

Fishtales
Saturday, September 29, 2012
Working Waterfront Festival

Interviewer –Ace Elijah-Burgess
Interviewee – James Dwyer, Jr.

0285

AB Alright say that one more time.

JD My name is James Dwyer Jr.

AB [inaudible]

JD My name is James Dwyer Jr. I'm gonna tell you the story about the fishing vessel FRAN. It was June 1st, 1977. I always did the work for Jack Jacobsen. He was the owner of the vessel. I used to offload his boat, ice his vessel. And on and around June 1st, I got a call from Mr. Jack Jacobsen sayin' he wanted 30 ton of ice. I ordered the ice down at Hathaway Braley Wharf and I was putting the ice in his vessel around 10 am in the morning. And in between waiting for the trucks to arrive, I was talkin' to his crew. The skipper was his son, the late Wayne Jacobsen. Eugene Connors was the mate. Tony Elenessy from Fairhaven was the engineer. Sam Cuccuro from Gloucester was a deckhand. Michael Amaral was a deckhand as well from Fairhaven. And also David Osvick, he was from the Wester (?) area. They left on June 2nd I believe. They were gonna go for a ten day trip. I was workin' during the week between June 1st and June 10th. I got a job to offload the fishing vessel The MARINER. Myself and my partner, Turk Pasqual was workin' the vessel down at LVD. And around 11 AM on June 10th, we heard a rumor that the fishing vessel FRAN had sunk with all hands. During that time I had anxiety, and I was anxious to find out that if it was true. I said to my friend Turk, I'm gonna call the skipper's, the mate's wife which was friends of ours. And I says [to my wife] Carol "I heard that all hands went down on the FRAN. Call up Jan Connors and make everyday conversation you usually have with her indicating that it's just a routine conversation, don't say anything about the boat. My wife did and she contacted me back and she said she had called Jan and had mentioned that if you had heard anything about the FRAN sinking. And Caroline says no, I haven't heard a thing. We'll I'm gonna let you know. You're gonna hear something that the crew was rescued. All six men got off the boat. But the boat will be sinkin' from what we understand. As soon as I got that message, I said to the guys dockside, please let's stop the rumor, let's change it. Let's say that everyone has been rescued. The boat sunk, but everyone's been rescued. We don't need to carry a rumor down sayin' that everyone went down with the FRAN. The story is they were all saved. They were picked up. They were taken to Otis Air Force Base. During that time, I believe they also had a trip aboard, 55 thousand during that time. At the time of the rescue, they called the helicopter, the helicopter got there with the rescue basket. They lowered the basket. Every individual fisherman off the vessel. During that time she was blowin' a gale of wind durin' that time between 30 and 35 miles an hour. At the completion of the operation, she was blowin' up a gale between 50 to 55 miles an

hour. They were fishin' I think, I believe durin' that time, it was like 35 miles east of Nantucket. But the best part of this story is everyone was saved during that time. And that was on June 10th 1977, fishing vessel FRAN.

AB That's a great story.

JD Yeah. All of them. but the rumor during that time was that they had heard whoever had picked up that conversation saying all hands went and the waterfront is a big industry and we don't need to have a rumor like that because they're gonna bump into someone and eventually someone's gonna hear that their brother or their father or their uncle is aboard that boat

AB And you go through that grief

JD the grief and they don't have to go through it. So I thought it was very important to find out and Gene Connors during that time he was my best man at my wedding and my daughter's godfather so I figured if we could get that conversation and she heard something which she did, it was good. And I didn't want my wife to say "We heard the boat sunk". Let her feed into you. And it was great because she said, "I don't know if you heard or not you heard the radio but, they're all off, they've been saved."

AB That's a great, a great

JD It is a great one. There's so many stories I hear over the years, like this man was telling you, Brad, I remember the MIDNIGHT SUN. I remember the BARBARA GAIL

AB Wow

JD I started in 1960 down here working as a fish lumper. I've been in this business for 50 years.

AB Yeah, crazy.

