



Oral History and Folklife Research, Inc.

An Interview with Lela Anderson

Interview Conducted by

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Keith Ludden: Let me do a little housekeeping first. It's July nine, isn't it? And, we're in Corea, C-O-R-E-A; and we're at Lela Anderson's home; and I am going to switch these mics [There is mic handling noise here]. And we're talking about the Stinson Cannery, which became the Bumble Bee Cannery,

Lela Anderson: That's right.

KL: And is now...

LA: Now lobsters.

KL: Canning lobsters. Do you mind if I ask what year you were born?

LA: 6/6/31

KL: You were born in nineteen-thirty-one?

LA: Yes. I just turned eighty. In June

KL: So, you saw a few hard times

LA: Oh yes; I've seen it all. Course, my mother worked there long before I did.

KL: Oh, your mother worked there?

LA: Oh yes.

KL: And were you born here in Corea?

LA: No, Sullivan

KL: And that's...

LA: David's coming now

KL: Oh, okay. We'll stop. I need to look for a pen anyway

LA: I've got a pen; you want one?

KL: Let me see if I've got one in my bag.

LA: I thought that was him, but maybe I was wrong. Too bad, because he likes stuff like that.

KL: Pardon me?

LA: I said, "Too bad, because he likes stuff like that". He likes doing this. He's a nice kid. Do you know him?

KL: Did you say you saw him coming?

LA: I thought I did, but it wasn't him.

KL: Okay. Let me adjust my hearing aids so they work properly. [laughter]

LA: That's what I'm coming to

KL: Pardon me?

LA: That's what I'm coming to.

KL: [laughter] Okay, so you were born in Sutherland

LA: Sullivan.

KL: Excuse me, [laughter] Sullivan, and that was in nineteen-thirty-one, and Sullivan is in Hancock county.

LA: Yes.

KL: And your mother worked for the cannery before you?

LA: Yes

KL: Could you tell me a little bit about that?

LA: She worked there when I was in high school; in fact she worked there a little while I was working at the same place for a while, but then she moved to Connecticut, and worked in Connecticut, in places.

KL: When did she start working in the cannery?

LA: Well, it must have been ten years before I did.

KL: I see. When did you start working at the cannery?

LA: Nineteen-fifty-six

KL: Nineteen-fifty-six, so...

LA: April.

KL: April? So, your mother was working in the cannery in the forties?

LA: Oh yes. In the forties.

KL: So, tell me what that was like.

LA: That was in the old plant.

KL: Oh, yes.

LA: Yes. I said when I grow up I'll never work in a sardine place; it stunk so bad, and I ended up there.

KL: When you grow up you'll never do what?

LA: No, I'll never work in a sardine plant because when she came home it stunk so bad, and I ended up doing it.

KL: [laughter]

LA: Fifty-four years.

KL: So, you didn't necessarily want to go work in the sardine factory

LA: No, no.

KL: What did you want to do?

LA: Well, I have a twin, and we tried several different things, but we were so small that we were turned down, so, we needed to work, so, I worked in there when I was in high school, you know, to make money, but I said, "When I get out of high school that's it." But, I was a nanny for a little while, and I said, "Well". I got married and I said, "It's time I went out and made a earning," you know, so, I left the job I was on, went in the canneries and been there ever since.

KL: What kind of other things did you try?

LA: I worked in a blueberry plant

KL: A brewery?

LA: Blueberry.

KL: Oh, blueberry plant. Forgive me, I have midwestern ears. [laughter]

LA: [laughter] That's alright.

KL: So, you worked in a blueberry plant? And what else?

LA: I raked blueberries, and mostly sardine plants; I worked a small one up in South Gouldsboro. You've heard of Snow's Clam Chowder.

KL: Oh, okay, and where was that?

LA: South Gouldsboro (?). And then I got married, and my husband was from here, so then I went to work in Stinson's, been there ever since.

KL: And when your mom came home from working at the cannery what was that like?

LA: It smelt bad. She'd stop at that little store and bring home cookies and stuff and they'd taste just like—Oh! She didn't have to worry about us eating them up, because we didn't like the taste of them.

KL: [laughter] The cookies smelled like sardines?

LA: Yes, they tasted like it too. I used to eat sardines though, when she'd bring them home. But they're so boney.

KL: And what was your first job in the cannery?

LA: Packing.

KL: Packing?

LA: Yes. First experience I had packing fish it was up to Snow's; it was just a little small factory, and they had a lady that, you know, you had to check out your age and your birth - when you were born, she came in, and my twin sister and I were at the table (inaudible), she said "You girls must leave the table, because you are not old enough to work". And we said, "We are", and I wouldn't say a word, but my twin sister said, "Well we are, and they got our birth certificate upstairs in the office." She made us go away from the table, and go right up and verify it.

KL: And how old were you?

LA: We had to be sixteen to work.

KL: And this was in, about, nineteen-fifty-one.

LA: Yes, just about 1950, '51; or a little before fifties.

KL: And you were sixteen did you say?

LA: Yes, we had to be sixteen.

KL: So you started fairly young at it.

LA: Oh yes. Real young. That's when work was reasonable, but there was very little expense, you know, but now, when the last of us working, there were expenses, before the old factory burnt, you know.

KL: The sardines were expensive?

LA: The sardines are expensive now. No, to buy the equipment to work with, you know, like your scissors, but see, last of working, they were all cut for us.

KL: Okay, so you had to buy your own equipment.

LA: We had to buy our aprons, and our hair nets, and our scissors, yes.

KL: So you had to lay out some money before you started working.

LA: Oh yes, and you had to have your scissors razor sharp.

KL: How did you accomplish that?

