Interview with Arnold "Woody" Bowers

Narrator: Arnold "Woody" Bowers
Interviewer: Millie Rahn
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Project Name: The Working Waterfront Festival Community Documentation Project
Project Description: This project documents the history and culture of the commercial fishing industry and other port trades. The project began in 2004 in conjunction with the Working Waterfront Festival, an annual, educational celebration of commercial fishing culture which takes place in New Bedford, MA. Interviewees have included a wide range of individuals connected to the commercial fishing industry and/or other aspects of the port through work or familial ties. While the majority of interviewees are from the port of New Bedford, the project has also documented numerous individuals from other ports around the country. Folklorist and Festival Director Laura Orleans and Community Scholar and Associate Director Kirsten Bendiksen are project leaders. The original recordings reside at the National Council for the Traditional Arts in Maryland with listening copies housed at the Festival's New Bedford office.
Principal Investigator: Laura Bendiksen, Laura Orleans
Transcriber: Millie Rahn, Erin Heacock

Abstract

On September 25, 2004 Millie Rahn interviewed Woody Bowers, who was joined by his daughter and son-in-law, Sue & Rodney Murray, as part of the Working Waterfront Festival Documentation Project. Woody discusses his life as a commercial fisherman in New Bedford, Massachusetts, and his experiences in the Merchant Marines during World War II. Sue Murray, Woody's daughter, shares what it was like growing up with a father who was often out at sea. Rodey Murray, Sue's husband, serves as a captain of a scallop boat. While none of his children have followed in his footsteps, he believes strongly that there is a future in the fishing industry. Woody and Rodney chronicle their families' history of fishing and their experiences as fishermen. Woody recounts his journey from Nova Scotia to New Bedford, Massachusetts, and the challenges faced by immigrants. Woody also talks about the boats he worked on, including one that sank after thieves stole all the alcohol and dismantled the vessel. Rodey gives more detail about his experiences as a captain of a scallop boat and the changes he's noticed. While differences, such as better pay, are an improvement, there are also more regulations that make it harder for boat owners to make a living. Rodey stresses the importance of conservation, but also highlights the need to strike a balance between conservation and the economic interests of fishermen. The conversation ends with a discussion of the importance of preserving fishing traditions and the memories of those who have worked in the industry for generations.

Millie Rahn: Ok, we are now doing our next interview. It is Woody Bowers. Would you tell me your full name please, when and where you were born, and how you got into fishing?

Woody Bowers: Alright. Is that close enough now? My full name is Arnold Woodrow Bowers. I was born in a fishing village in Nova Scotia named Folgers Cove which is about 30 miles from the big fishing port of Lunenburg. Lunenburg, Nova Scotia. I grew up there. As a boy, I fished on my father's boat there for up until World War II. We had a family boat. There was another bother and my father, and the other people would go with us on the boat. When the war broke out, that year, I had been to a place called Cape Breton Island, sword fishing. On the way home, we stopped in Halifax, and I got off the boat at Halifax, and I joined the Merchant Marine. I went on a Swedish freighter. I went to the British Isles, and after we unloaded our load of steel there, we loaded there a load of barbed wire in the place called Cardiff, Wales. We started our other voyage to land this in Port Siad. First we had to go round Africa, we couldn't go through the Mediterranean, because it was closed off in the war years, so on the way to Africa going around Cape Town, one of the engines broke down, broke a cam shaft. We had to go in Cape Town to get that repaired. Then we went around the Cape of Good Hope, up through the strait of Madagascar, up to the Red Sea. We crossed the Red Sea into Port Siad, where we unloaded the barbed wire which was for the prison camps for the Italians. Where they had Italian prisoners of war. That's what the barbed wire was for. So then, in the bottom deck, we had – That was coal. Then we went to Alexandria, Egypt, to take out the rest of the cargo of coal. So, but that was unloaded, then back through the Suez Canal again, back down the Red Sea, cross the Persian Gulf, to Bombay, India. Then from Bombay, then we went down to a place called Marmagoa. That's way down the tip of land in India. That was for to load peanuts, shelled peanuts. People asked what that is for. What they did that was supposed to go to England, and they used the oil out of the peanuts for explosives and the residue was used for making soap. So anyway after we got the cargo we went back to Cape Town again where we had to take on fuel, fill the bunkers with fuel and supplies. The main take was cigarettes. That was our problem down there. Everybody smoked cigarettes on the ship. And all we could get was a few English cigarettes. There we got the Americans – Camels, Lucky Strikes, or all those. That was a happy day just for that episode. But anyway, then from there, from Cape Town, we left on afternoon blowing a howling gale of wind when we came out Cape Town. I can't see why we never go straight for England, but instead of that, they sent us across to Canada. We wound up in Cape Breton Island, where we left a year before, a whole year before! Back to the same place!

