

Interview with Dan Orchard

Narrator: Dan Orchard

Interviewer: Millie Rahn

Location: New Bedford, MA

Date of Interview: September 23, 2006

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.

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Abstract

On September 23, 2006, Millie Rahn interviewed Dan Orchard as part of the Working Waterfront Festival Community Documentation Project. Dan shares his experiences the *Travis and Natalie* out of Point Judith, Rhode Island. He's worked on a variety of boats, including smaller boats, engaged in inshore dragging, scuba diving for steamers, and bull raking for little necks. He also mentions establishing a newspaper, *The Fishermen's Call*, which aimed to connect fishermen and scientists from around the coast. He describes the camaraderie among fishermen and the pride he has in his work. However, he acknowledges the many challenges and dangers inherent in the industry, including unpredictable weather conditions, changes in fish populations, and increasing regulation. After entering law school, with a focus on Maritime law, Dan has taken a step back from fishing, but continues to work as a lumper. His hope is to practice law while staying connected to the water.

Dan Orchard: I was up in Alaska out of Juno, one boat just stuck out with me. It was called Mystery Bay. It was actually an old tugboat that the guy had converted, just a beautiful old boat. One of his good friends and their two girlfriends just cruised basically the Pacific Coast. You know, going from Southern California all the way up to Alaska doing different fisheries along the way, salmon, halibuts, squid fisheries and you know, pulled into different ports at different places and stayed a week and checked it out and did different things and obviously you know, it's obviously a unique lifestyle even within fishing as far as a gypsy life there but it just really appealed to me. I thought, this is pretty cool. So when I got out of the Coast Guard, I had a buddy who actually one of the guys in charge of me, a commander there, his brother was a lobsterman over in Point Judith, Rhode Island and I told him I wanted to go fishing and so he sent me to meet his brother. I spent one day out in Point Judith. I went out lobstering with his brother. It wasn't a day, it was kind of just a hot muggy day with a long swell but his brother, it was the day he was cleaning traps which means traps get seaweeds and barnacles and sea squirts growing on them and so with time you got to clean them so what they do is they take a big tank out on their boat full of like boiling water and every pot that comes up they open up the lid and throw the pot in and let it cook for thirty to forty five seconds to kill everything so when they dump it back in its clean again so lobsters can find it. What happens then is the whole boat just reeks like this awful seaweed stew and I was standing right by the diesel exhaust as well and it was just a hot muggy day. I don't think I have ever been as seasick as that first day. Even after years in the Coast Guard just going on this boat, every pot that came up I would turn to the rail so he was a little shocked when we got in and I said, and it was more like one of these — "yeah, it was nice to meet you take care, have a good life," and I'm like, no and this is what I want to do, I want to go fishing. I hadn't really wanted to be a lobsterman anyway. I wanted to go in bigger boats, draggers. That kind of confirmed it that day that I didn't want to lobster. He called up a couple of friends of his and I ended up working on a boat called the *Travis and Natalie* out of Point Judith. Its an eighty four foot Stern Trawler run by a Fred Matiera and his brother Joey Matiera and a couple of Italian descent over there so the minute I got on board there I introduced myself as Dan Orchard and they immediately started calling me Danny so that kind of has been my name since then working with Italians.

I learned a lot about fishing really through that boat. We would go out on ten-day trips. Right when I started first trip was a ground fish trip out to Georgia's Bank. Haddock, Cod Fish some lobsters and flounders and things that come up, and you know all your fish sticks really. Learning how to cut and gut and clean and stack every fish on ice and run the hold and learning how to cook. I swear I didn't know how to bake a potato when I got on that boat, but the youngest guy, the newest guy is the cook, usually. So immediately they had me go in and of course I'm cooking for a bunch of Italians. The new guy is always catching hell for everything whether its just teasing or you're actually doing something wrong, so you have to get them back

