NEWPORT HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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ANTHONY BUCOLO

THE FISHING INDUSTRY IN NEWPORT, RHODE ISLAND, 1930-1987

INTRODUCTION

The Fishing Industry in Newport, Rhode Island, 1930-1987, an oral history project, was implemented under the auspices of the Newport Historical Society and the University of Rhode Island Sea Grant Program.

Through question and answer format, the tape-recorded transcribed interviews document the fishing industry from the point of view of its complex traditions and changes. They provide a body of unedited primary source material focusing on priority issues of local concern and those beyond the geographic area under study.

Interviews were conducted by Jennifer Murray of the Newport Historical Society and were transcribed at the Center for Oral History, University of Connecticut. Narrators include representatives of the floating fish trap industry, the inshore and offshore lobster industries, the inshore and offshore dragger industries, the swordfish industry, the wholesale and marketing sector, and fisheries conservation and management.

Oral history enables us to learn about our heritage from those who usually don't write about it. It supplies what's often only hinted at in written historical documents. Readers and researchers using these oral history memoirs should bear in mind that they are transcripts of the spoken word and that the narrator, interviewer, and transcriber sought to preserve the spontaneity and informality inherent in such historical sources. The Newport Historical Society and the University of Rhode Island are not responsible for the factual accuracy of the memoirs nor for the views expressed therein; these are for the reader to judge.

Copies of tapes and transcripts are available for research at the Newport Historical Society. Copies of transcripts are also accessible at the library of the University of Rhode Island, Narragansett Bay. As stated in the release form which accompanies each transcript, the memoirs are to be used for scholarly and educational purposes only.

ANTHONY BUCOLO

In 1945, Anthony Bucolo's father, a fish peddler, became part owner of Tallman and Mack Fish and Trap Company in Newport, R.I. Anthony Bucolo's association with Newport's fishing industry began at that time.

In 1956, Mr. Bucolo started his own business, Anthony's Seafood; in 1986, his business was sold. His operation played an extremely important role in Newport's fishing industry. Mr. Bucolo's business progressed from the handling of lobsters, to lobsters, fish, retail and wholesale, to the addition of a seafood restaurant. Mr. Bucolo also obtained his own boats that caught the fish and lobsters and handled fish and lobsters of numerous other incoming boats, many of whom were attracted to Newport by his reputation for fairness and honesty as a fish dealer.

Waite's Wharf, the site of Anthony's Seafood was purchased by Mr. Bucolo in 1965 for $40,000. Illustrating the dramatic increase in the value of waterfront property in Newport, it was sold to a developer for $3,000,000 in 1986.

Interview with Anthony Bucolo for the Newport Historical Society's Oral History of the Fishing Industry in Newport, Rhode Island, conducted by Jennifer Murray on June 2, 1987

MURRAY: Is it all right with you if I tape this interview?

BUCOLO: It certainly is.

JM: Let's start out with your family. What were your parents' names and where did they come from?

AB: My father's name was Mariano [Bucolo]. He came from Sicily when he was two years old. My mother's name was Crispina [Bucolo]. She was born and brought up in Bristol [Rhode Island].

JM: How did they meet one another?

AB: My father's father died the day my father was born. My grandmother came to this country and left my father and his brother in Italy with her family. She was here a few years; she married again and sent for the kids. The fellow she married was a fish peddler. He also had a little store, which was across the street from where my mother lived. My father worked for him, and that's how they met.

JM: How did they happen to get into the fishing industry in Newport?

AB: My father and uncle, who was older, both worked for their stepfather. They peddled fish. After my dad got married, he and my uncle opened up a wholesale place in Bristol. It was my father's

job to come down to Newport. He used to go to Long Wharf, where the Yacht Club is now. He bought from the Fougeres, Normie Brownell. There was probably seven or eight inshore draggers that they bought from.

He would then take the fish back to Bristol. They would sell it to other peddlers in the area. What they didn't sell in Bristol, they would put on another truck and my uncle would drive that to Boston. As their business grew, they also shipped to New York and to Philadelphia.

They used to buy from Cliff Tallman when he had Tallman and Mack. During the war, Mr. Tallman was commander of the Coast Guard from Woods Hole down, I think, to Stonington, Connecticut. Of course, he used that vehicle as a means of selling a lot of his fish to the government.

At the end of the war, there was a lull. He was of the opinion that the fish business had seen its day and had peaked. At the time, he got a hold of Captain Arsenio Mendonsa, who had four sons: Arsen, George, Manny, and Abel [Mendonsa], and sort of made a marriage between my father and uncle and the Mendonsas, knowing that my father had the ability to sell the fish; they had the ability to catch it (because that's what they did

all their life). That's how Tallman sold Tallman and Mack to the Bucolos and Mendonsas. At that time, I was ten. From then on, I spent all my summers down at Tallman and Mack.

JM: Did you commute back and forth to Bristol?

AB: Yes.

JM: Every day?

AB: Every day.

JM: What time in the morning did you come to Newport?

AB: I used to leave at 4:30 because we had breakfast at 5:00.

JM: Here in Newport?

