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**Interview with Geno Marconi by Elizabeth Farish for the Historic New England Oral History Project, January 19, 2010.**

ELIZABETH FARISH: It is Tuesday, January 19, 2010. This is Elizabeth Farish. I'm here at the Portsmouth Port Authority with Geno Marconi. Geno, could you please state and spell your name for the record?

GENO MARCONI: My name is Geno Joseph Marconi, and that's G-E-N-O, M-A-R-C-O-N-I.

EF: Thank you, very much. So we're here to talk about commercial fishing in Portsmouth today. Can you tell me a little bit about your history with fishing? When did you begin? What your first memories are?

GM: Well, my first memories are going out on the boat with my father. My father was a commercial fisherman, primarily lobsters. In his earlier days, he did fin fish and other species, but my recollection is of fishing with him, God, since I was a little, little kid. In fact, talking to my mother, when I was born, my mother used to go out on the boat with my father when I was infant and carry me with her. So.

EF: Did she help him?

GM: She gave a lot of advice, I assume, [laughs] so...

EF: [Laughs] Did your dad—we—he was born in this country?

GM: Yes. Yes, the family came over in I want to say 2000—1911, and there were—two of the older brothers were born in Italy, Hugo and Florindo, and then the rest of the brothers and the two sisters were born here. There was William, Columbus, Geno, Joseph, and the two sisters were Mary and Rose and they were born here. And they were all fisherman, including the sisters.

EF: Including the sisters?

GM: Including the sisters. My Aunt Mary, her—her son, my cousin Vincent is—her married name was Prien, P-R-I-E-N, and Vincent Prien today is still a commercial

fisherman over at the fish pier and his mother, right up until the day she died—she died in the boat out fishing with Vincent.

EF: Ah.

GM: That's an interesting story unto itself.

EF: That's a very interesting story.

GM: Yeah, yeah.

EF: Was she—were they lobstering or were they ground fishing?

GM: No, he was gill netting.

EF: He was gill netting.

GM: Yeah, he was a gill netter. Yeah.

EF: And his mother went fishing with him or—

GM: Yeah.

EF: Rather he went fishing with her?

GM: No, she went fishing with him and, you know, she was—she was quite a bit older at that time. I don't know her exact age. I want to say she was in her seventies and she'd get up every morning and go fishing with Vinnie.

EF: Wow.

GM: So, yeah.

EF: Did she—were they fishing when she died or were they—

GM: They were on their way out and she went down below to make some coffee and when she didn't come back up, Vinnie stuck his head down the fo'c'sle and she was on the floor down below and had died.

EF: I guess she was probably where she wanted to be.

GM: Yeah. Yeah.

EF: Yeah.

GM: So.

EF: So was your grandfather a fisherman, as well, when he came here?

GM: No, actually, no. My grandfather was a farmer. They left Italy, very similar to the Irish with the potato famine. There was a drought at the turn of the century in Italy and he came over here because the vineyards had failed and when he moved

to Portsmouth, he worked as a—he worked as a gardener at a lot of the big estates around the—around the seacoast area. But his sons, you know, they lived on the waterfront and his sons all became fisherman, so...

EF: So your father was always a fisherman?

GM: Yeah. Yeah. Turn this light down a little bit.

EF: Yeah, definitely.

GM: Yes, he was always a fisherman.

EF: So you started fishing when you were a child. You just always fished. That's what you did.

GM: Yes. My—my—I mean, I had a rowboat as a kid. I don't even know how old I was and I had a—put a life jacket on and I had five traps and set them down along the wall in Prescott Park and I'd go down there and haul my lobster traps and then, you know, when I got a little bit older and I could work on the stern in my father's boat, I'd go fishing with him, but I was about eleven or twelve years old when I had my first boat that I can remember. About that time, yeah.

EF: Because you lived down on the waterfront.

GM: Yup.

EF: You lived on—?

GM: On Marcy Street.

EF: On Marcy Street.

GM: Yeah, where Strawberry Banke is now.

EF: Right.

GM: Yeah.

EF: And then when you—how old were you when you moved to—did you move to Mechanic Street?

GM: Yeah.

EF: Yeah.

GM: I want to say I was probably a sophomore in high school. However old that is.

EF: Fifteen or so. So you were—you were a young adult.

GM: Yes.

EF: You were not a child.

GM: Yeah, yeah.

EF: When you—when you moved. And you—did you continue to have a little boat all through high school?

GM: Yeah. I mean I started out with a—I started out with a rowboat and then I worked the whole summer for my father and I bought an eighteen-foot wooden boat. It was actually built up in Nova Scotia. At that the time there was a whole bunch of them in the area. There was a guy that lived down in Rye that had come from Nova Scotia, so he knew this little boat builder up there. And so all of us—I mean myself and all my cousins, we all had these eighteen foot Easterns, they called—East Porters, they called them. So I worked the summer and I bought—I bought this boat. It was a lot of money. It was like four hundred bucks, and then I worked the whole next summer to make enough money to buy a—a motor for it and then after that, I just—you know, had that for a number of years and then I want to say it was probably 1971 or '72 I bought a thirty-five-foot lobster boat. It was built by a boat builder down in Rye—down in Hampton, Harold Mace. He had built a lot of lobster boats in the area. So I had that boat and—

EF: Was it wooden, as well?

GM: Yeah, it was a wooden boat. And then I had that boat for a number of years and then when I went off—you know, when I went off shipping because I had a Merchant Mariner's license, I sold the boat to my brother, Michael, and he had it and then in 1985 my father and I together bought a forty-two-foot fiberglass boat that was—we used it for lobster fishing and for ground fishing. And then my dad died shortly—shortly afer we got the boat and I fished the boat probably until, I want to say '92, 1992. So '93. No, I had the bought for nine years, so it would have been '94 I sold the boat.

EF: What was the name of the boat?

GM: It was the *VinAnn II*, because my father's original boat was the *VinAnn*, which was named after his father and his mother, Vincent and Anna. So we named the boat the same thing, the *VinAnn II*.