LA: Well I was left-handed, but I used right-handed scissors. I couldn't use left-handed scissors for something. I used right-handed.

KL: They would not let you use—

LA: Oh yes. They'd let you use whatever you wanted to, but I started out with right-handed scissors and I stayed with them.

KL: I see, okay.

LA: Everybody said, "You're upside-down." [laughter]

KL: I'm left-handed too,

LA: Yes

KL: So how did you keep the scissors sharp?

LA: They had people right there that sharpened them.

KL: And how did they sharpen them?

LA: They had a little grinder, wall grinder.

KL: So, did you have more than one pair that you could, kind of handle?

LA: Oh yes. Sometimes they'd come apart while you was working. Oh yes, you had to have extra ones.

KL: And when one would get dull you would hand them to somebody to sharpen them?

LA: Yes. If you knew they were dull, you went and got the guy to sharpen them, any time of the day you were working; because when I first started, in the old factory, when I was young, there was no end to hours. We worked, go home, just time enough to get an hour or two of sleep, and go back on the bus, because they had buses then that carried the packers, and back to work we'd go. But see, then later on, when the years went on, they had hours, eight hours a day, and if we wanted to work over-time, to get them done so we could have longer time off, then we'd finish them up.

KL: How many hours was it between shifts?

LA: They only had shifts at one time, that was in the new plant they built, they didn't last long, then we went completely to just one. But in the old factory, just everybody worked the hours that they had. If you had to work eleven hours, you worked eleven hours, and you'd get to go home and have a couple hours sleep, and come back, and go at it again. But we did cooked fish then.

KL: Explain that to me, if you would.

LA: Well, they cooked them, and they had them on flakes; they had these big, tall, wooden, oh, looked like a box, and it had shelves, and it had flakes, wire flakes that went in, and the fish were laying on them cooked, and they had men that would stand there and the belt was here, and they'd put them on as fast as they could, as fast as we'd pull them off, my partner and me. Then when we got done we had to flip it over and put it back in, then haul out another one, that's the way they done them then. A lot different.

KL: So the sardines were cooked when you put them in the can.

LA: Yes. We did little ones, about

KL: They were about three or four inches long?

LA: Yes. They weren't very big. We put up to twenty-something in a can. When we got this new plant, they didn't do these little tiny ones.

KL: How long did it take you to learn how to do the packing?

LA: It didn't take me long to do it. When I started I think they made about seventy-five cents an hour. I made my time from day one. Lot of people couldn't make their time when they started, but we made ours.

KL: What do you mean by, "making your time?"

LA: If they paid you seventy-five cents an hour you had to make seventy-five cents an hour. That's what it was.

KL: You mean you had to pack a certain number of cans per hour?

LA: Yes.

KL: Okay. How many cans per hour did you have to pack to make the seventy-five cents an hour?

LA: Well, we didn't get much for a case, so oh, probably four, just estimating.

KL: About four cases per hour?

LA: Just about, in an hour. And gradually you went up, you went up, you went up, you went up, and [of] course you got a little better price.

KL: So, the more cases per hour you packed, the more you made.

LA: Oh yes. The more money you made. That was what was good about it.

KL: And the minimum was about four cases per hour.

LA: I'd say just about. I really can't remember for sure.

KL: It didn't take you very long to learn how to do it?

LA: No. I think that's about what the hourly wage... You had to make the hourly wage, or whatever the hourly wage was that they paid, you had to make that. They'd give you so long to do it, and if you didn't make it, I guess you was out the door, I don't know, because we made ours from the beginning.

KL: Explain to me what you did. You took the fish off these racks...

LA: Yes.

KL: Tell me what you did then.

LA: Then you dumped your cans; you had a belt that your cans was on; you got your cans [and] put them down on the thing, then you had empty trays over here that held twenty-five cans to a tray; you had to pack four of those to make the case, four of those trays, then they'd have someone come pick it up and put it on a cart [and] take it to the cooker, then you just kept on, that's how you did them; you built your cases up, and they punched them as you got a case.

KL: You had a punch card?

LA: Yes. I kept a lot of them for years, then I didn't keep them, but the guy'd come along, then you had them hanging on the table, on a string. And we had wood tables then. We had our chum hole right in the end of the table, so we pushed it down in. When we got chum, when we cut the

head and tail off, then we'd just push it right down on that waste belt, see, then we'd haul out another tray, keep right on going. We'd do that all day.

KL: That must have kept you moving pretty fast.

LA: Oh yes. I was the fastest one. Not in the beginning...

KL: That's what I hear.

LA: I used to give it to her.

KL: You used to what? I'm sorry.

LA: I said, "I used to really give it to it". It was fun though, it was fun. I think we had more fun though, in the old days.

KL: Why is that?

LA: I think we raised more devil

KL: [laughing] How did you raise devil?

LA: Oh, we'd get each other going. Oh gosh, play some awful tricks on each other. [laughter]

KL: [laughter] Can you tell me about some of them?

LA: We had a fellow that, well now what did he do? We used to fill his dinner pail up with nails and everything.

KL: You did what?

LA: We'd fill his dinner pail up with nails and stuff we'd find. [laughter] Oh, Charlie Westcott, that was his name; he was a nice fellow.

KL: What was his last name?

LA: Charlie Westcott.

KL: Is he still around?

LA: No, they've all gone, passed on. All of our old workers, you know, just about. You know I don't really know how old the oldest one was that ever worked there.

KL: When you were at your fastest, how many cases could you pack?

LA: Oh my lord, the last of it, we made a-hundred-some; oh gosh I don't dare say, we probably got, wasn't nothing getting seventy cases.

KL: One-hundred-seventy cases?