MR: Oh, to Sydney?

WB: Back to Sydney again. Sydney, Cape Breton Island. Now, wait a minute, don't get confused. There's a Sydney, Australia. Then there's another one down in Florida somewhere to called Sydney too, isn't it?

MR: Well I know Sydney, Cape Breton, because I used to live in Newfoundland, and that's where went to go [inaudible]. [05:25]

WB: Oh! Well, then you know where it is then! Sydney and north Sydney! There's where we wound up. We had left a year before and we were back to the same place. But anyway, I – My brother and I, the engines were all shot to pieces, and we knew it was gonna be a long time till they was repaired, and so we paid off there, and we went up to Halifax which we both shipped on oil

tankers cause you back and forth [inaudible] just like this. Back and forth! Them old slow ships going. We'd make three trips on the tanker when we making one on that one. That was the difference in the new tankers. I happened to get on a new one, and god! In no time it was over, and we was unloading, and we was on our way back! You can't spend your money, what you earned, you can't get ashore to spend it, so you save money. So anyway, that was a couple years that I stayed in the Merchant Marine. Then I went ashore in Halifax, and they put in the Halifax Navy Yard. H.M.C.S. Naval Dock Yard. I was there until the end of the war. Then I came to the United States. The first thing they asked when I went to the American Consul, "Who was gonna sponsor me in the United States when I came here?" I said, "I don't need nobody to sponsor me!" He said, "Why?" Well, I said I got ten thousand dollars in the bank. He says, "Can you prove it?" I showed him the bank book. He says, "You can go to the United States tomorrow." That's the words the man told me, and he stamped my paper like that. He says, "You can any time you want." That was my start coming to this county.

MR: And you came from Halifax to –

WB: Right, direct to Boston.

MR: To Boston?

WB: Then I went down to Gloucester. I was down in Gloucester. I think I was in Gloucester, two years. Then from Gloucester, then I came here to New Bedford, and I've been here ever since.

MR: So, you've done the big fishing ports of Massachusetts – Gloucester and New Bedford.

WB: And New Bedford.

MR: Wow! And how long did you say you've been here?

WB: I – see '46. I think I came here in '49, '48, or '49. I'm not so sure. Say '49. So that's the time I've been here in this port. Nice pier, bought a house.

MR: Made your life here.

WB: I like this place. I was here, I was on a boat, the *Ellen Marie,* seventeen years. I never missed a trip! When that 17 years was up, I had a ticket for Hong Kong. I got on the plane, and I went to Hong Kong!

MR: To fish or just to visit?

WB: No, no! My daughter was down there. She went for international weekends. She was stationed in Hong Kong. So I went there. Then I was there, I went to a place, Kowloon, Lantau Islands, a big gambling place, Macau, the new territories. That was the area that I covered while I was there. When I came back home, she came back home with me. That was that part. Then I came back. Then I went back fishing again on different boats. That was the start of the new, the new style boats. The new stern trawlers with the steel boats instead of the old. Boat that I had for so long was wooden. A wooden boat, built in Maine. Then the next one was the big, the big stern trawler, double ramped stern trawler. The *Captain Man-o*, that was the name of the boat. [09:50]

MR: Now what kind of fishing did you do?

