

Q: [00:00:03] How do you like to introduce yourself

A: [00:00:05] As Joanie.

Q: [00:00:07] Joanie. And what year were you born?

A: [00:00:09] 1959.

Q: [00:00:12] Can you tell me a little bit about where you grew up?

A: [00:00:14] Well, I grew up in the city of Brockton, Massachusetts, and it was a pretty good neighborhood most of the time. Well, we moved around a lot. Some of the neighborhoods were good. (laughter) Went to a lot of different elementary schools down there. Anyways, a friend of mine said that's why I'm so tough, because I come from Brockton. (laughter) I told her I was a rough, tough cream puff. (laughter)

Q: [00:00:40] And where are your parents from?

A: [00:00:42] Oh, they're from also Brockton, and one was Bridgewater, Massachusetts. You don't hear of that one much.

Q: [00:00:47] What did they do?

A: [00:00:48] Let's see. My dad did all kinds of different jobs. He usually worked for himself when he could – construction. He even had a clam business, believe it or not, at the end before he died. My mom – well, they were split up, so she was a stay-at-home mom for most of the time and did odd jobs here and there when she could. Yeah. Want me to shut my phone off?

F: [00:01:19] It's OK. No, don't worry about it.

Q: [00:01:21] How did your dad get into clamming? Was he from a fishing family?

A: [00:01:26] Well, he moved up here to Maine, and he married into a family that was clam diggers. Actually, I had the clamming business first (laughter) before I started clam-digging myself. When I had the business, I had enough of it because it was taking away too much from my family life because it's seven days a week when you have your own clam business, and that was just too much for me. I was like, "No, I don't like this schedule." So, after a couple of years, I sold it to my dad. He took it over, and that's how he got into the clamming business.

Q: [00:02:01] Oh, that's awesome. I haven't heard that before. (laughter) Do you have any siblings?

A: [00:02:06] I do. A brother and a sister and a half-sister in New Mexico and a step-sister in Waldoboro.

Q: [00:2:15] Is anyone else in your family involved in the fishing industry at all?

A: [00:02:21] My stepsister. She cuts clams over in Waldoboro for Abden Simmons and April Simmons. I don't know if you know them or not. Yeah.

Q: [00:2:32] Other than that, no fish processing or marketing?

A: [00:02:35] No.

Q: [00:02:37] Can you describe your educational background?

A: [00:02:40] I finished high school – well, night school because I had a child when I was seventeen. I did finish the year I was supposed to. So that was neat. Just brought her with me to night school. (laughter)

Q: [00:02:55] Are you married?

A: [00:02:56] I am. The second time. (laughter)

Q: [00:03:00] Is your partner in the fishing industry at all?

A: [00:03:03] My husband. That's how we met.

Q: [00:03:05] Clamming?

A: [00:03:06] Actually, clamming. Yes. I got thrown into his boat. Well, not thrown. But I got put on his boat because we were digging depuration at the time. And that's how we met. We were friends for three years before we did get together. (laughter)

Q: [00:03:20] Do you have any children?

A: [00:03:21] I have two girls.

Q: [00:03:23] And are they involved in the fishing industry at all?

A: [00:03:26] One was for a short time because she married a clam digger at the time, but she didn't stick with it. Now, she works for UPS. (laughter) A little more stable.

Q: [00:3:39] How would you describe your role in the fishing industry in Maine?

A: [00:03:44] My role? Such as –?

Q: [00:03:48] Your job.

A: [00:03:52] I dig clams. I go with my husband sometimes, but he's taught me how to go alone so that when he can't – recently, he's had a bad knee, so I've been going alone. I'll go to Vinalhaven by myself or down the river by myself. It's a very free feeling when you get to do it by yourself. I like being the captain. (laughter)

Q: [00:04:14] I bet. Have you been involved in any other forms of fishing?

A: [00:04:18] Earlier on, I did try diving for urchins and scallops and things like that. But being a woman, back then, it was hard to get the outfits to fit you properly, so I was always freezing to death. As soon as I made back my money that I paid for all my gear, I quit. That was enough of it.

Q: [00:04:36] Wow. What was that like? The urchin fishing?

A: [00:04:39] It's very difficult because I'm always on a boat with men, and being a woman in the business, it was like – when you have to go the bathroom, things like that – the men were always very respectful of me. I must say, they always were. I appreciated that very much. But when you had to go the bathroom, it was just difficult. When you had your period, you just didn't go. (laughter)

Q: [00:05:04] How did you get involved in that?

A: [00:05:07] Just talking with people through – when I was buying the clams, I'd meet different guys, and they'd tell me about it and say, “Oh, you got to try it.” So, I did and got out of it, like I said. That's actually how it became a clam digger, but you'll probably get to that question.

Q: [00:05:20] Oh, tell me more.

A: [00:05:22] (laughter) Oh, it started off – I actually have it written right here. It's probably better if I read it. I won't forget something. Because they did ask me how I got into that. Let's see. Well, I'll just tell you. So I had a clam digger. A lot of them used to just love to sit and gab. It's kind of like a guy in a mechanic shop; everybody gathers together there. A lot of them would just sit and gab with me. And one older man said – I said, “I think I need to go to the gym and start working out.” He's like, “Well, why would you go to the gym and work out? Pay to go to the gym when you can go to work and get paid?” I'm like, “Doing what?” And he's like, “Go clamming.” And I was like, “Well, you show me how, and I'll try it out.” He showed me how, and I was very bad at it at first, of course, but as you keep at it, you get better. I just loved it. I loved being out there doing it, and I could go the day I wanted to go, not go the days I didn't want to go. That worked out much better. And from there on, I was hooked, no pun intended. (laughter) That was over thirty years ago.

Q: [00:06:24] That's a great story. Which commercial fishing licenses do you hold?

A: [00:06:29] I hold a clamming fishing license and just a commercial fishing license, which you needed for periwinkles. Back when we had a red tide scare, we were doing a lot of periwinkling.

Q: [00:06:41] Do you have any experience in the industry beyond directly harvesting itself, as in bookkeeping, post-harvest, research, or food preparation?

A: [00:06:54] No, not that I can remember. I'm on some committees to do with clamming.