LA: Seventy.

KL: I'm sorry.

LA: Seventy.

KL: Seventy?

LA: Probably more than that, I really can't remember.

KL: That was in a day?

[A documentary film maker named David arrives]

LA: Oh, in a day, yes. Come in David. You're late.

David: Well, I thought you said he was going to be here.

LA: I said, "Twelve o'clock".

KL: Hi David.

David: I thought you said he called and he was in an accident.

LA: No, I said, "Twelve".

KL: Hi David, I'm Keith.

D: Thank you very much.

KL: We just went ahead and got started here.

D: Okay, do you mind if I step to the side and not say a word?

KL: No, that's fine. We are just chatting here a little bit about the cannery

D: Okay

KL: And Lela was telling me about some of the devil they raised

D: Oh, the what?

KL: [laughter] Some of the devil they raised

D: Right, right, right. Okay.

KL: [laughter] You said you used to stuff people's lunch cans with...

LA: Yes. We'd put stuff in his lunch pail. He was a nice old fellow. And he'd do things to us. We'd take his lunch; put stuff in the place of his lunch. Oh, Nancy Harrington, another packer, we worked out in a place on the end of the line. It was called "Russia". They called that end of the factory "Russia," in the main factory. It wasn't, that was just the name they gave to that room. He worked out there, and oh, we'd get him. Of course, they used to be on coal then. Maybe that's what he worked on; maybe he worked on the coal fire.

KL: Okay, why did they call one end of the factory "Russia"?

LA: I don't know. I never did find out why they called that "Russia".

KL: [laughter]

LA: So many packers was out there. I never worked out there. I always worked out in the main factory. Oh, some of the girls did some awful things to that boss. My sister worked there too, my older sister, she and another friend, they took the boss down, (inaudible) his name was, and they nailed his necktie to the floor.

KL: [laughter] Who did they do that to?

LA: One of the bosses.

KL: [laughter] The bosses?

LA: They nailed his necktie, nailed him right down to the floor.

KL: Not while he was wearing it, I hope. [laughter]

LA: Yes. Took him right down and nailed him. That was before I went there. She was a big, tall, skinny girl and I mean, she was fast too. But I didn't work there then. Nailed his necktie to the floor. [laughter] He said, "You girls'll pay for this," but he never did nothing to them. But I did pack under him. I didn't have very many bosses. I had nice bosses.

KL: Now, you said you were one of the fastest.

LA: I was the fastest, in there.

KL: Were there others who were pretty fast?

LA: Oh yes.

KL: Can you tell me about that?

LA: Course, everybody had their own rhythm. I used to throw my fish up in the air and catch it, and come down, cut the head off. For example, A friend of mine, that packed, she just kept hers, and then just—but I didn't dare do that, because a lot of them cut right through that, and I said, "No, no. I'd rather cut my finger off then cut through that part of my hand". So, I threw my fish up in the air, and when it come down, I'd cut - that's why the people when then they come in the factory [and] visited they always wanted to come to my table. Said, "We've got to see that little girl that flips them fish."

KL: [laughter] I'm not quite getting this.

LA: There's a herring, right there, right? You'd flip it up. I lost your pencil.

KL: That's alright. I got it.

LA: Anyway, I'd toss it up, and flip it over, and I'd cut the head and tail off. And I'd turn it myself. Well a lot of them didn't turn them, they'd just took the scissors and went under-handed; I wouldn't do that, because I was left-handed, but I'd cut the fish with my right hand.

KL: So you would toss the fish in the air and flip it.

LA: Yes.

KL: and then...

LA: Cut the head and tail off. Yes. And the little, tiny ones we'd put in the cans, what we called double rows, we didn't cut the tails off of them, you left the tails on them.

KL: Why was that?

LA: I don't know. I always wondered that too. That was the only sardine I liked to eat, was those little, teeny ones, when they'd come out of the steam boxes red hot.

KL: And why were they especially good?

LA: Because they didn't have so many bones to pick out of them.

KL: Did you have any other jobs in the cannery, or did you just do packing all the time?

LA: When I just went out to the one in South Gouldsboro (?) I sealed a little while, but that made me so sick I didn't stay on that very long. Oh yes, I've done other things. I worked down [in] the casing room a little bit. We worked out in the cutting room, and we had to do other things. [We] had to take turns in the sealing room.

KL: Okay, you said you worked in the "casing room"?

LA: Yes.

KL: What was that?

LA: Well they'd take the cans after they're all done, and put them in boxes to ship out. Pile them up in five, boy you want to see some of the girl's work, you should've been there watched them; some of them could really case up a box of sardines.

KL: [laughter] How long did it take them to put a case in a box?

LA: I don't know, but boy they could make some.

KL: [laughter]

LA: One of the fastest ones was Ramona Dyer (?). I'll tell you where she works now. She works up to Burger King in Ellsworth.

KL: At the Burger King?

LA: Yes.

KL: In Ellsworth?

LA: Yes. Her names Ramona Dyer. And I mean, she could case up fish. Course, she hasn't worked in a sardine plant for years. She could really put them in the cases.

22:30

KL: What did you like about the job?

LA: Well, mostly I liked going to work and being there with everybody, doing things together; know you was going back in the next morning [to] work with them; it was enjoyable. I never, ever said I didn't like it, because I did; I enjoyed it. I'd get dirty, because I was so quick, i'd get dirty.

KL: I'm sorry, pardon me?

LA: I was quick so I'd get quite dirty.

KL: You got dirty?

LA: Dirty. Yes. We used to do these, what they called, ovals, or two great big fish in a can, the great big herrings, that's that long, and man, when you cut the head off them, the guts would fly; oh, they were terrible.