WB: Fishing, it was codfish, haddock, flounders, yellow tails, all those different species. At the time, we was allotted just so many pounds of each kind. We couldn't get a whole trip of one species. So you had to, you know, you'd go to the ones that keeped the longest and the best, get them first, the amount. Then you'd sort it around until you – Of course, that boat, god, she'd carry two hundred thousand pounds of fish easy. But you'd never bring that much cause – But the way the boat, the way it worked it out, because you'd have an assortment of catches. You'd get a price for them. You'd get a good price for each of amount. You'd have your allotted amount, and there'd be a set price, and there'd be no arguing. You'd just that amount for that much, that one for that.

MR: And where would you – What fishing grounds did you go to?

WB: The fishing grounds? It was all mostly, on that boat, that boats I'd always go on Georges Bank. It was always Georges Bank. Any part, wherever the species of fish I'd look for. Whatever part they inhabited. Cause I knew all those things from other boats that I'd been on, over the years. You learn that stuff yourself. You don't get that out of books. That you get from actual hands-on experience.

MR: You were saying before we turned that tape on that New Bedford used to be the number one –

WB: At one time it was number one in the world of fish landings, money-wise and I guess poundage too. I don't say poundage now because you take the big Russian trawlers and them big ports, they have vast amounts of fish, but they didn't get the money that, money-wise. This was the highest at the time, rated highest in the world. The value.

MR: When did you stop – Did you ever stop fishing?

WB: Oh, yes, yes. How long since I've been stopped now? What, 10 years?

Sue Murray: Over ten years.

WB: Over ten. 'Course, you know, after – I used to stop and then summer months, I'd go out and make a few trips. Winter months I wouldn't go out anymore because of the bad weather and stuff like that. Some captains want to stay ashore for a trip or two; I'd take the boats out for them. I'd like that. After I got to retirement age, I'd still make a few extra trips because I could do it easy. It was no problem. [13:01]

MR: And what do you think about the regulations? I mean you've seen –

WB: Regulations of the fish today? I think it's a good idea. It saved the fishing industry. Otherwise today, we would have nothing! The 200 mile limit was the first thing they've done right. Stopped all the foreign vessels in the 200 mile. Then when they regulated the amounts landed, and time fished, I think that was another good idea. Say saved the industry anyway. [13:40]

MR: Do you have any children who are fishing?

WB: No.

MR: No. So where do you think the future of the industry is gonna be?

WB: Oh there's plenty other ones. There's plenty others. You see this – You got the nationalities. You got the Newfoundlanders. Well there's not so many Nova Scotians today, but Newfoundlanders, Norwegians, Portuguese, all these nationalities. All these young people. All came to this country and there's plenty of people here to maintain the fishermen. You'll see the port of New Bedford, the fleet that the Portuguese has alone has here, is just something! Is some fleet of boats!

MR: So, when you were fishing were most of the people on the boat kinda from the same background or were you mixed from Nova Scotia –

WB: Oh, from all over! You had – I had, one boat that I was on, there was 7 for us. Five of us was Portuguese come from – Had been down in South America and they came back up here to New Bedford. Five of them was Portuguese. They had [inaudible] from the islands, and went down there, and I guess they didn't pan out so good, so they came up here. So they went fishing from here. So that was five right there. I'm a Canadian, and they're Portuguese. The other fellow was, the cook, was right from New Bedford. So that was the story on that boat.

MR: And 7 was about the average crew?