every once in a while. One time the captain Joe Matiera came down to dinner and I put out this Pasta dinner and he looks at me and he's like, "You know I'm not just trying to bust you here but you can't use a marinara sauce with a number eleven pasta because its too thin and it won't stick to the pasta." And I looked at him and said, "Joe this isn't marinara sauce. This is Ragu," and of course he loses it and says, "Ragu on my boat!" and I said "I'm just kidding, Joe, I made, I made it." There are characters in this industry and that's what made it immediately appealing. You meet some great people that what they want to do in life is work hard and provide food and feed people and that elemental and kind of tangible element of fishing along with the people from day one appealed to me. You finished those days were hell on that boat out working twenty hours a day for ten days straight. You get maybe four or five hours off at night but an hour and a half of that was your watch at night anchor watch or just drifting in the middle of the ocean and somebody has to stay awake so you rotate between the guys so really it was a broken three or four hours of sleep for ten straight days and your always tired and your always dirty but you hose yourself off at the end of the day and get that quick kink but you'd sit there and then steam home and I don't know if there is any moment I'm ever prouder of than the steam home.

You sit there and your standing on top of the hatch and its full of fish and you know what you just did and you know how many people are going to eat because of this and there's few other jobs where it's that tangible or you say what did I do today. You say I did a bunch of paper work and I did this and that. You don't have something that you can say no, ten thousand pounds of flounder here that are now going to be filleted and sent all over the world basically and people are going to eat and its going to affect all these peoples lives and you walk down the street and smell the fish from the restaurants and you know that either you or somebody you know caught it and it's just this great feeling so from there we just kept fishing. I've done a bunch of different fisheries. I guess I'm giving you the long-winded answer here and I'm just rambling but I'll keep going...

MR: That's good, keep going.

DO: On that boat we did a lot of squid fishing too where we'd go out and catch a lot of you know uh, Lalagos squid which are uh, the hot item. Seems like in America now with calamari as an appetizer, so oh God we would go out, uh you know just fill the boat with squid and a lot of times we'd freeze the fish. It was almost- you know, industrial, I guess in a way its kind of a factory process but it's a small boat still you'll make four or five guys and your working and processing the squid on board freezing them into blocks, frozen blocks stacking those down in the holes and then you know unloading it that way. We had the biggest trip. Normally we'd go with five guys and we'd take a full ten or eleven days and we'd maybe put you know- close to fifty thousand pounds on board. I remember one trip, we went with four guys and we did it in eight days and we had the most the boat had ever held in squid that time. It was six fifty seven thousand pounds and it was just...I got pictures of it, of a captain just would give us a twenty

minute break at lunch and he'd bring out a pizza that was just thrown in the oven and I have pictures of consecutive days where you can just see you know the three of us standing there eating a slice of pizza and the fatigue each day had gone but so, you know.

MR: Where do you go for squid?

DO: Squid are, they in the wintertime a lot there out in the canyons. You have to go off shore from Rhode Island. Rhode Island's kind of neat because the guys down there and New Bedford. In a bit too where you kind of got the whole mid Atlantic stocks that, you know, circle in their migration north, kind of stop at the Cape a lot of times and it's the bulk of it so you can get a lot of the mid Atlantic stocks. But you can also go up north and you know off just past the Cape to Georges and everything like that and get a lot of your groundfish which a few more traditional above New England fish like the cod fish and everything. So squid in the wintertime you got to go off shore a couple hundred miles off to the canyons where, you know, it gets deep there's a whole string of canyons out on the shelf, different ones and you tow along the, you know, certain depths along the ridge there and you can get squid that way. There, at the bottom at — during the day and then a lot of times during certain seasons at night they come up so that's when you get those four hours off.

MR: Mmmm

DO: Which is neat too, because you know you'll be working on deck sometimes and if your lucky, the squid will — you know, I had one night where it came up and I don't know the life history of exactly of squid. I've read a little bit about it but during certain mating seasons and things they have these frenzies where they all get in certain areas and one night we might of just hit that spot because the water was, in the middle of the night it looked like you know, Pink Floyd light show. I mean, just squid. They're only about, they grow maybe a foot in a half long. The biggest one they only live a year, a year in a half or something, but they were just, the whole water was just filled with them and they were jumping out of the water and they can change colors. So they're just changing from red to green to yellow to you know, just rapidly, just and jumping on top of each other. Then of course you have all these other animals that want to feed on them like sharks coming in and you know, circling around and stuff. And were just sitting there you know, staring over the side of the boat and they don't care that we're there, you know, we're just all of a sudden some visitor in their world and they're just going crazy, you know doing what they naturally do. You get those moments too out there so it's really cool.

