



NEWPORT HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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JAMES VIOLET

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 It supplies what's often only hinted at in written historical documents.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.

JAMES VIOLET

James Violet worked as an inshore lobsterman in Newport for much of his working life. Of Greek lineage, he learned his trade from Greek lobstermen who came to Newport from Skiathos, Greece. Mr. Violet reminisces about these Greeks who were an important and colorful part of Newport's waterfront.

In addition, Mr. Violet describes the Newport fishing industry during the 1930's, the 1938 Hurricane, overfishing, the 200 mile limit, and the impact of tourism and development on the fishing industry in Newport.

Tape I Side I

Biographical Interview

Violet's work with his father building lobster pots, making nets,
painting lobster buoys. Family participation in the
inshore lobster industry.

Family immigration from Greece to Newport

Greek fishermen in Newport-- Active involvement, 1918-1930

Reasons for Greek immigration

Greek Church in Newport, R.I.

Greek neighborhood in Newport, R.I.

Newport fishing industry during the 1930's

Greek lobstermen

Fishermen and boatbuilders from Maine

Boatbuilders along the waterfront

Mathinos and Son

Maine boatbuilders built stripboats

Majority of Greek fishermen in Newport were from Skiathos

Fish wholesalers (1930's, 1980's)

Day Draggers

Docking in Newport Harbor

Inshore lobster industry during the 1930's

Distances considered inshore

Speed of the boats

Number of lobster pots needed

Price of lobsters

Comparison of the inshore lobster industry, then and now

Abundance

Keeping lobsters-- lobster cars, wells for keeping lobsters
built into boats

Seasonal nature of the early inshore lobster industry

Conservation

Lobster wholesalers

Lobstermen's work during the winter off-season building new
equipment, making nets

Violet's son's work in the offshore lobster industry

The Depression

Father's work as a fisherman

Loading fish on the Fall River Line

Fishing Industry, 1930's

Lobster industry

Day boats

Trap Companies

Decline of Greek involvement in Newport fishing industry

Technology developed for World War II found its way into the fishing
industry.

Surplus Navy marine equipment became available

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Larger engines, larger boats

Small Business Administration loans to lobstermen during the 1960's

Tape I Side II

Fisheries program at U.R.I.

Comparison of old time and modern fishermen and how they start out in the fishing industry

Effect of SBA loans and growth within the fishing industry on fish and lobster stocks

Gear conflicts between draggers and lobster pot fishermen

Rules of conduct

Gear conflicts with foreigners previous to establishment of the 200 Mile Limit

Impact made by foreign fishing before 200 Mile Limit

Damage to lobster gear

Depletion of offshore and inshore fish stocks

Foreign and domestic overfishing

Efficient technology and resulting stock depletion

Characteristics of lobster groups

School lobsters

Ground keepers

Violet's work in the lobster industry

Grounds fished

Knowledge of where lobsters are is gained from experience.

Difficulties with hired helpers

Navigation pre loran and radar

Learning the ways of the water

Violet's close call in the fog with a Navy destroyer

Navigational equipment used today

1938 Hurricane

Storms at sea, taking risks in bad weather

200 Mile Limit

Depletion of fish stocks

Some species have recovered, some haven't

Overfishing

Mesh size regulations

How fishermen feel about government regulations

Violet's work as a spokesman for Newport lobster fishermen

Changes in the lobster industry

Larger boats

More equipment and effort

More people fishing for fewer lobsters

Changes on the waterfront

Dramatic changes for the small-time fisherman

Competition for dock space with yachts

Yachts considered "more desirable" than lobster boats

Shipyards would rather deal with yachts than fishing boats

Impact of tourism and development on the fishing industry

Changes on the waterfront

State Pier in Newport

Importance of making sure the fishing industry isn't driven out of Newport

Changes in the sociological makeup of Newport, R.I.

Changes in the kind of people becoming involved in the fishing industry and knowledge required to be a fisherman

Future of the fishing industry in Newport

Tape II Side I

Future of the fishing industry in Newport, contd.
Importance of political involvement of fishermen
 Obstacles to fishermen's political involvement
Regulation of inshore and offshore lobster harvests
Discrepancies in lobster regulations along the east coast
 Need for uniform regulations
Violet's retirement activities
Perceptions of occupation
Origins of Greek lobstermen in Newport
Childhood memories of Newport's Greek community and culture

Interview with James Violet for the Newport Historical Society's Oral History of the Fishing Industry in Newport, R.I. conducted by Jennifer Murray.

MURRAY: Why don't we start out with where you were born?

VIOLET: I was born in Newport, Rhode Island, in 1920 at Spring Wharf, which is downtown on Thames Street. When I was born, my father was engaged in the lobster fishing industry.

JM: What was your father's name?

JV: My father's name was Michael [Violet]. I lived down at Spring Wharf until about 1935. During that period, while I was a youngster, I used to go out fishing with my father during school vacations. I used to help him build lobster pots and make nets and so forth.

JM: What kind of nets?

JV: The trap nets that fit inside the lobster pots.

JM: Yes. They were all handmade then, weren't they?

JV: Yes, all handmade. Right. I used to paint the lobster pot buoys and do things that a young child could do.

JM: What were your father's buoys painted like?

JV: They were painted half orange and half white. You'd have a gallon of white paint and you'd paint the white one day, and the next day you'd paint the other half with the orange. The white would dry and then you'd paint the orange.

JM: Didn't everyone have a different color scheme?

JV: At that time, yes, everyone had a different color so they could identify between who belonged to what. The state started regulating the industry and they started putting a number on the buoy. My father's number was 144. When I started actively working, I got a license and my number was 152. Today the numbers are up in the thousands. They're all different numbers. They ran out of the low numbers, and they're maybe up close to two thousand.

JM: That's in Newport or the state?

JV: In the state.

JM: What was your mother's name?

JV: Her name was Margaret Violet. She had five children -- four boys and one girl. My brothers also participated in the business. My brother, Melachrino, more or less made a career out of it. He worked from about fifteen years old until he retired in '83.

JM: Was he a lobsterman, too?

JV: He was a lobsterman. The only interruption he had was when he went into the Navy for a couple of years. Outside of that period, he worked continuously.

JM: How about your grandparents? Where were they?

JV: My grandparents never did come to America. I have really no background recollection of what they did.

JM: So your father came over?

JV: My father came over, two of my uncles came over, and one of my uncles on my mother's side came over. So actually there were four -- my father, Harry, and George Violet (three Violets), and then my uncle, Jim Melachrinis -- who were related and working during that period.

JM: Were they among the first Greek people [in Newport]?