WB: Well, usually. There was about 6 and 7 men was about, cause you know they had – They way they used to work, you could handle the fish and you didn't have handle the fish over 2 or 3 times. You could do it once and it was all done, iced, and it didn't take so long to do. You didn't need such a big crew then. Years ago, when they used to take 11 and 12 men, we did the same work with 6 men, which is the way the boats is laid out, and work saving jobs, or the ways it's arranged. That's why. And that gives the crews double amount of money, shares, so it paid better all the way around. [16:35]

MR: Did you have any bad experiences in storms?

WB: Oh, I had those! I had plenty gales of wind. I went through plenty of those. I guess after every gale that blew I happened to be out in it. I was always lucky enough to be there at the right time when the gale blew! But I always, I always watched the weather reports, and got the weather reports, and had the boat in a position where we had drift room. I don't know if you heard what [inaudible] said today like where they was on top of Georges Shoals, in the shoal water, that's one thing I stayed clear of. As soon as I got a bad – I got on the side of the bank, on the lee side, the wind come from the north, I'd be on the south side of Georges Banks. If it came from the southern, I'd be on the north side. So they had the shoal water that was on the lee side. I always make sure, but you get some hard, hard slams and bangs, but you don't have to worry about shoal water, hitting bottom or anything. [17:59]

MR: How about – One of the things we've been asking people is about some of the superstitions. About superstitions, about boats, things you do, you don't do?

WB: Oh, well yeah. There's some! Where I come from, the people in Nova Scotia are very superstitious. Things that they done or words they used. They never said pig aboard a boat. Oh my god, that was – A swear word had no comparison with that! Just say that word and that was supposed to be automatic gale of wind.

MR: Ah, I wondered what that meant.

WB: That was – Oh, that was –

SM: Whistling in the house – Call the wind! Come on Dad, you have a few other good superstitions!

MR: Did you ever take animals, especially dogs or cats?

WB: Oh, on the boats, some boats, they'd take a small dog or a cat. That's one thing they'd do. Yes, that part. Did that. You take those old vessels there, they'd usually have a cat or a dog on board of them. I tell you what the dog was mostly for. Those times, they never knew what a radar was, or a sounding machine, or anything like that, but a vessel that's laying anchored in the fog, you'd hear a dog barking, especially if you was on the lee side, you could hear that dog bark for maybe 2 miles. You knew there was another vessel in the vicinity. The other thing that you had, they used to have what they call, a crank fog horn, crank hand used to pump this, and that's how you'd blow that horn when you was anchored, the vessel was anchored. 'Course, when the vessel was sailing, and another one could be coming the opposite way, they could run together, and you'd never see them or nothing, till they hit. By time you heard the fog horn, and you got the vessel stopped, it was hit together cause you'd find out where'd you hear the horn, which direction, and you'd let the vessel come up into the wind, possibly the other fellow was doing the same thing in the other direction. Well, once in a while there was vessels that ran together, and some sank, others got damaged, but if you hit them just right, they're bound to go down, that's for sure! You hit them bow on one hits the other one, bow to broad side, you're gonna cut her in two. Those are big vessels, that was 140, 150 feet long. Twenty-five, thirty men on them.

MR: Were you ever on a boat that sank? Did you ever get rescued?

WB: No, I never – I always made it to the shore luckily! [21:27]

MR: Well I knew you did. What was it like, if you could sort of add, your daughter – I just have to say this for the tape. And your name is?

SM: Sue.

MR: Sue, what was it like being in a fishing family? I mean your dad would go out and –

SM: It was very hard growing up because my dad, he was always away. You know, we did things at school, plays, different things like that, and my father was never home.

MR: He was never home.

SM: He was always out. You know, sporting events, graduations, my dad was always gone.

MR: And you probably worried, especially in storms.

SM: All the time, yes. Yes.

MR: And did you do – You certainly didn't whistle in the house. Were there other things you did kind of for protection?

SM: No. My father used to say if you left the house, and you forgot something, don't go back and get it, especially the day he went out fishing. Remember that, Dad, you forgot your glasses? He wouldn't go back home to get them. He stopped at a pay phone and called my brother and had him bring them back. And the hatch cover on the boat. Couldn't turn that upside down.

