price doesn't go up. I mean, you go to the stores, fish sell for 9.99 a pound. I worked in a fish factory when they got 10 cents. Scallop, look at scallops. Scallops are \$17 a pound.

CT: So, what do you think can be done to increase the price?

RF: I don't know what they can do. I mean, that Lobster Promotion Council we've got don't help none. All they did was up our lobster license. Because they haven't sold anything for us.

CT: Okay.

RF: Well, Linda Bean might help in there.

CT: How do you mean?

RF: If she starts enough processing plants, and there's more starting all time. We've got one started down in St George's. Some young fellow started it. If they do that and start processing all the main lobsters, don't let Canada have our lobsters for nothing, keep the lobsters in United States, the price would go up.

CT: Yes. Is that because of the sort of added value?

RF: Yes. I mean, these lobster process plants would pay more money because – to keep – just to keep the lobsters down here, don't let them go up now. Because I think they should shut the borders off myself, anyway, in Canada.

CT: So, Canada is a big problem then, as far as the markets.

RF: Canada is a big problem in the lobster industry and the lumber industry.

CT: Why is it that they're able to buy it so cheap then, up in Canada and then sell it?

RF: I have no idea. I don't know why these pounds never tried to sell the lobsters, other than it's easy for a pound. I mean, every day they call, "Okay, I need a truck here, Monday through Sunday." This trailer truck's going to be here from Canada every day to grab all these lobsters, take them up there. You don't have to worry about calling anybody. The truck is going to be there. I mean, they make – how much they make a pound, I don't know what they make, but every night, them lobsters are gone. They don't have to worry about storms coming in or staving up the crates or anything. They're gone every night.

CT: So, moving on a little bit from lobstering, unless you have anything else to add specifically.

RF: – No.

CT: I want to just talk about your perceptions of the community. How's the infrastructure here?

RF: It's getting pretty bad. It's hard, I mean. The country's bad. The economy is still going downhill. I don't care what the government tells us about how it's coming back, because it's not coming back. Because it won't come back up here for a long, long time.

CT: So, does the infrastructure now meet the needs of the fishermen?

RF: Probably but not much better than that. I mean, they do nothing for us.

CT: No?

RF: No.

CT: What can you see as any improvements that need to be made to the infrastructure in Rockland in order to benefit fishermen?

RF: Well, probably, let's see. I don't know if the city could help us. I really don't think there's anything they could do to help us.

CT: Well, in general, what needs to be done?

RF: Well, the government, they've got to get rid of some of the regulations they've got. Like they had that regulation, I don't know if it was government or the state, on the herring quota. This year was the biggest problem ever. Because when they got close to getting near the end of the quota that they could catch for the year, they should have told these people, "We ran out of herring a month ago." They can't catch no more herring now until January. Herring, the number one bait for lobster industry. Well, it's over.

CT: So, there wasn't any bait?

RF: There's no herring. No, the herring's gone. There's no herring on the whole eastern part of the United States.

CT: So, what are you guys using for bait now?

RF: Anything they can get their hands on.

CT: [laughter]

RF: But they don't fish as good, nowhere near as good. But see, three years ago, they had the quota, and they made it through the year. Then last year, they cut it way down for some reason. Then this year, it was the same as last year. But there's no – I don't know, they're not telling these areas, "Okay, you've got 92 metric tons," or something they could have, or 92 million metric tons, whatever it was. When they started getting close – you're getting close to it. These boats are bringing in all this fish back there in the beginning of September. Some of it you can't sell. They have no market for it. But it still goes toward that quota. The next thing you know, the government says, "That's it. Quota's caught. You're done. Tie up your boats." That's it. It ended that quick. It was over.

CT: You just had to use whatever you could.

RF: Use whatever you could. That means your catches go way down.

CT: Is it more expensive to use the other types of bait?

RF: No, I don't think it's any more expensive. It's just no fish is good.

CT: Okay.

RF: Herring has always been the number one bait. If they could have thought this out and they could have had it so there would have been enough herring to get it all the way through the season, to at least get it through until January 1st, when they could start again, then the boats could go back fishing again. I mean, they have rough weather, but they'd go do it.

CT: So, somehow, they could have organized to spread out the supply of herring?