JV: Right. I would say between 1918 and 1930 was when the majority of the Greek fishermen were active in the Newport Harbor and the waterway here. Originally, many of them started out with what they call a cat boat, which had a sail on it. They used to sail out to their traps, and they used to haul all the traps by hand. Starting in the middle twenties [1920's], they all started converting over to boats with engines in them. Gradually, over a period of time, the boats started increasing in size.

JM: What was your father's boat's name?

JV: Cora. Where it came from or what it designated, I have no idea.

JM: Did your father tell you why they came over to the United States?

JV: Originally, most of the Greek people that came over here came to better their lives for one thing, and then make enough money to go back to the old country

where they originated from and live comfortably. During the twenties and thirties, many of them left their families there and came over here to work with the intention of returning. Some of them never returned; some of them left their families there and just sent them money; and some of them did that for twenty or thirty years without ever going back. But my father brought my mother over and then their children were born here, so his intentions gradually faded away as we became more Americanized, I would guess you'd call it.

JM: Where did you go to church? Was the Greek Church there yet?

JV: Yes, it started just around that time, so we used to go to St. Spyridon's Church on Thames Street.

JM: How about your neighborhood? Were there a lot of Greek families near you?

JV: No, my father was a very quiet type of person that didn't like to mix too much with the other Greek people. The majority of the Greek people used to live up in the Long Wharf area -- Marsh Street and through that area up there. My father moved way downtown to Spring Wharf just so he'd be away from all those people. Then we gradually moved from there. In the thirties we moved to South Baptist Street, which is a few blocks up. From there we moved to other parts of the city.

JM: Where did you go to school down there?

JV: I went to Lenthal School, John Clarke School, and then I went to Rogers High School.

JM: How old were you when you had your first job, or were you too young to remember?

JV: I didn't have a job per se because when you work for your parents, if they felt like paying you, you got paid. I never took another job outside of helping my father. All through high school, even, I never took a job because my father gave me plenty of spending money. We were never really short of money or anything like that. Even during the Depression, we never had any problems.

JM: You were lucky then. Where did you meet your wife?

JV: My wife, where did I meet her? Well, I met her in Newport. She originally came from Fall River with her family, and they settled in Newport. Her father was a candy maker. He used to have a candy store in Newport. We met here and then we finally got married and we have three children.

JM: What are their names?

JV: There's James Jr., which is the boy, and then there's Margaret Violet and Dorothea Violet.

JM: Are they all here still?

JV: Margaret is married to Cmdr. Dale Batie, a naval engineer, and Dorothea is married to Lt. Wolfgang Louis, who is also a Navy lieutenant. He's

stationed in Albany, New York, right now.

JM: And your son is in the fishing industry?

JV: My son is in Newport, right.

JM: When you were starting out, what was the fishing industry then? There was the lobster industry. Was that almost all Greeks?

JV: Yes. The lobster industry, in the early years, in the thirties, was predominantly Greek lobstermen. But there was also about thirty percent that came here from Maine. I should have made a list for you. I could have given you a list of the names that I can remember. There were some Maine boat builders that also came here. They used to build what they call a strip boat. They used to make them out of strips, maybe twenty feet long and an inch and a half wide by an inch thick. They'd nail one strip on top of another after they made the mold, and they'd build a boat out of it. Those boats were popular up until the thirties, and then they started building the plank boats around Newport.

JM: What are they?

JV: That's the regular wooden-type boats. But originally they had a lot of strip boats; then they had the regular built boats. Today it's all either fiberglass or steel, one or the other.

JM: Where were the boat builders' shops?

JV: You used to have a Greek boat builder -- Mathinos

and Son. They were down where Tallman and Mack is now, down Spring Wharf. When I was a kid, I used to hang around the boatyard while my father would be fishing. Then when he'd come in, I'd go over and work on the boat and so forth. They used to build some boats in that shop. Then there was a person called Howard Libby. I believe. He used to build the strip boats. Strip boats were mostly being bought by the Maine fishermen because that's what they were used to in Maine. There wasn't too much boat building going on in the early years here. I don't know where the boats originated from or where they brought them from.

JM: Did the strip boats have motors?

JV: Yes, they all had motors.

JM: I don't know if we got on tape what island most of those Greeks that came over with your father were from?

JV: Most of them came from an island off Greece in the Mediterranean called Skiathos. Now, it's not a very large island. I think in the early years, the only thing they had there was a few olive trees, and they all used to go out fishing. So evidently, being fishermen from that island, they came here to go fishing, because somebody that originally came here told them how good the place is and how it resembled their island in some respects. Gradually, they had

a big migration from that island.

JM: Isn't that fascinating? Did your father tell you stories about life there?

JV: No, he was very quiet. He'd never speak very much about it.

JM: What other fisheries were going on during the thirties?

JV: During the thirties, you didn't have any real large wholesale distributors like you have today. Today you have Parascandolo and Sons, and they handle thousands and thousands of boxes of fish each day. In those days you only had one place that would handle fish products. That was George Lewis, they used to call the place. That was up near where the old Newport Yacht Club used to be, up in the corner of the harbor here. At that time, you had about seven or eight day draggers. A day dragger consisted of a boat, but it was approximately forty feet long, which isn't large for a dragger in today's industry.

JM: What kind of equipment did they use?

JV: They used to just use a regular net. They'd tow the net in the water. Most of the lobstermen used to buy their bait from the day draggers, so one helped the other.

JM: Where did the boats tie up then?

JV: Most of the Greek fishermen used to tie up at Long

Wharf, in that area. A few, like my father and I, used to tie out at a mooring (in the early thirties) in the harbor near what they call the Spindle, down in the South end of the harbor. Then my father tied up at Newport Electric Corporation. At Spring Wharf, there's a slip in there. I think we've had a boat in there from 1935 until last year. Until they sold the building, we've always had a boat there. Now my son has two boats. He just bought a boat recently. He has one boat at the State Pier. The other boat is too big to tie in Newport, so he has it at Melville. That boat is seventy-six feet long.

JM: Is that an offshore boat?

JV: It's an offshore lobster boat.

JM: Did your father do that all his life?

JV: Yes, he was lobstering all his life. Right.

JM: How far out did they go in those days?

JV: Oh, they never went more than thirty miles. Thirty miles would be a long trip.

JM: In a forty foot boat.

JV: You have to figure that the maximum speed would be ten miles an hour. If you went thirty miles, it would take you three hours to get there and three hours to come back. That wouldn't give you much time for working. But you didn't really have to go too far in those years. You could catch more lobsters, then, inshore, just along the coast

practically or within three miles here. You didn't really have to go any further. Today it's different. Today you keep going further and further.