JD So it's very interesting when you hear these stories you know. The good stories, you know.

AB Has anything gone down recently at all? I mean at this stage they can just use cell phones to let each other know

JD Yeah the recent, most recent one I heard was the, it was the bad one just, I think the recent one was the LADY OF GRACE. She wasn't that far from here and all hands went with that. But that's not on, oh you can delete...

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JD I am, I'm not a fisherman. I'm not a commercial fisherman. I make my livin' from the sea. I offload the boats. I am considered a fish lumper. We off load the boats. I offload

fish and scallops. We pump ice into the boat. We do the washing. We provide those services. We're not commercial fishermen. We are dockside. I did my, it was a short lived career as far as a commercial fisherman. I made two trips. I did try. I went down at 1964, 1964, I'm sorry a friend of mine, his name was at the time, Isaksen and had the CAPN BILL II and he wanted to know if I'd make a trip with him during that time because one of his crew couldn't make it. And I says, "Well you know I don't know. I am a land lover." He says, "Well look, I'm buyin' a, I'm buildin' a new boat and I'd like to break in a young fellow for the near future." He said, "Why don't you go?" Well it was in the month of August and I told him, I says, "Well, I'll give it a try, it's gonna be a trip, because I'm comin' back to lumpin'." You know I built up quite a bit during that time lumpin. I says, I'll give it a try and all that. So I went with him and I came down and we left there. It was on a Monday. We left the docks and the first two days I was seasick. It was flat ass calm, but I still got sick, you know? I was havin' crackers and milk so I wouldn't get the dry heaves. So when we did come home, I believe it was Monday to Monday, dock to dock Monday. And he had, I think it was about 50 thousand pounds of fish at that time. And came home and we settled up and I though the check was pretty decent in those days. After taxes I, your net pay was \$286 dollars which I thought was decent pay. And I thanked him. The whole thing that when I had gone with him that time, the first thing he had said when I docks, a Gorda's boat (?) was please take off your wedding band. And I wanted to know a reason, and like I said his name was Captain Willie Isaksen and I says "Hey captain, why do I have to take my wedding band off?" He says, "I'd rather have you take the wedding band off now so you don't lose the finger or something if you get caught up in the twine or the chain or something." I said "Ok" I don't have a problem. So I took the wedding band off. He's lookin' after me and all that. So anyway we came in, we settled up and I went back the following week there, back to my job as a lumper. And again, a few years later, it as 1968, my best man Gene Connors he was runnin' the boat. It was the MARY TAPPER and that was the month of March. We're not talkin' August now, we're talkin' where the weather gets very sloppy and everything. He says, "Jimmy," he says, " Tony's not gonna show up this trip. If you could come with us just for this trip, transit." I said, "Look, I told you I would four years ago, I get seasick and you're talkin' March. He says, "We're not gonna be gone long, maybe five days" Of course he was my buddy and my best man, my daughter's godfather. I said "Ok Gene." So again I went aboard the boat, it was the MARY TAPPER (TAFT?) and we were only gone like four or five days, I was sick from the beginning to the end. I mean I was heavin' and I had to have crackers and saltines and again you know it was rough. And I know, I wasn't goin' as a career person in the industry, it was because I was fillin' in for a guy that couldn't make it during that time.

AB Did you work at all while you were out there?

JD Yeah I did some work on deck there and then at one point he said to me "Go get a basket under the whaleback" The whaleback is storage where they put the twine in baskets. Well, I went under there to get the basket so we could fill it with fish and I didn't get very far out of there I tell you, I think I lay there for the next day but in and out type thing you know I. That particular boat, at that time, I'd be the first one to admit it, I didn't run my watches and all that. And the skipper during that time, it was the Gene Connors,

the mate was Jack Pipe, Barry Boucher and myself. We were four-handed. Where I said four years ago, that boat they were six-handed during that time.

AB Right.

JD So my fishing career was very short lived.

AB Yeah [laughs] You found that it wasn't for you.