MR: Did you hear any stories about giant squids?

DO: That's funny. I mean just that you mention that. Just only because I always followed those stories when I was younger, so my Mom still sends me, you know every article that pops up on

the internet about you know, giant squids, so, yeah they always interested me, uh but you know we never...we, we obviously didn't catch any but we caught a couple of rare species you know. I say rare to appear in the net. I don't know if they're rare around the world or anything like that, but once in awhile we get a squid in the mix there that you'd be like what is this? Somebody told me once they were the younger large squids, you know so who knows? Maybe we caught one or two little ones at one point but yeah.

MR: The reason I ask is I went to graduate school in Newfoundland and it was a marine institute up there at the Memorial University and they put the word out for giant squid and said there's a reward if you bring one in and people did. I think before that, I mean fishermen always talked about it and I always trust what fishermen say, but then they actually... but people thought that it was just a tall tale you know and it was not a fish tale. They brought them in. I'm not sure where it was from but...

DO: Cool. Some boats fish a lot of you know deeper water and do different things but the deepest we'd ever fished is you know like a hundred and thirty fathom I think um really you know. I don't think we got much deeper than that.

MR: So you're based, still based in Rhode Island?

DO: Nope, I just moved to New Bedford, so I mean that was seven or eight years ago that I was fishing really full-time on the *Travis*. Since then I've, I still take trips with them every once in a while but I've done different things with smaller boats inshore dragging out of Plymouth, Mass out of Nantucket, run my own shift? Just clamming in the summers for the past four or five summers you know, scuba diving for steamers and bull raking for little necks set some lobster pots and things like that just on my own. Worked on fish traps for a while which are a whole different fishery, I could talk about them for a whole fifteen minutes too. Then I also published a newspaper. It reached a point where kind of right at the beginning when I was fishing having been in fisheries and Portsmouth before and studied fisheries a little bit in college, I was interested kind of in just the whole politics of it and learning about it. After having fished first-hand, you get your view points from school, people explaining things to you second-hand, and then you get your experience being on boats. Doing the fisheries in Portsmouth seen from that perspective, but once I fished myself, it kind of changed my view points, opened my eyes to a lot of things. I kind of felt like there was a story that wasn't being told, or it was just being overlooked. You said a second ago, "You always believe what fishermen say," and that I think is rare. There's this stigma put on it that's really just been ingrained. Either that they're uneducated or that it's — you can't believe what they say because it's the "fox guarding hen house" kind of stuff, and I, after meeting the people and experiencing it myself, I really didn't think that that was accurate and I thought there was a lot more to it. The uneducated thing certainly bugged me right at the beginning because majority of the Captains in Point Judith, the

port I was in at the beginning, are college graduates. The University of Rhode Island used to have a degree, a college degree for fishermen. You would come in and you learn all sorts of net building and diesel mechanics as well as some of your business skills and things like that. There were a lot of educated fishermen and the fox guarding the hen house thing was the majority of guys I know. Yeah, you have some bad apples, you have bad apples in every business, but the majority of guys I know aren't out there to destroy the ocean. You're close to the water every day like that you, you really grow a respect for it that you really can't shake. So yeah, you're a business man and your running your own business and you got people, your own family to worry about and mortgages, but you still look down the road and, that if you just do something for a quick gain you're less likely to succeed down the road.

So I started a newspaper. I started a newspaper down, it started out in Rhode Island called *The Fishermen's Call* and it was basically a trade paper for the commercial fishing industry that was just set up, so that it was all fishermen who were writers, all the writing was supposed to be put in by fishermen or people who at least fished just recently. It kind of tied in with all the fishing associations in Rhode Island and quickly, since guys were taking it from port to port and dropping it off with their friends, there was, it sparked an interest so it ended up expanding rather quickly in the first year all the way up to Gloucester, New Bedford, Boston down into Stonington, Connecticut and subscribers down in Montauk, Long Island and places like that, and just picked up writers that would write columns about what was going on in their ports and stuff. And guys talked about it, it really just connecting the ports you know. Guys would, like, see boats, you see boats out on the ocean or you know you pull into a different port to take out maybe or you hear them chattering on the radio, but a lot of guys didn't know each other and it was kind of interesting, and would tell me it was real interesting to hear that the same view points were going on in Gloucester because we don't talk, we don't really talk to those guys and they're experiencing the same thing we are. Just for the different species or you know different feelings about the whole community. So it really connected ports that way and we had a couple of scientists would write in and stuff like that and talk, and so we tried to link fishermen and scientists and kind of — really just start to have it as a vehicle for communication between the groups.