JM: About how many pots did your father have?

JV: In those days, we never really had too many pots. Two hundred or two hundred and fifty pots was plenty. You could haul the same pots the next day and catch just as many lobsters. Today, some of the boats that are fishing in the area have seven or eight hundred pots. They alternate maybe half one day and half the next day. As far as the catch goes, we used to catch as many lobsters, then, as they're catching now with eight hundred traps. The difference is that there's a tremendous difference in the price of the lobsters between now and then.

JM: How much were they then? Or what were you getting for them?

JV: In the early thirties, around twenty some odd cents a pound. During some periods, we could catch more than we could sell. In other words, we'd have to keep them on hand just to wait until somebody would buy them. Today you can sell them as you catch them.

JM: How did you keep them then?

JV: We had what they call a lobster car. It looks similar to a lobster trap without nets in it. You

just put all the lobsters in it, you'd hang them into the bottom of the water and they'd stay alive. Years ago, a lot of the boats used to have a well in the boat. The well wasn't like the wells they have today. In the wells today, you pump water in, and you pump the water back out. In those days, the well was similar to the ones they have today. But they had holes right into the bottom of the boat, so there was constantly water in the boat. But it would circulate through all the holes on the bottom as the boat would move, and that would keep the lobsters alive.

JM: It was a seasonal [job].

JV: In the beginning, it was seasonal. It used to be from April 1st to the end of the year, December 31st, for example. Every year, everyone would be down the wharf getting all their lobster pots repaired and getting their boats all ready. On April 1st, their boats would all be loaded up the day before. Starting around midnight, all the boats would be heading out of the harbor to set their pots. There was always a very good catch of lobsters the first two or three weeks of April because no one had been fishing in those waters for three months.

JM: It was closed then, wasn't it?

JV: It was the closed season, but now it's open so they

go year-round.

JM: How about conservation then? Were people pretty conscious of --- [that]?

JV: They had conservation. At that time, they had, I think, one conservation officer for the whole state of Rhode Island. He was kept pretty busy running from wharf to wharf and all over the place. Today it's a lot different. He didn't have any boat or anything. He had to just drive his car down, and he'd check one boat here or there. Today they use a combination of boats, airplanes, and so forth to check on conservation.

JM: Were people pretty good about not taking shorts or egg-bearing lobsters?

JV: There was really no need to take them. You had so many lobsters that you were catching that you might as well eat the good ones. If you didn't, eventually if you had too many, they would die.

JM: Who were the wholesalers then?

JV: Originally, there was John F. Mack. I don't know if you're familiar with John F. Mack. He used to have these big cars in the water. I guess they must have been about twenty feet long by twenty feet wide. They had pens in there, and they'd put different grades of lobsters in these pens that stayed in the water permanently. When they needed lobsters for the retail market, they'd go down with a scoop net,

they'd scoop them out of this tank, put them in boxes, and then they'd distribute them. He was one of the largest dealers. Then, during the middle to late thirties, my father and my brother, Melachrino, made arrangements with Francis Manchester from Tiverton (Manchester Seafood), and he started coming to Newport. He'd come down every afternoon in a truck for the lobsters, and he'd buy them from us. He started buying them from other fishermen, so he became a big dealer also. From there, it gradually grew. Aquidneck Lobster went into business. That was when all the offshore boats started bringing lobsters here.

JM: What would take place in the winter during the closed time?

JV: During the closed season, it was sort of a lackadaisical type of affair where each one had a workshop and they'd build new equipment. They'd order lobster pot wood. Pots were usually made out of oak. At one time, in the early years, we used to make them out of cypress, but the cypress would deteriorate in one year. You'd have to throw it away and build a new one, so they went to oak. Also, at that time, they didn't have the synthetic ropes or the twines that you have now to make the equipment with. You used to buy what they called manilla rope or sisal rope which would last probably

one year and then you'd have to throw it away. It would turn black and you'd just discard it and buy new rope. Today they have what they call a rag rope. They have all the different polypropylenes, and they'll last three or four years. You practically can't wear them out. The nets at that time were also made from this manilla twine, and you were constantly making nets, day in and day out. It seemed to be a never-ending process because they'd only last one year. The nets you make today last the life of the trap so that saves a lot of time and effort.

JM: Does anyone know how to make the nets now?

JV: That's a good question. I would say seventy percent of the people that have lobster boats that are fishing lobsters today couldn't make a net if you gave them all the material to make it with. A lot of the nets are made by some woman sitting at home, under contract to a builder. The majority buy all their pots made. Most of them do today. They buy the nets all made, too. A lot of the people that are fishing couldn't even make the net.

JM: Did you always make your own or did you get so that you --

JV: No, we always made our own. I did, particularly. I was used to it. In the winter, I'd watch TV and I'd make seven or eight a night. In a month I'd have

maybe one or two hundred.

JM: And you made all your own pots?

JV: I made all my own traps.

JM: Does your son do that?

JV: No. Well, the business he's in now is a more modern type of business. You don't really have time to build pots. He does build some pots, but the majority of them he has to buy. When you build a pot or when you buy a pot, you pay the base price -- say, for example, thirty dollars. Now, there may be fifteen dollars worth of material in each pot, but if you buy the material, you can spend a lot of time building the pots, but your time isn't deductible. You can't say, "My time is worth X amount of dollars," when you make out your income tax.

JM: What about the Depression?

JV: In my family, the Depression never really bothered us that much. When I was young, I remember my father told me when he came here, he came from a fairly wealthy family in the island that he came from. By wealthy, I don't know.... He said when he came here, he had thirty thousand dollars. That was in 1915.

JM: I'd say he was wealthy.

JV: So I would say, at that time, that amount of money was a significant amount. Besides that, he was working at his job and was making money. He always

caught different types of fish to supplement the food that you had to buy, so we never really had any problem.

JM: Did your father ever sell to the Fall River Line?

JV: No.

JM: No. Did some of the fishermen?

JV: Not that I can think of, no.

JM: I had heard stories about fish being loaded on the Line to go to New York.

JV: Right. They used to send fish on the Line, but you had no idea how much money you would get in return for your fish. My father had tried that. Several times he bought some barrels and he packed the fish in the barrels. I think he shipped them by railway express to New York. He was lucky if he got a dollar back from what he sent, plus his time and effort. So he really didn't go into that part. Like I said before, the only other place was George Lewis which was up in Newport Harbor. He used to buy off the day boats. He started shipping the fish, and I guess he built it up to a fairly good business. So from there it expanded.