WB: Oh yeah, never turn the hatch cover on a boat. No, don't do that.

SM: Peas, couldn't have dried peas on a boat.

MR: Now the hatch cover. Somebody mentioned that earlier. Is that turning your luck?

WB: I don't know. That's an old Nova Scotian tradition that hatch cover – A bottom up hatch cover was bad luck. That was back in the old sailing vessel days in Nova Scotia. That was something that they made sure of. When you're lifting the hatch cover up, make sure that it don't turn it over. Especially them old time captains. Oh boy!

MR: They would then take the boat back to shore, wouldn't they?

WB: To do something to counteract it. To call the sailing day off till the next day or something. Something to counteract it. [23:50]

MR: So you didn't want to get into the fishing industry?

SM: Well, I married a fisherman.

MR: Oh, you did? Okay. Oh then maybe you should come join us. We're talking about fishing families and some of the – We've just been talking about superstitions on board but also on land.

Rodney Murray: Did he tell you about his pea soup? If the cook made a pea soup on the boat?

MR: No.

RM: The pot and everything would go out the porthole, I heard.

SM: Go overboard.

RM: Any truth to that Woody? Years ago? That was another one.

MR: Was that was the thing about no dried peas on board?

RM: No you never cooked pea – You never cooked pea soup on board.

MR: Pull up a chair!

RM: Well, I sitting out there, and I thought gee, I might as well come in.

MR: No, this is great because one of the things that we're talking about too are fishing families. Could you just say your name for the tape? [24:43]

RM: My name is Rodey Murray. My family is all fishermen too.

MR: Out of New Bedford?

RM: Yeah, New Bedford and Fairhaven for the last fifty years. My grandfather, "Red Ned," used to fish with Woody. My father was a fisherman. He had nine brothers. They were all fishermen. My mother has three brothers. They're all fishermen. I have five brothers, four of them were fishermen. There's lots of captains around here were all cousins. The Bruces, Murrays, Hogans. So we're kinda –

MR: Were you born in New Bedford?

RM: Yup, we were all born in New Bedford. They all came from Newfoundland and lived here.

MR: Ok. I'm a folklorist out of Watertown, but I went to graduate school in Newfoundland and I'm actually, I'll give you my card afterwards, because I have a whole other project on Newfoundlanders down here.

RM: Like, why they live so long? There's more centenarians in Newfoundland, they claim, then anywhere else in the world, did you know that?

MR: It's the rum.

RM: I don't know if it's the rum or the salt or the whiskey! Woody knows a little bit about rum in the days of Prohibition before he went fishing. [26:05]

WB: That was – That was the only way they made a living in Nova Scotia back when I was a boy going to school was to – What they call? Bootleg Rum! They would get it from St. Pierre, bring it up from St. Pierre. Well, they'd bring it here to the United States but they dropped a lot of it off along the Nova Scotian coast to all the fishing villages. That's about the only way they had to make a dollar those days was, especially if they could get the rum here to the United States that's where they got paid for it. They got the big dollars here for it. And that's where my father, him and another man, they chartered a big vessel, a big fishing vessel. They took her to St. Pierre, and all the money they could get together, and they loaded her with booze, and they went off to New York. They got down and laid off in New York waiting for the boats to come out to get the booze and in the morning, when daylight come, here's a four stacker laying alongside them.

RM: The Coast Guard.

WB: They put the tow line on them.

RM: The fog lifted right? They were in the fog.

WB: Towed here into New York. They took the vessel, the cargo. Put them all in jail. So they didn't press any big charges against them, so they kept them just so long, then they let them go back home. Give them a ticket back home to Nova Scotia, but they kept the vessel.

MR: Oooh! Did they ever get it back?

