

Fishtales, Saturday, September 29, 2012
Working Waterfront Festival

Interviewer – Markham Starr
Interviewee – Brian Lee

MS So we're going to start with what is your name?

BL Brian Lee

MS And where are you from?

BL Originally from Amesbury Massachusetts

MS Do you fish out of here or?

BL Yeah I fish out of here now. I run a small commercial rod and reel boat over in Fairhaven

MS And what kind of fishing do you do?

BL It depends on the time of year. Could be porgies, striped bass, sea bass, bluefish, tuna, depends on the time of year.

MS And how has business been with the economy?

BL Um it's ok. You know it's gettin' better and what works well for us is that we're kind of a niche industry where we do sushi grade fish for the higher end restaurants and stuff like that so you get a bit of a better price per pound

MS So sea stories, if you were to tell, when you sit around somebody who doesn't know fishing what sort of stories

BL I guess the one story that comes to mind first is the, I put a knife up through my hand on a long liner on the, I think it was the third day of a fourteen day trip and we couldn't stop the bleeding, we didn't have anything to stitch it up with on the boat so we found a tube of super glue and just filled the wound with super glue. We were able to get it to stop bleeding and the next eleven days were the longest eleven days of my life. You know workin' twenty hours on deck. Every couple days, the wound would open up again we'd have to close it back. It got really infected real bad and so by the time we got back to, the boat was out of Montauk, New York, I knew I had to go to the hospital. I could feel somethin' was goin' wrong with it. It didn't look good. But I knew I couldn't drive to the hospital 'cause it was, the closest hospital was in South Hampton, 30 miles away. So my plan was to go over to my buddy's house, get a full night's sleep, drive myself to the hospital in the morning. And just by chance, the cab driver that picked me up was also a nurse for all the seasonal workers in Montauk in the summertime and she saw my hand

and just refused to take me to my buddy's house 'cause she understood what was goin' on with it, I guess. And at this point I was startin' to lose consciousness a little bit and she just brought me to the fire station, they loaded me in an ambulance, brought me to the hospital. The hand surgeon said, that if she hadn't done that and if I had gone and slept 8 hours, I wouldn't have woken up 'cause the infection was so entrenched. And he actually said the only, probably the only reason I made it so long was that we never really slept on that boat. You know, you get 2 two hour breaks every 24 hours so you only sleep one hour every, you know, twice a day so the infection was never able to completely shut down my heart, but I was, I was on intravenous antibiotics for like three days after that. They had to re-cut it all and suture it up. But that was probably, everything seemed a little easier after that. Work in those days was really, it was, I mean, indescribably hard at times for sure, just to get through the next ten minutes, you know. But that was, long lining for tile fish, deep water long lining.

MS And then what other types of fishing did you do after that?

BL After that I've dragged for squid, I've gillnetted for monk fish, and now I'm a rod and reel fisherman, which I like a lot. I'm home every night. I fish with a fishing rod, you know, it's like being a kid again. You know just goin' out and cathing fish. I really enjoy it.

MS Do you go out by yourself?

BL Yup, yup. I work by myself. Small boat. Which is so it's fun. I get the same adrenaline rush out of it without the having to go out to sea for a couple of weeks at a time.

MS Well that's a great story [laughter]. That's what I think a lot of people don't understand about fishing they don't realize that you don't have anywhere to go if somebody gets hurt.

BL Yup, exactly. You know, I was back on deck less than an hour after it happened. I didn't even, when it first happened, I just put paper towels over it and duck taped it and finished my shift and then when I had my next break is when we realized it wasn't gonna stop bleeding on it's own and filled it with glue which didn't feel great [laughs]

MS Did you mention that to the doctor? What did they say?

BL They, they, I mean I was a wreck by the time I got to the hospital. And I think that hospital is used to seeing fishermen that are just in miserable shape, but I was lucky to get a really good hand surgeon to work on it too. I don't have feeling in my hand, but I've got full function of it. Yeah. But yeah, that was definitely the toughest job that I did, was long lining. You put out forty miles of cable, attach four thousand hooks to it twice a day and the trips are about two weeks. But it was a good experience. Like I said, it makes everything else, every day feels like gravy after you get through something like that for sure. Yeah.

MS Wow, that's great. That's a great story.