RF: Right. See, it hurts. They start catching the herring too early in the year. I mean, to catch it when it's there. But it's too early in the year. They go out there in April and May. Most go out there, they load them up the boats, and they come. What are you going to do with it? There's nobody fishing. So, you don't need it. But they keep on going, catching because they've got to make money too. But then it hurts this time of year. Because I think this is the first time of year that it's completely stopped. There was last year that they had it. You could go Monday and Tuesday, but you couldn't go the rest of the week. Then a couple of weeks later, you could go Thursday and Friday. But you couldn't go the rest of the week. Because they didn't know whether the wind was going to blow these days, and the boats couldn't get out. But those were the days they picked for them to go, which made it wrong. If they were going to give you two days to fish, the boats should be able to pick their two days of fishing, the two best days. That way it wouldn't be so dangerous out there for these guys.

CT: So, moving on towards the Rockland community, do you consider this place a fishing community today?

RF: Not – no more, no.

CT: No?

RF: No.

CT: Why not?

RF: A lot of people don't like the fishing industry. They don't like the smell.

CT: People in the community don't like it being there?

RF: Well, see, our community, we're getting a lot of out-of-staters that's trying to run the city. That's really hard. But no, I don't think – I don't really think there's anything in Rockland that would faze them a bit if lobster and everything stopped.

CT: How important is commercial fishing to the community?

RF: Oh, it's very important. There's a lot of money brought into this city. Probably, there's as much money brought in the commercial fishing between the lobstermen, the boats that go catch it and the pounds and stuff, as there is in anything else in Rockland.

CT: Overall, do you think the fishermen in this port are doing better or worse than, say, twenty years ago?

RF: Oh, they're doing much better.

CT: Yes?

RF: Yes.

CT: Why is that?

RF: Its just lobsters got better. There's more lobsters. Because I remember many days, you'd go up there for 75 cents a pound. A little hard 75 cents a pound trying to make a dollar [laughter]. Right?

CT: [affirmative]

RF: Because when I started it, in the summer, you'd get down 75 cents, \$1, \$1.25. Then finally, it went up to \$2, and everybody thought that was the greatest thing that ever happened. Then I sold up to the north end up there for 4 years, and I was one of the only guys that sold up there. I got over \$3 a pound. That was like a goldmine, getting \$3 a pound for lobsters. Wow.

CT: When was this?

RF: Probably ten years ago? Twelve years ago? Then it got up. We had up over \$4 there for a couple of years. That was just a couple of years ago, too. So, this was after the economy went to pieces. Last year the price was good. I don't know what happened this year, why it was so bad. I mean, it never did get good.

CT: Do you feel the fishing community here is resilient?

RF: No, I think it's a dying industry. You want to know the truth? The herring's going to be gone eventually. They're going to get so many regulations on it that they'll – if there is herring out there, they won't let them catch them. But once that's gone, then the industry will go down.

CT: You think once the herring is gone, the lobsters are gone.

RF: Once the herring is gone, the industry will be gone. Yes, because there's not enough other kinds of bait. I mean, because you pretty well have got to use saltwater bait. They tried some freshwater bait this summer, but then the government won't step in. They want to stop that. They don't want freshwater bait being used for lobster bait. But I don't know why. They'll have them use artificial bait, which has got to be a little bit more expensive. It's got chemicals in it to catch lobsters, but you can't use the freshwater fish to catch a lobster.

CT: What do you see as the major strengths of the fishing community? Are there strengths that you can identify?

RF: Well, the biggest strength, I think, myself with the fishermen, is the fishermen. I mean, they fight a lot, always have. They're always going to fight. But they still stick together in need. Now, the lobster fishing industry is the only one really that's protected its own industry, with seeders, oversized. No other thing in fishing has ever done that. That's why the ground fish were gone. Then they jumped into sea urchins. That's when they would get those – got those, they're gone. Mussels, they're gone. But we take care of our lobsters because of the detailed program with seeders. Can't take the sharks. You can't take the oversized. Throw these back. These are the future. The little ones are good for five years down the road. The seeders are good forever. They're going to keep having their eggs. They're going to have the little ones. But if you look at any other industry, nothing else is ever done. I worked for years. Oh, God, 25 years ago now – 30 years ago, probably, down at (Stinson's?). We used to do ground fish. Boats catch them. In the spring, the fish is going to spawn. It's easy to catch them because they know where they spawn. But they're no good. They're soft. They're not worth nothing. But the boats are going to load them up. Catch them all with all the eggs in them, all the babies. They're gone. Then why? Why don't we have any ground fish anymore? You caught all the ones full of spawn. You killed the future. You didn't get nothing for it.

CT: Do you consider the community here to be vulnerable?

RF: No. This is just a slow laid-back community. They're just going to let things keep going downhill the way it's going. Because it hurts. We don't have a lot of businesses left. Big businesses that employ a lot of people, we've got just two. Actually, we've got three now. That's right. We've got Boston Financial that's down there. They employ a lot of people. Then you've got fishes up here, and you've got marine boards.