JM: During the thirties then, there was the lobster industry and the day boats?

JV: Day boat draggers and the trap companies.

JM: How many companies were there?

JV: Trap companies? Well, you had Tallman and Mack Trap

Company, and the Coggeshall Brothers used to have a trap company. Coggeshall Brothers used to work out of where George Lewis used to have his wholesale place. Eventually, the Aquidneck Lobster Company bought out the Coggeshall Brothers trap rights, so then there were two trap companies in Newport.

Parascandolo and sons also have a trap company, but that's located at Sakonnet Point. It's called the Point Trap Company.

JM: Did you ever go out on any of those boats?

JV: When I was young, I used to go out just for the day for a ride or something. I was never really employed in that type of business.

JM: Which one did you go out on?

JV: I went out with Tallman and Mack. We tied our boat right next to Tallman and Mack, and I more or less grew up with George Mendonsa and his brothers.

JM: Did your brother, Melachrino, work for Tallman and Mack?

JV: Melachrino worked for a short period of time at John F. Mack Company on Lees Wharf. They tore the building down. It's all gone now. John F. Mack is gone. But originally, there was also a fish company in there, and George Mendonsa's father used to work for that company. My brother and another lobsterman, John Demitares, used to work on the trap boats just for a short period of time, but it wasn't their

type of work. They didn't really care for it. It was just a limited job.

JM: Did you ever go out on the island off Price's Neck where the Mendonsa's lived in the summers?

JV: No.

JM: You had said that a lot of those Greek lobstermen, during World War II, went into the war.

JV: Yes. A lot of them left fishing and they got jobs. A lot of them were skilled in other types of work besides fishing. Some of them went to work for the government; others went into the various industries. After the war, the Greek element of the fishing industry seemed to decline very rapidly. Today, there is only my son, and I think there is one other person that is a part-time lobsterman of Greek descent. Originally you might have had around sixty different individual lobster fishing boats. Today you have about two Greek owned boats. That's in Newport.

JM: Isn't that something. Did the technology change for you? Did some of the technology that developed for the war find it's way onto your boat?

JV: I think the technology that helped the industry was right after the war. There was a large amount of surplus Navy, marine-type equipment available. The largest thing, I guess, were the diesel engines that the fishermen used to buy -- surplus engines from

the Navy. They started putting these diesel engines into the fishing boats. The boats became bigger because the engines were larger. I think that was sort of a turning point there. The next major thing that happened was in the sixties when the S.B.A. [Small Business Administration] started getting involved with lobstermen's fishing loans. A lot of people that had the background and had just a little money to invest would get an S.B.A. loan and buy a large boat, or a larger boat than they had, and they would go into the business. The business really started to expand through that process up to the present day.

JM: Was this the inshore or the offshore?

JV: I think it affected both inshore and offshore.

Another development was the school at U.R.I.

[University of Rhode Island]. They started teaching fishing related subjects at the marine school and a lot of people got interested in the fishing business.

[end of side one, tape one]

The school also explained all the grants they could get and so forth. That produced a lot of fishermen also.

JM: Up until then, most people had learned from their fathers?

JV: Most of the men learned from their fathers. Years

ago, when a person went into the fishing business, if you had the money, you'd buy a boat. You couldn't go to the bank and say, "I want to borrow five thousand dollars and go fishing." They wouldn't even talk to you. If you had five thousand dollars, they might loan you five thousand dollars. But then things turned around in the sixties where you could go in there and say, "I just graduated from a maritime academy and I have the background and the knowledge of handling a boat. I have an M.B.A. in Business Administration. I have no money, but I have all this background, and I want to borrow three hundred thousand dollars because I want to build a boat." And they would get it. But the old-time fishermen, if you didn't have the money, you wouldn't buy it.

JM: What effect did all of that have on the stocks -- the fish and the lobsters?

JV: Well, when these people started receiving these S.B.A. loans, that's when the race to build more equipment [started]. In other words, if you could catch, say, a thousand pounds of lobsters with, say, five hundred traps you'd say, "Well gee, if I get two thousand traps, I'll double it." So it went on from there. Today the ocean is full of traps. You can go out ninety miles in the ocean and want to set your traps in a specific area. Sometimes you can't

because there's just too much gear there.

JM: How about the conflict between the draggers and the pot fishermen?

JV: There is a conflict. I know in Newport, for example, in the Upper Bay up here, the day draggers try to work out of an area where they can drag for their fish and try to limit the trap fishermen from setting pots in that area. It's not a written law or anything. It is just a word of mouth agreement: "We'll fish in this area and you won't set your traps in this area. We won't drag where your traps are." It is just a mutual agreement. But in the offshore fishing, it's entirely different now. It all comes under Coast Guard regulations. You can notify the Coast Guard where your traps are and it will be posted throughout the area -- throughout New England, in fact -- and the draggers that are fishing in the area -- say they fish at night -- will know where your traps are and they'll try to avoid them. It happened that sometimes the foreign boats, when they were fishing here previously, didn't care where your traps were. They just dragged these huge nets and they destroyed a lot of equipment.

JM: Did you ever have equipment out that far?

JV: No. My son does, but I never did.

JM: What effect did those foreign boats -- those massive

factory ships -- have on the industry here?

JV: At one time, they really caused a lot of damage. You estimate that a lobster trap with rope costs almost forty dollars, and usually you tie these traps in series, one to the other. You may have a string of forty of these traps tied together or even more. If they tow through it and they tow your markers down, you lose the entire string of traps. That can run into two or three thousand dollars or more for each set that they go through. Some fishermen have lost hundreds and hundreds of pots due to those foreign fleets. Now, they seem to be getting things under control, but every once in a while somebody will tow through the traps.

JM: How about the fish? Did you feel the depletion in this area was caused by all of that overfishing out there on the Georges Banks?

JV: Oh, I'm sure it has a big effect on the fishing. Overfishing has had an effect on the inshore fishing also. You almost eliminate a species of fish like the haddock, and then there's a large decrease now in the yellowtail flounder, and so forth. It's due to overfishing, either by the foreign boats or even by the American boats. Of course, all of these boats are really very up to date today. Years ago they used set a net in the water and try to see if there's any fish there. Today they have all types

of electronic equipment. They can see the fish before they even put their nets in the water. If the concentration on a scanner screen shows a large quantity of fish, they'll put their nets over and tow for them. If it doesn't show what they consider worth trying to catch, they just keep travelling until they find a larger school of fish. So there's a big difference today from years ago.

JM: Did you, or people that you knew, know by experience where fish or lobsters were going to be?