Q: [00:07:02] Which committees?

A: [00:07:03] I'm on the town – we have five towns involved in our clamming association, so I'm on that committee, and then I'm on the SHaC committee with the state. That's about it for now. I keep the books for it. You have to do so many hours to keep your clam license here. So, I keep the books on the hours, on what people do to get the hours. Conservation time, we call it.

Q: [00:07:29] That was my next question, if the committees are requirements, or if that's a motivation that you have to be on –?

A: [00:07:39] The committee isn't a requirement, although it's a requirement from the state, I believe, to have a committee. You're not required, if you're a digger, to be on the committee. Is that the question?

Q: [00:07:49] Yes.

A: [00:07:50] But I chose to be on that committee. I used to go to the committee meetings and not even be a part of the committee because I thought I should have a voice in what's going on in my job, which I wish more people would do. You can't get people to go to them. I don't know what they're doing, but they're not interested in keeping things going, I guess. I'm very interested in keeping things going for our future children that want to do this. So, that's my motivation there.

Q: [00:08:15 ] That's great. What does an average day of work look like for you?

A: [00:08:19] Well, that has changed completely from about ten years ago. We used to put in three or four days, do our job, go sell our clams, and we had the rest of the day to ourselves. Well, now you're putting in seven to eight hours, at least, a day, and sometimes even longer after you sold your clams because there's been such a change in the mud. So, that's why.

Q: [00:08:44] I'll get into what those changes will be in a little. How do you feel your background or identity shapes your work in the fishing sector, including how others may perceive you?

A: [00:08:56] Let's see. Well, my background was stay-at-home mom. (laughter) I don't know how that shapes me. It shaped me? I come from a hard-working family that always believed in hard work. You don't just get handed – my father had a construction company. If I wanted school clothes, I worked doing that – construction company – to get my school clothes. Nothing was just handed to you. You were taught that work was a part of it all. I brought my children and grandchildren up the same way. A lot of my grandchildren have gone clamming with me. They didn't stick with it but got them through high school. (laughter)

Q: [00:09:36] How does your role in the fishing sector work with any family or caregiving responsibilities?

A: [00:09:42] Well, it works very well as far as I could take the time off. If my daughter called and said, “I need somebody to watch such-and-such a child” – my grandchildren, I could just say, “OK, I won't go digging today.” I had my mom go through a grieving process when her husband had passed away, and I got to just say, “You know what? I'm taking the week off from work.” No flack. I could do that. That was very important to me, be able to be there for your family when you need to be. Not everybody can do that, unfortunately.

Q: [00:10:13] So, you feel like maybe your job as a clammer lended itself to more flexibility.

A: [00:10:18] Oh, much more.

Q: [00:10:21] I'm going to switch to asking more environmental questions. Can you describe any changes in the marine environment you've noticed?

A: [00:10:36] Say that again.

Q: [00:10:36] Can you describe any changes in the marine environment you've noticed?

A: [00:10:40] There's been big ones. As far as what I told you, from my workday being so much longer, it's because all the clams seem to have moved inside. About two years, all the clams just disappeared. I'm not kidding. They just disappeared. We were getting 200 pounds each, my husband and I, and we went down in that two years to nothing. I would walk a whole cove and didn't find a hole to pick a clam. I'm a picker, by the way. I don't know. Do you know the difference between picker and hoe digger? Well, a picker, you just put your hand in the mud, and you walk along, and you pluck the clam out, and you put it in your hod. I know we all have different names for things up and down the coast. (laughter) I don't know what they call a hod Downeast. I think it's different. And they don't call it picking; they call it plucking, I believe. (laughter) It's quite interesting. We're in the same state, and we have different names for things. But that's OK.

F: [00:11:32] So, that's instead of raking?

A: [00:11:33] Instead of raking. But then, when the clamming had changed, the whole environment changed. The flats that used to be soft were now hard for some reason. They had big dips in them. This is in a matter of two years. It was just really strange. I don't know what caused it. They had big dips, like holes. It looked like Mars. Am I in the same place? It was a really odd feeling. I just don't even know how to explain it. It was just different. And like I said, the mud was harder, so I had to learn to hoe dig. I already did a little bit of dabbling in it, so I had to learn to hoe dig, and that was much harder, and the income wasn't as good because picking is easier, and you can get more clams usually.

Q: [00:12:18] So, you had to go from being able to manually dig to having to use a tool to go deeper?

A: [00:12:23] Yes. Not so much go deeper, just to be able to turn the mud over because you have to be able to get your hand in there. We have soft mud here. Not everywhere has that.

Q: [00:12:36] Do you guys have an idea of why the mud may have changed?

A: [00:12:40] Well, it was kind of a perfect storm going on. It was about 2014, '15, '16, in there, and we had big fights going on with worm diggers. At the time, worm diggers were coming from everywhere. They were just digging and digging over in our river, and Waldoboro and, I think, down in Brunswick, too. It was just big clash fights between us all. They usually dig once or twice for their worms, which was fine because it used to help us out, actually, by turning the mud and keeping it soft. But for some reason, they were coming back four or five times and digging that same mud, and it was just making it so soupy, and they were taking so many worms. I really believe that they took too many worms. They took all these worms because they were just going over and over it, and then the mud wasn't right. It was turning black. You need worms in a garden. You need worms in that kind of garden too, I believe, a clam garden, we'll call it. Then, like I said, the clams disappeared. We had green crabs coming in. Also, that soft, soft mud, I think that helped the blood – not blood worms. I call them tapeworms. What's a better word for the tapeworm, those great, big, long worms? Ribbon worms. Ribbon worms. We were infiltrated with them, which we never had before. You might have saw one here and there once in a great while, but they were just, all of a sudden, there, and they like big clams. So, you see a clam hole, you go to get it, and they pull out, and it's just an empty shell. There wasn't a clam there because the worm had already gotten to it. So, between all of that, I think that was the devastation. I think turning that mud over so much could have brought up old things that might have been buried in the mud. I don't know. Because it's almost like a virus went through. Even the mussels disappeared. We have no mussel beds no more. We had many mussel beds down the river. They're gone.

Q: [00:14:40] Were you able to change your location at all, or did you feel that –?