JD I knew it wasn't for me during that time. But the industry itself was, it's been awful good to me, like I said, I've been at it all my life. Back in the 60s, there was so much work here you could work around the clock. You know. You had turn work away because we didn't have regulations in those days. There was so much fish comin' into this port. There was just no end to it. And for anyone to have a true understanding of what these great fishermen go through in there daily lives, you would have to make a trip. The isolation, the vast ocean, the occasions they missed, the smile on their children's faces when they have once in a lifetime experience, a home run, a wonderful dance. And I cannot forget to take my hat off to all the women that through their wives and partners because without them they couldn't do what they do. So I have the greatest respect for New Bedford fishermen. This isn't about my expertise as a fisherman, but about my respect for them. For my career was shortlived. I have nicknames. You wanna hear nicknames?

AB Yeah, yeah.

JD I have some nicknames here they go back as far as 50 years ago and some of the nicknames I cannot say and some cannot be printed. I'll let you decide and you can guess what the meaning means. ACE, ANDY GUMP, ANIMAL, BATTLE, BEAVER, BEER CAN BILLY, BICYCLE BILL, BIG L, BIG GUNNAR, DRIFER, DUTCHIE, BILLY GOAT, BIG TRIP PETER, BIG MANNY, ONE EYE LIES, BIG JOHN, BIG EDDIE, BIG DICK, BILABOLLY(?), BILLY THE GREEK, BIRDMAN, BREEZY NUMBER ONE, BREEZY #2, BROKEN ARM, BUFFALO BILL, CAROLINA JOHN, CHAMPAGNE JOHNNY, CAPTAIN MIDNIGHT, CHICAGO, CHICK CHOWDERHEAD, CIGAR GUS, COCO, CRACKERS, DIRTY CHARLEY, DIRTY KELLY, DOGGY, DUTCHIE, FARMER, FILTHY PHIL, FINGERS, FIREBALL, FISH MARY, FLAPPER, FROGGY, GERMAN BILL, GRAVEDIGGER, GREASY BILL, GREASY GUS, HANDSOME HARRY, HARD BOTTOM JOE, HARD TO PORT, HARD TO PORT LIEL, HARD TO PORT JIM, HATCHET MAN, HAWK, HIGHBEAM, HOPPOLON, HORSEFACE, HOUNDDOG, HURRICANE JOHN, ICEMAN, IRON BALLS, JEWBOY, JIMMY THE GREEK, JOE PLAY MONKEY, JOE THE PORT, JOE THE NOSE, JESSIE JAMES, KITTY CUT, KING BIRD, LITTLE JOE, LUCKY, MAGAZINE ANNIE, MICKY, MICKEY MOUSE, MILKSHAKE, MONEYBAGS, MOODY, MISTER CLEAN, MUFFINS, MURPHY, NICK, ONE EYE LARS, ONE EYE JACK, PEE WEE, PEPPY, PICKLES, PIPEY, PORK CHOP, PORKY, PROVE IT, PUNCHY, QUACK QUACK, RAPPY, ROOTBEER, SERGEANT, SCAR FACE LARS, SHAG, MONEYBAGS, SHOW,

SHOE SHINE JOHNNY, SHORT JOE, SILVER FOX, SKI, SLEDGE HAMMER,
TURK, SMITTY, SMOKEY, SNOWBALL, SONNY, SPEEDY, STUBBY,
SUBMARINE, SWEAT, TERMITE, BOSTON, THE SWEDE, THE POLLOCK, TINY,
TIPPY, TONY COO, TONY TUNA, TWO TRIP TONY, TWO COAT TONY,
TURTLE, TURK, TWO TURK, WALKIN THE BRIDGE, WEASEL, WHISKEY AND
WATER, WILD WEST

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JD On the New Bedford waterfront you learn many new words:

Finest Kind

I Kink - takin' a nap

Mug Up - a snack

Channel Fever - time to go home

Shacker - person that gets half share, he's training on a scalloper

Stiff – you're considered a plug

Dump Ducks - seagulls

Asshole - backlash on the rope

A down hull - a dessert

That's all I have on those as far as the words.