MR: Had anybody in your family fished before you?

DO: No, no my father was in the Coast Guard for most of his career, but he got wicked seasick too. He tries to stay away from boats but there must be something with our physiology because I still get seasick when I go but you just work through it because the benefits are so much better than the misery of those first couple days but no other fishermen at all.

MR: I've interviewed a lot of the old timers both here and other places but I'm really interested in the younger fishermen like yourself because things have changed so much

and what do you think makes a good fishermen these days?

DO: I don't know if that's changed, what makes the good fishermen. Fishermen, what makes a successful fishermen I think really in any age is somebody who has the ability to see a couple of years down the road, what changes are going to become. Fishermen are people who deal with something that you can't predict and that's the ocean. I mean you look at it and look for signs, you're guessing about what species might be prevalent or where they might swim this year. I mean, you might have stocks that are huge that are abundant but they just take a different turn because of a current or a [inaudible] or something, a gulf stream [netty?] then pushes them into a different spot and you might never even see them. And so, fishermen are people who can adapt to all these changes and can basically as long as they have the ability to make decisions and they're empowered through history. The great Captains have been the ones who saw everything in this dynamic environment around them and were able to react to it. Some days you're successful, some days you're not, but the good Captains have more successful days because they keep paying attention to all the signs. And I don't know if that's changed in the sense that the top fishermen are still the ones who... you've just added another dimension, you've added regulations and politics and things like that that are going on a lot more now. So not only do you have the ocean, not only do you have the market and the business world but you've got the politics behind it too. And you kind of got to predict that these last couple years have been a little bit different in the fact that like as I was saying, I mean, the most important thing is the fishermen has to be empowered to make decisions they kind of been stripped of that I think over the last decade in New England.

I mean guys no longer have a choice of when you kind of go fishing, you have a lot of rolling seasonal closes or you have limits on how many fish you can catch per day and you have things like, well if you go out on a trip and something breaks or the fish aren't there you can't just go and try somewhere else you know because that area might be closed to you since you declared into this one area. So they really cut down on the ability to make decisions which to me, that's the fundamental element of the good fishermen. No matter what era your talking about, so I guess I'm going two ways to answer your question here. I mean one I think it's somebody who can have power but to um unless things change you're just going to lose those people, those people who are really good at making decisions are going to say, "Guess what, I'm making the decision to get out of fishing now because this is futile," and what's going to happen is your just going to have kind of more, I don't know if it's going to be corporations or just drones, kind of just like, "I'll go and just do what they say" and grind on that fishery, come in with a product and that's it. I think you'd lose a lot of that character that original character that's been so important.

MR: What I see as a complete outsider is a lot of the old timers grew up in fishing families and they learned it very traditionally through you know their family members, their community. Where I see someone like you it's much more, certainly from a folklores perspective, the

occupational tradition, kind of, learning on job, learning from going to Coast Guard school but then also out on the boats and learning it that way. The regulation issue is something that always comes up. Do you see yourself being a fisherman all your life?

DO: I don't know if I'll be a fisherman my whole life. I'd like to stay, I won't be a full time fisherman my whole life because, I guess, it goes back to the Mystery Bay, I like to do different things and the idea of a guy going up and down the coast going to different fisheries appeals to me and I just like to do different things and diversify. So right now I'm going to law school for Maritime Law so I'll get a little background there and I plan on working in fisheries law and hopefully working still on the water. My goal is still to have a boat, a small boat and work in shore fishing while I'm doing that but you know, who knows so down the road. I'm the kind of person who bites off more than I can chew so it gets me into trouble, so we'll see- but your original question was more along the lines of do I think there's a future in fishing? Is that what you were kind of implying?

MR: Yeah.