A: [00:14:45] I did try going to Vinalhaven, but they didn't have many clams either. They did come back in Vinalhaven pretty good, and then they opened up some new area. So, this past year and a half, they opened up the bay for the first time in St. George River, and

there's been many clams in there. Some reason, it seems to circulate in there, and they seem to land in there. It works out pretty well. If it wasn't for that, I don't know if I'd be able to be doing clamming. I might have had to find another job.

Q: [00:15:18] What was the reason the bay was closed?

A: [00:15:21] Pollution, they say. Depuration used to dig it, though. But the guy that heads up our committee was just very adamant about taking tests of water and this and that and proving that it could be opened. He did it with a lot of our help, of course. That was a good deal. (laughter)

Q: [00:15:42] That's great.

A: [00:15:43] So, we're back to getting our two hundred pounds when we can dig there, which we also conserve. We're big on conservation in our committee, and so we conserve it by only being able to dig it three days a week, June, July, and August.

Q: [00:15:57] You described a lot of changes in the environment. How do they impact your work? You kind of already talked about this, but if there's anything else.

A: [00:16:07] It just impacted it by a longer day. Price of clams did go up for a little bit, but now it's back down again. I know the economy probably runs that. I don't know how that part of it all – I never dealt with that part of it. So, it hurts your pay of what you're getting. So, if you have any big bills you don't want – that's why we built our house little by little as we saved and did it because clamming is so up and down with how much money you're going to make every year; you never know how much you're going to make. That's why we say we'll save and build, save and build, and that's what we did.

Q: [00:16:45] Have you done any other things to respond to or be able to adapt to these changes, such as the gear you use or pursuing other livelihood opportunities?

A: [00:17:00] As far as pursuing something else, I haven't – well, I'm going to have a piece of real estate that I'll be renting out, so I have pursued something else for different income. But at my age, there's nothing more I really wanted to pursue and still have time for my family.

Q: [00:17:19] Are there any resources, relationships, knowledge, training, or organizations that you're able to draw upon to make those changes and adaptations?

A: [00:17:32] In the ShAC [Shellfish Advisory Council] – trying to think what that even stands for. (laughter) In the ShAC, to do with this state, we meet in the state building, and sometimes we go up – Ellsworth, I believe we meet. About every three months, we meet up together. It's different people. We have clam diggers, we have clam dealers, and we have the state people also, and they're very good at bringing the conversation up to what we might be able to do, what might work, what has worked, what hasn't worked. We all have that kind of discussion going on. It's been very helpful. We have one being pushed

right now, a law trying to be pushed in the legislature about being able to sell our clams out of our truck, which we can't do right now. We can sell from my home, which is very helpful because when the price – this spring, it went under two dollars a pound. Can you imagine this day and age, only getting two dollars a pound for your clams? That's crazy. So, it was very helpful for me to just put on Facebook that I'm selling clams from my home and get at least three dollars. I don't know if I answered that all. (laughter)

Q: [00:18:41] That's great. Can you tell me more about the different species that you've been seeing, maybe the changes in the mud flats? You mentioned green crabs.

A: [00:18:54] Yeah. Lots more green crabs I've been seeing. They've always been around, but I think they're getting just overpopulated, maybe. I want to say the tapeworm. What did I call it? What's that other worm I was talking about?

F: [00:19:13] Ribbon worm.

A: [00:19:14] The ribbon worm, thank you. (laughter) Plenty of ribbon worms. They can grow three, four feet long. They're gross. (laughter) That's about the only difference. Actually, I was talking to somebody the other day. He was fishing on the St. George upper river, and he said he found a blue crab.

Q: [00:19:35] Wow. How long have you been noticing the green crabs in the flats?

A: [00:19:43] Probably close to ten years. I've seen them before that, but more so. I was actually kayaking to go clamming one day. I knew it was going to be late when I got back, and it's a hard spot. It was down in the (gig?). That's part of our system, our five-town system. Not sure what the town – it's South Thomaston, maybe. I was kayaking down to go climbing somewhere, and on my way back, it was dark because it's hard to get your boat on the landing if it's too early before it's higher tide. I was kayaking back, and I heard this terrible noise, like, *crunch, crunch, crunch*. I was like, "What the heck is that?" So I look over with my flashlight on the flats, and it was thousands of green crabs just crunching along the mud. (laughter) It was like, "Oh my gosh, it's like a horror movie."

Q: [00:20:33] Wow. And you hadn't seen that before?

A: [00:20:36] No, I hadn't noticed it.

Q: [00:20:41] What's your access to the flats like?

A: [00:20:45] Well, I mainly go by boat, and when I first started digging, I used to walk in, and it was tough duty. You'd have to find someplace to be able to walk in for access to the water, and then lugging them out was always a chore. When you got 150 pounds of clams to lug out for a quarter of a mile or a half mile, it's not easy. It's sometimes right uphill. But access has become a problem. We haven't had too much of a problem up until recently. I can see why, too. There's always that bad apple that ruins it for everybody.



There was one guy who drove his truck down on this guy's property, got stuck, and just ruined the guy's property to get out. Didn't offer to fix it for him or anything. I can see it. He said, "One more incident, I'm closing." I couldn't believe he didn't close it, but he said, "One more incident, I'm closing down." We do have a place over in Barney's Cove on the St. George that we've lost access to, and another place down in Salt Pond that we've lost access to just because of people mouthing off to the owners and leaving trash, going to the bathroom. Yeah, there's a lot of nastiness. (laughter) People just disrespect people. Then again, you got to look at it on the other side. A lot of clam diggers – we have a lot of clam diggers that aren't capable of working out in regular jobs around people, and they just can't hold that kind of job. Mental illness is there, but they can dig clams. So, unfortunately, that's what you have a lot of, too.

F: [00:22:29] Can I go back to the green crabs? You talked about seeing a real increase in them. How does the increase in green crabs – you notice that impacting clam populations or where you see them?

A: [00:22:40] I think so. We used to be able to dig – the reason we only had to dig three or four hours is because clams are way outside. You didn't have to go all the way into shore and wait for that tide to come back in to get your boat out. There's no clams on the outside anymore, anywhere, even on Vinalhaven, outside, and I think the green crabs are eating them.

