

Fishtales
Sunday, September 30, 2012
Working Waterfront Festival

Interviewer – Ace Elijah and Dave Martins
Interviewee – Frances Rodrigues

AE What is your name? AE Your name?

FR My name is Frances Rodrigues.

AE And your story...

FR My husband's a commercial scalloper for 32 years. There's been good times and a lot of rough times and the fact of we have five children and four of em were born when he was out fishing which made a difficulty. Some of the stories he's told me are amazing. He has worked on this scalloper for 22 years. The name of the scalloper is the LIBERTY.

AE What's your husband's name?

FR Jose Rodrigues. Pranks? Well you know, one time a couple of guys were sleepin' and they drew with permanent marker on their faces or their bags. But the stories of him fishing doesn't really talk about very much, it's kind of like inside of him. But some of the stories that I've heard over the years are amazing. The fact that he has found a couple of sets of mastodon teeth, petrified shark's teeth, petrified quahogs, an amazing collection of bottles, some of 'em rounded at the bottom which could pre-date to the early 1900s. He has enjoyed his life fishing. He would never think of doing anything else, but at this time in moment, where the regulations are becoming very difficult for, to make a living, to pay health insurance, which that is a major problem with fishermen not bein' able to have a subsidized program through the government like they did for probably about 10 years. Now with them bein' self-employed, they have to pick up the whole trip, the whole price of the insurance which could be twenty four hundred dollars. You know that's a lot of money, not countin' co-payments and prescriptions. Learning the trade, he actually learned it by himself and taught many, many men to become the cutters that they are now. He's the oldest crew member and he's the engineer on the boat and

DM I asked what his position was on the boat

FR yes, oh I've lost my train of thought. Hmmm. To become, I'm losin' my train of thought here. To become the shuckers that they are now. He's the oldest man on the boat and he's still the fastest cutter on the boat. And his nickname is called Zippy for since 1978. A couple of years he's won the scallop shucking contest, but because of their schedule and stuff, he's never really made it lately. Good old days of fishing was when there was like 13 men on the boat, like late '70s where not so much of a burden would be to fish there would be more crew members. You know like their shift thing. 'Cause with

the regulations now I think it's seven maximum and that's taken a toll 'cause they get like about five hours of sleep you know a day, give and take, between the meals. It's become very...Close Calls, I probably could tell you that storms, they're the most, scariest. I remember a couple of storms he was out on the deadliest, Perfect Storm. He was out fishin' and they were on their way in. It was very windy and I had went down to the beach and waited for them to come in. The swells were probably five to ten feet at the time and that was just heartbreaking to know and to think of what could happen. Because I've heard that the fishing on this side of the country versus being in Alaska is more dangerous. Because in Alaska they only fish a certain amount of time. Here you're fishing and with the regulations, the captains and the boat owners are kind of a little leery about sending the boats back in because of the cost of the fuel and the cost of the time and everything kind of...The best trip was when they did 10,000 bags a trip. And you're talking like 40 pounds a bag. So you do the math [laughs]. Superstitions at sea: Never use the word pig [laughs], and on the home front, they never like to have a woman go on board because that's bad luck. Hmmm, a prank that was played, can I say that one? It might not be a good thing to say. In the late '70s, they used to play a lot of pranks on the guys and somebody decided to use ExLAX as chocolate which made a very terrible situation for all the guys on the boat because what they thought they were eating, a brownie, was not so good. I'm tryin' to think, hmm, and like I said, on the home front, you've learned over the years when they first come in, you do not talk about anything that's happened during the two weeks or week that they've been gone, you kind of let it go for the first day and then slowly approach them with what's going on, because the first thing they'll say is "What's going on?" which, don't really wanna say what's happened over the two weeks. If it's something major, you know, you have to learn to like let it ease. And then when they go out, they always have to have the worry of what's going on at home. And I told him that the best way to deal with that is to take your mind off of it and just keep on shuckin' and you know, that's it. That's a kind of motto to go by. I think that's it.

AE Thank you very much.

FR Oh, you're welcome.