KL: That got you pretty dirty?

LA: And if you had a partner, you got them dirty. [laughter]

KL: So you had to create a relationship with your partner.

LA: Oh yes. [If] they didn't like you, they'd leave you. If you didn't like them, you'd leave them.

KL: You would ask to be reassigned somewhere else?

LA: Yes, they'd move you, but I never did; I always stayed on the same table.

KL: Now you said your mother worked in the cannery before you.

LA: Yes, in the forties.

KL: Yes, in the forties. Did a lot of families work in the canneries?

LA: Yes.

KL: Can you tell me about that?

LA: My aunt worked there, and my older sister worked there, but I didn't pay much attention to it then, because I didn't tend to get into it. [laughter] After I got into it, that's a different story. You couldn't make any better money anywhere's else; you made good money.

KL: And in the fifties. What was Corea, and Prospect Harbor, and Winter Harbor like in the fifties?

LA: The people?

KL: The towns.

LA: Oh, they're all nice little towns. Course, I think this is the prettiest little town.

KL: What was it like to live there, in the forties?

LA: Here?

KL: Yes.

LA: Oh, I didn't come here until fifty-four.

KL: Excuse me, in the fifties.

LA: I liked it, but I didn't like the fog when it came here and stayed for a month or two.

KL: Got a lot of fog?

LA: Oh yes, we get a lot of fog here, David can tell you that. You was here when we had all that fog, weren't you David?

KL: And what about the people in the businesses. What were they like?

LA: You know, the difference between the people now and the people then. People envy each other. There's a lot of bickering and stuff [that] goes on, which didn't in the early fifties, you didn't get that.

KL: Why do you think that is?

LA: I don't know, changing of the world I guess.

KL: What were the bosses like in the canneries?

LA: The bosses were nice.

KL: Were they pretty good to work with?

LA: Yes. There was only one that I didn't get along with, but I never had much trouble with any of them. I'd way my piece and then just...

KL: You worked in canneries for fifty-four years, is that right?

LA: A little bit over.

KL: Did you ever get tired of it?

LA: No, I liked it. I enjoyed it. I enjoyed it when I started working like, six-thirty in the morning until three in the day, you know, during the day. I liked it then. Once in a while we'd work over, like I said, if we wanted a long weekend, and we knew we had a few too many fish on a Friday, we'd say, "let's do them all up", even if we had to stay there; some nights we were there until six o'clock, but we'd finish them all up so we could have the long weekend.

KL: Now, there was a point at which they just brought you in when there was fish, is that right?

LA: Oh yes. That's the only time.

KL: Okay. How did you know when there was fish?

LA: They had ladies that called us. They had one in this area, and one Downeast.

KL: When you say, "Downeast" you mean...

LA: Millbridge.

KL: Millbridge?

LA: Millbridge, Harrington, Lubec, all them places; people can as far as Jonesport, Harrington, Lubec.

KL: So the people came from quite a wide area.

LA: Yes. Yes.

KL: And they sent buses out there?

LA: See, because they used to have a plant in Jonesboro, Addison, and Eastport, and Lubec, and then they all went out of business, and we became the last one, so they all moved our way. We had buses, in the fifties, we had buses that transported us to work; I liked that.

KL: So, you would get a call...

LA: In the middle of the night, or any time. Might be one o'clock in the morning, they'd say, "going packing [at] eight o'clock; or going packing [at] nine o'clock". We'd have to be ready.

KL: And the bus would pick you up to have you there by that time.

LA: Yes. I don't know, it hasn't been too many years since the buses ran too. It cost so much money.

KL: The buses ran from the fifties until when?

LA: Until, oh man, it must—I think we still had the bus when they had the new plant, that was in the seventies, so they must have stopped in the late seventies early eighties; [I] can't remember.

KL: Now Charlie told me the plant burned in, was it sixty-three?

LA: Sixty-seven, wasn't it?

KL: Oh, okay.

LA: I don't know, I can verify it in my book anyway.

KL: You were working there then?

LA: Yes.

KL: What was that like? Can you tell me about it?

LA: Well, they transported us to the other factories, Bath and Belfast, in Southwest Harbor, on buses. Then you really got up early in the morning, really got up early. [laughter] You had to be going aboard them buses quite early.

KL: What was it like the day of the fire?

LA: [It] burnt at night, early in the morning.

KL: The night of the fire?

LA: I didn't go over. We could see it climb from here

KL: You could see it from here?

LA: The flames, you know, going up to the sky. People when they came to the (inaudible) that factory, they said, "Oh, can't believe it looks like that factory's burning". [Of] course, then they came to the realization that it was. I liked working under Charlie Stinson, and (inaudible). He was a nice guy to work under. His father, [of] course was the head of it for years. He had an old cane and he always came down thumping his cane and humming. "Here comes [Calvin Stinson?] here comes the old man. [laughter]

KL: This was Charlie Stinson's father?

LA: Yes. The old one.

KL: So you could hear him coming?

LA: Oh yes. He'd have his cane and he'd hum.

KL: He would hum?

LA: Yes.

KL: Did he have a special tune he would hum?

LA: No, same old tune. [laughter]

KL: [laughter] Do you remember what tune it was?

LA: No, no.

KL: Now, did a lot of the businesses in Corea and Prospect Harbor, and Winter Harbor, interact with the factory, do business with the factory?

LA: Oh yes. They would have, yes.

KL: And how did that work? Did the factory buy supplies from them?

LA: No. They had men that fished and brought in the sardines. They'd go seining. (Inaudible) the sardines. [Of] course, we used to have a whistle, in the beginning when I first started working over there, they didn't telephone you to come into work, they had a whistle that blew; they blew the whistle before we was going to go to work, it was heard everywhere.