F: [00:23:01] So, outside being subtidal, underwater all the time?

A: [00:23:04] Yeah.

F: [00:23:06] So, now you have to go into the intertidal, and you're dependent on those tides.

A: [00:23:08] Yes. They keep saying, "Well, maybe it's the warmer waters." Well, I'm thinking, "Well, it's probably warmer inside than it is outside, so I don't know if that would be a factor."

F: [00:23:16] Yeah. Do you hear discussions about it on the committees that you're on about conservation measures about the impacts of crabs on the population?

A: [00:23:26] Yeah. They've kind of given up on it because nothing seems to – well, there is help out there, like people that go out there and trap them – will try to get rid of them, will trap them. My husband brought some in one time, and we had them in a five-gallon bucket. I don't know if everybody wants to know this (laughter), but he left him out there for like a week, and it was like ninety-degree weather. And them things were still alive. They're hardy.

F: [00:23:47] They're tough.

A: [00:23:48] You got to stomp them. (laughter)

F: [00:23:50] Yeah. And then one more question. This question about changes – in terms of changes in the mud, you talked about the impact of maybe worms having an impact on that. Do you think anything about changing temperatures or changes in sea ice, or anything are impacting the kind of consistency of the mud, or you think it's not related to that?

A: [00:24:13] Well, ice did used to have a factor. It doesn't seem to be – the past winters haven't been cold enough to have much ice. But ice used to – I mean, they'd carry big rocks and place them in different places because you have to be careful when you're – we used to go screaming in with our boat, but you have to be careful when it comes spring because you don't know what might have been laid there from an iceberg, from a rock or something. I think, as far as to do with the clams, I don't know how it would affect the clams. Some people think that if too much ice is on the flats, it hurts the clams. But I don't think so.

F: [00:24:48] I guess I was wondering about the – you were talking about the changes to the mud, if that could be related to the lack of sea of ice or changes in –?

A: [00:24:55] Well, the big dips I was talking about, we were wondering – talking with other diggers, we're wondering if maybe – because all of a sudden, the sturgeon have started coming up our river. I guess they eat clams also, so I've heard, and you can see where they stick their nose in looking for the clam. Actually, when I go clamming, I look to see where they've stuck their nose in, so I can find the clams. (laughter) Because if they're searching for them – and they have that smell evidently, or something. They think that they get in there, wallow around, or wish their tails around something. They're pretty powerful. When I'm going up the river, sometimes I'll see them just jump up in the air.

F: [00:25:34] Thank you.

A: [00:25:35] You're welcome.

Q: [00:25:37] What would you say your biggest concern for the marine environment is?

A: [00:25:42] Biggest concern. Well, is for them not to replenish themselves, the clams and stuff. But then, like I said, we open the bay, and I go up in there, and I see them replenishing themselves beautifully up in there. There's all kinds, all different sizes, from itty-bitty baby clams to nice, big clams. So, not sure.

Q: [00:26:09] If you could tell policymakers in Maine what the biggest priorities should be to help people adapt to the changes, what would you tell them?

A: [00:26:17] Well, they probably wouldn't like to hear it. Keep dogs off our shores. Dog waste is a number one thing we keep – we do a lot of testing on our own, without the state, because we want to know what is impacting. We do deeper. They only test for different – like, bacterial, things like that. But we test a little deeper to find out what is

causing the resource that's making our river stay closed on different coves. And we have a lot of dog waste. The problem with dog waste is what they eat. We have nothing against dogs. We love animals, but the dog waste – what they eat is different things – it's not like what a horse would eat or a cow would eat. There's too many chemicals and things in what the dogs are eating, and it's really affecting the water quality. I know Waldorboro won a battle about having dogs on the landing, and we're still fighting it over here. We have a lot of dog owners. Especially in the bay, where we finally got that open, and they had a walkway – there was a little stream that would actually come into the bay, and they could walk their dogs there and stuff. Well, we actually won that battle with them, not being able to walk their dogs on that, but now there's a new person, a head of it, and he's changed it so that dogs are allowed again. So far, they've been picking up the dog waste. We check it ourselves because it's our livelihood.

Q: [00:27:43] That's interesting. Can you tell me a little bit more about that testing that you guys do, that process, what that's like?

A: [00:27:50] We just go down, and we'll test different streams, and we'll test the water with a little test tube. The state, I think, showed us how to do it. Well, the guy that runs our committee. He showed us. But the state showed him how to do it properly. We take a test tube, and we send it off to the place in New Hampshire, and they do testing to tell us if it's human or birds or dogs or that kind of stuff.

Q: [00:28:16] Interesting.

A: [00:28:16] Yeah, it's not cheap. We get grants to help do that.

Q: [00:28:20] That's great. Can you tell me a little bit about your experience or the history of the closures? Has that been more prevalent, or have you noticed any changes with that?

A: [00:28:37] Actually, I have noticed more openings than closures. They're working better with us now. (laughter) Everybody's working together better, I should say, and I think it's helping with the closures. Sometimes, they'll let us do the testing for them if they can't because they're understaffed, the state, which is a great help, or we'll have a boat available for them because they can't get out all the time in a boat. So, we'll have a boat available for them, and they'll take care of it that way. What else was we talking about? (laughter)

Q: [00:29:12] No, that's great. I can tell you're a really active participant in your community. Can you tell me if you participated in any climate resilience or adaptation training or programs in the fishing industry?

A: [00:29:25] No, no. Just on word of mouth through different people, the ShAC. They're very informative on the ShAC. They have a lot of different people in there – biologists and things like that.

F: [00:29:38] What's the ShAC? It stands for something, is that what you said?

A: [00:29:41] Yeah, I know. That's what I'm trying to think – it's to do with the state. I should look it up.

F: [00:29:46] Something to do with the state? DMR [Department of Marine Resources]?

A: [00:29:48] Yeah.

F: [00:29:48] OK, we can look it up. Thanks. But it provides information?

A: [00:29:52] Yes. Shellfish –

F: [00:29:56] Advisory Committee.

A: [00:29:57] Advisory Committee. There you go. Yeah. (laughter)

F: [00:29:58] There we go. Great.