- EF: Did your dad fish on that boat until he died?
- GM: We bought the boat. We took delivery of the boat. My father never went fishing in it. He died before we could go fishing.
- EF: Oh, no.
- GM: Yeah. Yeah, it was sad.
- EF: That's very sad.
- GM: Yes.
- EF: Why did you stop fishing?
- GM: Um, I saw the writing on the wall. It was—it was getting to be too tough of an industry.
- EF: Yeah.
- GM: Yeah.
- EF: And what's your position now?
- GM: I am the director of the Port Authority. So I—I started here in 1995 as a outside contractor and they hired me to manage a revolving loan fund that they—that the Port Authority had for the commercial fishing industry. They had received a federal grant. They had received a federal grant because the government had identified the—the coming crisis for the industry and so they set up this revolving loan fund to do long term, low interest loans to the fishing industry to help the industry sustain itself through the coming turmoil, financial turmoil in the industry. So I worked here for about a year setting that program up when there was a position as the operations manager became open. So I applied for it and I was hired and one of my jobs as the operations manager was to continue to manage the revolving loan fund and we still have that fund today. We still have that fund. We started out with \$810,000 to do these loans and to date I think we've given out fifty-three loans with a cash value of over two million dollars.
- EF: Wow.
- GM: It's been very successful program.
- EF: What are these loans—who' eligible for these loans and—

GM: Anybody that's actively engaged in commercial fishing and you can use these loans to buy equipment. You can't buy gear because they don't want to increase the pressure on the stocks, so you couldn't go out and buy gill nets to have more gill nets. If you could demonstrate that you lost your gill nets—say you had your gill nets stored in a building and you had a fire, we could do a loan for you to replace that. We've done a lot of electronic upgrades, you know, fish finders and radars and those types of things. We've financed a lot of boats because with the— with the regulations and the inshore closures and the rolling closures for the—the fleet in New Hampshire has primarily been a day fleet and an inshore fleet and when the rolling closures and the permanent closure in Jeffrey's Ledge came in, in order for the guys to make a living, they—they needed to go further out and stay a longer period of time. So they started buying bigger boats. So we—we financed a lot of boats for people to get out of a, you know, a thirty-five or a thirty-eight-foot day gill netter to, you know, like a forty-five-foot boat that was a larger work platform for them to work offshore. Yeah. It was a pretty—it's a great program.

We're in the process now of trying to get an infusion of some additional funds into it from a government program that is out there. We're trying to get some additional monies to—to get this going because there's been a lot of demand lately for help financing. Banks look at the fishermen and they look at them as a big risk. I mean, you read it every day in the newspaper. You know, they're going to cut back the days at sea. They're going to cut back on the quotas. You know, they want to limit the number of permits. They want to put a moratorium on issuance of permits. They're reducing—they want to—overall, they want to reduce effort and by reducing effort, you're going to—you're going to reduce the people that are working in the industry. So there's a lot of—a lot of—a lot of guys that are looking to make changes with their—with their operations and the banks just won't—banks won't finance them, you know.

One of the things that we did here that's different than a bank, and this came from my experience. When I bought my boat, of course, the first boat you

go, you always go to the Bank of DuMama, you know. Your mother. I don't know a guy in this life that started out fishing, his mother didn't co-sign the note for him. You know, my last boat I had, it wasn't secured on the value of the boat. It was secured on my property and if—if—if the government wants to come in and put the squeeze on your—on your business, you lose your home. So that's what we did different with our revolving loan fund, which made it attractive to the fisherman, was we secured the note against the equity of what we were financing. So if you bought a boat, we held the note on the boat. We didn't hold it against your property. So if the world crashed tomorrow, you know, we'd repossess the boat; we wouldn't go take your house away from you. And I thought that was an important thing and I thought that was a very, very important aspect of this finance program for the fisherman because guys wouldn't try to take an opportunity to improve their business situation, if there was—they wouldn't take a chance to make their business better, if they thought that they were going to lose their house if it failed.

EF: The stakes were just too high.

GM: Stakes were too high, especially if you've got a wife and a couple of kids and, you know, how do you make those changes? You don't. So...

EF: Is this a current—this is an ongoing program?

GM: It's—yeah. It's ongoing. It's been very successful. Like I say, we've done—fifty—fifty-two or fifty-three loans and we've only had one default.

EF: Wow.

GM: Out of all of them, yeah.

EF: And are fishermen aware that they can come to you—?

GM: Uh-hmm.

EF: And talk to you about these—

GM: Yup.

EF: These possibilities.

GM: Yup, and we've done a lot. We've done—we've done a lot of financing with both of the co-ops. The Yankee Co-op down in Seabrook, they still come to the well

every once in awhile. In fact, I think we still have a couple of ongoing notes with them. The Portsmouth Fishermen's Co-op, we had done a lot with them. A lot of the fishermen, you know, and it's not just the fishermen. It's businesses that are directly connected to the fishermen. So there's a—it's a—it's a good program.

EF: Businesses like fish stores, like Old Mill?

GM: Well, like the co-op.

EF: Oh, like the co-op.

GM: Yeah.

EF: And I know that you were very instrumental in—in establishing the Co-op, building it.

GM: Well, the co-op themselves, they—they organized themselves.

EF: Fishermen?

GM: Yeah. My—my involvement was more in the physical structure of the pier itself.

EF: Right.

GM: It—it all started back in like 1975 when—I mean I was fortunate. My family owned their own property and we had our down docks, but there were a couple of draggers—there were one, two, three, three, or four draggers that were working out of Portsmouth and they were tired up over on the wall at Prescott Park, and then all of a sudden one day somebody decided they didn't want them tying up over there anymore, so they were getting evicted. So a bunch of us got together and we went to the legislature and asked for some funding to build a facility. It was interesting, because to build a facility specifically for the commercial fishermen in Portsmouth and as soon as the facility was built, it became a regional facility. I got to blow my nose.

EF: Sure.

GM: The hot air heat is tough on the allergies.

EF: I know. It's tough on everything, isn't it?

GM: I keep—I keep a humidifier at home going all the time.

EF: Good idea.