DO: Yeah I do. I mean this next five to ten years I think are going to be pivotal on deciding what kind, it's in more on the regulators hands right now and the government and how they actually and how they actually set up the regulation that's going to dictate the future of the community. They'll be fishing but the fish are, in my mind, are doing well. The fish are all growing in stocks and some of them are extremely prevalent right now and that will only keep going up. There'll be an industry, it's just what the industry is going to look like.

MR: Your point about going into Maritime Law, are there other Maritime Lawyers who are fishermen?

DO: I don't know Jimmy Dyer down here he is the head of the Lumper's Union he was talking about a gentleman that used to lump because I just joined the union too but he was telling me he would introduce me to a gentleman maybe even this weekend too, was lumping and may have been a fisherman too who went into Maritime Law but other than that I don't think so. You know I think that's why it's an appealing trade is because when your dealing with this business there obviously lawyers who deal with fisheries law because guys you know, just like any business here you need lawyers for different things, whether its permitting or just changing boats around, changing hands, you're dealing with something with a crewman you need that collisions, accidents so you need a lawyer. What I found is that in talking to a bunch of guys is that their lawyers often don't know much about fishing and they usually have to call somebody and bring somebody in and so they if they talk to their own lawyer and talked about me they would love to have you at their firm already as an asset just the background and in the field would be such an asset, so I'm kind of going on banking on that. In Maritime Law in general they say the most

important thing isn't what school you went to, it's what part of the Maritime industry you were a part of. Because if you go down to a boat and you're supposed to do a deposition with somebody, and you don't know which end of the boat is the bow or the stern, they're not going to give you any respect. Just a business any working waterfront is a trade where respect is based on your experiences and things like that. Hopefully you know a lot of this will carry over into that.

MR: Well if nothing else you are learning all aspects of the business. I actually interviewed Jimmy Dyer the first year we did these interviews and...so your fishing your lumping your going to school your writing you've got an article in the current working waterfront festival newspaper handout.

DO: You have got diversify. A lot of young guys in the business right now I mean, just because of the instability and I've talked about the fact that the ocean is dynamic and you got to be able to guess and you know its unpredictable so you don't have a really long term business plan, no fisherman does in that sense, but you at least have a business plan of I'm going to fish. I can invest in a boat, I can do a lot of these things you're supposed to — unfortunately with regulations the way they are right now in the state of the industry guys don't know if they invest in a boat or a permit, whether they're going to shut down that fishery next week so they've completely destroyed this ability to make investments. As well you know so a lot of the guys my age that I meet some of them you know get boats and things like that , but I don't see any of them making big investments they're getting there making sure that they have kind of a diverse options. You got to keep yourself open with options and so that's kind of a [inaudible] needs the big investments. You don't want to put all your money into something because it could be worth nothing tomorrow if they just shut it down and you talk about pulling your hair out so I've kind of seen it as the way I am going to approach it. It's my diversity is putting together fishing along with you know, other trades so we'll see how that works. It's worked so far so I've been happy.

MR: Good. I'm just looking at some of the questions that we ask fishermen and you've talked about what types of boats you've fished on, your position on the boat kind of a typical trip, advice for someone starting out today. What are some of the more either frightening experiences you've had on boats or some of the funny things that have happened besides the initiation of being on boat and then being on galley?

DO: Yeah, I mean you have dangerous moments on boats just on anytime you go to sea. A lot of that is when you're just starting out, you might not be able to foresee the signs. A lot of accidents happen just because you're picking the wrong boat, I think, but you still get into situations. I mean right in my first year of fishing we had a top notch boat, one of the high liners down in Point Judith, broke down. Something happened with her main I don't even to this day know what it was, but so they lost all power and I remember because we were out on deck and it