JV: Fish and lobsters usually go in -- A lobster, for example, has two characteristics. There is what they call "school lobsters", and then you have a lobster that is what called a "ground keeper." A "ground keeper" is a lobster that more or less stays in one area continuously until it either dies or is caught. "School lobsters" are the lobsters that come from offshore in large groups. What happens is, certain times of the year, lobsters have a shedding period. The only time the female lobsters mate is when they are in their soft state. I don't know how or why, but from offshore, these lobsters seem to come swooming into the inshore areas when the lobsters are soft. They fertilize these lobsters and stay around for a short time. Then they disappear back offshore again. As a result, there's always a certain amount that are being

caught while they are here. That's why you have your highs and your lows in the lobster industry here.

JM: What time of year is that?

JV: Usually the lobsters start shedding around June. Usually you have two shed seasons. One is a large shedding season around June, and one late in September. The rest of the year, then, the lobsters become hard-shelled.

JM: How many boats have you gone out on that were your own? How many boats have you owned?

JV: Oh, I've had about three of my own boats.

JM: And those are all lobster boats?

JV: Lobster boats.

JM: How far offshore did you go?

JV: I've gone the maximum of about fifty miles in my boats.

JM: What are the names of those places?

JV: There actually is no name. You go by the depth of the water and you say, for example, "I'm going out to the forty fathom line." Forty fathom is two hundred forty feet deep, for example, right? Or you say, "I'm going out to the thirty fathom line," or you say that you're going to a certain ledge or reefs that are designated on the charts. Certain times of the year, lobsters are on the rocky bottom; other times they're on muddy bottom. You try to

determine where the majority of the lobsters will be, so you set your gear there.

JM: Did you go out alone?

JV: Many times I went out alone. Then I started getting a helper. Actually getting a helper is no bargain because sometimes you go down to the wharf at five in the morning and your helper isn't there. You say, "Well, he'll be here shortly," and you wait, and you wait, and you wait, and he doesn't show up until nine o'clock or something. Or else you wake up in the morning and there is thick fog outside. You know you're not going out, but your helper shows up that morning bright and early and says, "Where were you?" He knew he wasn't going out in the beginning. Years ago, in the thirties and even the forties, you didn't have the electronic equipment they have today. The radars were too expensive for a small lobster boat. You didn't have a loran. You had to always depend on just the compass. If you were going thirty miles out, and you estimated your speed at ten miles an hour, then you'd use a specific compass heading. You'd lose sight of land as you steered a course of a hundred and eighty degrees for three hours. You tried to take into consideration the tides and so forth on the boat, and you hoped you'd end up where your lobster traps were. Today they have a loran that you come within

a hundred feet. You can go a hundred miles out and come within a hundred feet of where your lobster trap is. Years ago, it was all a matter of good judgment and luck.

JM: How do you learn the ways of the water, to feel safe out there?

JV: It comes through time and experience. The biggest detriment, years ago, was working in the fog because you had no radar. You couldn't tell if anybody was around you. The only way you could tell was if you heard somebody blow a fog horn, or if you heard an engine of a boat going by, or something like that.

JM: Did you ever have any close calls?

JV: The closest call I had was with a Navy destroyer.
[both chuckle] There was another person with me on the boat, and I was about thirty miles out. It was thick fog; you couldn't see anything. We were at the lobster traps. I was reaching down to pick a lobster buoy out of the water to start hauling the trap, and I saw a shadow. I looked up and there was this destroyer coming at me; he must have been doing about twenty to thirty knots. At least twenty knots. I could see him practically twenty feet away from me. I had two choices: I could have gone forward, or I could have gone backwards to try to get out of his way. So I put the boat in reverse and he went by my bow, oh, I would say from here to

that recorder.

JM: About three feet.

JV: Three feet away from the bow of my boat, and he was really travelling. So that's how close we came. We sat there about a half an hour trying to think this over. We just dropped everything and we came back in.

JM: What was the wake like from it?

JV: Oh, it was a huge wake. They throw up a large wake.

JM: What were the names of your boats?

JV: My boats have always kept the same name ---

KAYMADOR. My wife's name is Katherine, so I had KAY, and then my daughter Margaret, MA, and then DOR for Dorothy. So I made the name KAYMADOR. I just keep that on my boat.

JM: On the later boats, did you have the loran and the radar?

JV: No, because I was getting to the age where I knew I was going to retire very shortly, within a reasonable time, so I said it wasn't really worth it. I really didn't need the loran because I knew I could go practically anyplace that I wanted to go without it. But the majority of the fishermen today, if you took the loran off the boat, they wouldn't even be able to find their lobster traps because they wouldn't know where to go. So the radar is a great help, and assists in navigating a

ship in the dark, fog and inclement weather.

JM: Did any storms ever whip up out there that were unexpected?

JV: Oh, yes. I worked with my father during the '38 hurricane, I remember. We must have had close to three hundred traps in the water and the hurricane came. When the water subsided, a couple of days later or so, he said, "Let's go out and see what we can find." We didn't find anything; everything was gone. You didn't have any disaster loans or any such thing at that time that you could apply for to rebuild your equipment and so forth. You had to go out and buy all new equipment again.

JM: That's tough. What happened to Spring Wharf in the hurricane?

JV: Nothing. We had our boats there. During the hurricane, I was in my teens. My brother and I went down to the boat. Tallman and Mack also had a boat over on the opposite side of the pier, where they tie up. At that time, Tallman and Mack used to have maybe around fifteen people working in the fish house there, and they used to sleep in that place. They had upstairs sleeping quarters. They had a dining room area, also. During the hurricane, everybody deserted the place -- the boats were all tied there. My brother and I went down and sat in my father's boat. I guess we were foolish and brave

at that time. During the course of the storm we said, "Why don't we go over to the trap company and see what's going on over there?" So we got in the rowboat. We managed to get across the small inlet to the other side, and we tied the rowboat up. We went upstairs in the building and no one was up there. The kitchen table was a long table -- about forty feet long at that time. It was like a picnic table, but a huge, long one. It had pies and pastries -- everything was laid out like they were just going to eat, and then the storm came and they all took off. So we sat there. We were eating custard pies and whatever and having a great time. [chuckles] Then we said, "We'd better go over and see if our father's boat is all right." So we got back in this rowboat and we rowed over to the boat. In the meantime, the water was almost up to Thames Street. Everybody was standing in the street saying, "Where's Jimmy and Melachrino? They're down there. Something's going to happen to them." Then all of a sudden, everything got quiet. The wind sort of died out because the eye of the storm came, and then you had a reverse backlash. I think the reverse was worse than when the water came in. All of a sudden, the water started going out -- like a huge stream of water coming downhill. Everything came washing off the wharves -- all the stuff that

was up there -- and flying around. It was really a dangerous situation, but we were just too foolish to realize it. We saved the boat anyway; no damage was done to the boat. But it was an experience.