GM: But anyway, we—you know, when we built that facility, we went to the legislature and at the time, there was a commissioner at the Department of Resources and Economic Development [D.R.E.A.D.] who really recognized the importance of the—of the commercial fishing industry. You know, back in the '60s there was a facility built down in Hampton. In the later '60s, there was a facility built down in Rye and there was nothing in Portsmouth, and Portsmouth was actually where some of the bigger boats were. So went out and got some funding from the state and they constructed—began to construct the Portsmouth Fish Pier, which the original part of it was where the parking lot is and then the pier itself was only about half as long as it is today, and there were no buildings on it. And then in 1977 or '78, because once the facility was built and it attracted all of these boats, the Commissioner of D.R.E.A.D. went and got some additional funding. I think he got a grant from the Economic Development Administration in Washington and that's what—what you have today. The length of the pier, they did some dredging and they put up the original buildings there, and then in 1979 the state went out to bid to try to find a concession operator to sell lobster bait, ice, and fuel there and there were a number of bids that came in, but they were like all over the place. So the governor at the time told the commissioner that he wanted his department to—to run it for a year so that they would have a set of books that they could look at and compare to what—what the bid proposals were.

Prior to that, when the pier was being built, the commissioner had an advisory group made up of commercial fisherman and I was one—I was on it, and—

EF: Because you're still fishing at this time.

GM: I was still fishing, yeah. I was—I had my thirty-five-foot lobster boat and I was still fishing and—so the commissioner got a bunch of us together. There was myself, Mike Flanagan, Raymond Levesque, Harrison Workman, somebody out of the commissioner's office, Ken Lang. My Uncle Columbus was on it, and anyways, we used to have these meetings where we sat down and said, "Well, okay." We were advising the commissioner on what kind of rules should be on

how the fish pier should be, you know, set up. So anyways, fast forward now to 1979 when the commissioner was supposed to have his department run it for a year. The commissioner said to me, he said, "Well, you've been pretty vocal on how this place should be run." He says, "Basically, put or shut up." He says, "I want you to go in there and run it for me for a year," and you know, I couldn't—I couldn't say no. So I hauled my boat out for a year and hauled my traps out and I went over there to run the Pier for a year and I wound up running it for three years.

During that three-year period, because business over there just grew—[blows nose]—you know, up until that facility was built, the only other place boats could go unload was the Kittery Town Dock, and only one boat at a time could unload. It was very, very limited over there in what they could do. I mean, just unbelievably limited and back in the '70s, you know, that was when the pollock fishery was just going great guns, you know. I mean, you know, everybody was doing eighteen, nineteen thousand pounds of pollock a day.

EF: Wow.

GM: You know, and you had six, seven, eight boats backed up over there trying to unload, by the time they finished unloading it was ten o'clock at night and they're going back out fishing, you know, early in the morning. So when this pier was constructed, all these boats started coming over and unloading at the Portsmouth Fish Pier. At the time, there was only one company handling the fish and a lot of the guys were concerned that they weren't getting the best deal that they thought they could get. So that's when they got together and organized the co-op and I will say that the person who really kind of jumpstarted it was—was the commissioner, Gus Gilman, and it had the backing of the governor then and it was Governor Hugh Gallon and the commission and Hugh Gallon knew someone that had—was an experienced businessman who actually came from over in Nashua area, and he came over and he helped them organize and get a business plan together and the co-op was formed, the original—there were original twelve or fifteen stockholders in the co-op that put money up front. They bought a truck and

everything they were doing was done outside because the building over there wasn't big enough. There was only one—one building. It had one small office in it and had a refrigerated cooler that was used for lobster bait. So in—around 1981 the commissioner advertised for bids for a concessionaire to operate the fuel and bait. The natural progression was that the co-op got that contract. [Coughs.] With that contract, the co-op secured some financing—no, excuse me. With that contract, the state made a capital investment and expanded the facility to almost its current size now building. It gave the co-op an office area and a work area where they could bring the fish in and get it out of the weather and the deal with the co-op was, is the state would build it and pay for it and the co-op's rent would be the bond interest—principal and interest on the bond payments. And then as the co-op progressed, they made additional capital improvements to the building with ice machines and an additional refrigerated building. So it's been a pretty good symbiotic relationship between the state and the co-op where, you know, property got improved and that was the—that was paid for by the co-op through their rent.

EF: How did the co-op make money? Through the sale of ice and fuel and—?

GM: Ah, the sale of ice and fuel. In the beginning they did sell lobster bait, but that, like all businesses, there's changes, shifts in commodities. And basically the co-op was a trucking company and a brokerage. They brokered the fish and they trucked the fish, so they got—they made money by charging handling costs. So when the co-op got the contract in 1982, I resigned my position and basically my position went away because there wasn't any need for it, and I took my merchant license and went to Alaska for five years. So. But the co-op—the co-op really made a significant impact on the advancement of the commercial industry in the area. They really did.

EF: So when you were there, from say '79 to '82, you organized the sale of the fuel and ice?

GM: Right.

EF: And things like that?

GM: Right. We handled—and it's—it's—it's—it's—actually, it's gone full circle because we're doing it exactly the same way then—today as we were doing it then. The state has always been responsible for the overall management of the facility, all of the docking and birthing permits and pier use permits. All of the businesses that operate over there have to do with permission of the state.

EF: And it's always been that way? It was never—

GM: Always been that way. It was originally under the Department of Resources and Economic Development, and then back in 2002 the legislature took those facilities away from the Parks Department, Parks Department, and put them over under us. And then in—phew, God. When was it? Probably would have been 2007 or 2008 when the co-op dissolved, we took over the complete management of the fuel and ice sales over there.

EF: So again, you're managing the ice and fuel.

GM: Gone full circle, back again yes.

EF: So the co-op is no longer in operation by—?

GM: No longer in existence.

EF: No longer in existence.

GM: To the best my—right, they've dissolved.

EF: So the building that exists there now where there's still some offices.

GM: Right.

EF: There's still some refrigeration where fisherman still take out.

GM: Yes, what we've done is is we went out, we advertised requests for proposals—and I've done it twice—and again I say that the reason is is that the bad publicity the industry has gotten and the uncertainty of the future of the industry regulatory wise was very prohibitive of us getting any competent, reasonable, proposals from anyone to go over there and lease that building from us to set up a business over there. What we were looking for when we sent out our request for proposals, we were looking for a company to come in—company or companies to come that would provide support services to the commercial fishing industry through the handling and trucking of—of fin fish, lobsters, and we were also looking for some

support for the lobster fishing industry for someone to retail sale of lobster bait. And I firmly believe that because of the unknowns in the industry today, bad publicity and—and the—the unknown factors of what's going to happen regulatory wise, we never got any solid bids.