was probably 4:00 or 5:00 at night and we had just finished cleaning up the deck and it was like almost a stereotypical line like this guy was just like, “Ahhh!” He had noticed that the wind had turned south southwest and he’s like, “It’s going to pick up so fast,” and it had been pretty calm right then and I’m like, “Really?” So we go in, we start eating and right then the Captain had gotten the call that this other boat had broken down. We came out on deck a half hour later and it was like we were in a different world. I mean, the wind was just howling and the seas were huge and so we steamed over to this other boat and by the time we got to them it was dark out and you know the seas were probably about fifteen, twenty feet and we had to back down to them to toss them a line, so that we could tow them home and it was just [hellaciousness?]. Just watching the bowel of this other boat rise straight above you and the Captain can’t see because fishing boats aren’t made to back down to one another like a tug boat or something like this. I mean you got net drums in the way, you don’t have reverse lights and things like that backing down and stuff, so and they’re just not maneuverable like that. And we’re here with — we are throwing a little line with a shackle around the end, two guys just grabbing onto their railing holding on as the seas are pouring over them trying to catch it. We finally pass it to them of course we don’t have a towing hoser? Or anything that you’re supposed to tow with. You’re supposed to tow with a big line that can stretch and give a little because in heavy seas the boats are going to be bouncing in different directions and pulling on it, so we just used our fishing towing cable which are three quarter inch braided steel cables and we passed both of them back to them that way and put out, I don’t know, I think we put out a hundred fifty fathom right at the beginning, just a lot of wire, so that, we hoped that there’d be enough what they call a centenary? You know the bow and the bend and the line that would give the resistance, but we’re towing them home in these [hellacious?] seas and of course we part the wires so we have to tow them all back, the wires all back up then back down to the boat again then toss the shackle back to these two guys then put them back out again put out some more wire of course we parted that one and I think we lost the whole system on that one, all the wire, so we still had more wire on them and we went out again.

Now your fixing parted wire it’s just very sharp and just like any rope would kind of unwind but now its wire that’s unwound and so you got to bend that back over with a certain tool and clamp it down and put shackles on it so you can make an eye out of it and — it’s not hard work but when you’re in a huge sea and everything, it’s hard work, it can be a little bit annoying in the middle of the night, you haven’t slept in seven days so we go out on deck. And I’m doing that, I’m bending the wire back on itself to make an eye and another guy, standing over me, a seasoned guy, a guy who has been fishing for twenty years and he is just handing me the tools and I am doing it, and he is a guy who never shuts up. He is always talking to you about either one, your doing something wrong or two, how he would do it , and three, how good he used to be at football, so you know he’s just going on and on about everything nonstop. I can eat more Oreo cookies than you, or something. Just it’s always a contest, and all of a sudden he just was silent and it was one of those silences that you notice quickly even though you know the wind is

howling and everything like that, and I'm kneeling down on the deck just working on the, with the tools and he is right in front of me where his feet are and so I look up at him and he's just looking up behind me, and I'm like "Oh shit" and the next thing I knew, I was swimming. Basically it was just green water all the way across the deck, just flushed us right all the way across the deck, my leg. I held onto his leg, and then my leg went out on one of the scuppers just slammed into the railing because you get sucked out once all that water gets on deck it's got to go somewhere, and you have scuppers that's the way they're made, so that the water can discharge. And so it gets sucked right out one of the leg, and all the tools are washed overboard and everything, but I wasn't sure if we were just going to go straight over board that so of course the Captain comes out, and he didn't, he was like, "Why aren't you done yet?" When it's like, "Well, why don't you get me a new wrench and a new tool, we'll fix it." So we went of course right back to work and completely soaking wet and just fixed it up, passed the wire back to those guys as a third time towed them for another hour and then the wire parted finally and we had no wire left so we went home. We had to leave them, which was too bad, the Coast Guard came out to get them and the Coast Guard had a hell of a time. The Coast Guard had to send two boats out to tow them home so you know its just that rough a sea and that rough a day so you get in that situations like that.

MR: That was off of Point Judith?

DO: Out of Point Judith. We were southeast of Long Island and basically straight up from there at one of the canyons squid fishing. It's one of those businesses where we come back into port they get back in and that boat, that Captain obviously comes over and we put in all that effort he just handed us all the crewman you know, gift certificates to the nicest restaurant in town for a hundred dollars and immediately went to the owner of our boat to pay for all the wire and everything that he lost because he basically lost all this wire and I don't even know how much wire cost because I've never had to buy it but it's a lot. He basically lost a couple hundred fathom of wire plus a day of fishing because we would have just stayed out there and kept fishing. We would have just rode out the storm and then kept fishing so you know that's a huge cost. My owner wasn't going to take anything from him because it's kind of — these are part of the rules of a brotherhood if you will, of fishing that you know next time its going to be me that needs a tow to go home and you know, and he knows that that other boat will be there for him so these things kind of tied in with each other in the whole community that appealed to me so that was kind of a bad day but I felt worse for them. They had to sit in it you know, so as bad as it was just us towing them we got home still you know ten hours later. They probably had another forty-eight hours of just being towed slowly home.

