Interview with Dick Grachek

Narrators: Dick Grachek
Interviewer: Madeleine Hall-Arber
Location: New Bedford, MA
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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
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Abstract
On September 25, 2011 Madeleine Hall-Arber interviewed Dick Grachek as part of the Working Waterfront Festival Community Documentation Project. Dick shares memories from his childhood which nurtured his attachment to the water. Despite not coming from a professional fishing family, his love for the ocean was instilled in him by his grandfather, who owned a fish store in Brooklyn, and father, who took him fishing frequently. Growing up on the south shore of Long Island, Dick was exposed to the cycles of fish and the intricacies of marine life from a young age. At the age of 12, he obtained his first commercial clamming license and started his journey in the fishing industry. His early ventures included trapping eels, potting crabs, and selling his catch in his neighborhood. While he left the coast briefly to pursue his degree, his still found time to go fishing, and found his way back to the coast after graduation. While he initially stuck to fishing in the Bay, he soon ventured into the ocean, where he experienced moments of both beauty and terror. At the age of 32, he briefly took a break from fishing and pursued a graduate degree in psychology. He worked on land as a counselor, often to fishermen, for eight years, before he found himself back in commercial fishing as the captain and owner of the F/V *Ann Katherine*. Dicks reflects on the challenges fishermen face, including regulations and growing financial insecurity.

Tech: Recording and just give me a second to exit the room, but yeah, Madeline, have a good discussion.

Madeleine Hall-Arber: Thank you.

Tech: This is the final one? Is that right?

MHA: Uh, yeah.

Tech: Ok so I'll be by and kind of wrap everything up.

Dick Grachek: Thanks. Madeleine, do I need any notes or anything?

MHA: No, you just need to sign that.

DG: Uh oh.

MHA: That's an agreement to be taped.

DG: Up here?

MHA: Yeah. Yes, please. And then if you're willing to have it used in —

DG: Depends what you ask me! [laughs]

MHA: That's fair enough. Actually, could you just write your name and telephone number is probably sufficient just so we have, know who.

DG: No, you're the narrator? No, I'm the narrator.

MHA: Yes.

DG: I'm going to put Dick because that's how everyone knows me, ok? I'm nervous about this now.

MHA: Oh, don't be. Hey, we've talked before.

DG: Oh yeah. Once I get going. I just don't want to say stupid things, you know.

MHA: Oh that's, ok. You won't.

DG: Now there was a, I don't know if you're going to ask me a continuous history or not, but there was a ten year period when I got, which is probably part of my story, when I got off the water and went and got my degrees and stuff and finished my degree.

MHA: Well let's, I will ask you about that.

DG: Yeah.

MHA: But first of all we'll just start off with your name.

DG: Ok, my name is Dick Grachek.

MHA: And you were born where and when?

DG: I was born in Queens, New York, November 11th, 1944 at 11 minutes after 11. And my mother said once we always thought that meant you'd be lucky. [laughs]. I was born in Queens, Q-Gardens Hospital in Queens, Queens, New York. I grew up in Long Island.

MHA: So did you come from a fishing family?

DG: No, my father was, and is, an accountant. However, my grandfather and my grandmother owned a fish store in Greenpoint Brooklyn, I think on Green Avenue as a matter of fact. And my grandfather, William York, had a stand in the Fulton Fish Market before that. So he, we grew up in the South Shore of Long Island and he would take me down to the bay and down to the river, the salt water river and we'd catch crabs and snapper bluefish and he taught me all about the fish. He taught me about cycles of fish and how some day the weak fish would come back and long after he died, the weak fish came back after a long absence. And they came into Great South Bay or the Flats off of Sayville and spawned there. Acres of them. Acres and acres and acres of them. And he always told me that some day they'd be back. But they were gone for years. Usually about seven years so he taught me about cycles. He said, "Some years you're going to have a lot of flounders in the Bay." He says, "Other years, you won't be able to buy one."

MHA: So did that, the disappearance of the weak fish was due to the cycles.

DG: Yeah. Yup, yup. In fact we fished them for a few years when I was, I started fishing on the Great South Bay as a kid. Got my first clamming license at, my first commercial clamming license at 12 years old. Had a clam boat, a tong boat and started, other kids had paper routes and I had a clam boat.

MHA: What inspired you?