KL: You could hear it from here?

LA: Yes. When it [was] twelve o'clock, every day it would whistle at twelve o'clock. Like if we was going to go to work like at nine o'clock they'd blow the whistle about an hour before.

KL: So you might hear a whistle at eight o'clock in the evening?

LA: Yes.

KL: And that meant you had to go to work at nine in the evening.

LA: No, that meant we had to go to work the next morning.

KL: Oh, okay.

LA: Early.

KL: Okay. Now they brought the fish in on boats?

LA: Sardine boats

KL: Sardine boats?

LA: Yes. And all of the sardine boats were named after his daughters. The Auda Mae, the “Eva Grace,” the “Luanne”

KL: Named after Mr. Stinson’s daughters?

LA: Yes. He had five daughters and they was all named after them, “Joyce Marie”. Some of them [are] still being used for other things.

KL: How did they unload the fish from the boats?

LA: They had a pumping thing right at the end of the wharf at the factory.

KL: Did they pump the fish...

LA: Out of the boat, and up into the factory, into the tanks.

KL: Now, at one point they used weirs, [is] that right?

LA: At one point what?

KL: At one point they used weirs, fish weirs.

LA: Weirs, oh yes. In the bays. Right up here on Paul Bunyan Shores they used to have a lot of weirs.

KL: Oh did they?

LA: Yes. They still use weirs in Canada that they get fish out of, for bait. There really was no point of that factory ever closing. There’s plenty of fish right now.

KL: You think it should have gone on?

LA: [Of] course it should have gone on; it never should have been closed. We knew it would close; the packers all knew it would close just as soon as it was sold. [We] said, "One of these days there's going to be a padlock on the door". Sure enough, came the padlock one day.

KL: Tell me about the day the plant closed.

LA: Oh, there was some sad people; there were some tears; and it weren't a very good day, we had a big dinner, but it weren't a very good day. Just know you weren't going to be there no more.

KL: How did you find out the plant was closing?

LA: Well, we had a big meeting, [they] told us.

KL: Can you tell me about that meeting?

LA: Well they just called us all out into the back warehouse and told us, but we already knew it. They were sorry that the factory was closing, they had (inaudible) there, and a number of big bugs there. [Of] course then we knew right off it was final.

KL: You could see what was coming.

LA: Oh yes. We knew what was coming.

KL: Was there ever any union activity at the...

LA: NO. You don't talk about union. No.

KL: Anybody ever, suggest to you?

LA: No, no. Nope, they didn't talk about that; they stayed away from that.

KL: Why do you think that was?

LA: I don't know. I don't have—

KL: What did the inside of the building look like? I've never been inside the building.

LA: Now, you mean?

KL: When you were working there.

LA: When we were working there, [of] course it wasn't finished like it is now; it was just a big building, didn't have walls, white walls and stuff like we had in this new one. We had everything modern, everything. We didn't have to punch in, they just had a lady come around, take— everybody was at that table, if they were there at seven o'clock, or whatever time we were supposed to clock in.

KL: Is that when you usually went to work, at seven?

LA: Yes. In the old days we went [to] work at seven; until four. Then gradually they changed it to six-thirty to three.

KL: And the cans would come to you on a conveyor belt?

LA: One belt, then our fish would come on another one with flakes. You'd have to reach up and get your cans, because in the old days you had the real old, heavy aluminum cans, and I mean, one just touch, your finger it'd cut it. And when we got done in the new plant your cans was very light, very light.

KL: Did you cut your fingers very often?

LA: I didn't very often, as fast as I was, I didn't very often cut my fingers, but they got some bad cuts, bad cuts. And when you worked on the flakes in the old days if somebody on that end of your table went, like, she was on that end and I was on that end, if she flipped that before I got ready, and you had your scissors in your hand, you could get a bad cut, bad one.

KL: You had to, kind of, be in sync with your partner.

LA: Yes. And if they didn't like you, they'd flip it when you wasn't ready, and you'd want to be aware.

KL: [laughter] Play a few more games with you?

LA: That's right. I got along with just about everybody, though. I never had much problem. I was agreeable to most anything. [laughter]

KL: Now, when do you think the canneries hit their peak? When were you the busiest?

LA: Oh, we used to only work from—they didn't get too many sardines, like, in the spring, until sometime, maybe it was June, or July when they really started. And then they'd start in, and they'd go right through. And the factory used to only run from when the sardines started running in the spring/summer, until September or so, and we'd be done for the winter. We never worked winters.

KL: Okay. So, what did you do during the winters?

LA: Draw unemployment. [Of] course when the new one started up they worked year around.

KL: Was there ever any winter employment in other places?

LA: Oh, I imagine there was. They had this one going. We didn't have very many days off. [Of] course a lot of days we got done early, some days we'd go in [and] only work an hour; some days they'd condemn the fish and we'd get to go home. Then everybody'd holler, "Hurray".

KL: [laughter] So, once in a while they would have to condemn the fish?

LA: Yes. We had inspectors, when we were packing, [of] course the packers always knew if the fish weren't right anyway, and all they'd do is tell the boss when he come along. And of course, they had inspectors. You can take that cushion right out of there if you want to.

KL: No, that's fine.

LA: Then the inspectors would condemn them. But they didn't have inspectors [in the] last of it, not on the raw fish.

KL: What kinds of things would the inspectors look for?

LA: [A] lot of broken bellies that were bad, and different things. And if they was too old or if they looked like they was smothered or, you know...

KL: If they looked like they were what?

LA: Smothered.

KL: Smothered.