JM: Oh, I'll bet it was. It was probably one of the worst storms we've ever had.

JV: Yes. A friend of mine was on the adjacent wharf -- (one of those Peckham boys) I think his name was James Peckham -- and he got killed in that storm. Either a sheet of glass or a section of metal hit him in the neck. From the wind, it blew and struck him in the head and killed him.

JM: That's terrible.

JV: There was a lot of damage. A lot of people died and got hurt. But, being young, you don't realize those things.

JM: No, you don't. Have you ever been far out on the water when a storm came?

JV: Yes, I've been out there many a time. Of course, during those days, you knew your capability. You knew what the boat could do. Sometimes, though, when you're really catching a lot of lobsters, you feel like you're doing something, you feel like you're making money and you take more risks than you should. I've had some bad experiences, but I managed to get through them alright.

JM: Did you ever have to go into another port?

JV: One time we were on Coxes Ledge, which is about twenty-five miles out. What they call a northeaster developed all of a sudden. What would normally take us three hours to get back from there, took us almost six hours to come back because you could only go so fast. The water was coming over the roof and flooding the deck. Those boats weren't really equipped for that type of weather. More water was coming into the boat than you could displace. You had what they call scupper holes on the deck, and the normal runoff would go through those scuppers. But from the spray coming over the roof, the floor mats were floating around. They were plugging up these scuppers, and the boat was getting full of water.

JM: Were you alone then?

JV: No, I had someone with me.

JM: What happened to the lobsters?

JV: The lobsters didn't care. They were in their tank and the water was circulating in there, so they didn't have any problems.

JM: Did the establishment of the two hundred mile limit have any effect?

JV: I don't think it really affected the inshore fishing; I think it affected the offshore fishing to a large degree, especially the offshore draggers that were competing side by side with all the

foreign fleets. The major effect it had was by the depletion of the stocks, as far as the inshore fishermen were concerned. I think that was for the whole coast, actually, up and down.

JM: Do you think we've recovered?

JV: I think, in certain species, we've recovered; in certain others, we haven't. I think a lot of it is due to over-fishing. These boats are still capable of practically cleaning out an area. They catch everything if they want to. They've gone to mesh size -- what they call the size of the meshes in the nets. By making them larger, they're letting the smaller fish escape. That has been some help, but you can only go so far in increasing the mesh. The fish are only so big, and if you make them too large, you lose your main catch.

JM: How do fishermen feel about being regulated by the government?

JV: Well, they really don't care for it, but it comes to the point where you have to have some degree of regulation. Trying to get a group of fishermen together to agree on some specific point is fairly difficult. That's why, if you could have the government sit in as a moderator with some authority -- by being able to regulate to a certain extent. Years ago we tried to form something similar to what they have today -- the Atlantic Offshore Fishermen's

group. We tried with the Rhode Island group for Rhode Island fishermen. When we were dealing with increasing the size of the lobster, I took more verbal abuse from so many people because I was in favor of increasing the size of the lobster gauge. They called me everything under the sun, but they eventually adopted it over the past few years, and it seems to be successful. But at that time, when the state biologists were recommending it and I was agreeing with them, I was sort of one of the spokespersons for the lobster fishermen in Newport. But they really didn't care for it at all.

JM: That makes it really hard to get involved.

JV: Sure does. You can express your opinion, and then you become a bad guy, even in an open discussion.

JM: Yes, especially to get them to vote.

JV: Especially when you're in competition with the people that are disagreeing with you.

JM: Even if it is for their benefit, too.

JV: Right, right.

JM: In what ways has the inshore lobster industry changed since you started out?

JV: The inshore lobster industry has changed. The boats have gotten slightly bigger and the amount of equipment and effort that a person puts in is greater. For example, the amount of lobsters caught per year hasn't changed dramatically. But the

amount of equipment being fished for that same amount of lobsters, and the effort put into it, has increased considerably. In other words, where you had, say, one hundred lobstermen fishing for X amount of lobsters, now you have three hundred lobstermen fishing for the same amount of lobsters. So it has made quite a change that way. Those that were successful were able to continue; those that were marginal had to drop out. They couldn't keep up with it.

JM: This is a really broad question, but tell me about some of the changes that have taken place on the waterfront.

JV: Changes on the waterfront, as far as the fishing industry, have been quite dramatic, especially for the small-time fishing operator. What I classify as a small operator would be a boat with up to two or three people working on it. The biggest thing is, you're in competition for dock space. You can have a forty foot lobster boat that costs fifty thousand dollars take up the same amount of space as a forty foot yacht that costs half a million dollars. The dock owner is only concerned with how long is your boat? Well, he doesn't ask you if it's a million dollar boat or whether it's a five thousand dollar fishing boat. [He asks,] "What size is it?" And they say, "It's so much a foot for dockage." If

you're a lobster boat, they don't even want you there anyway because you might have odors emanating from the boat. They prefer to have the yacht people there. That's one thing. Another big problem would be when you want to haul your boat out, you're under the same circumstances. You're dealing with shipyards today that prefer to deal with large yachts. It has become quite a hassle today to maintain a fishing boat.

JM: How about support services? Were there more before?

JV: Years ago, they used to cater to the fishing industry to a greater extent because you didn't have the tourist element to the extent you have today. The yachts that were here were the old-time yachts. They'd come and they'd go year-round. But today, just about everybody owns a yacht of some type. My son-in-law has three yachts -- a big Pearson sailboat, three small sailboats, and a canoe. Everybody seems to have a boat. Years ago, in the thirties, forties and up to the fifties, people that had boats were usually only the wealthy people. Today, practically anybody can buy a boat, but you only have so much space. Where are you going to put these boats?

JM: How do you feel about that change?

JV: Being retired, I don't think it really effects me personally now. It does, in a way, because my son

is still in the industry. I think the state has spent a tremendous amount of money at Point Judith for the fishing industry. Although they have a state pier here, ever since they acquired it, they haven't spent any money at all to upgrade it. They passed the bond issue for a large amount of money for that purpose, and there is nothing that has been done. Nothing is being said about it or anything like that. That really irks me to a large extent. I don't know if they're in collusion with the Newport yachting people to get rid of the fishing industry as a whole, or whether they're really interested in developing a Newport state fishing pier.

JM: What importance, in your opinion, does keeping the industry here have to the town?