Q: [00:30:03] What strategies do you think would be effective in building resilience against climate-related impacts for fisheries?

A: [00:30:15] I'm really not sure. I really don't know what we could use to – I'd like to know.

Q: [00:30:25] Are there other types of changes, not only environmental that are impacting your work you want to tell us about?

A: [00:30:34] My age. (laughter)

F: [00:30:37] It's tough work on your – you've been doing it a long time. You must have to –

A: [00:30:41] I have. About thirty-five years. People say, "Oh my gosh, how's your back?" I'm like, "Well, actually, it strengthens my back if I'm doing it all the time." After the winter – I used to go all winter, too, but not anymore. So, come spring, I know I haven't gone all winter, believe me. (laughter) I make sure I do stretches and exercises every day to keep myself up to par for it.

Q: [00:31:03] Yeah. What does your season look like?

A: [00:31:06] Nowadays, usually, I start in about April, March if it's a warm March. My protocol used to be, "Well, it's above twenty degrees, I'll go." Then, when I got a little older, "If it's above thirty degrees, I'll go." Now, I kind of like it forty. (laughter)

F: [00:31:28] Still pretty cold.

A: [00:31:29] Yeah, it is. It depends on the wind. The wind is a big factor out there, of course. It's nice to have a boat. I don't think I finished that other thing where I was talking to you about walking in. I prefer going by boat all the time.

Q: [00:31:43] Yeah, tell me a little bit about how your operation works. What does it look like to go out on the flats with you?

A: [00:31:51] Well, you just hook up my boat. Decide where I'm going to go beforehand, hopefully. Sometimes, I get there, and there's already too many people there, so I'll look for a different spot. I like being a loner out there a little bit. I'll hook up my boat, head out there, unload my boat down on the landing, head upriver, and just looking for a spot to dig. Usually, you have it, like I said, pre-planned. You have to get up there early, otherwise, you can't get your boat in there because the tide will leave. I end up bringing my kayak sometimes, and I'll leave the boat out, and I'll kayak in with all my gear being towed behind me in a sled, and that's how I'll get back out to my boat also. I was a little worried one day because I had my sled, had about 150 pounds in there, and it's about what it holds. It started getting a little choppy, and there was some boats going by, creating a wave. And I was like, "Hmm, that's attached to my kayak. If that sinks, I'm going with it." (laughter) So, I got a little smarter on that one. Not put so many in there.

F: [00:33:03] You said you start in April. When do you go until?

A: [00:33:05] Up until, usually October. November if some good days or something. I might go hoe digging even in December and January if there's some good days. I've just been building that house down there. So, that's kept me busy a couple years.

Q: [00:33:20] Is the amount of clams you bring in consistent throughout the year, or does it change seasonally?

F: [00:33:28] It changes because I start hoe digging, usually when it gets colder. I've already started hoe digging only because I can't find no clams to pick on the river. They close up after it gets kind of cold, the holes, so it's hard to find them. So, I'll start the hoe digging now. So, of course, that's less clams I'll have. I don't know. Like I said, I was getting 200 pounds in the bay picking, but now I'm hoe digging, I think I had a bushel last time I went – fifty pounds.

F: [00:33:59] Can I ask what –? So it sounds like you prefer picking, but you do a little bit of picking and hoe digging. Is that typical for people to do both? How do people get more into one or the other?

A: [00:34:12 ] I think it's how they were brought up. A lot of the guys around here, they were brought up doing this for a living. If their father was a digger, than they dig. If their father was a picker, they pick.

F: [00:34:23] I feel like you hear more about digging in general, I would say.

A: [00:34:27] Yeah, probably.

F: [00:34:29] So, there's less pickers (inaudible).

A: [00:34:30] Well, on this river, there was a lot of pickers. It used to be (laughter) when you could dig – when there was more clams and the clams were outside, there was a lot of pickers. A lot of the men picked because it was just easier on your back, too. I see a lot of them hoe diggers, and they hunched over pretty good, them older ones. I don't want to look like that. (laughter)

F: [00:34:53] You've got good posture.

A: [00:34:54] Well, my mother made sure of it. (laughter)

Q: [00:34:59] Well, it sounds like a really labor-intensive job. What is it about clamming that draws you in?

A: [00:35:05] Being outside. I was always an outside kid. I love being outside. I was one of the kids that if you were in school, you're looking out the window, wishing you were out there. That's all there was to it. Being self-employed, I love that part of it. Running a boat – it's just a lot of fun stuff.

Q: [00:35:27] Do you hope to involve your grandchildren?

A: [00:35:30] I already have. My oldest grandchild is thirty now. We've had a few of them come and clam. They were interested until the clamming got bad, of course, and then it's not much fun. I mean, we've even – one day, there was a kid down at the wharf, and he was riding his bike around. I said, "What are you doing riding around? Why aren't you down there making some money? You're old enough." And he was like, "I don't know how." And I said, "Well, let me contact your mother, and you meet me down here tomorrow morning." And he did. He was on our boat for most of the summer, and he learned how. We've had a couple others. Actually, they're in the Merchant Marines now that we've brought clamming with us and taught how to –

Q: [00:36:06] That's awesome. Do you mainly work on your own, or do you have people that help you?

A: [00:36:14] Usually, my husband and I together, but when he's not going, it's just myself. Yeah.

Q: [00:36:21] Can you tell me about any opportunities or positive changes you've experienced in the industry?

A: [00:36:28] The positive change would be being able to sell from our home, first of all, and now what they're trying to do and pass us being able to sell from our truck so that we

could actually go to farmers markets. I have some people that don't want to travel that far to get to my house. I can meet them halfway, or something to buy clams. Of course, the dealers aren't liking this idea, I'm sure, of us being able to sell our clams on our own because that's going to affect how much they have to pay us to get us to go there, which is rightly due. I know how the farmers feel. They do all the work, and they don't get much money for their product.

Q: [00:37:04] Can you tell me more about that? Your experience with working with dealers?