AB: Yes. When they first took over, until about, I guess, 1945 to maybe 1952 or 1953, they had a lot of Canadian fishermen who had worked with Tallman for years. That meant that they had to have a place to stay and they had to have a cook to cook the food. This lasted until, like I say, 1953 or 1954, when these older fellows just moved off or died. The younger fellows couldn't live on what they were getting. Part of their salary was allocated to the food. They decided they were better off getting an extra twenty or twenty-five dollars a week and bring a sandwich from home than have a beautiful meal. I mean, the meals were just unbelievable. But that was the start. We

commuted every day.

JM: Who did all the cooking?

AB: When I was a kid, the first guy's name was Joe Landry. He was from Nova Scotia. He cooked everything - baked his own pies. I mean, everything was done from scratch.

Then there was Tony [ ]. I can't think of his last name. He was a Portuguese fellow. He took over after [Joe]. He was actually the last one. He had trouble. I think he went blind in one eye. They tried one or two guys for maybe a month or so. When that didn't work, they said, "Hey, let's cut it out and give everybody the extra money." That was the end of that. Then, of course, they knocked the two-story building down and built what they have now.

JM: So all those men that came from Nova Scotia lived there when they were working out on the traps?

AB: That's right.

JM: Weren't there some problems with the government with that? Maybe that was before you.

AB: It must have been. There was no problem that I know of.

JM: With them immigrating down here.

AB: They actually weren't immigrating. It was a seasonal thing. They did go home in the

wintertime. They probably had a visa. I think, at the time, the Mendonsas and another family in Newport, the Costas, were the only locals. The rest were all from Canada. Without them, there wouldn't have been a trap company. Before then, there was Coggeshall, John F. Mack, Tallman and Mack, and George Lewis. So there were four that I knew of. And they said before that, there were even more. So, you had to have these experienced people come down from Canada and do it.

But as time went on, the Mendonsas, being a younger group, got younger guys involved in the fish business. That was the end of the old Canadian people - the young blood. And that's what it takes today.

JM: Did any of those Canadian people stay here?

AB: Not that I know of.

JM: When your father was buying fish down off Long Wharf, did he buy from all those fish trap companies, too?

AB: He bought from the fish trap companies -- You have to understand one thing - the fish traps catch a very limited species of fish, scup being the predominant fish they catch. The draggers would catch yellowtails, flounders, yellow eels. In the fall they catch a handful of whiting and

sardines. These are things that were not common to the trap fisheries. In order to run a fish business, you need a wide variety. It meant that you had to go to the draggers and you had to go to the trap companies.

JM: How about lobsters? Did he buy those from the men down there?

AB: No. He very seldom bought lobsters. The only reason they bought lobsters was my uncle and his wife had a grocery store. Part of the grocery store was a fish market. He might have bought a handful. Knowing everybody, he'd probably say one day, "I want to buy fifty pounds from you," and another day he'd buy fifty pounds from somebody else. But lobsters were something he never got into.

JM: That was all before you, when your father went down into that area?

AB: Oh, yes.

JM: You didn't get involved in it until Tallman and Mack.

AB: Until I was ten years old, when they bought Tallman and Mack.

JM: How many brothers and sisters?

AB: I have two brothers.

JM: Did you go to school in Bristol?

AB: I went to grammar school in Bristol; I went to LaSalle Academy in Providence; and I graduated from Manhattan College in New York.

JM: Really?

AB: Yes.

JM: So you worked summers.

AB: I worked every summer. I always enjoyed school. I wanted to go to school.

JM: Was that encouraged in your family?

AB: Oh, yes. I worked when they needed me to work. But when September came, I went back to school.

JM: Tell me what those summers were like when you were about ten years old, coming to Newport.

AB: Well, when I was ten years old, I'd come down. My father would leave Bristol around 8:00 because he had to go to work. Sometimes he went to Providence to get fruit for the market. Then he'd come back, pick me up, and we'd come down. Of course, at ten years old, I'd take the skiffs out, row around, and just spend the time while they were sorting out fish and whatever, until it was time to go home.

The next year, at eleven years old, the Mendonsas had a sailboat that was given to them when they were kids. They decided it was time I learned how to sail. So that next summer, I spent

ninety-nine percent of my time just sailing. Every once in a while, I'd get adventurous and I'd sail up to Bristol. I'd call my dad and say, "Don't look for me. I'm home."

Then, the next year, when I was twelve, they decided, "You can do little things around here instead of sailing all day." So I would help them while they were taking out fish. While he'd be still waiting for some of the draggers to come in, or waiting for a truck to pick up fish, then I'd go out sailing.

The summer I was fourteen, the summer of my freshman year of high school, they ran into a problem where they didn't have enough help to haul the traps. At fourteen, I was like five [foot] eight or five [foot] nine, a hundred and fifty pounds. They figured, "Well, you're strong enough." They let me take a car at fourteen years old, and drive back and forth in the morning. They needed the help.

JM: [chuckles] That's great.

AB: I worked with a fellow by the name of Louis Gaspar - well-known around town. We both worked on deck. Back then, all the fish was lumped with a scoop net into a bucket. You didn't stop for five or six hours. You'd have fifty or sixty thousand

pound of fish.

One day, Louis said to me, "What are you getting paid?" Everybody figured I was the boss' son --

I said, "I don't get paid. I'm just doing this for fun."