CT: So, the community is doing fairly well then, or what do you think?

RF: I wouldn't say very well, but we're getting by [laughter].

CT: You're getting by.

RF: Getting by, yes.

CT: Okay. What do you see as the major threats facing the community?

RF: Probably the cost of getting everything here. I mean, that's why you're not going to get no business.

CT: How do you mean, the cost of getting everything here?

RF: The cost to truck everything up here, it costs too much. I worked for Nautica up here for 10 years. They used to do clothing, like sports clothing. They used to come in down in New Jersey, trucked it to Maine, unpacked it, packed this into the others, and send it down south. Finally, they decided, it cost too much to bring it all the way up here to send it back down there. But it was a good business and then they sold it to a company down south. It folded in two

months. It was gone. They couldn't do it. No. Because your best workers are from Maine. If you're down South to anywhere, I know people that's going to Florida for winter, fishermen, and get out of there, and all you've got to do when you go look for a job is tell them you're from Maine. They'll hire you right on the spot. Because everybody up here in Maine works so hard.

CT: In what ways do you think fishermen can adapt to some of the threats and challenges that we've been talking about? We've talked about co-ops.

RF: Co-ops might help. The biggest problem is, like I say, they've got to find a way to keep these lobsters in the United States. I mean, maybe co-ops would do it. Because, I mean, you could sell lobsters in New York, Pennsylvania. The only problem is getting them shipped down there. Well, now, I see they're starting overseas, a lot of shipping going overseas. But we could do that just as easy as the Canadians could do it.

CT: So, you see us getting out to these different markets as being something –

RF: You get these markets overseas. Then the fishing industry would be good. They'd give us some of that profit. Because there'd be a lot of profit.

CT: Who represents the interests of commercial fishermen in this port?

RF: Joe Bates is our representative.

CT: Oh, yes?

RF: Yes.

CT: Are fishermen fairly well organized then?

RF: Yes. We don't have many problems out here.

CT: No?

RF: Not like some of the towns.

CT: Okay.

RF: I mean, you get their arguments and stuff like that. But you get them in any kind of business. If you're getting people in it, there's going to be arguments. There's going to be fights.

CT: So, I guess towards my next question, which is, how would you characterize the relationship between fishermen within the community?

RF: Most of the fishermen get along rather well. They really do. You've got a couple of guys that think they're better than everybody else. But you pretty well ignore those.

CT: So, what about the relationship between fishermen within this community and other nearby communities, say like Owl's Head. How's that relationship?

RF: Good. We get along good with the Owl's Head guys, Rockport guys. Like I say, because we fish with the Rockport guys. We all fish out there together. Owl's Head guys, like I say, we get along with those. It's not like it used to be. It used to be pretty cutthroat years ago, real cutthroat.

CT: How would you characterize the relationship between fishermen and non-fishermen in the community?

RF: Yes, we get along. Like I say, there's not a lot out here on the – what do you mean, like out on the water?

CT: Out on the waterfront or just in town.

RF: Out on the water, we have more of out-of-towners and out-of-staters on the water than you do local people. Sailboat, a lot of sailboats.

CT: Is there ever any conflict with the sailboats? I have heard sometimes that they get around –

RF: Yes. I've had a few.

CT: Yes?

RF: Yes. I've had my problems with a few of the sailboats out there that think they own the ocean.

CT: Can you sort of describe a typical situation?

RF: Well, there's been a couple. Like one day when my daughter was with me, was hauling over there on the shore over there on Owl's Head South Shore. One of the big sailboats here, the (*Victory Chime?*), which was the biggest one out of Rockland, this three-masted schooner, come up on this side by the isle, swung around, came over with us, and if I didn't move, they'd have run us over.

CT: So, they just didn't recognize.

RF: They're just the way the guy is. It's just the way he is. Then I've had my problems with a ferry. They thought they owned the ocean. A couple of times they tried to run us over, my wife and I once, [laughter] one day, when she did go up with me to set traps.

CT: So, what do you do about that?

RF: I've been to the Coast Guard and complained. I went to the wardens on the *Victory Chime*. And the warden went right above the *Victory Chime*. Told them if he ever heard of anything like

that again, he'd pull the guy's license. He'd be done. But there was no need for that because we don't have to move. Like these sailboats think that we have to move for them because they're under sail, and we don't have them.

CT: So, you think lobstermen's rights are fairly well protected in Rockland then when you're fishing?