DG: Well, I grew up on a salt water river, on the Santapaug River in West Babylon or Lyndonhurst on the south shore of Long Island in Western Suffolk County. And we lived right on the water. And what really inspired me is my father. My father, I say he was an accountant, but he would drag me around to Narragansett on the fishing boats in Narragansett. He would take me to Bay Shore, there were some fishing boats in Bay Shore, Montauk. And I remember the smell of oakum and tar and fish and diesel fuel and in those days the nets were cotton and I guess nylon after the War and stuff, but I remember all of those smells as a kid and there was just something about a commercial fishing vessel that was somehow in my blood. And I think my father was a frustrated. I have a photograph of him in Key West standing at the end of a pier with his hands in his jacket just lookin' at his backside standing at the end of the pier watching a fishing boat goin' by. And you could see the longing that was there in him. And he never, never pushed anything on me. We had plenty of boats in the family. He bought a 36 foot Liberty Launch from the navy and converted into a cruiser, into a family boat. I had a boat when I was eight years old. He built it for me and I went up and down the river in the back yard of our house. And we had several boats. So I had a lot to do with the water.

And our family outing was goin' out into the flats and treading clams and throwing seaweed at each other and my aunt I remember on day my aunt came to visit — the water's only knee deep and we were all treadin' clams on a hot summer day and my aunt came out of the water about three or four feet and she said, "Eek a mouse!" And we all almost drowned from laughter. It was a crab. But she thought it was a mouse goin' by. And crabs do scoot when they [laughs] I was afraid wouldn't have anything to say. You won't be able to shut me up now. So what got me into it was really growin' up on the water. And I started digging clams and then I, digging clams is extremely boring, and I started to, oh I started to trap eels, to pot eels and I potted crabs, I potted eels, and sold them. I'd have a little route in the neighborhood and bring clams and crabs and whatever I had you know I usually had scungilli, snails. And whatever I got out of the Bay I would sell.

MHA: In your neighborhood?

DG: In my neighborhood. I dragged a little wagon around. I was kind of the little fish boy [laughs]. So I went from clams to potting crabs and then I caught bait for many years as a youngster. Well I guess, I don't know, maybe fourteen, fifteen, sixteen years old. We'd take our little skiffs over to the flats and on the full moon in June, all the fish would spawn and we would clean up and catch a lot of silver sides, shiners, spearing for the party boats at Catheree at Robert Moses. And I'd trapped killies or mummy chugs they call 'em here, little bait fish and sold them to the captains of the party boats. I always had somethin' goin' on with the water.

MHA: How about your friends? Did they look at you and wanna mimic you?

DG: Not everybody wanted to stand out there diggin' clams in the middle of the winter, no. I had some friends that were clam diggers of course, but no, most of the other guys were into oh who knows, other things. A lot of people, well a lot of my friends when we graduated high school, they either went into the service or they worked for Grummond or Republic Aviation which was in Beth Page in Farmingdale and I, I went off to college, in Kansas of all places. However, my friend and I, in Kansas, we'd catch white bass. There was a white bass run at the Fall River Reservoir in the Cheney Reservoir, pardon the expression. [laughs] And we would catch white bass which is really kind of almost like a striped bass, it's a cousin of the striped bass. So I fished out there too actually, not commercially. But I went away to school, and largely because of the Vietnam War I stayed in school and I came out and went right, I taught school for awhile, taught high school on Long Island in Brentwood, Long Island and coached swimming, but I always had a skiff, always had a fishing boat and I would fish the seasons. I'd gillnet when the striped bass were on the beach. We could gillnet 'em in those days or weakfish or bluefish when they were on the beach, I would be out there with my skiff at least on weekends.

MHA: So then, what happened. How did you progress?