WB: No! They stole all the booze off the vessel, and the vessel sunk at the dock. They just tore it apart and let her float down the river. That was the end of her. [28:04]

RM: Did you talk about when you first came to New Bedford? In the New Bedford Hotel?

MR: No, didn't hear about the New Bedford Hotel.

RM: The night you took the train to New Bedford for the first time, and you played cards.

WB: Oh!

RM: See I've heard all these stories before –

MR: No, this is good! This is good.

WB: See this is when I come down from Gloucester. I went to Boston and I was gonna – I got a job as engineer on a steam trawler up there and I waited, come Saturday, so everybody's waiting around to go and finally the skipper showed up, says we're not going till Monday. Where the hell am I gonna go now? I didn't have very much money. I said, there's nobody aboard on the boat. So I went up to the, got my clothes bag, and I went up to the railroad station. So I said to the clerk, I said, "Are there any more fishing ports down south of here?" Yeah, he said, "I heard of a place called New Bedford." And I said, "How do you get there?" "Well there's a train that goes there at 8:00 this evening." I said, "Give me a ticket for New Bedford." So I was on the train, and when I get here I got off the train and I got a cab. Asked the cab driver to take me down to a hotel. The Harvey – the old Harvey Hotel. Right across from the New Bedford Hotel. So I went in, I think it was ten dollars a night for a room, so anyways I went in. I think I had 40 dollars left, so I paid ten dollars for the room. I came out, walking down the hallway, to get something to eat down in the restaurant. The door open, and there was a bunch of guys playing poker there. "You wanna sit in?" Yeah, what the hell! I might as well lose the rest of the money. So I sat in there, I don't know, I played an hour or two. I made forty or fifty bucks.

RM: But that was fifty years ago. That was a lot of money!

MR: That was a week's wages or something.

RM: Especially when you coming somewhere all by yourself with no money.

WB: So that was – I went down to the restaurant. The next morning I went down to the dock and I got a job with – I forgot the name. They had quite a few boats around. Mullins? Was it Mullins? Well anyway, I got a job anyhow. So that started me off. I made one or two trips and I came in. I got on another boat called the *Alvin Estelle*. I was on that one two years. What was the next boat? I was on that boat for a year. My uncle was on there. One day the skipper said to me, he said, 'How come the George's name is Bowers, and your name is Bowers?' I said, 'Yeah, he's my uncle.' I was aboard the boat for a year and he didn't know that. He didn't know that he was my uncle. [31:27]

MR: You said that weren't a lot of other Nova Scotians down here.

WB: Well, there were some, a few of them. Not many though.

MR: A lot of them were in Boston, weren't they.

WB: Up around Boston. They seemed to stay up around Boston there.

MR: Because even where I live in Watertown, a lot of my neighbors are from Cape Breton especially, but they're the ones who came working construction. But when a lot of the Newfoundlanders would come down, especially in the old days, they came down with a load of fish and winter over in Boston and work under the table doing construction, and go home, especially before confederation. Go home with American dollars.

WB: Oh yeah, that was the steady work cause summer months here, and wintertime, they'd be up there. That's the style, but then they stopped that crossing the border. They allowed nobody into the United States. The spring gang that used to migrate to Boston – That stopped. That ended that money flow.

MR: They caught on to it.

WB: Oh yeah, yeah. A lot of people there that used to figure, the first of April, they'd be in Boston, and then September, October, they'd be back home for the winter months.

RM: Didn't a lot of them go to Gloucester? I thought you told me?

WB: Later on, oh yeah. A lot of them stayed there, you know. Stayed there in Gloucester. If they went home, they wouldn't get back. See that's why they stayed there. Until that law that was appealed, and then they were allowed them to travel again. But for a while they allowed nobody. [33:19]

MR: Rodey, what kind of fishing do you do?

RM: I'm captain of a scallop boat. I've been dragging and scalloping, but mostly scalloping.

MR: So what changes have you seen in the time that you've been doing it, or watching your father do it, or your family?