Well, they went on strike. They had to stop work and everything. George said to my father, "What do you mean, you're not paying him?"

"He's only a kid. What's he worth?"

"He's worth as much as anybody else."

He went in the office. They made a deal. That was fine. I got twenty-five dollars a week. This was seven days, long hours.

The following week, we're on deck again. Another load of fish. Louis starts again. He never would keep quiet. "How much they giving you?"

I said, "Twenty-five bucks."

Down went the scoop net. Another strike started. George said to my father, "I thought you said you paid the kid."

He said, "I did."

He said, "What are you giving him?"

He said, "Twenty-five dollars."

He said, "You can't give him twenty-five

dollars when he's better than half the guys we've got here."

So I got $42.50 a week like everybody else - at fourteen.

JM: That must have felt great.

AB: Well, it did. I enjoyed the work, I really did. It was a lot of fun. I was helping the family out. I didn't need anything. I spent the afternoons sailing or whatever. I grew up a lot faster than most people, I guess.

By the time I was seventeen, I left for college that spring. But I worked from the day I graduated from high school till the day before I left to go to college. I wouldn't take a day off. I did that when I used to have my own business. Then, every summer while I was in college, I worked from the day I got out till the day I went back.

The year I graduated, my brother was sick. He owned a fish market - Tallman's Market up on Broadway. I went to work trapping. When I got through trapping, I went and helped him at his market.

JM: Your brother, Domenic [Bucolo]?

AB: That's right. I helped him. There was a lobsterman who used to sell him lobsters. There

was another fish market in town. My dad had had a few words with them. He said to this lobsterman, "What do you do with the lobsters Domenic doesn't use?"

He said, "I sell them to George."

My father looks at me and says, "I don't want any lobsters being sold to George. You make sure you sell them."

We knew somebody that owned the Clambake up in Bristol. I made deals with him to get him as many lobsters as I could. He only wanted chickens. What do you do with the pound and a quarters and the pound and a halfs, et cetera? I'd car them up and had to find restaurants to sell them to.

JM: You carred them up in the water?

AB: That's right. That fall, I got married, started a lobster business. I said, "That's it. I've had it with the three jobs. I want to do one thing and do it right."

In 1956, Anthony's Seafood was started. In 1986, it was ended. We had thirty good years. We progressed from just handling lobsters to handling lobsters and fish and retail and wholesale, and ended up with the restaurant. The cycle was completed. We had our own boats that caught the

fish and lobsters. We handled them. From the time they were caught till the time you had them on your plate, it was an Anthony's Seafood production.

JM: Did your father ever take a day off?

AB: The trap company really doesn't start operating until about April 15th. It closes around the end of November. The Mendonsas would take maybe a couple of weeks off, and then they'd work on gear. It was one of those things where they worked four or five hours a day. There was no big push.

My dad and uncle really had nothing to do but vacation. So they worked hard for the six or seven months, but they had four or five months off.

JM: Your uncle's name was --

AB: Santo [Bucolo].

JM: Did he have sons that were involved?

AB: He had one son. He was named after my father - Mariano [Bucolo]. He went to the Naval Academy, put twenty years in the service. Upon retirement, he was coming back to the East Coast. He was offered a job at Raytheon and a few other electronic companies because of his contacts in the Navy. He decided he would like to give Tallman and Mack a try. His father subsequently

gave him some stock, and Buck [Mariano] began working down at Tallman and Mack. He started -- God, he might have been forty-five -- at the same position that I started when I was fourteen. I guess Buck might have been there nine or ten years. Then my dad died. Buck took over. I guess it was four or five years after that that Buck died. Now Ronnie [Mendonsa] has taken over.

JM: Ronnie Mendonsa?

AB: Ronnie Mendonsa.

JM: How about your uncle? When did he die?

AB: My Uncle Santo died three years after my dad died, which was about a year or two before Buck died.

JM: Big change in a small amount of time.

AB: Yes.

JM: What was the waterfront like when you were a boy down there, sailing? Did you go out sailing alone mostly?

AB: Mostly, yes. If you want to start down in the North corner here, it's where the Yacht Club used to be - across from where it is now. It was where Perrotti Park is. That corner was the Yacht Club. It was a run-down building - a few little docks there. The Greeks all had their lobsterboats lined up along Long Wharf. You came down a little bit, there was a shipyard - Norton's

Shipyard. Of course, that was another run-down affair. Next to that, was a real dilapidated building. That was George Lewis. He used to take out a few draggers. Next to that, you had the Ferry Landing - both the Government Ferry and the Jamestown Ferry. Of course, the Seamen's Institute that we're in now was always here.

Commercial Wharf, Johnson Brothers -- That was the next thing that was there. Then you had Parascandolo's. Christie's was there, but it wasn't quite as elaborate as it is today. Newport Shipyard followed that.

Then you had the Peckham Coal Company, which was the only steel enclosed wharf in Newport at the time. That was done right after the war.

Johnny Mack's was always in a state of decay, but they operated. They're the trap company, plus they had the largest fish market in Newport. Then, of course, came Tallman and Mack. After Tallman and Mack, came the property that I'm on. That was called the Palm Gardens, because there was a couple of trees and a couch where the winos would sit all day and just have a few drinks.