A: [00:37:11] Well, this past dealer that we've had in town – our dealer that we always dealt with for years and years gave it up – Karl Crute. He was just old enough that he just wasn't going to deal with it anymore. I don't know how many years he was there, but he was there the whole time I ever dug. He gave it up a couple years ago, and he always tried to get us the fairest prices and good prices. If we ever wanted to buy anything – he used to buy all kinds of seafood. If we ever wanted to buy anything, he would always sell them to us for what he paid for him. He was a very fair man that way. Then, all of a sudden, when he was done, it was like there wasn't enough competition. That's when the price really started slacking unless the guy really wanted them bad. Then he'd put that price up all of a sudden, and then, he didn't need him, he'd drop it right down. He didn't let you know what the price was. Karl Crute, when he was buying, he'd let you know what the price was in the beginning before you went clamming so you knew what you were going to get. Well, the newer guy, they let you know in the middle of the tide when you're digging. They'll just drop that price on you. Once in a while, it goes up, not very often. Usually, it was dropped. I didn't think that was very fair at all. I didn't like that kind of dealing.

Q: [00:38:30] How does that impact your harvesting process?

A: [00:38:33] Well, it kind of takes away your zeal to want to dig them hard that day when you get a message like that in the middle of the tide. That just pops your balloon. But you know you got to make a living, so you got to do it.

Q: [00:38:47] Right. What is your hopeful vision for the future of Maine's coastal fisheries?

A: [00:38:53] To see more children get involved – older children, high school kids. I just don't see many anymore. I don't see many getting into – we offer free clam licenses for first-time clammer kids. We can't get them. We just can't get them. They're not interested. I don't know what they'd rather be doing, but it's not clamming, evidently. (laughter) I have a great-grandchild that's very interested, but he's only seven right now. (laughter) I can tell he just loves being that outdoor-type stuff. I could see it in him. He'll probably be a clam digger if there are any clams around still, then.

Q: [00:39:31] Do you have an idea of how that could change, getting people more involved or wanting to?

A: [00:39:37] Well, we've already tried. We've gone to high schools. We'll put out bulletins seeing if anybody would be interested. I think it would be better if we opted to – “Hey, we'll take you.” I mean, they don't know how to get there, some of them.” But then you have the problem of, well, what if that kid says I looked at them wrong or touched them wrong? I mean, there's just so many differences going on these days that you have to worry about now that you never had to worry about before.

Q: [00:40:10] Have you noticed any changes in women's presence or participation in the fishery?

A: [00:40:17] Changes as far as more? We've had more. A lot of women in the past thirty years that I've been involved. A lot of women come and go, and some of them stick with it. Some don't. Some are usually there with their boyfriends that they had for the season. (laughter) I know a couple that have stuck right through it, but then couldn't afford or needed health insurance. That's another problem is the health insurance for self-employed people. I went for years without any health insurance. I just did the best to stay healthy.

Q: [00:40:51] That's hard to have control over.

A: [00:40:53] Yeah. Now that I'm sixty-five, it's pretty good. I get free insurance. (laughter)

Q: [00:40:58] Congrats.

F: [00:41:00] You said you've seen women throughout your time, but maybe some more over time. Is that right?

A: [00:41:06] Yeah, yeah. As the years went on, I saw more women getting involved.

F: [00:41:10] Have you ever seen changes in terms of reception, how they're treated, or something relative to male diggers?

A: [00:41:22] No, no. I haven't seen the difference in that. I think we all get treated pretty equally in this. Most of the diggers respect me as a woman, being out there. Like when they have to urinate, they'll turn their back, thankfully, or go up in the woods. That's another difficult thing for us women is when we have to go to the bathroom. When you have a boat, it's pretty good. You can climb in your boat. But when you don't, you have to either walk all the way up to shore and go find a place. Yeah, it's difficult sometimes being a woman out there that way. Men get it pretty easy that way. (laughter)

Q: [00:42:05] I think that's it for our questions. But is there anything else you'd like to share with us?

A: [00:42:11] Let me look over on my notes.



Q: [00:42:13] Yes, please do. We love stories.

A: [00:43:16] One time, I was clamming on my own. I walked in because it was wintertime. I was walking in; it was all ice. I had my hods and my gear, and as I was getting done – I pushed it a little longer than I wanted to, but I pushed it because I said, “I’ll get up on that ice; I’ll be all set.” Well, I got up on that ice, and it gave way. And the tide was coming pretty good. The whole side of me went in. Thankfully, I could grab up onto the ice, got myself back up, and crawled instead of walking with my gear. That hod actually helps you on the ice, to walk along with it. I had a fork, too, so I could claw if I needed to. I did make it, obviously. Here I am. But that was kind of scary. Sometimes, when I walk in alone at different places, or even if I’m in my boat, it gets kind of scary if there’s some strange people around coming to dig that I don’t know. Especially when we had a lot of the worm diggers because I felt kind of – because they were drinking a lot down there and stuff, too. Actually, I was picking, and I said to one of the worm diggers that was right there – I said, “What do you do with your bottles when you’re done drinking?” And he says, “Oh, we just crush them up real good.” I said, “In the mud? Do you see how I’m digging? I’m putting my hand in this mud.” (laughter) Sometimes, I just felt a little intimidated. There’s a whole bunch of men out there, and it’s just me, the woman here. Gets kind of scary.

F: [00:43:47] You mentioned it was 2014, 2015, 2016, those fights with the wormers. Has that settled down a little bit?

A: [00:43:55] Yes, it did because they stopped coming. We literally had meeting places in Augusta and everything. There were such bad fights going on. We had cops involved. People were slashing tires.

F: [00:44:07] What helped it resolve?

A: [00:44:10] It just dissipated all by itself. They stopped coming, like I said, because they got all the – we were up there one time, and one of the guys says, “Listen, we just dig them until they’re gone.” I was like, “What kind of conservation is that?” You dig them until they’re gone? That can’t be healthy for the mud. But they wouldn’t listen. DMR wouldn’t choose a side. It’s not that they wouldn’t listen. They didn’t want to choose a side.

F: [00:44:43] You said at the beginning that you own your own clam business, and then you got into digging. When you say you owned your own clam business, were you a dealer?

A: [00:44:50] Yes, I was a dealer.

F: [00:44:51] OK. What was that experience like? What got into it?