RM: It's actually changed much for the better, money-wise, compared to what it used to be. We were eight children in my family. The older guys, they never got paid much for the fish, you know. They used to bring in a boat load of fish and get nothing for it. Go out and dump it out here if the price was too low. Changed quite a bit that way. But not it's gone too far. Now there's all the rules and regulations which are keeping us from fishing a lot now. It looks like it's coming to a period where it's gonna turn the other corner and the boat owners are gonna have a real tough time making it or not making it because of the regulations. The regulations were good. Conservation was good. They got everything they wanted to when they started it 9 years ago. From our perspective. From the fishermen's perspective, we think it did a lot of good. But they went too far, you know. If they leave it where it is now, it's great for everybody. That's what we all think. It's good for us. It's good for the boat owners. It's good for the conservation. But. Here's the but –

MR: As a folklorist, I listened to the fishermen because they've been doing it forever, and their families have been doing it forever, and they know the patterns –

RM: Naturally, we don't want to catch the very last fish or scallop because that won't be beneficial to us either.

MR: Well, even those old photos of the cod – Those cod that were just enormous. They've got little kids holding these enormous fish. You could almost walk out and grab them by hand, and that's –

RM: In the years that I've been fishing, there's more fish and more scallops around than I've seen in my whole lifetime. And probably you too. Is there, Woody, now? I mean in what they catch in one day sometimes. [35:45]

WB: Yeah but then again, you've gotta take consideration the way that they catch fish today. The system. See that's another thing. You catch three times the amount of fish. Like when I started here, when I first come here to New Bedford, with the nets and stuff we that had then what we had today. The nets you got on these boats, they'll take the boat and the net right down inside of it. You can imagine what that'll do going over the bottom.

RM: But then there's the other side of it, the mesh in the net today is six or seven inches versus what it used to be – three. So you're getting a lot going through.

WB: See what we did was destroyed small ones too. We destroyed the little stuff. That was the thing that was bad. If we had that large mesh then! It would have been better all the way around because the small fish kill the market for one thing. And destroyed the fish itself from producing. But then they squawked about when they started – I remember one skipper I was with. He went 'Oh they changed the mesh size a quarter inch.' Oh he went right crazy. Oh we're gonna starve to death now! But what good does it do. So they got it striked away. You see the fish that is out there now. There's plenty of them there. But the – Let the small ones grow, let them produce, grow. If you kill them all, can't, can't, can't multiply, no way! So there they strike that part out. [37:41]

MR: So do you think – Well, what do you think about the future of the fishery?

RM: I don't know. Right now it's a big bureaucratic mess right now. There's some many rules and regulations, we can't even get to them. We've been waiting now for – In August of this year, they sent out letters to all the boat owners and captains telling us where we could fish come September first, in these closed areas that have been closed for 9 years. September first has come and gone, and they haven't let us in there yet. Then they told us the fifteenth, then they told us October first. We still don't know when we can go, or if we can go. The weather's getting bad. The yield in the scallop itself is much smaller then it would be, now it's bigger than it would be when they do let us in, if they let us in. So it's hard to say where it's going. It's got nothing to do with us. It's all up to all these committees now that are trying –

MR: So what do you do? You just sit around waiting?

RM: We sit right around and that's the worst thing. Nobody likes to do that. I mean, it's no good for the boats to be tied up. We can't go look for a job anywhere else. I can't go up to a construction company and say I'd like to work. They say, "Ok, you start tomorrow." But I say to them, "Well, it can only be for a week, or maybe two, or maybe three, or maybe a month. I don't know how long I can work for you." Who would hire you? So we don't know what we're doing because the government hasn't let us, hasn't told us, and that was all supposed to be finalized, and it's been an ongoing problem for a long time. It's getting worse instead of better.

MR: So what are you doing about – I mean, are you organizing together?