MR: I think that's the danger, I mean there are a lot of occupations that are dangerous but when you're at sea you don't have an escape plan necessarily. You're at the mercy of the elements.

DO: You got to be quick and you got to be trained in a lot of things. I mean, I don't know if other people have talked about this already, but it's kind of one of the things that a lot of fishermen knows that you know a fisherman isn't just a fisherman, he's an engineer, a meteorologist, he is a cook, a business man, he's an electrician, a carpenter. You got to be skilled in all of these trades because whatever you go to sea with is all you have. You can't just go out there expecting, well you won't be a very good fishermen if all you know how to do is fillet a fish, cut and gut and I can chop ice. Well great, we need you to do a lot more than that, and so you get into hairy situations all the time and I remember that first couple of months of fishing so many times something would go wrong because something is going to go wrong every day you just kind of have to expect it. So many times I'd see something go wrong I'd be like "holy shit" like this is, that was so incredible that we must be going home now, the Captain is just going to pack it up and go home. No, we spend two hours or three hours fixing it, just pulling tools out of I don't even know where, a torch and cutting it in half and welding it back together and here we go again and they always did top notch work. It wasn't that I was on a derelict boat. Those guys put a lot of money into that boat, always. It's just the elements. It's a very hard world and things are going to go wrong. Good fishermen, you're talking about a good fishermen too, a good fishermen is a guy who can react like instantly and if something break and snaps and swings you know guys see it already coming and then if it's something that you couldn't foresee, they react quickly to it, they don't even need to be told what to do they're just jumping up and grabbing something to fix something and it's quick where you see other people who just haven't been in that kind of world just stand there stunned you know they're just motionless and so you know that's one of the benefits of experience. A lot of more experienced guys just work quickly you know react quickly.

MR: Did you ever any superstitions?

DO: Sure I mean my first captain there Joe Matiera, that Italian, he had a bunch. He had a bunch. He kept all the superstitions really. Don't turn a hatch over. Always coil a line a certain way you know things like that. He had a couple and I didn't always pay attention to all of them. They weren't my thing kind of really I mean, but he had one now for a trip. He was just kind of one of those guys that believed a lot in luck and things like that. Quick story, one time you know it was probably one of these trips where we did ten days, came in unloaded the boat, got that afternoon off. The next morning I went and grubbed up and got all the food and then we were going to leave again that night and we had probably done like three of those in a row and all I wanted to do was just go home and sleep or go see my girlfriend or do something but instead we were just working around the clock. I just wanted to go get a cup of coffee so I was in a real bad mood I remember, and I just grubbed up and brought a full truck load of food for another ten days and a thousand dollars worth of grub on board and of course

he's nitpicking and pulling through all the boxes and crates that I just brought aboard like, "Where is this?" and "Where is that? What about the paper?" and course, I'm like, "It's right here, it's right there it's right there. He reaches in one of them and he, the guys getting the grub can get things from morale too, every once in a while too they get like Halloween masks on Halloween or pick up a couple different movies and stuff like that so when he reaches in he pulled out a potted plant I had bought. A violet, just a little African violet you know just to make the life just a little bit less miserable every once in a while you've got some flowers. So he is like, "What the hell is this?" And I'm like, "It's a flower, Joe. It's a violet," and "Don't worry about it." He's like, "A thousand dollars in grub and you're getting violets." I'm like yeah, so I just stormed out of there or something and we started fishing and it was one of those trips that began with a bang. We were out on deck for the whole time and so I didn't even see the Captain for like three days. We were just working and going to sleep whenever we could and so like the third or fourth day I get a break. I was in a better mood and he was in a better mood, and I went up in the wheelhouse with breakfast for him or something and I look over and it's a sunny day to calm down and everything and right in the cup holder on the port side is the violet and he's got it in the cup holder with bungee cords around it and everything and a water bottle next to it that says "don't touch." I'm like, "What the hell?" And I look over on the port side and there's the other cup holder and its got a bungee cord around it and there is nothing in that one and I'm like, "Joe, you really like this violet, huh"? He's like, "Don't touch it. It's good luck." [laughs]. He had brought it up there that first day put it up on the window sill and now it had it's own water bottle because we had done so well and whenever we were towing and we turned around on the tow and we're heading the other direction and he'd have switch sides so it could always be in the sunlight, so he had it going both sides. He really believed in luck and everything and you don't change anything when you're doing well, and I mean obviously he believed even more. He's a great fisherman and he knows what he is doing but he also had that element of luck with it. I didn't bother telling him that violets weren't supposed to have full sun, but he believed in it that trip, the violet superstition.