So we took a little different road of approach here. We did not want the fishermen not to be able to move their product across the dock. Again, separating the two issues at hand, the first issue is is having a physical facility, maintaining that physical facility adequately so that these boats had a place to dock, they had a place to do their work. On the other side was what could we do to facilitate the businesses or the businesses growth through the handling of their products, the harvested seafoods and providing support services to them.

Well, the basic support services were easy. There's a fuel system over there. There's a twenty-four-hour credit card swipe, you know. Anybody can get fuel twenty-four hours a day. We still provide the sale of ice to the fisherman for—not only for on the boats, but also for transporting their fish to market. But the third piece was, you know, how do we enhance their—their ability to handle their fish?

There are a couple of companies in the local area that on a small scale were trucking fish. One of them was a fisherman himself and the name of his company was the Heidi Elizabeth Fishery. He owned a gill netter. He bought a truck and he'd come over there, unload, but he wanted to be able to put his fish inside the building until the next morning when they'd go to market. So we rented him cooler space, you know, at a monthly rate. Then he had a couple other fishermen come to him and say, "Gee, can I throw my fish on your truck?" So next thing you know, we had three fishermen going through the building with Heidi Elizabeth's truck going to the market.

Then there was a lot of interest from some other boats, so the local seafood market in town here, Seaport Fish, they approached us because they had a couple of other guys that they had been doing business with that wanted to be able to have Seaport take their fish, you know, to the auction or wherever, or another

outlet. So Richie Pettigrew, who owns Seaport Fish, started trucking one boat. Then he started trucking two boats. Then he started trucking three boats and then him and—you know, Seaport Fish and Heidi Elizabeth Fisheries started handling multiple boats that were going to separate markets. Richie would send his truck one way; Heidi Elizabeth would send his truck the other direction. So the next thing we know, we saw, you know, some of the boats that had gone to Gloucester starting to come back because they had the ability to get their fish to market and yet be back—you know, back home, so to speak.

It's—it's worked pretty well. I would still like to have Richie or Richie and Jamie, the owner of the other company, you know, rent a portion of the building outright from me on a one year basis or whatever. What I tried to do is give them a year, give them a year and a half to get their feet underneath them, to get an idea of what the business complexion was like so that they could make an intelligent decision and make an intelligent proposal. So probably after the shrimp season is over with, we'll probably sit to the table and see if we can't work something out.

EF: Does Jamie or Rich currently pay the fishermen whose catch their putting on their vehicles to transport?

GM: It's—

EF: Or does the—?

GM: It's the other way around. The fishermen pay them a transportation fee to take it. Now, Richie's fish market buys some of the product. Like some of the shrimp, some of the ground fish, he'll buy it and use it in the local retail market that he has in town here. However, the fish that he trucks to Boston or he trucks to Gloucester, they pay him a transportation fee and a handling fee to do it.

EF: How do they get paid by the—the market in Boston?

GM: Um, the auction down there cuts a check directly to the—

EF: To the fishermen.

GM: To the fishermen.

EF: Not to them.

GM: Right, right.

EF: So it's not like Jamie or Rich are buying the fish.

GM: No.

EF: They're merely giving it a ride.

GM: Right. Right, handling and giving it a ride.

EF: So that's—that's new, isn't it. So that—?

GM: It's a similar concept except in the old days the co-op, what they were doing is they were the clearing house for the checks and what they were doing was commingling the fish from multiple fishermen and the checks would be cut to the co-op. The co-op would settle up with each of the fishermen, fishermen individually and take out their—take out their—their fees, and then write a check. This is a little bit different. Same principal. So, it seems to be working. I mean we've got a lot of activity over at the pier that, you know, five years ago wasn't there.

EF: So even though the co-op is not—is defunct for all intents and purposes, it's still an active pier and that's where most Portsmouth fishermen fish out of.

GM: Right, and it's—it's a—it's a regional facility, too, because—it's interesting because I just did a—part of my traveling road show, I gave a—I was asked to give a presentation to the York County Economic Development Commission and when I was talking to the—to the people, you know, heading it up, I couldn't quite—I couldn't quite figure out, you know—you know, this is New Hampshire. That's Maine and so I said, "Let me think about it." So then I started to look at it a little bit more and I realized that—I started with looking at the fish pier and then I started looking at all of our other operations and I realized that we really, truly have a regional economic impact. Just talking about the fish pier alone, when I started looking at it and I looked at the boats that were over there, there were a lot of people from—from Maine, that utilize that facility. It's not just, you know, go back to 1975. It's not just the Portsmouth commercial pier for the Portsmouth commercial fishermen. It's—it's the State of New Hampshire's commercial fish pier at Portsmouth, New Hampshire, and because of our close proximity with Maine, it really is a regional facility. It really, really is. I would say that

probably—I'd say sixty percent of the fin fishing boats that operate out of there, the owners are from Maine and the business—the economic base of the business is from Maine, although the physical boat, you know, utilizes the pier.

EF: Like the owner of the *Heidi Elizabeth*.

GM: Right, the owner of the *Heidi Elizabeth*. He keeps the boat over in Maine. He lives in Maine, but the dock is essential to him, you know, for his operation and there are a number of boats that—that berth there that are from Maine. You know, Dennis Robillard and his boat. The boat stays there. He lives in Maine. The boat's registered in Maine, but he needs that. Jordie King, Jerry Davis.

EF: Craig Mavrikas.

GM: Yeah, Craig. Craig's boat is there and he lives in Maine. My cousin Vincent Prien lives in New Hampshire, keeps his boat in Maine, but he offloads his fish at the fish pier. So it's a—it's a real potpourri mixture of utilizations there.

EF: So the Piscataqua River is a very blurry line when it comes to this—?

GM: Yes, the government's the only one that wants to draw that yellow line down the center of the river, unfortunately, so...

EF: [Laughs] I just want to clarify real quickly.

GM: Yeah.