Next to that was the old D.J.'s. Then, on the other side of D.J.'s, which is now Coddington Landing -- That was also run-down. That was

another coal company that had gone out of business. Then you had the gas company. Then, of course, we had King's Park.

That's what the waterfront was in 1945 to 1950.

JM: Did you know any of those Greeks?

AB: Oh, yes. When I decided to go in the lobster business, they'd all come down and buy bait. It was no problem saying, "I need x number of pounds," or "Can I have today's catch?" or something. That's how I got started. Then, it got to be to the point where "I just can't give to you today and tomorrow. You either take them all the time or..."

I said okay. Once I made the commitment, I just went along with it.

JM: Do you remember any of those people in particular who made an impression on you?

AB: Well, actually, most of the Greeks were pretty old at this time. There was just one. His name was Marty [ ]. I just can't remember what his last name was. The only ones that really were up-and-coming were Jimmy and Mimmy Violet, Nick Violet (another brother). There was a Johnny Demitares. I guess Johnny Demitares was the one that really taught all these younger guys. I

mean, he was really the mentor. He taught Ronnie Fatulli, [Neil] Finnegan, the Murphys, [Joe] Oliveira (all these guys) how to lobster. He took them out one summer with him, lobstering. He taught them where to set the pots and how to do it. Every year that went by, one of these guys bought a boat, bought pots, and started. That's what you have today. Although, they said before that, there were at least sixty lobsterboats. In my time, there weren't. But I guess back in the 1920s and 1930s, there were about sixty rigged boats.

I know when I was a kid, there was seven or eight that I can remember - old catboats. There were a few other guys who fished down Third Beach. A fellow by the name of Ted Sturtevant. Of course, the Medeiros. They all fished down that way. They'd bring their lobsters back in the truck.

JM: In the River?

AB: Yes. They all fished the Sakonnet River.

JM: Does anyone do that now? I haven't seen pots in there.

AB: I thin kmost of those fellows are dead. Well, there is one. Yes. There's a young fellow, John Pinksaw. He still fishes out in the Sakonnet River.

JM: When you started your business in the 1950s, what was the make-up of the Newport fishing industry?

AB: Johnny Mack was still in business. The fish market was in business; the trap company had gone out. George Lewis had long gone out. Coggeshall sold to Ronnie Fatulli. Tallman and Mack, I would say, was the leader in the trap fishing. Of course, I had done something that nobody else had done. You had Aquidneck Lobster. They just handled lobster. Parascandolo just handled draggers. The rest of the companies were self-sufficient. When trap fishing, they caught their own fish and that was it.

I had a feeling that the lobsters weren't going to last forever. So when I bought Waite's Wharf, I said, "Let's make a building where we can handle fish and lobsters." I already had two draggers that I bought years before this. They lobstered whenever they could. But then we had a problem, that when they went fishing, they had to sell to Parascandolo or somewhere else. To own something and be in business, and not get your product, didn't make any sense. So, when Anthony's Seafood opened up on Waite's Wharf, we allocated fifty percent of the building to lobsters and fifty percent to fish.

When we first started, money-wise, we were handling more lobster. We had more lobster dollars coming in. After about, oh, I'd say, the late 1970s, my premonition came to reality. The lobsters really started to disappear. We really were handling nine, ten million pound of fish a year. If it wasn't for that, we would have had to go out of business.

JM: Where did those lobsters come from? Were they inshore stocks or offshore - when it was good?

AB: When it was good, it was about seventy-five percent offshore. By offshore, I'm talking drag - not offshore pot lobsters. 1973, 1974, and 1975, possibly into 1976, were the best years we had as far as the drag lobsters went. Those years, there were about five draggers left, lobstering. Two of them were mine, and two of the other three sold to me. So I just about controlled the offshore drag lobsters for three or four years. When that petered out, we had a bunch of offshore lobsterboats come down, wanting to take out -- We built an extension off Tallman and Mack's wharf so that they could tie up there. For the next few years, we had five or six offshore boats. That sort of petered out a little bit. We got into handling some scallops. In 1980 and 1981, we

handled two hundred tons of scallops. We had seventeen scallopers.

JM: Where did these boats come from?

AB: They came from Virginia. It was a Virginia-based operation. The boats would come up here, fish two weeks, sell their scallops to me. Actually, they didn't sell them to me. We packed them up for the company. Then, they'd go back out. The next trip would be going back to Norfolk.

JM: These were sea scallops?

AB: Sea scallops. Then, toward the end of 1981, you could see that dropping off. At the end of 1981, I had a massive coronary. From then on, my business went downhill. It seems that everything in the fishing business started to peter off. The fish petered off; the traps started to go downhill; scallops completely were gone for a while; lobsters disappeared.

However, I'm a firm believer that your lobsters, fish, or whatever, all live in a cycle. I can remember two years ago talking to somebody and they were saying, "Oh, boy, lobsters have had it." Within a month, the North Shore of Boston had so many lobsters they didn't know what to do with them. I'm sure this will happen in Rhode Island again. The same with the fish. The

draggers have cried for a long time now, but they are making it. The price of fish has come up so that they can make a living. The boat owners, I don't think will ever make money. I mean, they'll survive, but it's not a business that you'd want to invest in today.