DG: Well, it's a natural progression. From digging clams, well actually, it's not a natural progression. A lot of people stayed on the Bay. Stayed baymen. Which means basically digging clams. But doing a little bit of gillnetting, doing, and in the Chesapeake they call them watermen. We called it baymen. It was essentially digging quahogs, digging hard shelled clams, either with a bullrake, what we called a Jerich Rake or with tongs, scissortype deals with baskets on them, wooden handles in a scissor configuration. And to do tonging you need a sizeable boat. We had 36 foot flat decked Garveys with sometimes diesel engines, but mostly big Chevy engines or Oldsmobile 455s and we used to have races with those. They were pretty fast and they could go up in the flats. They could go in a couple feet of water. But you were either a bayman or you started into goin' offshore. The bay fishing was wonderful. You could make a living off of it. But it, I was a little more adventurous. It was boring. And I needed to, I needed to get out in the ocean so I had a 26 foot downeast wooden boat, lobsterboat type that I gillnetted out of for years and I started offshore with that, along the beach, along Fire Island and along the [Capturee?] Beach, down by Cedar Beach and [Tow?] Bay and down towards Jones Beach on the south shore there. And that was seasonal. But then a friend of mine bought a dragger and that was, then I was hooked. We went out, we made decent money. Actually it was just a, actually there's a 45 foot Stonington dragger right here in the seaport in New Bedford and we had a 45 foot Stonington dragger, the *Fish Hawk*, and we fished out of Fire Island and didn't get rich, but it was steady money and I learned, I learned about draggin'. We had a, it was a little

boat with a 671 naturally aspirated, geeze I think it was only a hundred and fifty, a hundred and sixty horse power. But she tugged pretty good, salty little thing. They were built in New London and sometimes in Stonington Connecticut, how they got their name, little Stoney's we called 'em. And we dragged a net right onto the beach for the most part along Fire Island, down towards Ocean Beach, from Democrat Point west or east rather to, oh all the way down to Cherry Grove or the Pines down that way. And we caught fluke and that, and, but we had very antiquated equipment on that boat. Not that there wasn't better equipment around. We couldn't afford it though. We were just sort a startin' out. And we had a Loran which is a positioning gizmo from an aircraft from World War II and you would have to look into a scope and I think I can remember how to do this, you, there was two dials. One dial you had to put the two mountains together, on the, it was an oscilloscope I guess, and then the other one you had to put the two houses together and when you got those both together at the same time, you looked down at the dials and those were your numbers as to where, approximately where you are. Except if you're a little bit seasick which we always were and the boats rollin' tryin' to get those two houses together was, it was funny actually, we used to wind up laughing. And your face would be black and blue from gettin' banged into the, into the hood of the scope that you were lookin' into, but those were the old Loran, Loran As.

MHA: Approximately what year was that?

DG: That wasn't actually that was in the, let's see, Bob Dylan, I have to go by Bob Dylan's albums, that was like the album was Desire I think which is like in the early '70 that was. We used to have Bob Dylon blaring on the stereo all the time so it kind of, he's my calendar. And from there we went to bigger and better boats and in 1972, a high school friend of mine and another fellow from Babylon, we bought a 72-foot Desco, wooden Desco from Brownsville, Texas. And it had an old Caterpillar D-130000. It was a relic when we bought it. The boat was 1954 I think the engine was the same year. But we started offshore fishing with that. We went, it was in the early 70s this was. We would fish offshore out of Debs Inlet or Little Rockaway Inlet off of Long Island and we'd go to Hudson Canyon in the winter with this boat. People were astounded that we came back. The boat was in decent shape, but it was old and it was wooden and it was an old engine. But we caught ok. And we were out there with the, actually all the Russian factory ships were around then. This was before the Magnuson Stevens Act. And, with that old wooden dragger we had it was comforting to see all those ships out there. Especially in a storm. They would kinda all huddle up and we'd kind of huddle up with them. Get down wind of them. It looked like Coney Island. It looked like Times Square on the water in those days. Huge, three hundred and fifty factory ships and geeze I don't know, I don't want to tell any falsehoods here, but I think the way they work, well they actually towed a net with some of those big ones. And there was a big mother ship, but there was a lot of activity out there. They were catchin' a lot of fish. They said they were catching herring and mackerel, but we knew different. They we're catching fluke, flounder, cod, whatever they could, and a lot of lobster. Whatever

they could get. That was before the Magnuson Stevens Act and in 1976, they passed the Magnuson Stevens Act and we were still fishing and everything was fine. They actually started to capitalize the fleet because we threw the foreigners out, the government realized how antiquated our, we don't get noticed unless there is something wrong, unless there's a tragedy or the government finally realized woah, we don't have any fishing boats. Now that we've got our fishing grounds back from oh, Spain, Poland, Japan, Russia, all those countries were fishing in our backyard. We have the richest fishing grounds probably some of the richest fishing grounds in the world, right here. After the Magnuson Stevens Act a lot of money came into the, well money was made available, let me put it that way to upgrade the fleet. So people went sort of wild with the gear and the horsepower and people were fishing. We used to fish, let's see, the *Cinderella,* the first boat we had, I think she was lucky if we had 200 shaft horsepower with that tired old engine. Then the next boat we had was the *Rainbow* and that was two 671s, both naturally aspirated so what is that, it's like 400 horsepower, 450 horsepower, somethin' like that. So but all of a sudden with the new money coming into the fishery, they went way up with the horsepower, they were puttin' two thirty-foot twelves, two thirty-four o eights caterpillars and gettin' maybe a thousand shaft horsepower in some of the boats. Most of the boats you see today are vintage from that time, from the late 70s. The boat I own now, the *Ann Katherine* is 1979, 1980.