RF: Yes. Because like I said, he told me, you're out there working you don't have to move for anybody because you're working. They're out there for pleasure. They can ride anywhere in the Atlantic Ocean they want to. I can't go anywhere in the Atlantic Ocean and haul my traps. I've got to go where the traps are set.

CT: Has fishermen's access to the waterfront changed over the years?

RF: It's getting tougher all the time.

CT: How so?

RF: Because, I mean, you can't get anywhere near the water on a business now because of insurance purposes. They won't allow you on their wharfs or anything to do anything. So, I mean, you're pretty well stuck with you either go to a pound, and you go through their pound, or you go down to the public land like a public boat ramp down there like that, and you can't get near the waterfront.

CT: Is that where you go? Where do you go?

RF: I go, like I say, I go right out of the fish pier. Then up the north because I have my boats moored up the north end in the summer. I go. There's a little sailboat place up there. I run a spot on their float for me to keep my punt tied, so I can get out to my boat.

CT: Okay. That's in the wintertime though?

RF: That's in the summer.

CT: Oh, that's in the summertime.

RF: That's in the summertime. Yes. The wintertime I haul it out.

CT: How did it used to be then? Was it much easier?

RF: It used to be, I mean, if you found a spot on the water, you'd get out across the company's property like that and go out across. They didn't care. They never said nothing.

CT: Oh, I see. So, you used to be able to take your little punt and just walk across some property for a property.

RF: Yes. Or like when the Seapro used to be up, I used to tie it to the corner of the wharf. They didn't care. But you can't now because it's all for insurance purposes.

CT: Oh, I see.

RF: You just can't blame them. They don't want to take a chance on getting sued. Because it's easy to put up no trespassing signs. They're just protecting themselves is what they're doing.

CT: So, besides fishermen who else is using the waterfront or the dock space? You mentioned there's a lot of sailboats.

RF: Down at the fish pier?

CT: Yes.

RF: There is nobody else. No sailboats come in now. They're not allowed. No pleasure boats. No sailboats. That's fishermen's wharf. Up there at [Jamie's?] where I fish, that's the same thing. That's just for fishermen. The other ones, like a sailboat, they go to public landings. Go into Journey's End Marina. Go into (Knight's?) Marina. Plenty of places for them to go. They've got plenty of access.

CT: So, it's pretty divided between the working –

RF: Right.

CT: – and the pleasure waterfront.

RF: Yes.

CT: How important has tourism been to the community – to Rockland?

RF: Tourism brings a lot of money into the city of Rockland. Yes. It really does.

CT: How do you feel about that?

RF: I have a shop. I like that. But I mean, Maine has got to have tourism. If they don't have tourism, I don't know what Maine would do. You look at some of these cities, Bahama, Portland. I mean, they make millions and millions of dollars because of tourism, that and cruise boats. I wish we could get more cruise boats in myself. But we don't have – there's no time for them. The summer the harbor is all taken up. Every week, just the boat is taken up. There's no other time for them.

CT: How do you feel about party or charter boats and how important are those to your Rockland?

RF: We've got a couple. They do rather well out here. We have the (*Monhegan?*) which used to

be an old ferry. Now, they rigged that into like a little party boat, a little cruise boat that goes up for a day or overnight and have their lobster meals. I just wish they'd stay in the channel, stay out of the lobster trap, so they wouldn't cut so many traps off.

CT: [laughter] Are there opportunities for fishermen to be involved in tourism here?

RF: Not really.

CT: No?

RF: No. A lobsterman doesn't really have a much time to do much of anything but fish. In the summer when the lobsters are there, he's got to go 6 days a week. He goes out at 5:00 a.m. He gets in at 5:00 p.m. or 6:00 p.m. He really probably doesn't want to do much else other than go [laughter] and get some supper, take a shower, and rest a little bit.

CT: How do you feel about tourists and people from outside the community who want to move here, that are people that want to come into Rockland or even the surrounding area?

RF: I don't mind them coming into Rockland. I just wish we didn't have quite so many out-of-staters. Most of them that come in there, they've got money, and they want to take over the town. They want to run the town. If they'd come in and join the community and live the way the community does, that'd be great. But they don't want to. They want to change everything to be like Boston or be like New York. Well, we don't want to be like Boston or New York. If we did that, we'd move down there not up here.

CT: Why do you think they're coming here then?

RF: The land is cheap. It's cheaper to live, a lot cheaper to live.

CT: How affordable is the current housing situation here?

RF: How affordable?

CT: Yes. Can you sort of talk about that?