MR: Wow, that's great so a typical trip would be ten days?

DO: On that boat yeah.

MR: How large a crew?

DO: Four to five um three to five. We do shorter trips too. We do four or five day trips if we were doing a lot of fresh and you play the market, I mean the markets calling for higher quality fish or that there's twenty-five boats out there and they're all coming in on Saturday, you cut your trip short and come in on Wednesday because then you got the price. So we do different things, but the most we would ever be out is ten or eleven days on that boat. Other boats, day boats you just go out for the day and things like that, different fisheries, yeah.

MR: Wow, so describe a typical week. There probably isn't a typical week, but like this last week, what did you do? Because you're doing all these different things.

DO: I mean, when I started school here I had to promise myself to give up fishing for the time being. That was kind of, because I know I'm going to get that phone call and law school is obviously expensive so I saved up for a while. But you're going to get that phone call that's like, "Hey you know, I just need somebody for a week a transit man. I know you, we'd love to have you. You can't guarantee money, but it looks like it's going to be a good trip we've had a couple good trips in a row you want to go for six days." I promised myself, even when that call comes and I'm so urged to go, not to go, just focus on school and do that well right now. But I joined the lumping union down here so this last week it was, I mean basically starting school on Monday all day and then Monday night gave me a call, there was a boat to lump out so we lumped out a boat at, I don't know 7:00 or 8:00 at night. I think we started the Isabel, lumped her out until 11:00 or so, went home, got all the slime off and everything, and showered, studied a little more and went to bed next morning. Tuesday was just school and then I play rugby, so I played rugby up in Boston all night for practice. Back home in bed Wednesday, was school and then we lumped two boats started one at 7:00 in the, and was done at 9:00 and then did another, slept for two hours and got up and did another one at 2:00 in the morning until 6:00 in the morning maybe 7:00, I forget when we finished. Went home, showered and then I also do safety training for fishermen because a guy I know has a company that teaches fishermen how to put out fires at sea and abandon ship. And you know kind of the emergency preparedness, so he hired me to kind of fill in whenever he needs me to just because of my background in the Coast Guard and a lot of things I've had a lot of that training. So I went down to Point Judith and trained a boat for a couple hours on those elements, what to do on a man overboard and all that kind of stuff. Then back to school, then rugby. Then Friday morning was yesterday so I stayed up in Boston because we did a whole workshop up there over in Situate. Training fishermen and basically all those skills I was just talking about. We did a lot of firefighting and mayday calls and life raft survival. Those were our lobstermen up there. We probably had forty lobstermen come through that workshop. So we did that all day then I went down to Plymouth and hung out with a fisherman down there and did just catching up on a guy I worked with in the inshore fleet for a while. Catching up with him on how the season's going and whether he's got some work or he needs me to do different things so, and then came down here and started this morning to photograph the festival all weekend.

MR: Where are you going to Law school?

DO: Roger Williams University. It's over in Bristol Rhode Island. That's not a typical week and all the elements, but it's a typical week in the diversity I guess. You got to throw in a whole bunch of different things.

MR: And you really get around then too.

DO: Yeah, you travel around and stuff and that's just personally the way I like to do it. I like to have a lot of stuff going on. My mom is upset because I haven't, there are no grandkids coming yet but with time.

MR: Eh, there's time. Well if they're anything that you'd like to add that we didn't get into? I know we could probably talk for hours more. I'm looking at your cap, what does your cap say?

DO: The Rhode Island Commercial Fishing Association. That's a group out of Point Judith. Not too much I want to add. I mean yeah, we could talk forever, so.

MR: Well, thank you very much and I'm going to turn off the tape recorder.

-----End of Interview-----

Reviewed by Nicole Zador, 1/13/2025