They, people geared up and they started fishin' hard. And whether that caused the decline in the fish is, I don't know. I do know that when I was fishing before the Magnuson Stevens Act I often said to myself, mostly, because nobody wanted to hear this, but I often said, you know we can't be killin' this many fish. There was a huge pile of fish and probably three quarters, at least two thirds would go back overboard 'cause there's no market. There was no market for, we couldn't keep whiting, because only the last tow you could keep whiting. We didn't have enough, we didn't have totes. We didn't have a whole lot, we didn't have, we certainly didn't have any freezing capacity and we didn't have the market to keep whiting. They turn to mush after a day or two. But we would deck load the whiting on the way in during the winter and throw ice on them and we'd get maybe a nickel for them or somethin' like that. But a lot of the species there was no market for monkfish, there wasn't a market. Maybe there was a quarter a pound, maybe or somethin' like that I think. And scup, there was a decent market for scup until of course you started catchin' a few and then it went down. There was a good market for fluke. But a lot of the fish we would throw over. We couldn't keep them. And I always said, you know, we can't be doing this. We gotta, so it wasn't, we weren't anti-regulation in the 70s and the 80s. We didn't get anti-regulation until the regulations became anti-fishing. Then we got, then we became anti, then we got militant. We got activist. Just because there was so many lies being told about what was really going on out there. Fish are abundant. Fish have always been abundant, really. And a lot of the surveying that was done doesn't, isn't worth the salt that's on the net. The whole idea that there's a direct relationship between commercial fishing and stock health is a leap. There's, it's sort of reasoning cause and effect from sequence which I remember

from logic, a logic course, is a fallacy. That because you see dead fish coming up in a fishing boat doesn't mean that only fishing boats control the mortality of fish. We know better. We know when there's bait around there's fish around. We know that when there's an easterly wind there's no fish around. When there's a good sou'westerly, the Hudson Canyon has good squid fish. So a lot of the surveys that were being done were in direct contradiction to what we were finding. We've always had a lot of fish and always caught a lot of fish. The regulations are fine. What, I don't want to get on the political bandwagon too much here, but fishermen, more than anybody, are interested in preserving the resource. I believe. Certainly not in it to get rich. I believe in the whole life. I believe in the food. I just had the best fish and chips that I've had since the last time I was here. Wonderful fresh haddock, handled beautifully and there's just nothin' like that. There's, if you believe in that, and if you believe in the whole waterfront, you wanna see things last. And like I say, if you're in this to get rich, you took a wrong turn. You can make a living, but it's not about buying your own island in the Bahamas or anything.

MHA: Can I back up and ask you how you learned once you started going offshore. How did you learn where to go, how did you know where to go?

DG: From people who knew. I knew nothing. I still know less than the people that are running my boat now. This is another fallacy that's out there. Fishermen sorta know where to look at what time of the year, but it's vague. I know there's a misconception that with all the current electronics that we have we can just go out there, drop the net and just fill up the boat anytime we want. Not so. Not so. With all the electronics that we have, it's still like looking for coyotes in the Mohave Desert with a flashlight. That's about the proportion of the bottom that we can cover with our fish finding machines. The Mohave Desert at night I should add. There's, it's a misconception that all you do is turn on your machines and with all this wonderful gear and with all this wonderful electronics we can do anything.