RF: It's not.

CT: No?

RF: No. It's gone down some. But before the economy went down, the housing prices were ridiculous.

CT: How has that changed over the years?

RF: It's gone down over the years. It's gotten bad. Because it used to be, I mean, you could go get a house cheap. You could live here. You could raise your family here. But then about ten

years ago, it started going the other way, and you couldn't. That's why all the houses went to the out-of-staters. The local people couldn't afford to buy them, couldn't afford to keep their houses. Taxes kill us, property taxes. They're horrible.

CT: What do you feel has been the most critical changes in the community since you've lived here?

RF: I think it's grown too fast if you want to know the truth. I like it the way it used to be, quiet, peaceful.

CT: So, what do you see is the cause of this rapid change?

RF: Probably, just because of time. I mean, look at it, the whole world's changing, trying to keep up. I love it. I go up north in the wintertime. We do a lot of fishing. I love to go up there. People are so nice. You go up there. I mean, you can knock on a person's door. They'll invite you in, how things are going. We're up there looking for a place to fish. You need a place to park. Park here in my driveway. Only thing is, here in Rockland, you could go outside. If you park in the driveway, they're not going to let you. But up there, you could. No problem.

CT: What do you think this community will look like in ten years? What do you think it's going to be like?

RF: (Augusta?)

CT: Yes.

RF: Rat race [laughter] I mean, you go up to Augusta, you look at the traffic, zoom zoom zoom. That's all it is, and that's the way this place is going to be. You've got Camden Street up there going Route 1 North. Now, they're going to start developing Route 1 South over here in Thomaston. It's going to be a rat race

CT: What would you like the community to look like?

RF: Small, quiet like it used to be, get rid of some of these big box stores that we got.

CT: Would you still go fishing if you had your life or career to live over again?

RF: Yes. I love it. I love working outdoors.

CT: Yes?

RF: Yes. I grew up working outdoors. I used to survey. We built the interstate, Interstate 95, built the power lines in central Maine, helped do those. Just love working outdoors.

CT: And would you advise other young men to enter the fishery?

RF: Not now I wouldn't.

CT: No?

RF: No.

CT: So, what do you like most about living in this area?

RF: I know nothing else. I've lived here my whole life. I don't know of any place outside I want to live. If I did, it'd be, maybe upstate New Hampshire, maybe upstate Vermont. I wouldn't go down south. Don't need the heat. I like the cold in the winter. I love the cold.

CT: Not very cold this year.

RF: No, not yet. I know, I'm going on a fishing trip here, the third week in January. So, there better be some ice by then.

CT: Oh, yes. Wow.

RF: We had it bad last year we went. The second week last year, we went up to Long Lake, which is up in (St. Agatha?), and one of the lakes was three-fourths open still. There was no ice. The year before, that was on that same lake, it was 2.5-foot of ice the same weekend.

CT: I'm hoping we get some cold weather too.

RF: Yes. I don't want the snow. I don't care for the snow. I want the cold. I don't mind the cold.

CT: Are there any other issues that we haven't talked about that you feel important to address for understanding Rockland and the fishing community here?

RF: Not really. Rockland hasn't really done a lot for the fishing industry. They never did. They never will. It was almost – I know for years, it was almost like – let's say, when the out-of-staters first started coming – moving into this area, they wanted the fishing industry right out. Nothing made them feel better when all the factories are gone.

CT: Do you think they still feel that way?

RF: Probably. They'd never let one back in. No way. Like I say, if you'd have seen us back when I was little, I could get down around the dock when I was really little. My dad worked at a fish factory, taking the redfish out of the boats. I mean, I could get out, and I could sit there in that dock all day long. They'd let me sit there. I'd sit there and catch fish, take them up to the hotel, and sell them. They'd buy them and sell them for suppers. People would buy them. In fact, I'd catch them. I'd take them up there. They'd clean them, fry them up, sell them. They'd be gone. I did that all the time when I was little. Now, you can't find a spot down on the waterfront where you can go fishing.

CT: No.

RF: No. Not allowed. No way

CT: Well, that's it for me. I don't have any more questions. But thank you very much.

RF: Thank you.

CT: If I do think of anything, can I contact you back?

RF: Sure. Anytime. Yes.

CT: All right. Great.

RF: Did you talk to Billy?

CT: Yes, I've talked to Billy.

RF: He's a good guy. Good friend of mine. We went to school together. We grew up together.

CT: So, he's the friend you were talking about?

RF: Yes.

CT: All right. I'm going to stop this then.

RF: Okay.

[end of transcript]