LA: Yes. They were real choosy.

KL: When do you think they canneries started to decline?

LA: After they sold it.

KL: Yes, I mean, at one point there were like, I think there were about seventy-five canneries up and down the...

LA: I know. They just started one. I don't have no idea why they— Slow, one by one they closed. Well, I'll tell you really what people believe, they never used to run it in the winter. Once Eastport broke the rules and started working winters, and that started it going, I think, otherwise they would still be working.

KL: Okay, why did that make a difference?

LA: Because you didn't deplete everything.

KL: Okay, so they were taking more fish out the (inaudible)

LA: Yes. It's like everything, and every year there's more and more people going into it, you know, seining and weirs, and then the weirs started to go out, and people didn't have weirs, all number of different things that really hurt it.

KL: When did they start changing from the weirs to the seining? Do you know when that was?

LA: That must've been in the eighties. Along the seventies, eighties. [Of] course when they started pair seining that really...

KL: When they started what? I'm sorry.

LA: Pair seining, they called it, two boats.

KL: Okay, explain that to me.

LA: I couldn't tell you, because I don't know how they do it.

KL: Okay, what did pair seining mean?

LA: Pair means there was two boats seining at the same time, and putting over the boats. It was better when they just had the seiner that put them into the boat.

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KL: Okay. One of the things I noticed when I was doing some background reading was, there seemed to be a lot of fires in the canneries, and a number of them burned down.

LA: Yes.

KL: Do you know why that was?

LA: No. They was remodeling the old plant over here when it burnt down. They figured somebody put a cigarette in the waste paper basket, but they didn't know for sure. There was no way of really knowing, I guess.

KL: Did most of the people in Corea and Prospect Harbor, and Winter Harbor, work for the canneries?

LA: Yes. And as their kids got older, they worked in the cannery.

KL: Something you were just expected to do as you grew up?

LA: Yes. [A] lot of them stayed. Well, it gave the school kids a chance to work, if they were old enough to. I guess in the beginning when factories first started, I don't know, because I was younger than a lot of them, maybe there was no age limit, because I had heard some of the ladies tell me down at Jonesboro, when they used to come up to this factory that they went down at

night and worked with their mothers, just twelve years old, so maybe they just did it to work with them.

KL: You heard that from some people in Jonesboro?

LA: Yes. Ladies that I used to pack with, that I knew. They said a lot of them used to go in and help. Probably played around. [laughter]

KL: Now, they changed the way they made the cans, to some extent, from at the beginning to recently.

LA: They went to a lighter can.

KL: Can you explain that to me?

LA: See, they had their own factory over here that made their cans. Then Canada got that, they all went to Canada, so the cans all came from Canada. I don't know much about all that.

KL: And each plant had it's own label?

LA: Yes.

KL: Can you tell me very much about the labels?

LA: Well, most of the labels came from Stinson's anyway, I think. And just like the sauces they put in the sardines. One of the girl's husband used to make up all kinds of different sauces. But the light aluminum cans they had more success with them.

KL: They had more success with them?

LA: Yes.

KL: Now they made different sauces for the sardines. Can you tell me about that.

LA: They made ketchup sauce, what looked like ketchup, Louisiana hot sauce, hot peppers, chilis; they done a lot of different sauces, because a lot of people went for that; they liked the hot chilis. I think that was one of their biggest sellers. When we went to steaks, that's when we

made the money on steaks, when you put eight pieces in a can. One packer put four, and then you put four, I mean you could really have your belt going.

KL: Now, were the sauces made there at the plant?

LA: Yes.

KL: Okay. And did you add the sauces?

LA: No. The sealing room, they had their own workers out there, and they added it; The machines put them in. We used to do the pepper with our hands and oh, hot. Then they started putting them in the machines [and] putting them in the sardines. They were the biggest seller.

KL: Now, why do you think people stopped eating so many sardines?

LA: I don't know, I guess what they read about, they liked. People still like sardines.

KL: A lot of people still like sardines?

LA: Oh yes. They buy them in the store, [of] course we was allowed a couple cans a day. We could go out in the casing room and and get us—they had a big table out there, they'd put ones out, [of] course they weren't allowed to pack certain density, in the rounder where it seals, if the ones cased up didn't see if there was anything wrong with them, they had to put them aside; they'd put them on a table so us packers would have some at night. There was a lot to it; there was a lot to that sardine plant.

KL: It supplemented your grocery budget a little bit.

LA: Yes. Peter was a good boss though, the one they got now.

KL: Mr. Colson?

LA: Yes.

KL: I've been hoping to talk to him.

LA: Oh, he'll talk to you. Probably right now he's quite busy.

KL: Probably right now what?

LA: He's busy.

KL: Busy?

LA: He'd probably talk to you though. David works over there.

KL: You work at the cannery? [question asked to David]

LA: No, he's got an office over there's what I meant.

KL: Oh, okay.

LA: No, he don't work.

KL: Okay.

LA: You heard tell of Bill Green?

KL: No, I haven't.

LA: The one that's on T.V.? Bill Green, "The Great Outdoors"?

KL: Oh, okay, yes.

LA: Well, he come down to interview me one time down to the factory, the girls got him to put on an apron and one of those white caps, and pack sardines with them. He said, "This is not easy".

KL: Yes, I don't imagine it is.

LA: They got him laughing, and Senator Mitchell come in and (inaudible) they got him pack some cans. [laughing] Yes, they gave me a big fiftieth party.

KL: Oh, they did?

LA: Yes.

KL: What was that like?

LA: I didn't know nothing about it. It was quite a party. Peter says, "Come on". I weren't going to go out back, but he says, "This is for you." Oh my lord, I got all kinds of plaques. I got one from (inaudible), I got one from Susan Collins.