JM: Getting back to the trap company. Did you also go out when they were hauling the nets?

AB: Oh, yes. When I was from fourteen till like twenty-one, I went out every morning.

JM: Did you see a change at all in the abundance of the fish?

AB: Not when I was a kid. No. There was always more than we could handle. It's been the last fourteen or fifteen years that there has been a marked decrease in the amount of fish being caught, which the decrease has decreased more and more each year. In other words, say, back in 1976 -- If they caught three million pound of fish, I would say in the last few years if they get anywhere around six or seven hundred thousand or a million, that's a lot of fish.

I can remember days of taking in -- One day, there was a hundred and sixty thousand pound of fish brought in.

JM: Was that mixed or mostly scup?

AB: That was all scup. And that's just what we could carry. There were more in the trap. There were other traps that were full that you couldn't handle. I know that -- not this past year or the year before -- two years ago I think one day they had five hundred boxes of fish, which is fifty thousand pound. I think the total for the whole spring was seventy thousand pound. They were lucky they caught a lot of squid that year.

There has been a real, real decrease. Of course, you keep hoping. As long as everybody can make a living, you're going to keep going with it. But as the land value keeps going up and the decrease in the amount of fish -- Now you have to look at the economics of things.

JM: Yes, that's right.

AB: That's what I did in my own personal life.

JM: Yes. Now, what about those draggers you had? When did you get those?

AB: The first dragger I bought was the Chris-Ann. I bought that, oh, maybe 1959 or 1960.

JM: After you got into business.

AB: That's right. I always thought it would be a good idea. There was a company down South that owed Tallman and Mack money. My father, as the manager, figured it was his fault. So this boat

was up here and we made a deal that I would buy the boat, pay off Tallman and Mack, and pay this fellow what was left. Everybody was in complete agreement.

That was the first boat we owned. It was too small to do what we wanted to do. So, somewhere around 1963, we bought another boat out of New Bedford. It was the Val T. We named it the Elizabeth Ann. Both of them were named after my daughters. Somewhere around 1965 or 1966 I said, "You know, this is ridiculous." There was always something to be done on these boats - haul out and... I said, "Well, maybe we ought to build a steel boat." I talked to Luther Blount and he come up with a price. I went to the bank and they come up with terms. I went back and talked to my dad.

He said, "Gee, if you can do all that, why build one? Build two."

So we did. We built the Crispina and Mariano Bucolo. One was launched in 1967; the other one was 1968. They're still going. I mean, they're not doing as well now in this economy. Back then, with the Crispina, it was a bad year if they didn't do a half million dollars. Today, that would be close to three million, and that's

impossible. The fish just isn't there.

JM: You'd hire skippers and crews?

AB: We'd hire skippers and they'd hire the crews.

JM: What were the grounds that these boats --

AB: They always went to Georges Banks.

JM: They did?

AB: Always Georges Banks.

JM: Did you ever go out on any of the trips?

AB: No.

JM: It sounds like it was quite an experience for people who went out there.

AB: Oh, it was. That's all they knew. It's like anything else. You do what you know how. You have to realize fellows on the Crispina back in 1975, 1976 -- The captain was making sixty thousand dollars a year. The senators in this country weren't making that. Plus, fishing is really the only type of work, I would say in the world, where you go out on a trip and you come in and you tell the captain, "I want a trip off," somebody takes your place, and next week it's your job again. If you tried that in industry -- I know guys that every other trip they take off. You did that in industry and you'd be looking for another job. And to make sixty thousand dollars back in 1976, that's worth about three hundred

thousand today, I'd say. You take everything into consideration. They had plenty of time off. The figure I'm quoting was the captain's, but he worked nine months that year. He's still fishing. He doesn't fish for me any more, but he's still out there fishing.

[end of side one, tape one]

JM: Who's that?

AB: His name is Felix Bruce. He worked with us for thirteen years. He was just an exceptional captain. I mean, he just knew where the fish were, knew where the lobsters were. If one thing wasn't there, the other would be there. He just rolled them along.

JM: Where was he from?

AB: He was from Newfoundland.

JM: He probably had whalers in his background.

AB: No. His dad and himself used to go out and catch codfish and salt the codfish.

JM: Grand Banks?

AB: No. They didn't go out on the Grand Banks; they stayed right around home. They had something that was similar to the traps, but they were like stub traps, where they'd set poles and they'd go out and they'd haul them. They'd bring the codfish ashore. They'd spend time drying them

out, salting them, and they brought them to a little general store. It was like the mining days. The general store owned everything. They'd get their food and supplies. The day before Christmas, the father would go up there and probably pick up fifteen or twenty dollars for his year's work after all expenses were out.

JM: How did you know all that? Did he tell you?

AB: He told me that. We were very close friends. We still are.

JM: Were those new boats that you built (the steel ones) stern trawlers?