EF: When you say sunfish, is that a ground fish? Is that any ground fish?

GM: Fin fish.

EF: Fin fish.

GM: Fin.

EF: Fin.

GM: Fin fish, could be any—you know, anything with a fin.

EF: Fair enough, yeah. [Laughs.] So the industry at stands today, has it been a rapid decline? Obviously, you saw the writing on the wall a very long time ago at this point. Going on fifteen years you haven't been fishing. Do you see the professional world of these fishermen getting better? I know it's all an unknown, but—?

GM: Well, I think—

EF: I mean, how many boats even work out of Portsmouth anymore?

GM: Oh, I can tell you but I don't have it—I don't have it in front of me.

EF: But it's a much smaller number than ten years ago?

GM: Um, I'd say it's probably—it's probably a greater number than it was five to ten years ago. A lot of boats left. A lot of boats left Portsmouth back then and they're starting to come back.

EF: Hmm.

GM: I think the industry itself here, there's two things that are—two things that are happening that—that—one thing I can say is not good and that is that we're not really seeing a lot of young guys coming into the industry because they don't have the ability to make a living like you used to before. The guys that are surviving today are the guys that had been in it, had made a living and a lot of those guys have boats that probably don't have some horrendous mortgage on them. You know, for somebody to go out and—and get a big mortgage on a boat, although today the price of boats is down because, you know, there's a—there's a lot of boats on the market, so the price of the boat is down. The mortgage rates are down, so there's some sort of an enticement but still, on the other side, the unknowns of what the regulators are going to do. I mean, you know, talking to the lobster fishermen now, the feds are going to cut the herring quotas, you know, starting this spring and that's going to have a—they say, well, the economic impact of cutting the herring quotas—you know, we've got—for example, we've got ten herring midwater trawlers that are working, you know, in—in Sector Two and if we cut the quota, we may lose, you know, two of those boats that are operating in Sector Two and so we feel that that's a minimal economic impact. But what they're not taking into consideration is the—the unintended consequences of this with the other industries that depend on that herring fishery, like the lobster fishermen. If they cut the quota and there's no herring being landed, or the volume of herring that's being landed, the lobster fishermen can't get the bait that they need for them. So all of a sudden supply and demand, the price of bait's going to go up. It's going to be in short supply and they're trying to

do all of this on a three-dollar lobster, and the economics of it doesn't work. So—so the unknowns in the industry, there's so much to it that I think—I think not having people come in and be able to make a living, you know, us old timers are going to die off eventually, so...

EF: What do you attribute having more boats at the co-op—or working in Portsmouth, I should say, now rather than ten years ago. Are things looking up?

GM: I think—I think that—I think as haphazard as it looks from the outside, I think the services that they're getting over at the fish pier have improved and I think knowing that they can—they can buy their fuel there, still get their ice there and there's an outlet for their—for their catch, I think has made it attractive for them to commute their business out of Gloucester and back up this way. I think that's—I would attribute it to that, and I think the service that—that Richie Pettigrew is giving is probably one of the biggest factors. Richie is really, really good about providing service to the fishermen and handling their fish different hours, different schedules, night time, early morning, whatever is necessary to—to provide that service. I think that's a big factor in why we're seeing more activity at the pier. It probably has to be the one single factor is the service that he's providing, so...

EF: What do you think about the sector approach to regulating the fishery?

GM: I think it's probably a good approach to it. The way they're going at it stinks. I think the sector approach is probably not a bad idea. I just think that—I think the way they're going about it is wrong and I think it's going to be—I think it's going to have a deleterious affect versus having a positive effect.

EF: And is it sort of the way that fishermen are being treated? I heard someone say yesterday, "I'm just so sick of being treated like a criminal."

GM: Yes. Oh, there's no question about it. There's no question about that whatsoever. Of course, you know, I—it's interesting because I was looking at this the other day. In the State of New Hampshire, the Fish and Game Department has a Marine Fisheries Advisory Committee and it's interesting because I was looking at it. I've been on—I've been on the committee for over twenty years and when all of this

started to come up, I just—I sat back and I looked at it and I said, “Boy, this regulatory scheme is creating this, you know, multi-headed monster with tentacles, slimy tentacles on your shoulder,” and I can still remember at one of the meetings I said, “You know, what are we doing here?” I said, “You know, when I grew up, it was you went fishing. The harder you worked, the more you were rewarded for your hard work, yet today we’re telling people in this day and age no, you can’t work hard,” and what’s wrong with this picture. You know, when we look at back then the statistics were eighty percent of the fish being landed were being caught by twenty percent of the fleet, especially going back and looking, you know, we have a small boat fleet here and the regulations seem to favor the large boat fleet. And you look at the large boat fleet that are owned by corporations and I made the suggestion that what we should do is, it should be an owner-operator permit. You make a commitment to be a commercial fisherman and you own the boat and you’re the one that’s going out steering that boat, and you’re the one going out there on a day-to-day basis, you make that commitment to do that, then you should be able to go out there, work as hard as you want and catch what you—as much as you want, within reason. Within a certain reason, but still, you know, with the regulations as they are today are stifling that free enterprise aspect of the individual. The individual’s rights, and I think it’s wrong, and I got criticized very heavily for making that suggestion. You know, if you go out onto the west coast, you know, the Pacific—when I worked out in Alaska, the Pacific Northwest Whiting Fleet out there, which is all the white fish you see like in the McDonald’s fish sandwiches and fish sticks here and fish sticks there. The Pacific Northwest Whiting Fleet is owned probably ninety percent by Tyson Chicken and when the Pacific Northwest Regional Management Council came up with a whiting management plan, it was the first and only time that the Secretary of Commerce stuck his fingers in and overruled a management plan by a regional management council and that was Ron Brown was the Secretary of Commerce. He was appointed by Bill Clinton who we know is from Arkansas and where’s Tyson Chicken from? Arkansas. That’s the stuff that politically and

philosophically drives me absolutely crazy because here the regulations are being favored towards the big boat fleet that has corporate ties, whether it's a big corporation like Tyson Chicken or it's a corporation with someone sitting home in her office in Portland, Maine, some place who has three or four boats that are, you know, just catching a lot of fish and it trickles down to all of a sudden you've got a guy at the Portsmouth Fish Pier who's told he can only catch four hundred pounds of a fish a day. And, "Oh, by the way, in May and June, April, May, and June, you have to go thirty-six miles out to sea to catch those four hundred pounds of fish."