JV: I think it is a very good mix to have a fishing industry in the town. You have people that come from the midwest and states that have no ocean or water boundaries, and they come here to see what the water situation looks like. [They come] to see yachts and also to see a fishing industry and what the fishing boat looks like. If you take some children down to the pier, they'd rather go aboard a fishing boat than they would a yacht. They'd probably have more fun that way. I think it's a good mix. I think they should try to maintain it,

or even increase what they have today.

JM: Do you think Newporters, in general, have an appreciation of all that the fishing industry brings?

JV: I think the real Newporters do. Now today, when you say the Newporters -- you have such an influx of new people that are residents of Newport, and many of them don't even live in Newport; it's like their second home. So it's very hard to say, when you use the word "Newporters," whether you're referring to all Newporters as an entire group, or whether you're referring to the original Newporters, which probably appreciate the industry and have many of their family who have worked in the industry. You have to make a distinction between those.

JM: That's right. How about big changes now in the kind of people who get into the industry? It used to be a family situation.

JV: I think originally it used to be largely a family situation that was handed down from one to another. Many of today's fishermen have graduated from the school over at URI and other colleges, and they're interested in marine type of activity. They have a higher background as far as education goes pertaining to modern seamanship and use of new equipment and they can adapt to it. In other words, it doesn't take much to go out and find fish today

if you have the background of the electronics that they use. That's why I think you have the conditions you have today in the business. It's been upgraded to a large extent by these people that are coming out of schools and colleges.

JM: What do you think, personally, the future of the fishing industry is in Newport?

JV: In Newport, I think the fishing industry will depend a great deal on several factors. Now, the lobster industry in Newport, for example -- The people that are bringing lobsters into Newport will have to have a place to sell these lobsters. You had Anthony's Seafood, which has gone out of business very recently. He used to handle a small amount of lobster, but at times he handled quite a few. Today you only have Aquidneck Lobster Company and Long Wharf Seafood. So unless you want to crate them up, or take your boat and go to Point Judith, or go to some small retail place like over in Jamestown, or you have a retail/wholesale business of your own, it causes a large problem. Now if Aquidneck Lobster isn't forced to, or doesn't suddenly decide to sell out for a large amount of money to some condo outfit or something like that, and if the state decides to really be serious and develop the state pier the way they planned it, I think it has a good future. I think the city should work towards it. I also think

the fishermen's association should get involved and try to keep pressure on to have them continually improve the situation.

JM: Are they as involved as they should be?

JV: I think some of the City Council are interested in the fishing industry. As far as the state goes, I don't like to say this, but --

[end of tape one, side two]

I think on the state's side, whoever brings pressure on upstate -- The people at Point Judith, over in that area, seem to have a lot of influence, and seem to have a lot of state money being spent on facilities at Point Judith. Now, if you were to estimate the amount of business that comes into Newport versus what goes to Point Judith, and divide up how much money is spent there compared to here, you'd find that we're way down on the bottom of the list. I think there should be something done in that respect. If they wait too long, there won't be anything left in Newport where you can actually do anything. They have the property and they should develop it.

JM: I guess it's difficult sometimes for the fishermen to be as involved as they should be where they're out on their boats all the time.

JV: It's true. It's very hard to take time away from the job because all these fishermen are like

business owner-operators. They own the business, and they operate the business. It's not like a store where you have people working as clerks and so forth -- and you can say to the head cashier, "I'll be back in two or three hours." If you don't watch after your business, it will deteriorate very rapidly. When you're fishing for lobsters at certain times of the year, you have to go out and check your gear. The buoys get cut off from the traffic of the ships going by and so forth. It's a constant thing that you have to put your time in on. You don't have too much time to go to meetings -- usually in the evening -- and then get up at four-thirty, five o'clock in the morning and go to work again. Also, when you go to these meetings, like I said before, if you express your own view on something that doesn't coincide with somebody else's view that is in the same industry, then you put yourself in a predicament. The Atlantic Offshore Fishermen's group have their own agenda, too. They're interested in the offshore industry more than they are in the inshore industry, although it does trickle down. What is good for them usually helps the inshore industry. But some things that are good for them are bad for the inshore industry, so it works both ways.

JM: Like what?

JV: The offshore lobsters are usually a larger size than the inshore lobsters, so they would find no great fault with increasing the size of the lobster guage. You have a Federal Fisheries Board, you also have a state group, and you have what they call the New England Regional Fisheries Commission. Between all them, the federal government is trying to adopt a three and a half inch size. That's what they call the measure of the lobster. They've been trying to get this for years. They don't care how they do it, if they can get it. But in the meantime, down off New Jersey, up until a couple of years ago, they were bringing in what they call lobster parts. Instead of measuring a lobster, they'd just take the tails and the claws off, and they'd bring those in. There were no regulations on those. Now they're trying to get a uniform code for the entire east coast. Before, each state had it's individual rules and regulations, and the federal government wasn't doing much about it. But now that the federal government wants to get involved, they want to establish a set size. But it's very hard to go from, say, three inches to three and a half inches. You could do it over a ten-year period by using graduations and increases like a thirty-second, and then skip a year, then go another thirty-second. That's what we did with the lobster guage in Rhode

Island. That's why we're up to three and three-sixteenths. Originally, they didn't want to do it, and you want to see the fighting they had for two years, up and down, at different meetings.

JM: They're trying to do that again, aren't they?

JV: They're talking about it in Massachusetts and Maine. But see, in certain areas, Maine has an overabundance of lobsters. Usually, they're a much larger size, so it wouldn't hurt the Maine lobstermen too much. The only way it would hurt Maine is the Canadian lobsters are usually smaller. When Canada floods the market with their lobsters, it drops the price of the U.S. lobsters. So there's quite a bit to the federal side.

JM: Is the Canadian lobster industry subsidized?

JV: It was at one time, but today they say it is not. Unless you know someone that is Canadian and can talk to them and see how they go into business and so forth --

JM: Because that would have a big effect on prices here.

JV: Right, it would. Right.

JM: What are you doing now that you've retired?

JV: Well, I'm sort of retired. My son has a big boat with three engines in it, so he has me designated as the engineer. In between trips, I'm usually changing the oil on one engine or checking out electrical problems or advising them on how to fix

this or that. I keep busy.

JM: Do you go out with him?

JV: No, I don't go out.

JM: Have you ever?