AB: No. Stern trawlers -- At the time, I think there was only one. It was the Narragansett. It really didn't show anybody that this was the up-and-coming thing. Fellows like Felix didn't want to know anything about change. They'd go out and work alongside these fellows and they'd haul back as fast if not faster. They had more pros for the side trawlers. However, he is on a stern trawler today. As the television show goes, how the world turns. Our boats, in their day, they were very different. They had two holds - one just for lobsters. It was full of water. The other one held seventy thousand pound of iced fish. The rest of the boats, they either went

lobstering or fishing, because they didn't have the split hold. It was my idea. I figured if we're going to do this, let's do it right. It worked out well - until the lobsters disappeared, of course.

JM: Were those mostly yellowtail trips?

AB: No. Felix never worked on yellowtails. He always caught lemon sole. Until today, he is the lemon sole king.

JM: Are there any other legends like that that you remember, who were particularly good at knowing where to go?

AB: Well, I guess Felix was about the best. A fellow that worked for him always said, "You know, he thinks he's the best." He says, "He's not. He's the luckiest."

I said, "What do you mean?"

"Well," he says, "this guy fishes in a two-mile square area. He has -- I've been with him twenty years. I want to see how good he is when the fish dry up in that area."

I forget. It was one Labor Day. I guess he left on a Wednesday. The mate couldn't go because he was going to have a clam boil Labor Day. You have to remember he left on a Wednesday, so he didn't get to Georges Bank until sometime

Thursday. Sunday morning, the mate come down to get some lobsters for his clam boil. He said, "Have you heard from the old man?"

I said, "Yes. He'll be in tomorrow."

He said, "Oh, broke down?"

I said, "No, he's loaded."

That was Sunday. He was going to be in for Monday. So that meant he fished Friday, Saturday, and part of Sunday. He had forty-four thousand [pounds] of lemon sole and twenty-two thousand [pounds] of codfish.

Back then -- that could be 1976 or 1977, in that area -- the crew share [was] four thousand dollars for the four days that they were out there. So that clam boil cost that fellow four thousand dollars plus the lobsters and whatever.

JM: That's the hard part about staying home.

AB: That's part of the game. Why I brought that up was I asked this other fellow, I said, "Boy, I thought the fish disappeared."

He said, " He is good."

He went out of his two-mile square area.

So I said to him, "Felix, where'd you go?"

He said, "You know, there's a spot I haven't been to in twenty years. Everybody was chasing me around. There's no fish. A fog bank came by, I

got in it, and I just took off."

JM: That's really amazing. They didn't have fishscopes and things like that.

AB: Oh, yes, they did. We had a fishscope on there, but he really didn't know how to use it. It wasn't until he got this Newfoundlander, a skipper in Boston, who went with him. He brought him out there one day and he said, "Why don't you use this thing?"

He said, "Oh, it doesn't work."

He said, "It does work. You don't know how to use it."

Of course, Felix is very sassy. But Fred Ryan was a little older and he was about six [foot] two. A very pleasant man. But, evidently, he put the fear of God in Felix. He said, "Now, I'm going to tell you, this is how you use it."

Well, there was a boat similar to ours right alongside. He had five hundred pound of haddock and Felix had five thousand, using the machine. After seven years or eight years that he had the machine, all of a sudden the machine was the best.

But, see, they're so used to their own way and mode of doing things, that you can't change them.

JM: Sure. That probably happens a lot in times of big

transition like that.

AB: That's right. And as long as it works for them -- And it did. I mean, there are other, million dollar boats, that go fishing and still couldn't beat what he was doing.

JM: What was life like on those boats when they were out on trips? What kind of conveniences?

AB: Well, they don't have the conveniences that the new modern boats have. I have a new boat that's only two years old, has showers, television, VCRs, radar ranges, and the whole works. These fellows had bathroom facilities, but no shower; sink; of course, no television; radio. But they were happy. The biggest thing was, like Felix always said -- He said, "You know, there isn't a better sea boat than this boat." And until today, he's on a stern trawler. Every once in a while, he'll see my boat fishing. He'll always say to whoever's on the boat, "You take care of my boat now."

JM: About how old would he be now?

AB: He's about sixty-two.

JM: Those offshore lobsterboats you talked about, that would come and sell to you -- Where were they from?

AB: Four or five of them from Marblehead. One of them

was from Tiverton. Right now, I think everybody that owned one sold it. In fact, Gilbert Manchester, he sold his. Of course, a few of them got lost out to sea.

I remember the case of the Zubenelgenubi. A young fellow named Steve Goodwin owned the boat called the Queen. He sold that to somebody else from Newport and went out and built this steel boat called the Zubenelgenubi, which is supposed to be the star that's at the right hand of Scorpio. He had mortgage payments that were due. He left in a storm one night and that was the end of him.

Another fellow had a boat that was called the F.J. Merriwell. You remember Frank Merriwell? He's the man who went from rags to riches on Wall Street.

JM: Yes.

AB: They caught a tremendous amount of lobster. This guy was an ex-trap fisherman up in Marblehead. He got this idea of doing the lobster business. He did terrific. He decided that the boat was too small. They built a bigger boat, which was named the Lady Claire. He was having a lot of problems and committed suicide . He might have been like fifty when this happened.

Like I say, the rest of them just sold their boats and did different things.

JM: Any of them still working here today, out of Newport?

AB: No. Not one that sold to me is in the business.

JM: What kind of services did you provide for those boats that would dock at your wharves?