EF: So if regulations continue the way they are now, you see it becoming—the fishery becoming a corporate endeavor rather than a place where an individual man or boat can go out and make a—?

GM: Yeah.

EF: Honest living.

GM: You know, growing up, like down here you get down because if you look at the coastline, it starts up in Portland, it curves in towards New Hampshire and then curves back out, and down south of the Azure Sholes between here and Cape Anne is what's known as Ipswich Bay and I can remember the old timers telling me as a kid, "If you leave the bay alone at night time, you can fish down here for codfish right up until fourth of July." When—when they closed down the George's Bank to—to ground fishing a few—a number of years ago back in I want to say—back in the late '80s, 1990, and they displaced all of these big boats, where did those big boats come? They left Gloucester and they came up here and they were pounding the bay at night time. And so, you know, we were forced to go down there to try catch our share of the fish and I can remember going down there and, you know, doing a two-and-a-half-hour tow and hauling back at eleven o'clock at night and, you know, having thirty-five hundred, four thousand pounds of jumbo cod and what's inside the codfish, but all the eggs that they were out, you know, laying. So, you know, again, you know the regulations—

EF: They're forcing the same amount of people to—to sort of fight each other for the smaller piece of the pie?

GM: Yeah and, you know, those big boats that were traditionally fishing offshore coming in there and grinding twenty-four hours a day, four or five days at a time, the stock can't take that kind of pressure. I mean fortunately now we don't see it like we used to because there is that closure, but that closure hammered the local fleet. So, I mean this is something that's been going on since the '70s and it's just—it's—it's a—all I can think of is it's like going in and opening up the top of your washing machine when it's washing and everything's going like this, you know. It's a—it's a—it's a—I don't know what the solution is. Probably the solution is to get the government out of it.

EF: [Laughs] What do you think about the environmentalist movement's impact on—on the fishery and also the public's perception of—of the fishery?

GM: I think there's probably another root problem that goes back to the '70s and that is the conflict between the industry and the science. The science saw it this way. We cut down to the bare minimum, the harvesting of the fish or the species to maximize the potential for comeback and this is how we're going to do it, and they didn't take into consideration the socioeconomic impacts of those decisions. There was no balance between what were perceived—perceived, I'll strongly emphasize that word. What were perceived as the economic—I mean the environmental impacts of the fishery versus the need to have an industry that sustained itself. I think that conflict still goes on today. I mean, I know guys that tell me that they feel that the codfish have rebounded better than they ever did, yet they continue to allow them not to—not to harvest them or they put restrictions on them and allow them not to harvest them, so...

EF: What do you think the most important thing current today fishermen, for people who are fishing today, can do to protect their—their jobs, their employment, their livelihood? Do you think it's important for—for fishermen as a whole to come up with a way to communicate with the media and therefore their community in a

way that the environmentalists have been doing for years, to sort of—to sort of educate people about the realities of fishing in 2010?

GM: Yes, I think—I think that's an important aspect of it. Let's back the train up, though, you know. Back in—back in the '70s, you know, fishermen were very independent, very—fishermen were very—very—what's the word I want to say? Very—they were independent but they were independent and kept to themselves. There was not a lot of group—there was not a lot of group cohesion in the industry between individuals. Everybody was a separate entity and it wasn't until the industry—the individuals in the industry recognized the onslaught that they were facing and realized that they couldn't do this alone, that we started getting organizations like the New Hampshire Commercial Fishermen's Association, organizations like the Portsmouth Fishermen's Co-op or Yankee Co-operative that they founded. You know, guys that today that, you know, thirty years ago were fighting with each other. I mean physically fighting with each other are now sitting at the same table with each other because they have a common goal and a common need and a common enemy, so-to-speak. And I see that because there's a lot of guys I deal with on a day-to-day basis at the fish pier that thirty years ago we hated each other, but because of the need to survive, these alliances were made. And I think that's probably the biggest thing that they've got going today is—are those alliances. However, this is—this is where our industry locally here is struggling is because you take the corporate fishing culture, you've got the person in the office behind, that's ashore seven days a week, three hundred and sixty-five days a year and they have the ability to push, push, push, push, push, push for what they want. These guys here are making, they're working, they're hands-on and—and the time that they put into their version of the push, push, push to achieve what they want with the regulators and with the government, there's a gross inequity there in—in time and input because of the disparity between the corporate—the corporate culture and the independent business owner. I just think that—that that's a big problem. I think these guys are doing a great job.

That's why in my position here I've—I've done what I can to be an advocate. You know, if you take my job—my specific job and what statutory charge is, it specifically says in state law that I'm to provide facilities or to foster and promote the commercial saltwater fishers in New Hampshire. So I look at my primary job as maintaining and improving these facilities where these guys can work. As a side note, where I can be involved in regulations or whatever that affect the industry, then I have the ability to do that, too. That's part of my job. It's not one hundred percent of what my job is, but I think—I think the first step that we can contribute here in this office is to make sure that we provide these facilities and it's tough sometimes. It's tough for me to go up to the legislature and ask for money to support an industry that again, like going to the bank and talking to bank and, "Well, I read in the *Boston Globe*," or "I read in the *Wall Street Journal* that, you know, these regulations are going to come in and that the industry is in this and that," and you know, I go up there and I have to be very convincing in order to bring back down here what I—what I can for these—this industry and it's a tough—it's—you can't turn your back for one second on it.

But I think—I think probably these guys—these guys here are doing a good job. They're doing the best they can. They've got some good spokesmen that are out front for them, however, I still believe that it's the time and effort on the scale between the big boat fleet and the small boat fleet over here and then, you know, you put the regulators in there and the scales are tipping away from the small boat fleet.

EF: Do you think that the industry will survive?