A: [00:44:54] That was pretty neat. The neighbor. I was a stay-at-home mom, like I said, but the neighbor was the dealer. He wanted to go clamming, so he asked me if I’d buy for

him while he was digging. So, now the diggers came. I said, "Yeah, sure." So, I did. Well, he ended up getting in some trouble buying small clams. I don't know. Maybe I did. I didn't know the rules and regulations and stuff then. So, maybe I bought them. I don't know. But I know he dug them plenty himself. He ended up getting fined terribly. It was a big deal. He had lots and lots of clams that he got busted for. He had to get rid of the business, and he asked me if I wanted to take it over. I said, "Yeah, that'd be cool. I can be at home." My kids went to Christian school, so I had to drive them back and forth, so I'd be free to do that. Well, I found out there was no freedom in being a dealer (laughter) because you have to be there all hours of the day for these diggers that come in whenever they're going to come in. Like I said, it was seven days a week. If I wanted to go do anything, I had to get my brother or somebody to be at the station to buy and stuff. It was terrible. (laughter)

F: [00:46:03] What year did you get into the dealer side? About when was that?

A: [00:46:09] Let's see. About '90, 1990.

F: [00:46:11] 1990.

A: [00:46:12] Yeah. In '92, I left. Sold it.

F: [00:46:13] And you said you sold it to your dad, right?

A: [00:46:14] To my dad, yeah.

F: [00:46:15] How long did he stay in it?

A: [00:46:17] Oh, jeepers. He passed away about ten years ago, and he was just about – so, it was about twelve years ago. He was in it a long time. He did well. He had trucks to go deliver to Boston. He just really built it up.

F: [00:46:31] And then you also said your sister cuts clam. What does that mean?

A: [00:46:35] Shucking. Shucks, yeah. Shucks them out. Yeah.

F: [00:46:40] And she still does that?

A: [00:46:42] Yeah. That's what she does still. Yeah.

F: [00:46:43] Interesting.

A: [00:46:46] And my stepmom did, too, her mother.

F: [00:46:48] Oh, really? You were telling us a story, and then I had some other questions for you. But was there anything else you wanted to share? Any other stories that come to mind?

F: [00:46:59] Oh, let's see. Well, one time, I broke down in Vinalhaven. I was alone again, and I was going through the thoroughfare that goes between Vinalhaven and North Haven, and all of a sudden, the motor just died. I'm like, "OK." I had a little flip phone back then. It wasn't that long ago, actually, but I had a flip phone. I was like, "Oh, what do I do now? I'll call my husband. What's he going to do? He's way back on the mainland." Well, all of sudden, as I'm trying to figure out what I'm going to do, I saw this great big lobster boat coming through, and boy, did he put out a wake. And I'm like, "Oh my gosh." So I get my paddle out, and I'm paddling to beat the (inaudible). All of a sudden, he notices what I'm doing. So, he figured I was broke down. Thankfully, he came over, and he towed me over to a buoy that I could tie off on because he was going to bring me in. And I said, "No, I won't have no reception" because it's hard to get reception in there on your phone. He just left me out there, and I did get a ride back, towed back over to the mainland. But that was scary. You're stuck out there for hours waiting for your to help to come. (laughter) I've been lost in the fog before, just on the river. I didn't have no compass. I had nothing on me. That was bad. This is back when I was first learning to go out on the river. The things you learn. It was so foggy, and I couldn't find my way back. I kept coming to the same buoy over and over because they're numbers on them. I was like, "What in the world?" I just didn't want to go the wrong way. The river is only so wide, so where are you going to go? You could head out, though. I wanted to make sure I was heading in.

We had this little porthole. Our boat was enclosed at the time for winter. We had this little porthole. So, I'm sticking my head out and trying to see better because my window kept fogging up. At the same time, it was cold air, so my poor nose was getting so stuffed up from being up in that cold air. So, finally, I'm looking, and I see – all of a sudden, I saw all these bright lights. It was like a football stadium – bright lights. I'm a praying woman, too. So, I prayed about this thing. I see these lights. So, I was like, "Well, what do they say? Head for the light, right?" (laughter) So, I'm headed to the lights, and I get up on a piece of land, and I just climbed – I moored my boat, and I climbed up on the bank, and I'm banging on these people's doors to tell them I just can't find my way. I was more worried. I wasn't worried about going out to sea or anything. What I was worried about was everybody's worried about me. Where is she? She's out there by herself. It got dark at the same time. That's why I couldn't find my way, too. It just was so dark, along with the fog. So, I said at the door – they answered, and they're like – I must have looked like quite a sight. They're like, "Oh my gosh." (laughter) I said, "I need help." But that's not how I said it. My nose was so stuffed up I couldn't even talk. "I need some help." (laughter) They brought me right in – they were such nice people – set me right down and got me a phone so I could call my husband, and he figured out where I was, and he came, and he drove the boat home. I took the car. (laughter) But it was a scary situation.

F: [00:50:10] Yeah, being out there by yourself.

A: [00:50:12] The fog is definitely a scary thing out there. I went to Vinalhaven one time. I forgot my GPS, and we were fogged. I had my granddaughter with me. That really scared me because I had somebody else with me that I'm responsible for. The fog was

just so thick. I can remember my husband always telling me – “Just keep going east. Keep following that east.” I did have a compass on the boat. But I know there's a lot of rocks and different things that you have to watch out for. So, I just had to keep listening for boats – because you have to worry about – we've almost been hit so many times going up to Vinalhaven by other boats. You just have to put your engine down a little bit and shut it off. Just listen and see if there are any lobster boats around. So we did that all the way out. I said, “Don't worry, honey, when we get out there, it'll be all clear on the way back.” Well, it wasn't. (laughter) It always is. It did not. It was the same thing. I've been out there enough so many times that I knew the different buoy bells and things like that, so I'd just have to listen, or if I hear waves going up by the shore – no, we're getting too close to the shore. (laughter)

F: [00:51:14] It's a long haul out there to Vinalhaven.

A: [00:51:15] Yeah. I don't think she's ever been out there again with me. (inaudible)

F: [00:51:19] Last (inaudible) for her. Wonderful. Well, anything else you wanted to share with us?