Technology is not king out there. Technology's part of it. Seamanship is part of it. Sobriety is another part of it. Experience is another part of it. Love of what you're doing is another part of it. Being able to take the broker trips or the trips where you lose money along with the good trips is part of it. And learning that, there's only one way to learn that is through experience. I went with people, I still can't mend webbing. I'm like all thumbs with that. I'm not good at that. I can run a boat. I can, I can do a lot of things mechanical. And I can, I used to usually find fish pretty well. But there are so many aspects to converting a pound of fish into a dollar along the way that you can't learn it in a college course and, it wouldn't hurt to have a college course. It wouldn't hurt to have the technical aspects of the gear for instance taught. But how I learned was by getting yelled at a lot. And by being called a bunch of unsavory names. I learned by doing it and by sticking with it. 27:00 And by every, a lot of trips I would come back and the minute I got on the dock I would say, that's it I quit. I'm takin' my stuff off. And a lot of times when I was out there I used to say, if I ever get back on the beach, that's it, I'm outta here. I'm

goin' to Kansas. In fact I did go to Kansas in school. And every time I would go. I would go back. I would get nervous and sick even before I got on the boat. But I kept with it for some reason. I learned and there were beautiful moments and there were terrifying moments. I've watched people go overboard with the net. We got him back actually, but I've seen people get hurt, bad and you say, constantly I used to say, what am I doin'? What am I doin? It's sorta like in a storm especially, I have a beautiful, I have a wonderful story. We were in a storm with that wooden boat, the *Cinderella*, and we were laying to, in other words, we were just drifting. We were in a storm for, what was it, four days. It felt like a month, but it was probably three or four days offshore and it was blowin' it was hurricane force winds and it was pretty ugly and grey out there, greenish grey. The sky was green-gray, the water was green-gray. We were all green - gray. We tried to stay in our bunk and we would all wind up on the focsle floor in a pile every time she'd throw us out of the bunk. But everybody was pretty despondent. The storm didn't want to give up. But I was up on the bow of the boat just kind of like, not contemplating suicide necessarily, but hanging over the bow of the boat, not sick, just sorta in a daze. And sorta feeling very depressed. And feeling like I was on some foreign planet. And all of a sudden, I'm lookin' down at the water and this big eye is looking at me. And it was a, it was a dolphin. And the dolphin looked at me and I got this very clear message in my head, "Hey, I'm a mammal. I'm out here. Relax. It's okay!" [laughs] I swear! I didn't tell anybody about it for a while. But it was a very clear message that it was okay to be out there in a place that felt very much like a hostile, foreign planet. And those were some, those were the good moments. And you learn from that. That was a lesson I learned. What it is I don't know, but I learned something from that. That it was ok to go there. And if you're well prepared and if you're careful and if everybody knows their job and if nobody panics, usually you can get through stuff. Usually, and everything goes wrong at once. I mean, it's, Murphy's Law is rampant. We used to call the god of the fishermen is the Hodge.

We used to call him the Hodge and we'd say oh the Hodge is with us this trip. He was nasty, the Hodge. He wasn't a good god, he was a bad god. And the Hodge would, one thing would go and then another thing would go and then another thing would go and before you know it the engine was overheating and the radio didn't work and the recep...you know. So we'd say, "Oh, the Hodge is on board with us this trip." And we'd try to throw him off, but he'd stay on the whole time and if you said, "Oh looks like it's going to be a nice day," somebody would say, "Shhhh, the Hodge is gonna hear you!" And the Hodge would say, "Oh, a nice day huh? Hold on boys, watch this!" So that was part of the humor that developed that we had to have. And that was a part of the lessons that I learned. But where to go, where to catch fish — I lobstered for a while too. I was, I had a lobster boat I worked on a lobster boat. Lobstermen are a little bit different than draggermen. Draggermen are for the most part they're cliquish, but each clique kinda, kinda will share and sometimes even in the same port, people will share, unless you're, unless you're a, I'm trying to keep my language above board here, unless you're a jerk, people will share, you know, which way the squid are moving or something like that. But for the most

part draggermen will even call each other to the fish. Not everybody, but usually four or five boats, like I watch ospreys fish sometimes. One flies on the Mystic River. We live in Mystic right near the river there and I watch them fly and one flies down the middle of the river, the other one flies along the bank. And they talk to each other constantly, like, you know, psew, psew, psew back and forth, back and forth. And all of a sudden one will come over to the other one. He finds fish. Sort of the way I think the draggermen work. And there's, my boat works with probably four or five or six other guys that will call each other to the fish. And somebody comes, although, sometimes you keep it to yourself for a while, but people will come over to the boat and say did you guys, "Where'd you guys find your squid this time?" And we'd say, "Oh they're movin' down towards Hudsons" or "They're out towards, the other way," or somethin'. And that feels good. And we usually fish in at least with at least two boats. So that there's always somebody near you. And we've towed people in from you know a hundred miles out and we've been towed in from a hundred miles out. You get the net in the wheel which happens in the winter and you don't want to go over.