GM: Yes. I think fishermen are unique amongst themselves. You get them into a corner and they'll—they'll scratch, claw, and fight and do whatever's necessary to adapt and—and make changes in what they do. I mean, stop and look at it. You know, years ago you were either a lobster fisherman or you were a gill netter or a dragger. You look at these boats over here now, I mean, you know—I know of this one boat over here that when a certain fishery is at its peak, they're gill netting. When the gill netting, you know, starts to wane and yet the dragging part

of the industry, you know, starts to pick up, they—they make those adjustments. There are guys that go lobster fishing during a period of time when lobstering is good. When lobstering drops off, they take their gear out of the water, put it in their backyard and they put some scallop gear on the boat and, you know, there's a couple of guys like that. There's one guy over at the fish pier again, lives in Maine, keeps his boat here, but when he's scallop fishing, he'll go down off of Block Island. He'll fish out of Point Judith, Rhode Island, and then when—you know, if lobsters start to pick up up here, just happens to coincide pretty closely with the closures on the scallop, he'll come up, make that transition. So—and you never saw that thirty years ago, you know. It was either one or the other.

EF: So fishermen are really diversifying what they fish for.

GM: Yup.

EF: To try to like patch together what they used to be able to make in one fishery.

GM: Right. Right. Right. Yeah.

EF: Do you think your father and your uncles and your brothers would recognize the working waterfront today from when they were working on it?

GM: We don't have much of a working waterfront anymore. You know, like I say, Prescott Park, you know, there were three or four draggers over there. There was Jinxie and Frank Stewart and Ray Levesque and God—getting old, I can't remember everybody. But I mean those were the last three holdouts over at Prescott Park and, you know, they got bounced. So, you know, growing up there were fishing boats everywhere. You know, down—you go down—you go down on Mechanic Street where Pickering Marine is, that little construction company, that was Portsmouth Fish and Lobster Company was there and they sold lobster bait there and there were—there were fishing boats built there in that yard, you know. There were a couple of boat builders there. Squarehead Peterson and—God, I can't remember his name now. The other guy there, Arthur Finnegan. They built boats there. Where Taylor Lobster is, you know, next to Pierce Island Bridge, there's limited activity there now but, you know, when the LaCava family

operated that, there were a number of lobster boats that were in there, in and out of there.

Growing up over in Prescott Park there where the flower garden is, right by the Pierce Island Bridge, there were times in the summertime when the Gloucester Pogy boats when they were fishing up this way used to come in and tie up there to that—up against that wall. You know, so there was a lot more activity fishing-wise up and down the waterfront than we have today. It's consolidated, but it's consolidated all in one spot now. So, you know, the working waterfront where it was dispersed now is all concentrated pretty much right there on that one spot.

EF: At the co-op?

GM: Yeah.

EF: What was LaCava's?

GM: Dan LaCava! Came over to this country about the same time my grandparents did and he—they opened up a little lobster pound right there. When you go over the Pierce Island Bridge, fish pier is on the left. If you look on the right, you'll see that dock there. They lived in the house there and they bought and sold lobsters and sold lobster bait and that was the old man, Dan, and the son, Sam, who just died a few years ago. He ran the business there. Now this Taylor is actually the great grandson of Dan LaCava. Dan. It was Dan. The business went to Sammy. Sammy's daughter married Stevie Taylor and this is Stevie Taylor's son. So this is Dan LaCava's great grandson.

EF: Wow, and they have the retail outlet on 236 there in Kittery? Taylor Lobster?

GM: I think so, yeah. He also owns that restaurant down on Route 1 in Northampton, Al's Seafood.

EF: Oh, yeah.

GM: Yeah, he just bought that last year.

EF: Oh.

GM: Yeah. Yeah. So, I mean—so there. There's, you know—it's interesting because, I don't know, three, four, five years ago they hired an executive assistant over in

PDS, a woman. Her name was Liz, Liz English. So she been there a while and we got talking and she says to me, “Oh, I was over my boyfriend’s grandfather’s house the other night and we were talking and you know, I just go this job at PDS.” And she says, “Yeah,” and you know, and she says, “I do a lot of work with the people down at the port.” She says, “You know, I work with that guy Geno Marconi,” and she says, “You know, my boyfriend’s grandfather looked at me and he says, ‘Oh, you work with Gee-Gee?’” And I looked at her and said, “Who’s your boyfriend?” Her boyfriend’s Dan LaCava. So her boyfriend is one of the other grandson’s of Dan.

EF: Oh, wow.

GM: And he married Liz. Her name is Liz LaCava now, so I—I work with Liz. So, you know, my—my grandparents and my father knew Dan and Sam and so, you know—

EF: They were neighbors.

GM: Yeah.

EF: Just there.

GM: Yeah. Oh, yeah, we were close neighbors.

EF: So what happens at LaCava’s now?

GM: They buy lobsters, store lobsters there, and sell lobster bait.

EF: They still operate?

GM: Uh-hmm. Yeah. There’s no—I don’t think they—they don’t do any retail sales there. They do their retail either in Northampton or over on 236.

EF: 236, and that—that white house with the chain link fence, is that the LaCava’s house? The one that sits more up on Mechanic Street, you know, like the pier obviously goes out more towards the water, and the building that says LaCava’s is—?

GM: Yeah, there’s that—

EF: Off the road a bit.

GM: Looks like an apartment house.

EF: Yeah.

- GM: Yeah, they own that and then a number of years later the grandmother, Gracie—I can still remember Grace, they bought the house across the street. So if you're standing in LaCava's parking and you're looking at Mechanic Street, across the street there's a red house.
- EF: Yup.
- GM: And then there's a yellow house.
- EF: Yeah.
- GM: The LaCava's, the old man and—and big—no. The grandfather, Dan, and his wife, Grace, lived in that house.
- EF: In the yellow house?
- GM: In the yellow house.
- EF: Oh, wow.
- GM: Yeah. Somebody—somebody bought it a number of years ago and restored it. Did a good job restoring it back to like—it was a pretty old house.
- EF: Yeah, eighteenth-century house.
- GM: Yeah. Yeah. It was interesting, the waterfront, growing up down there.
- EF: I bet. There's a lot of nineteenth-century houses down there.
- GM: Yeah.
- EF: Yeah. So maybe your grandfather would recognize a few things like LaCava's.
- GM: Yeah.
- EF: That might be it.
- GM: Yeah. Yeah, I mean the whole, you know, Prescott Park and Strawberry Banke and urban renewal and eminent domain displaced a lot of families.
- EF: Did it change—so when Strawberry Banke was created and your family moved and urban renewal was taking place in Portsmouth, did that change the life of many fishermen?
- GM: [Blows nose.]
- EF: Do you think that people went out of the industry because they were no longer living near the water? Like not everyone stayed on the water there, I assume.