AB: Electricity, fuel, water, a vehicle so they could get groceries. Up until the time that Al Quinn died, there was a little grocery market up the street. He supplied all the boats. We did all their settlements. Like, we had a bunch of boats that came up from Virginia in the summertime. They'd come in with their fish, the bookkeeper would turn around and make their settlement, and each guy would have his check. That way, he could go right to the bank and cash it. We'd send the owners what was left. Really, from the time the boat was unloaded and the time these fellows got cleaned up and everything, by the time they were ready to go home, the checks were waiting for them. They really had not much to do. Of course, our boats were union, so they weren't allowed to do anything anyway.

JM: That was pretty much the norm, wasn't it?

AB: The union?

JM: Didn't the Parascandolos and Fatulli do that, too?

AB: Yes.

JM: Where did the rest of the fishing fleet dock?

AB: That was it. You sold to me; you docked at my place. You sold to Parascandolo; you docked there.

JM: No State Pier then?

AB: There was no State Pier. No.

JM: And just out around in the Harbor, too?

AB: No. There was always enough room [at the docks]. One time, we had seventeen boats tied up against the dock.

JM: About how many boats, would you say, were in Newport's fleet?

AB: There really was no such thing as the Newport fleet, because boats came and left. Parascandolo, I would say, had about twenty boats that were semi-committed to them. We had about ten or eleven. What happened, as years went by, the competition got so strong from New Bedford and Point Judith that there was no way of luring these boats back. Some of these fellows felt a life-long commitment. They would come back and come back. Finally, they'd have to sit down with you and say, "Hey, you know, we like you. We're friends for a long time. But if I have twenty thousand pound of fish and you're ten cents less

than New Bedford, that is two thousand dollars." In reality, it really wasn't because the weights never came out the same. But it's beating a dead horse into the ground. The young fellows that go on the crew, they don't want to know. You have to realize the captain is only one man. Those other five guys, they're on his necktie all the time. And they go to another port and they do get beat. But now they're not man enough to admit it. Very few will admit it and come back. They stay there and get beat and get beat. Then, either they quit or something else happens.

JM: It sounds like a pretty difficult place in New Bedford.

AB: Well, it is. But it's the same old thing. They call it "tricks of the trade." Some people just like to be fooled.

I had a captain that worked for me one time. And I had this boy from Alabama that was working for me. The guy's crying that I was only going to pay him twenty cents for the flounders. He could have gotten twenty-five cents in New Bedford. So the fellow says, "How much fish do you have, Captain?"

He says, "Four thousand [pounds], like I said."

When he got through, he weighed out five. So I sat with him. I said, "You know, Charlie, you've got five thousand at twenty cents. That's a thousand dollars. If you would have gone to New Bedford, you would have had four thousand at twenty-five. It's still a thousand dollars."

"That's not the point."

What is the point?

JM: Plus, you've got all that time to go back and forth.

AB: In New Bedford, they could hire lumpers. They could go to the barroom. Here, you didn't have port-side facilities. We had a fellow that worked for us who did work, but he was so wrapped up with our own boats that he could only give suggestions to these fellows, what to do. In New Bedford, a guy comes off the boat and right off the bat, he finds a boss lumper. The boss lumper gets other lumpers. The men all go to the barroom. They come back when it's over. In the meantime, either the owner, or they have a shore captain -- He comes down. The engineer gives him a list. He says, "This is what's wrong." They go back to the barroom. Four o'clock in the afternoon, they go to the settling house, they get their checks. Three days later, they come down. The oil's put

aboard; the grub is put aboard, the whole works.

Down here, the engineer has to put his own -- We have the fuel right there, but they have to put it on. We hand them a hose to put their water on. They don't want to realize that in New Bedford they're paying for this - not in dollars and cents that you can see, but they are paying. It's just like five thousand pounds instead of four. They might be getting twenty-five hundred gallons of fuel and paying for twenty-eight. It's all part of a scheme that this is what they like.

I had a fellow tell me one day, "We don't want to be cut."

I said, "Wait a minute. You come in, you handle twenty thousand pound of fish; it weighed out twenty-five. You really didn't get cut. Let's put the prices of the fish to the totals. Get an average, and we'll subtract by -- "

"No. Next time we come in, whatever we handle, you pay us for that and you keep the four or five thousand that might be extra."

I said, "I'm going to tell you right now you might as well get your clothes. Because you can go up the street and say I paid you two cents less, but you'll never go up there and say I stole five thousand pound of fish." I was in the

business for thirty years and nobody could ever say that. They could say I was hard and the prices were the same as Parascandolo's or higher than Point Jude but less than New Bedford and less than Boston, but they couldn't say --

We had guys that came in, "I'm going up the street."

"Fine."

"You take good care of my weight."

They'd come back, there it is, there's the check. How many people would do that?

It was the same thing when we handled lobsters. We'd send lobsters to Boston or wherever we sent them. There'd be trucks there, all backed in. They'd bring scales out, "You -- take them off." We never had a problem.

But like you say, things change. That's what happened to us.

JM: How did you set your prices?