You don't want to go overboard even in the summer although some people have. So those are the kind of lessons that you learn. You learn in your, you have a book and you know where, what fish you caught, you keep a log and you know what fish you caught where at what time of the year and what the numbers were and how many tows you made and what kind of gear you were using and stuff like that. So you learn. But things change. Every year is different. Which is what I try to tell the scientists all the time. Fish swim. And you know they might have been there last, but a fisherman, if he knows that the squid are going to be in a certain place or he things they're going to be in a certain place where they were last year, he goes there and there's nothing there, he puts a little note on his chart. He doesn't say well the fish are, the squid are gone. The squid are not gone, they're just in a different place. We had some pretty good squid fishing inshore this summer, thank God. And when the storm when Irene came, we knew that was it. You can go back after Irene, they're gone. They more on an easterly. And you just have to make note of that. You have to learn that. Which way they went is another question. Probably southwest. And start to move offshore at what time of the year and you get to learn, you get to know the fish a little bit. Squid are smart. They're not stupid fish. They're, they like deep water too. Deeper than we can fish in. So they'll go to a thousand fathom, no problem. We can't fish more than, well my boat, maybe 200 fathom. So at certain times they're gone. And it doesn't mean that there's no fish left. It means that they're someplace else which we try to tell the the surveyors but a lot of times they don't listen to that.

MHA: So how many crew members do you have?

DG: On my boat? My boat, I have an eighty foot stern rigged, used to be groundfishing, we got bumped out of the groundfishery by the catch shares. We didn't get enough allocation to make a decent trip to George's Bank. We, if we went to George's Bank for haddock, we would keep

three crew on the deck plus the captain. Most of the fishing we do now is squid, fluke, monkfish, which is two men on deck plus the captain. At times if you're fishing in crowded, crowded meaning several vessels around you, the captain has to stay in the pilot house naturally so then you might wanna take a third crew member. If you're haddock fishing you have to head, you have to gut, not head, but you have to gut fish as you go. Squid fishing is, we're pretty automated with that. We have a conveyor table and we have shoots where we pick out the fish that we don't want to go down into the fish hold and throw them overboard and the squid or whatever we're working on go down a shoot into a pen and there's somebody in the fish hold shoveling ice like a maniac. Can't get enough ice on the squid on the hot summer day especially. But that's still three people on the boat. If I could afford it, it would be four. Not the more the merrier, but you don't wanna go out without enough people for sure. You want people who can take a watch. In other words who can stand a watch in the wheelhouse. They don't have to be master mariners, they just have to know how to read radar. And how to watch engine gauges for over heating. Of course all that is alarmed. They have alarms on everything these days. But, so you wanna have at least three people who can take a watch. So when you're steaming you work four hours on, four hours off or six hours on maybe four hours on, eight hours off. However they work it out. But you need adequate people and you need seasoned people who have a sense of seamanship which means when they're not doing anything they walk around the boat looking for trouble. They look for stuff that's not right. And that can save your life sometimes.

MHA: Have you gone to the safety training?

DG: Oh yeah, yeah, yeah. And we have new requirements coming up now. I have to read up on them, but I think more often we have to do more often, safety training more often now. And every time we have an observer on the boat which is when you're groundfishing all the time, they go through all the safety gear has to be up to par. Everything has to be current. So we're, I don't hesitate spending money on safety gear, on life rafts and fire fighting equipment and you know, survival suits and what have you.

MHA: Do all your guys try on the suits?

DG: Oh sure. Oh, it's a drill. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. They, when you're nervous and when your boat is healing over, they get very sticky so you gotta kinda know how to put one on.

MHA: You were mentioning that you did leave fishing for a time?