GM: No, because it was interesting because where Strawberry Banke is—it's interesting because that was the Jewish neighborhood. The Italian neighborhood was up here where the—where the Sheridan is. That was the—we were the only gentiles in that neighborhood. Our next door neighbors were the Cohens, the Ziedmans, the Izzlebeckers, and, you know, at Passover we were the strangers. We went from house to house, knock on the door, they open up the door, you go in, they'd say their prayers, we'd have a little something to eat with them. They'd say their prayers. We'd leave. We'd go to the next house, knock on the door. Part of the Passover ritual is they brought, you know, a stranger into their house.

EF: Strangers in. So they invited you and your family to come?

GM: Well, we participated in their religious activities.

EF: Wow.

GM: Yeah. And there weren't a lot of fishermen that lived right in that neighborhood, no. No, there weren't. There weren't. The fishermen pretty much back in those days in the late '50s and early '60s were pretty much, you know, you either owned your own place or you came and gone—came and went off of a—a public way. But of course the fleet was much different then. It was a smaller fleet, size-wise because you didn't have to go too far to catch a fish. You know, you didn't have to go out to Jeffrey's Ledge or the other side of Jeffrey's Ledge, you know. You could go down there outside the harbor, the other side of the lighthouse out there and put a fishing line over and catch a haddock right, you know, within two miles of the shore.

EF: And that would not happen today?

GM: No, no. No. So, you know, the—the—the industry has changed, the physical part of the industry has changed.

EF: The boats are bigger?

GM: Yeah, we technologies ourselves right—right into oblivion.

EF: Right out of business.

GM: Yeah, yeah. Yeah.

EF: Well, maybe we can technology ourself back into business.

GM: Owner-operator permits.

EF: Yeah.

GM: I mean, look at Stevie. I mean, granted you can't be in the boat a hundred percent of the time. I think there has to be an equation in there where, you know, I can take a percentage of my time and go on vacation or take a percentage of my time, you know, for myself and my family, but the majority of the time I'm actually hands-on operating that boat, and I think that's—I think that's a real alternative that has not been looked at. It really hasn't been looked at and that also applies, though, to some of the big boats. You know [signs]—God, I can't remember names now, but there was a guy down in—in—in Gloucester that had a big steel boat and the name of it was *The Gloucesterman*, and it was a big boat. It was like a ninety-foot boat, but he owned it. He ran the boat and he wasn't some corporation that he was hired to—you know, he was hired as a captain to go run it.

I think we've kind of lost sight of the rights of the individual here, a little political philosophy.

EF: Well, we've seen it happen in so many other industries, it would be wise to pay attention now.

GM: Yeah, not too late. It's not too late to turn it back, turn it around. It really isn't. But I think the industry itself has its eye on the ball. I think that you're correct in saying that they—they do need to go out and promote themselves better. I mean, just look at what happened in the last year locally here with that—that, you know, Buy Local Seafood project that went on over with Erik Anderson and a few of those people. It started out as a little committee appointed by the mayor or, you know, with Esther Kennedy, Erik Anderson, a couple other people. They invited me to come and I sat through the first couple of meetings and then finally I went to—to Esther, you know, who's on the City Council and I said—I said, "This thing's growing some legs," and I said, "It's way, way beyond what my involvement in it is," and you know, the couple of meetings that I did go to sporadically over the course of the year, it went from five or six people at the

table identifying—trying to identify some issues and solutions, to you know, you got twenty people sitting at the table. Then you got people sitting at the table, you know, offering in-kind services of printing and, you know, a promotional person offering their expertise in advertising and—you know, and it turned out to them having that Seafood Festival down in Strawberry Banke this summer. So I think things like that are good, but it goes back to how much can the fishermen themselves take on.

You know, back when I was a fisherman, you went fishing, you came home. I took my lobsters around the corner to my uncle's fish market. I sold them. I went back. I got my boat ready to go fishing the next day. I didn't have a care in the world, you know. Now, you know, I can still remember one of the last years I was shrimp fishing, you were allowed, you know, say fifteen percent or ten percent bycatch, and—but you had to fill out the report and submit it to the feds and I can still remember the Federal Fisheries Agent coming down with a summons for me. I said, "What are you talking about?" "Well, your report here, you know, .5% over the allowable bycatch." I'm saying to myself, you know, here I am at the end of day filling out this report, sending it into you and you're going to use your report to pinch me. With—what am I doing—what am I missing this connection here? So I just—it's just too much.

EF: And now the fishermen have to fill out numerous reports.

GM: Numerous reports.

EF: And if they got—

GM: And you can't go fishing unless you call in and if you call in and the—and the electronics on the other end aren't working right, you know, you go, you're in violation. So I don't know. I just—I don't know. I am—I am quite a bit away from—from the details of a lot of it now, but—

EF: Well, maybe the day-to-day but you're definitely an advocate for the industry from—from where you are now.

GM: Yeah, and that's why I've taken the position, more of a position of providing that shore side infrastructure because if you look at it in a couple of ways, without the

shore side infrastructure, what we do have for an industry is going to diminish. If we don't maintain the shore side infrastructure and continue to improve it, when the time comes that the industry gets back on its feet again, the regulations allow fishing to a better extent, then we need to be able to provide that infrastructure for these—for these fishermen to operate. So I think that's a two-fold based mission with that. Provide the infrastructure so that we can continue to operate and provide and maintain and improve that infrastructure trying to look out with that crystal ball down the road so that if the fleet were to tomorrow to try and start to grow again, could we handle it? How could we handle it? What would we do? And these are—these are scenarios that we look at constantly here as we try to, you know, manage that—that resource. But the regulations still are what they are today, so I don't know what the answers are to those. Less government.

EF: We'll find out. Well, thank you so much for your time this morning. This has been good to—

GM: Well, my pleasure. I—it's a stimulating conversation.

EF: It certainly was.

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