A: [00:51:32] Red tide. When we had our red tide going on, that was terrible. Right now, our river is exempt from red tide. They've proven the way the tides move, the swirling of the water, or something, it does not come up into our river. But everything was closed for red tide. My husband and I were like, “Well, we heard about a place down Stonington way that's open. Let's go down there.” Well, we took our little fourteen-foot boat all the way from here to Stonington. We went over there, and we started clamming. We were doing OK. We weren't setting the world on fire or anything. Before we left, though, I wanted to say that we asked the wardens if it was open the way we were going. They said, “Yep, you're all set that place.” While we were there, it closed. Well, back then, we didn't have the cell phones like we do now. Well, I guess they did, but we didn't. The wardens came and said, “Hey, you're digging red tide closed area.” I said, “Well, we checked in Rockland before we got here.” He says, “You guys came here from Rockland in that boat?” (laughter) Like, “Yeah, you do what you got to do to make a dollar around here.” (laughter)

F: [00:52:41] Red tide – it's not a problem here in your river anymore, so it doesn't impact you much these days.

A: [00:52:48] No.

F: [00:52:50] You did mention periwinkles. You were also harvesting periwinkles.

A: [00:52:53] During this red tide series, we'd go get periwinkles. That was always so dangerous because you have to go on rocky places. I would have our boots on, and we were pretty much crawling along places, and it was slippery, and the tide would be crashing up on you. It was terrible. But we did it. You had to do something to make a living.

F: [00:53:12] You don't do that anymore, though?

A: [00:53:12] I never thought of a normal job. (laughter) No, we don't do it anymore. Nobody here buys them anymore. You have to go way down to Yarmouth, I think, to sell them now.

Q: [00:53:25] Have you noticed any different changes in the weather? I'm sure you're really in tune, going out day to day.

A: [00:53:30] Yeah, the tides. I notice the water, not so much the weather. The weather has gotten worse. When we come home from Vinalhaven, it's always so rough, and it wasn't like that ten years ago, we'll say. But now it is. It's always very rough coming home, and the tides don't – they go out as far, but they don't stay out as far on the big tides, and they come right back in, it seems. They don't stay out there very long. It'll say it's a 1.8 tide, and it barely leaves the shore. It's much different. You can tell that it is rising, definitely. You can tell the water is rising. There's no doubt about that. Some people say, "Well, that's a bunch of baloney." No, it's not.

F: [00:54:19] The sea level, you mean?

A: [00:54:19] It's really happening. The sea level is definitely rising.

F: [00:54:22] That really impacts the work that you do in the intertidal?

A: [00:54:25] Yeah, it does.

F: [00:54:29] You also mentioned the mussel beds disappearing.

A: [00:54:31] Yeah, they're gone.

F: [00:54:31] We've heard that from others, too. Do you have any sense about why that is?

A: [00:54:35] Sometimes I just think a whole disease went through because that's the same time that the clams disappeared. I really think it was some disease that went through and just took them out because even the bay, where there's so many clams now, that was affected, also. There wasn't clam beds there. There's still no clams on the outside of the bay either, where there used to be a nice soft mud. That's gone, but you have to go inside more.

F: [00:55:03] Has the mud texture changed there, too, in the outside, or the clams aren't there?

A: [00:55:10] It did in some coves, but not all. Some are still real soft. But one of them, like I was telling you when we first noticed all the caved-in mud and everything, that

turned hard, and we were hoe digging it, which we used to always pick. But the clams never came back after we got done hoe digging it. The mud turned black, like I said, from all the worm digging.

F: [00:55:39] Interesting. I think that's all the questions we have for you. You're welcome to keep sharing if anything else comes up.

A: [00:55:48] I think that was about it. I was going to let you guys take this if you wanted to read it over, if you need more information. It was a little workday thing I had one day when I was out working.

Q: [00:56:01] That's great. Do you want to tell us about it?

A: [00:56:03] I'll read it to you.

Q: [00:56:04] That's great.

A: [00:56:05] OK. This was the day I went out by myself. I said, What an awesome morning it was yesterday. The first of it started with the sun being out. Just that alone was a blessing. As I headed off to work and got to the landing, there was just a handful of trucks there. I was by myself. (Glen?) had his finger operated on yesterday. I unloaded the boat and got a prime parking spot. As I headed out, I took it slow, as I noticed a man high up on one of the sloops getting ready to take down the mast over at Lyman-Morse. I see why they chose this morning. It was like a sea of glass, just beautiful. Even though there's not many pretty colored trees on the river, there's a lot of browns and dull shades of yellow and orange mixed with the green to make its own beauty. It just feels homey, kind of like today. My first encounter heading into the cove I was going to check out was a playful seal. We exchanged greetings and I continued on in. I was headed into the sun, so I couldn't see very well, but I made it out to be a group of baby ducks cutting across my destined path. I shut off the outboard and sat silently till they passed by. They didn't seem to be bothered by me and just took their sweet old time. Huh, seems that they was in the same mood I am today. So, the tide didn't do much because it was very small, and so were the clams, unfortunately. The tide didn't – oh, sorry, that's what I read. But I plugged along, just enjoying being there, listening to the hum of engines of a couple lobster boats out there and an occasional gull. I prayed for everyone that came to mind, feeling so grateful that I had a lord that gladly takes any heavy burdens I have to offer. Well, now the tide's coming back, what little bit is left. So I wash my clams, put them in my sled, and start heading for the boat. I ended up walking quite a distance from it, so I'm glad I brought the sled. As I'm heading, I notice the wind has picked up, not a harsh, cold wind, but a nice, cool-you-off wind. It felt good along with the sun on my face. On my walk, though, I got to thinking, "This is so awesome." Some women are out there with such stressful jobs, and I have such a peaceful, tranquil job that gets me away from all the stress and craziness for a few hours a day. I feel like the luckiest woman around. Thank you, Lord. Now, it was time to head back to the landing, load up, and go sell the goods. Some people say this is the best part. I say, No way, I just left the best part. No amount of money can give you that kind of feeling.

Q: [00:58:49] That is beautiful.

A: [00:58:50] Well, thanks.

F: [00:58:50] Thanks for reading that.

A: [00:58:52] I write better than I speak. (laughter)

Q: [00:58:55] Thank you so much.

F: [00:58:56] You're very welcome, and you can have them.

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