DG: Yes. I burnt out. In the late 70s I got off the ocean. I was tired. I was a tired 32 year old and fishing will do that to you. And I got off the ocean and went in, partners with a friend of mine that I used to dig clams with, actually, Pete Annis, and we got a 36, a 35 foot Bruno and Stillman lobster boat on the north shore of Long Island out of Port Jefferson, Mount Sinai

actually. And we fished out of Mattatuck on the north fork of Long Island for a couple years setting our gear off the Shorum Nuclear Power Plant. Actually it was good fishing there because the water was warm and the lobsters liked it. Little did we know, that was before Japan blew up. So we just didn't have any qualms about doin' that. That ended in 1980. I just burnt out again and needed to get off the water. I just needed to stop and I went back to school and I always wanted to help people and so I got a degree in, I had a degree actually in philosophy, but I went back and I got a degree in counseling psychology and worked with people. I worked with rapscallions who wouldn't do well with the Fifth Avenue psychiatrist in a three piece suit. I worked actually with ship's captains and tug boat captains, my brother drives a tug boat off shore tugboat, and I worked with fishermen and downtown New York artists and like that. People I could relate to. People who could relate to me. And I helped them, oh I helped them get sober, I helped them stay out of jail and stay out of the morgue, stay out of the hospital and I still do some of that. But that lasted about eight or nine years. And I used to live in New York, right on the East River and would watch, in fact my brother, the tug boats used to go by and pull up behind their apartment house and blast the whole place with his horns which I thought was funny, but the neighbors didn't like it. But I used to watch the boats. I knew every boat. I was like that old song about the Dutchman that goes down to the ZeiterZee and knows all the captains and he waves from his wheelchair. I wasn't that bad, but I was longing for the, I was longing for the ocean, longing for the boats.

So I got a small inheritance when my mother passed away and we bought a, we bought a boat that was a Bruno and Stillman, it was a, actually a sort of converted lobster boat which was sort of easing me back towards the living in New York, easing me back towards the — my brother would pull up and we'd jump on the tug boat sometimes and tried pleasure boating for awhile, we bought a nice motor sailer actually, but I couldn't deal with, I would, it seemed ridiculous to me to start up a diesel engine and go to Block Island, turn around and come back. It didn't make sense to me. If you were going to burn fuel and go out there and risk your life [laughs] you need to catch something. So little by little I got back and I finally traded the beautiful steel motor sailor for a 46 Jarvis Newman lobster boat in the early 90s. And got back fishin' again. Didn't like lobstering, it's too much of an assembly line for me. The people would say, "Gee it must have been beautiful out there today!" I'd say, "I don't know, I didn't look up once." I was too busy at the rail, you know baitin' traps and bailin' lobsters and whatever. But then right after that I sold that boat back to the state of Maine, as a matter of fact, she's the *Challenger II* now, became a cop boat. But I had to get rid of it and she's out of, I think she's out of Portland, Maine. And I bought a small dragger. And then a little fifty footer, beautiful little boat, the *Krissy K* out of Montauk. And ran her out of Stonington for awhile and had various people run her and got a little bit old and realized I didn't want to do it anymore, but wanted to stay in it. So we bought the *Ann Katherine* in 2005, the eighty footer that we own now. And rehabbed her for a year, took us almost a year and about $200,000. But we re-habbed her and re-did all the machinery, put new gear on her and, she's fishing now. She was half groundfish and half squid

and monkfish and whiting and scup. But we got knocked out of the groundfishery by not getting enough allocation. The person who owned my boat, I bought it in 2005 and the cut off date for the qualification period was between '96 and 2006 and we didn't fish that boat in 2006 it was tied to the dock, we were rehabbing it so my history had nothing to do with the allocation that we got. And they based the allocation strictly on history. There were a couple of other things, other ways they could have done it, they could have done it by tonnage and horsepower which would have saved us and allowed us to still be a groundfishing vessel. But long story short is we didn't get enough allocation to make one trip. Going to George's and back with my boat costs, these days with the fuel prices, around four thousand dollars, maybe more, just the commute, that's not fishing for four days. Add fishing for four days, you gotta add another four or five thousand dollars. So we would have a nine, ten thousand dollar fuel bill to fish on George's Bank for four or five days and I don't have enough allocation to cover that fuel bill. So we haven't been able to groundfish which pushed us over into relying strictly on monkfish, fluke, I have a New Jersey fluke license which has some good allocations on it, so we can go fluking, scup, monkfish and we have to fill in with whiting and we fish squid. Hopefully those fish show up every year. Sometimes they don't show and sometimes they have a bad year. But that's pretty much what we do these days. And so far I'm still here. But it's been very, very difficult financially and never looked to get rich like I say, you gotta be a fool if you're tryin' to get rich from fishing. Unless you're Carlos Raphael who has done very well. But and I have no, I have no hard feelings about that. God bless him. He stands up for all of us.