KL: Oh, nice.

LA: House of Representatives. I got all kinds of stuff

KL: Now, did you know very many of the people on the fishing boats?

LA: Quite a few of them we knew, when they'd come in we'd go down [and] see what the fish look like; sometimes they'd put so many sardines on a boat they'd just be over flowing. [laughter] They'd be out on the—

KL: What would that look like?

LA: That's quite a sight to see, all them fish, nice and shiny, mixture of small ones big [ones]; [of] course, when the fish come in, a lot of times, if they had too many little ones like that, and it wasn't worth picking the larger ones out, they wouldn't do them. There was a lot of waste at times. Then when those great big ones came in we did, I'm going to tell you, you want some sharp scissors when you're doing them. Because that fish was about that long and about that thick, some of them, two in a can, two, three in a can, big fish.

KL: about a foot long, and about two inches thick?

LA: Oh yes. Your scissors go...

KL: And What did you do with those?

LA: Cut the heads and the tail, and we'd have to cut them the length of that can; that was a great big oval can; we'd have to cut them the length. You didn't have no measure nothing, you just in your mind, knew just what length they were going to be; you knew just exactly how you was

cutting them. It's unbelievable that you can do that, isn't it? You stand there all day long pack sardines, and your cutting those fish yourself, and judging the length.

KL: You were not using anything to measure with, you were just eyeballing.

LA: Yes, that's all. Just whack him off, turn him and whack him off again, the right length.

KL: Must have taken a little while to get the hang of that.

LA: Yes.

KL: Were there very many different ethnic groups that worked in the canneries? Were they mostly Scots-Irish from around here?

LA: No, we had Mexicans the last of it, but that's all. They're good workers.

KL: So, about when did you start to see Latinos come work in the cannery?

LA: Oh, probably back seven years before it closed, maybe down around there. They were good workers. Those women could really put sardines in a can, they really could.

KL: They could really make the hands fly.

LA: Yes. It was the last year and a half or so I didn't pack, I been to Portland, [and] had some operations done, which I was hoping to get back on the line, but it closed, so I never made it back.

KL: So, your last time in the cannery was about two-thousand-eight?

LA: Oh no, I worked right up until the day they got done.

KL: Oh, okay.

LA: I worked right on the packing lines, just the same, I was Quality Control.

KL: Oh, I see. But you weren't packing. I see.

LA: I was packing cans, but I was doing cans that the packers made mistakes in.

KL: I see.

LA: Oh, you got a lot of them upside-down, crossways... [laughter]

KL: [laughter]

LA: Fun though. Until you got a big smash-up, two cans right on top of the other under the belt, then you's in a mess, but you had help.

KL: So, you had to clean up...

LA: Oh yes. We had to get that mess untangled. Yes.

KL: And you had to clean up a few people's mistakes.

LA: Oh yes. And if I'd been on the line, then they'd had to clean mine up.

KL: So, you spent the last couple years on Quality Control?

LA: Yes.

KL: Did you ever have to go straighten somebody out?

LA: Oh yes. The fish weren't right, [and if] the can wasn't good we had to dump it. I didn't like that, I didn't like to touch anybody's can, dumping it. But that's what your job was, you had to do it. I did it. I wouldn't want nobody to dump mine.

KL: And that affected how much money they got.

LA: Yes. It sure takes away, but some of them would be told by the floor ladies over and over again, and they wouldn't pay attention.

KL: Some of them took a while to catch on.

LA: My sister-in-law, she passed away a couple years ago, she worked over there, and she packed the neatest can I ever saw.

KL: And she packed what?

LA: Neat. She packed beautiful cans, them double rows, you never saw such a pretty can. She wouldn't pack no trash or nothing. She wouldn't pack one that weren't supposed to go in the can; she's the only one I ever knew like that.

KL: It was a thing of beauty.

LA: Yes. They told her to put twenty-two in a can, she'd try to get thirty in a can. Man, they'd be some pretty.

KL: [laughter]

LA: [Of] course you get too many they weigh-up too much, you know.

KL: Can you explain that to me?

LA: They'd weigh-up to much, they have a weigher, and they'd weigh-up too much.

KL: Okay, so if the can weighed too much, what would happen?

LA: They'd just take out a couple fish, or something.

KL: Okay, and did they put them in another can? Or just toss them?

LA: No, put them in another can. Four fish to a can was what went into a can; your partner put two, you put two

KL: Now why did they split it up between partners? Why not just have one person put four in a can?

LA: So they could put out more, I guess.

KL: So, it was faster?

LA: Mexicans was the fastest though, in doing that. People varied on that new raw fish. It was the one cutting with scissors was altogether different. No matter what, you had to work for it. We didn't play around.

KL: Was it pretty serious business most of the time?

LA: Yes.

KL: Except for when you were playing tricks on each other. [laughter]

LA: You know, when it was time to pack, they got down and packed, but when we had time off, we had to wait, and if we had to wait in between fish, say the fish weren't no good, and they had to dispose of them, and bring on new ones, then we'd have a little time, you know. We got a beautiful lunch room over there now.

KL: Did everybody take lunch at the same time?

LA: Yes. They had machines over there the last of it, you could buy stuff. You'd be surprised at the end of the day how much stuff was left in that machine, not very much.

KL: Did you come home from work pretty tired, sometimes?

LA: No, I'd do whatever I want to at night when I'd come home. No, it never seemed to bother me much, no, I'd come home from work, mow my lawn and stuff like that.

KL: I worked at a factory for a little while, and I'd come home fairly tired.

LA: Well you do at the end of the week.