JV: No. He worked with me on my boat since he was about ten years old. Then, when I decided I was going to stop working, he wanted to get his own boat, which he did. He had that boat for about a year; then he sold that one and he bought a larger one. Then he had that one about another year and a half. He hasn't sold it. He leases it to a fishing company. He's also a partner in another one now which is over seventy-seven feet long. I encourage him because he likes the business. He likes that type of life; he enjoys being on the water. He would never be able to work in an office or a bank or anything like that. He's not the type. He really enjoys what he's doing, so I offer him whatever encouragement and help I can.

JM: What is it about that type of life that was good for you, too?

JV: Well, he's only twenty-four years old now, and he has four helpers working for him on the boat. He also has two people working on shore that are building and repairing the old equipment. So actually, he has six people working for him, plus my assistance whenever I can. It is a big operation

today; for a twenty-four year old, it's quite an undertaking.

JM: What was it that you liked the most about being a lobsterman?

JV: What I liked the most was being my own boss. If you felt like working, you went out and you worked, and if you felt like not going, you didn't have to go. It's sort of a freedom feeling. You just did what you felt like doing, and you really enjoyed it. In the early years, I did enjoy it because we didn't have the competition and the overfishing and the hassle they have today that can really spoil your day. Years ago, everybody would go to their individual favorite spots and they'd fish there. You knew where the other person's favorite spot was, so you wouldn't go there, and he wouldn't go where your place was. Each person was like a farmer; each had their own acre of land, and they'd go to those areas and they'd fish them. They wouldn't go into the other person's area. There were no markers or anything. It was understood. Things were real great, but then things changed rapidly with the influx of all these new, modern type of fishermen that came in.

JM: I've covered all of my questions, and I'm sure there are a lot more things that I should ask you.

JV: Well, you could talk on this subject for hours and

hours without covering everything.

JM: Yes. Is there anything you want to add?

JV: No. The only thing I'd like to mention, as far as the Greek fishing fleet goes, is that most of those people originated from one place, which is kind of unique in itself.

JM: It certainly is.

JV: It's not as though they came, say, from an entire country, from different areas of the country. They all seemed to come from an island like Jamestown over to Newport, more or less.

JM: Did they know each other beforehand?

JV: I think a lot of them did. I think a lot of them had marriages where one was married to somebody's cousin, because it was only a small island. You probably could get information on that island. I don't know if you know Koula Tsaparis.

JM: No.

JV: She's been over there several times, and she may give you a good history on the island and the people there. In fact, her father and mother were originally lobstermen here in Newport, too. Her father was ill for quite a while back in the thirties, and it was unusual for a woman [to be a] fisherman. Her mother used to go out and haul the lobster pots. She could tell you some stories that might be interesting as far as historical goes. I

don't know her address, but she's in Newport.

JM: Did you know many of those people who had come over?

JV: I knew quite a large number, right.

JM: Where would you see them?

JV: When I was young, I'd see them at church mostly. A lot of those people, during that time, used to go to church quite regularly, especially in the winter. At Easter holiday, church would be full. Of course, during the summer months, you'd see very few of the fishermen there; but during the winter, they'd all be there.

JM: Was your father a religious man?

JV: My father used to be fairly religious. Especially the holiday seasons, he'd always go to church and make sure that we went. We used to have Lent during that time. What was it, forty days or something like that? We weren't allowed to eat any meats or even drink milk. We used to just drink plain tea. The worst part was, I remember I used to be on the wrestling team at Rogers High School, and the tournament [for the state championships was] upstate at Providence, at the gymnasium up there. I forget the name of the gym at Providence. And everytime, during the championships, I'd be starving to death because we were on this Lenten diet. I didn't know if I'd have the energy to wrestle, but everything turned out fine.

JM: Could you eat in between meals?

JV: You could eat in between; it was just the certain things that you weren't supposed to eat. We could eat fish, we could eat something like a lentil soup. But they adhered to it very rigorously. Every once in a while, my brothers and I, if we were out with some friends, we'd manage to get a hamburger or something. Occasionally, you know.

JM: To hold you over.

JV: But at the house, it was strictly followed.

JM: I was reading in an old newspaper that during August, all the lobstermen would bring lobsters in and they'd have a festival.

JV: Yes, they used to have a picnic. They'd call you up and they'd tell you, "Well, I think you should bring us about fifty lobsters or whatever," which was fine. We'd fill up a bushel box. They'd come down and they'd pick them up. We'd give them, maybe, three or four hundred crabs. They'd boil these big crabs up. They did it willingly. There was no problem.

JM: Where did that take place?

JV: Let's see. Years ago, they used to go to Lawton's Valley. They used to have it like a picnic. They used to have it the picnic there; other times, they'd have it in the church hall, which was a little smaller than it is now. They used it have it

usually at the picnic time; whenever they had a picnic, they'd always come around looking for lobsters or something like that.

JM: Did they cook them out there?

JV: They cooked them out there

JM: And people from all over Newport, or just people --

JV: Well, the whole state. Usually when you have a picnic, it goes on the bulletin boards or through the councils of all the churches in the state, and you have people come down from Cranston. Some from New Bedford come down. They advertise all their picnics in between them -- Massachusetts and Rhode Island. Those that want to go, who have relatives in areas, go there and have a good time. They'd have Greek bands and they'd have these Greek dancers come in. You know, it's a lot of fun.

JM: It sounded so nice. Have you been back to Greece at all?

JV: No, I've never been there. For a while, I worked in Saudi Arabia. My wife and I were over in Saudi Arabia. She was pregnant when we were going to take a vacation. We went to Cyprus and we stayed a couple of weeks there. We enjoyed it. We were going up to Athens, but we figured with her being pregnant, we didn't want to risk the chance, so we stayed in Cyprus.

JM: What were you doing over there?

JV: I worked for the Arabian-American Oil Company. I was in the aviation department. I used to be in maintenance for their airplanes. They had their own, private airplanes. I worked over there four years.

JM: Then you went back into the lobster industry?

JV: I worked over there. Then they had a place in Kennedy Airport, and I transferred to Kennedy because my wife didn't like it over in Arabia. I loved it over there, but she didn't like it. I worked in Kennedy for awhile. Then I said, "I'm going to get out of this," so we came to Newport, and then I went fishing again.

JM: Were you glad to be back?

JV: I was. I'm the type person that can adapt to almost anyplace. As long as it's on the waterfront, I'm happy.

JM: Did your parents speak Greek at home?

JV: Yes, they usually spoke Greek at home.

JM: Do your children know any Greek?

JV: My children? Just a few words when they were growing up -- not too many.

JM: It all changes. I really want to thank you so much. It's been a really great experience.

JV: I hope I can be of some help to you.

JM: Thank you very much.



NEWPORT HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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DATED: April 1, 1987

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