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Bowden Murphy: 24 Years Splitting Fish My name is Bowdin Murphy. I was born in In? gonish on the 17th day of September, 1890. And even yet, although I'm in my 93rd year, I feel real good. (What did you do that makes you feel so good now?) Well, I don't know. I worked hard all my life, real hard. Twenty years I spent in one of those fish traps. I was splitter. Used to run the motor in the tow- boat. I've seen me go, split fish till 11 o'clock at night down in the stage by lan? tern light. Splitting the fish--there were three besides myself. There were four splitters in the bunch. You gain some days with three boatloads of fish; you know, you make three purses a day. The first purse you get out in the morning, just be? fore daylight. And then you go out at noon? time, about 11 o'clock. And then again in the evening, about 4 o'clock. Three purses a day. That is, if you didn't have too many fish. But of course, if you went out and got a big catch, get all your boats loaded--well, you'd only make about two purses a day. Poor old fellow, his name was Sid Burke, he was a merchant--he owned the trap. Used to get most of his crowd over in Newfound? land. They always used to come over, a bunch of them, every summer, just during the fishing seasons. (Were there not e- nough people in Ingonish to do the job?) Oh, there were enough, but everybody was on their own, like. Everyone here was fish? ing for themselves. And you see, you'd make more than you'd make if you were haul? ing the fish traps. (Then, why did you work in his fish traps?) Well, my poor old father, he wasn't very well at the time. And I was only young, I didn't know very much about fishing. And this old fellow that had the trap, he had a lobster factory, too. I worked before I was only a teen in the lobster factory, picking this fine meat out of the lobster, out of the arm part. I worked for him, oh, for years. I always thought him a very nice old fellow. It made no difference when he'd meet me or what I was doing, he always called me "brother." He said, "Brother," he said, "I want you to come in the trap with me." And he said, "I want an extra splitter. You're going to leam to split." Well, I had split a few fish be? fore that, just of my own. But after I went with him, then I split for 20 years. And there used to be a man come down--oh, he was an expert on fish--and he'd visit you once during the summertime to see that your fish were split right. You see, when you cut down by the backbone, there's a little white stripe. Well, if you cut that stripe out, you know, you've gone too deep. But if you leave that white thread along the backbone, and don't cut it or break it, your fish won't break by handlers, when they dry it. (So there was an interest in quality fish.) Oh yes, oh yes. In those days, the big American vessels used to come down. You had to dry everything. There was no such a thing as freezing fish or getting clear of them fresh at that time. You had to salt them all and dry them. And then the American vessels would come down and load up and take them to the States. I was in the boat. I used to go out and help purse the trap. And when we'd come in, then my job was splitting. Go out just as soon as it was light enough to work, you know, the pursing. Go out there lots of times, and we'd fill all the boats that we had, of our own; and probably some small boats used to go out, and we'd give them halves. See, we'd give them a boatload. When they split half of



them, they got half a boatload for themselves. (Would your own boats be really that full with fish?) Yes, you'd fill them. Sometimes you'd take too much, you know. If you happened to strike out a heavy breeze of wind, when you were bringing it in--you'd have to go very slow. The boat would be that low in the water. We pretty near lost a boat one time. I had charge of the motor- boat. And I saw she was taking water. There were two of the fellows standing in the forward standing room. And I noticed the boat was going down. The water was in among the fish, but you couldn't tell it. So I saw this lop coming--I just swung a- round so we were clear of it. But if she had taken another one, she would have gone down head first. (Did that ever happen to any of the vessels out there?) No, never had an accident. You'd try to take all you could, you know.

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