AB: It was all set on New Bedford. Way back when we started, it was like a penny under the board price. The last few years, it got to be ten, fifteen, twenty cents. Well, like everything else, if fish was ten cents a pound, you were a penny under. If it was a dollar a pound, you should be ten cents under. It all worked on the

same equation. Up to a nickel, there was no problem. But there were days when there would be one boat in New Bedford with five thousand [pounds] of yellowtails and Parascandolo might have had three boats with twenty thousand a piece; we had two with fifteen, twenty thousand a piece. This guy in New Bedford could say a buck and a half. He wasn't going to pay him that. What you hear on the radio is one price. Then, when you get in the office, there's another price.

One of my boats just took out in New Bedford the other day. The guy put a high price on his codfish. He got in there and he said, "Hey, look, you got the top dollar on lemon sole, but all the other boats got fifty cents on that cod. I had to go sixty-five because I wanted your lemon sole."

He said, "Then give me all my fish back."

They had to call the union hall and they had to call everybody for him to get the other three hundred dollars that was owed to him. But he was strong. Other guys say, "Oh, okay, okay. No problem."

JM: Is it hard to find really smart people to work for you, like that?

AB: It's difficult for us to find people who still want to go on a side trawler. That's been our

biggest problem. We were lucky we just found this guy who's like another Felix. He's a younger fellow. He wants to fish from the spring till the fall. Well, that's fine. We have another fellow who's fishing out of Boston. He's in his sixties. He's been on the boat for three or four years now. He's on it for a couple years and then he takes six or seven months and tries another boat, then decides he'd better come back; he's better off where he was. He's a very consistent guy. But he's getting sort of discouraged. He's been around Boston all his life. He'll go out there for eight or nine days and come in with fourteen thousand, twelve thousand, pound of fish. It was discouraging.

JM: What kind of hours were you working when you first started out, when Anthony's Seafood started? Was it just you or was your brother in with you?

AB: My brother, Domenic, worked for me. Richard was in college, then he went into the service. He started working about 1970. That's when we opened up the fish market, so they could both be in the fish market. That's what they really wanted to do.

JM: So it was all pretty much wholesaling before that?

AB: It was all wholesale.

JM: What were your main markets then?

AB: Well, up until about 1970, 1971, like I said before, about ninety percent of our business was lobsters. They went to Boston and New York. We had two trucks on the road all the time, anywhere from here to Boston, to restaurants. Then, when we got into the heavy production with the draggers and we opened the market, it was more economical for us to just go to dealers.

JM: Instead of specific places.

AB: Yes. At the end of the year, you need a new truck. You put seventy or eighty thousand miles a year on a truck. We had a bunch of outlets in New York, Long Island, where they would come down with their own trucks. Then, when we were hauling fish to New York, we'd always put four or five thousand on the end of a truck and a guy could go through Brooklyn, drop them off, and then go into the market. The same thing when we'd go to the Baltimore Market. We had customers and we'd deliver to them. As long as we had a truck going that way, we'd deliver.

But most of the people picked them up. It was a good deal.

JM: Did you go to the Fulton Fish Market or the old Baltimore Market ever? Or did other people always handle that?

AB: Our trucks went. It was always our trucks. I wouldn't put anything on anybody else's truck. It had to be my truck.

JM: That Baltimore Market sounded like quite a place. I think they've built a new one now.

AB: I've never been there. I have been to the Fulton Market; I've never been to Baltimore.

JM: Where were the lobster grounds the draggers went to?

AB: The draggers fished in Corsair Canyon in the wintertime. Of course, now, that is part of the Canadian rights. Then, in the spring, they'd go on what is called the Small Georges Banks, Georges Shoals. That was Felix and those fellows from New Bedford and Gloucester. They'd fish there. The fellows from Newport used to go to the West. They'd fish around Block Canyon out here, then they went down to a place called the Fishtail. Then, they'd go down to Hudson Canyon. In the spring, when they lost them, they'd come close to a canyon called Vearches Canyon. It's about sixteen hours from here. When the pot boats started to go, they just strung pots all over Vearches Canyon and that was the end of the draggers.

We always thought there'd be more of a battle

between the draggers and the pot men, but the draggers gave up awful quick.

JM: Did they?

AB: Yes. Well, it was just wasting too much time and what have you. Of course, there was enough fish to be caught, so it didn't make much of a difference. Then, when Corsair Canyon was closed down, it just changed their whole outlook.

JM: You didn't get into the pot fishery at all for lobsters?

AB: No. I watched these fellows. They didn't show me where they were really setting... One out of five setting the world on fire -- twenty percent. I didn't want to gamble on something twenty percent - not when I was doing something that was working. We had four boats. We finally sold two. We had the two steel boats and we had other boats that were committed to us.

You had asked me how many hours I was working. I was working about twenty hours a day, seven days a week. There was just too much. My problem's always been I've been a one-man show. I never knew how to delegate authority. When I did, it was fine, but nobody seemed to have the enthusiasm and desire that I had to make things work. It gets down to: "Well, it's a week's

pay." Well, I didn't look at it as a week's pay.

JM: Did you live in Newport?

AB: I bought a house in 1957 up on Manning Terrace, off Eustis Avenue. In 1968, we built a house in Portsmouth. The rest of my family still lives in Bristol.

End of Interview #1