So, but we wanted to, my wife and I wanted a little bit of passive income, because it's never the passive income when you own a boat. I do a lot of work fighting for the fisheries and I do a lot of work just running the business end of this one boat. And I have four families that are dependent on this. Actually five 'cause we have alternate crew members and stuff. I have actually two captains at this point. And they're all reliant on this boat makin' money. They're good at what they do. And they have families. There's about ten kids involved and they're not gonna go get a job at McDonalds if my boat goes out of business. And there's no opportunities left. There's a lot of big, a lot of packing houses in Pt. Judith where we berth, Pt. Judith, Narragansett, Rhode Island. A lot of the, a couple of the packing houses are buying up vessels so they're consolidating. One packing house for instance owns several boats now and, in fact my friend Joel Hovenasian just sold his boat to the town docks near the packing house and

MHA: But when he was still running it?

DG: Yeah they're fishing, but —

MHA: Specifically for the house?

DG: Yes. Yes.

MHA: That's squid right?

DG: They're fishing everything. Because they own a lot of licenses so they bought up a lot of licenses with the boat so they can go groundfishing and Joel is not running the boat, not running the Excalibur anymore. His mate Phil is. But, that's what's happening in the fishery. We're a little nervous about that because vertically integrated companies tend to fall over. And if they do, we lose a, we lose half the port because we'd lose half of our wholesale buying, we don't sell to that company necessarily, we sell to Handrigan's Seafood in Point Judith. But the more diversity and the more single tier small businesses, the better off we are in the fishing business especially. The more different fish that come in, the better the market is for everybody. As Paul Wellstone says, "We all do well when we all do well."

MHA: I think it also fits the ecosystem better.

DG: Oh, absolutely. Because small boats have built in restrictions. You can go so far from shore, you can't fish in a gale, you can't fish when there's too much ice. You can't break ice. So there's built in restrictions and they're restricted financially. There's no liquidity in the industry anymore which is why we're having trouble because if you don't get enough allocation, I for instance, they're closing down my credit lines for no good reason. I have good credit, but they're closing Bank of America's closing them down. 'Cause they wanna get clear up their books. And so there's no real liquidity in the industry for people to buy allocation as NOAA says we should be able to do. We don't have the buying power for that.

MHA: Are you able to lease out at least, your small allocation?

DG: Yes. I do lease it out. But it amounts to maybe, all of my allocation, comes to maybe I don't know, maybe $30,000 not even this year, I think 20 some odd thousand dollars which would be one decent trip to Georges. So that doesn't do a lot of good for me. And I hate charging other fishermen for fish that are still swimming. I sold, last year I sold fish to a kid in the Gulf of Maine, he paid me a dollar fifty for Gulf of Maine Cod, paid me a dollar fifty a pound, he only made two dollars a pound on 'em. And that doesn't count any of his overhead. So when NOAA is touting that revenues are up, they're not factoring in the fact that we have to, I just got a six thousand dollar bill from my or five thousand dollar bill actually I owed them a thousand from last year, but a five thousand dollar bill from my sector for fish that I've moved, fish that I've sold and fish that we actually caught a few groundfish in southern New England last spring. So but I owe them x amount of cents per pound for every one of those fish that I landed through the sector. We caught a handful of cod and some yellowtail. But I got a bill for almost six thousand dollars, it was fifty nine hundred dollars, somethin' like that. And they're very lenient about the payments, but thank God, but it's an extra strata of expenses and an extra

gamble because if I buy fish from somebody, I'm gambling that those fish are gonna be there when I'm gonna go, when I can go. And I'm gambling that if I pay a dollar a pound for somebody's fish, I'm gambling that I'm gonna be able to get a least two dollars a pound to make up for my overhead. We made one groundfishing trip last year and I lost two thousand dollars on it and I'm still paying for it because part of that six thousand dollars was a fee that I still owed them from when I landed some fish, plus I had to buy Joel's yellowtail for thirty five hundred dollars 'cause we went over on our yellowtail we didn't have enough yellowtail. So it's a, that whole thing isn't working. It's a mess. It's just a mess.

MHA: I imagine I'll hear more about that later on, I think you're on the panel.

DG: Yes.

MHA: Unfortunately, we're out of time for our interview.

DG: Ok. Well thank you.

----------End of Interview----------
Reviewed by Nicole Zador, 1/16/2025