RM: Well, yeah. We've two different – The draggers have an organization, and the scallopers have an organization. The scallop boats, we have what's called a Fishery Survival Fund. It goes – There's boats from, I think, as far north as Maine and south to Virginia, and I think there's about 250 boats. Jimmy Kendall could tell you the exact number. But they pay into this fund. Five hundred dollars per trip, every trip. And all this money goes to pay two lawyers who constantly fight the National Marine Fisheries. It's actually not the National Marine Fisheries, it's these other groups that sue the National Marine Fisheries to restrict us. Conservationists, these different groups, to keep suing the National Marine Fisheries, so we have to keep fighting them. We've never lost one suit yet. But they just – Every time they bring up a suit. Turtles, now the big thing is turtles. They gonna shut down one part of our fishery because we catch too many turtles. I've only caught four turtles in 25 years, and they were all a year ago. What? They'll take the four I caught on my boat and multiply it by 250 boats, and say 'Well, the scientific number we come up is 1,000 turtles.' Even though it's not accurate, that's the way they do it, and we can't – So we don't want to go fish where there's any turtles, we don't wanna harm the turtle. You know?

MR: That's the real difference between – You were saying the regulations were better, but in the old days –

RM: There wasn't any. The market kinda –

WB: There were no regulations them days. Nothing!

RM: Which that's no good either, and we're all for that. You know, you have to have some. So they funneled all these scallop boats for the last two years into this Hudson Canyon. Guess what's in Hudson Canyon? It's the only place the turtles are. So they send us all down there, now they tell us we're catching the turtles. We don't wanna be there. We wanna be up here on Georges Bank, where there's an abundance of scallops, and big ones. That's where we wanna go, they're worth the money. But they send us down there where the scallops are small and all the turtles are, and tell us we're catching too many turtles.

MR: What's the normal scallop season when you're out, when you get to go out?

RM: Well some boats do it all year. They give us a certain amount of days. We were down to 120 days as of two weeks ago, and they just took 20 more from us. Now we're down to 100. So we can take the 100 days and use them any time you want. Or you used to be able to use any time you want during the year. Now they divide them up and tell you can go and when you can't go. So we really don't know when we can go for these next three trips because we've been waiting to hear from them. [42:09]

MR: So that goes back to my original question about the impact on families. It's really hard. It was hard in the old days for other reasons.

RM: Now it's another aspect of it. We don't have any children so we're kinda lucky in one respect. But say it was like I had five or six kids like my mother had eight. If my father didn't go to work for six weeks, it was hard enough when he did work, but if he didn't go for six weeks, it's a lot of mouths to feed that you don't when you're gonna be able to do it so it's hard. And like I said it's

hard to go find work in between because you can never give anybody a straight answer as to how long you can work for them or –

MR: See and that's the story. I approach it from the cultural stand point and it in terms of, you know, fishermen – It's a job and it's a way of life too. It's not just a job and so many families have been fishing for generations. You can't just turn around and go learn to use a computer and get a new life. That's the story that doesn't get conveyed. Ideally a festival like this can help, but it's really hard to get the word out.

RM: Then everything's more commercialized. Now you gonna end up some day with just a few owners owning all the boats. Used to be that anybody could go buy a fishing boat and go fishing. You didn't need a lot of money. You needed some money but not a lot. Today they're so expensive because of what the government's doing with the licenses. In five years the license on a scallop boat for fifty thousand dollars to about six hundred thousand dollars right now for a license. That's just the license without the boat. So you know the average guy that's on deck used to be able to save a little money and buy his own part of boat. You can't do that anymore.

MR: I think this is just about to run out, so I can put in another tape and we can keep going. I've got plenty of tape if –

WB: Well, that's about – I think we hit all the spots. What's important.

MR: We can always come back and do more another time too. At this point I will say thank you and turn this off. [44:36]
[Conversation continues on an unrelated topic.]

----------End of Interview----------
Reviewed by Nicole Zador, 12/4/2024