KL: I think I lost about ten pounds that summer. [laughter]

LA: Lord.

KL: [laughter] I was working, this was in Kentucky, I was working in a plant that made ax handles and hoe handles, so I was handling a lot of hickory blanks, and hickory is a very heavy, dense wood...

LA: That's right.

KL: And I would go home fairly tired. [laughter]

LA: Yes, you'd get tired in almost any job you work on.

KL: Yes. Is there anything you want to point out to me that I might have overlooked talking about, that I might not have thought to talk about?

LA: No. We used to label cans, what they call labeling, and then on the big oval cans, the ones we put two in, when we wasn't packing, we'd go out in the shipping room and do that, and we'd have to paste the little label showing the big fish. We did skippers [kippers?] one year.

KL: Skippers? What were skippers?

LA: Like Canada puts out, the filleted, in the little round, oval cans. We used to do those.

KL: And were skippers herring as well?

LA: Yes.

KL: But they were filleted?

LA: Yes. When we first started doing steaks they gave us knives to cut the heads off with; I didn't like that. Then they got cutters made; we'd have to feed the fish into cutters, then the last were getting done over here, the fish was going through the machines, then all we had to do was pull the thing down, and keep the fish straight in the slots. You never did go in it?

KL: No, I never got a chance to go in the cannery.

LA: Oh, too bad you couldn't. This is going to be quite an operation.

KL: Yes, I noticed they repainted the sign.

LA: Yes, the old fisherman's gone.

KL: And I'm glad I got a photo of it before they repainted it.

LA: Yes.

KL: [laughter]

LA: Yes, I've got a lot of pictures with me with him.

KL: Do you have photos of the cannery, inside the cannery itself?

LA: Yes, we took pictures of all of us on the belt. The day we got done, before we got done, that week, we had the floor ladies took each one of our cameras and took pictures of everybody in different places, like in the sealing room.

KL: Okay, and if it was okay with you I might come back and see if I can get copies of some of those photos. I wouldn't take them out of the house, I could do it here.

LA: No, I had them here, I took them out so David could see. I'll show you

KL: Did you get what you needed David?

LA: The end of an era. They got a new one out called, *The End...*

KL: And who did this? [Speaking about the book]

LA: Oh the factory, they done one for each one of us packers.

KL: Who made the book though?

LA: I don't know. Stinson's the one who gave them to us. See them old pictures in there? That about (?) the same. That's the town meeting book. See, that's all of us when we got done; that's all the packers [in] each department. There's none on the market, just each packer got a book made up for them.

KL: Now, is this something that the company made?

LA: Yes, made for us. See, and this is every one of the workers. See, all of these people is all, made each one of us one, then they gave us...

KL: There you are.

LA: Yes, and they gave us an eight-by-ten

KL: Pardon me?

LA: They gave us an eight-by-ten photo of the whole place. See, there's the sardines. It gives you an idea, see where the packers are all standing.

KL: Wow.

LA: Is that the one of all of them? Packing room right there. Quite something. See there's fish.

KL: Now, was it pretty noisy in there?

LA: Oh yes, you got a lot of noise, not bad because...

KL: I noticed some of the women were wearing ear plugs.

LA: We had to, we had to be. We didn't in the old days, you didn't wear nothing.

KL: Pardon me?

LA: In the old days you didn't have to wear on hearing aid, no things over your [ears]. He's got to have a lobster trap now.

KL: [laughing] Yes, I saw that.

LA: They got a book out on the internet that's *The End Of Time*. I'd like to have it, when Mac comes to see me, I'm going to get him to bring me one.

KL: Now, are there other folks I might want to talk to that you know about?

LA: I wouldn't know who to tell you to interview, because a lot of people don't like to be interviewed.

KL: Can you think of any people to call and see if they would like to be interviewed?

LA: I don't know anybody right off hand. David might now, he's interviewed quite a few, haven't you David?

KL: Perhaps I can chat with David later.

LA: If you saw Peter, Peter give you a list of who you could talk to.

KL: Sure, I'd like to see if I can get ahold of Peter. And you mentioned that...

LA: He's a nice fellow. He'll talk to you. He's a nice fellow.

KL: Yes. I called him once, but I think it was a really busy day for him, and he didn't even get back to me, but I know you got some other places to go, so I don't want to keep you.

LA: No, I'm just going up to spend some time with my twin sister

KL: Okay.

LA: Lilly go to sleep after a while? She's in a kennel in the bedroom. I don't hear nothing. She was really howling when I put her...

KL: [laughter] Again, is there anything else you wanted to tell me about that I might...

LA: No, I think we covered about it.

KL: Okay, alright. Well, I appreciate you taking the time for me.

LA: I think a lot of these girls would talk to you.

KL: Okay.

LA: A lot of them aren't coming back.

KL: You mean they have gone some place else?

LA: Yes. They've gone to school and done things. See, that's the steaks, that's what I mean about the steaks, see. You got seven in that can.

KL: Yes. The label was Beach Cliff, wasn't it.

LA: They had all kinds of different, Beachcliff, yes. Commandos, Beach Cliff, all kinds of different names.

KL: What was Commando?

LA: Commando's was the biggest fish, I think. What were some of the other ones? We had a lot of different labels. Time goes by so fast, you kind of forget.

KL: Yes. Time does go by sometimes. I want to make sure I don't forget something, I'd like to take a few photos of you, if I may. Would that be okay?

LA: Sure, if you want to.

KL: Okay, now I have got a couple, two, three different cameras with me, I am going to use several of them. I am going to set up some different shots if that is okay.

LA: Yes.

KL: Okay.

-----END OF INTERVIEW-----

