

Name of person Interviewed: Marcia Blount [MB] [NB: Blount as in count]

Facts about this person:

Age (if known)

Sex Female

Occupation Shipyard president

If a fisherman (if retired, list the ports used when fishing),

Home port

and Hail Port (port fished from, which can be the same)

Residence (Town where lives) Warren, Rhode Island

Ethnic background (if known) European American

Interviewer: Janice Gadaire Fleuriel [JGF]

Sound tech: Chelsea Jenney [CJ]?

Transcriber: Janice Gadaire Fleuriel

Place interview took place: New Bedford Harbormaster House

Date and time of interview: Saturday, Sept. 27, 2008

INDEX (minutes:seconds) / KEYWORDS

KEYWORDS: Farming; Putnam, Connecticut; Boat building; Warren Rhode Island; Warren River; Commercial boat building; Ferries; Cruise boats; Blount Boats; World War II; Long Island; Narragansett Bay; Oystering; Hurricane of 1938; Clams; Campbell's Soup; Boat design; Propeller design; Controllable pitch propeller; American Canadian Cruise Line; Small cruise boat designs; Boat launching practices; Steel boats; Aluminum boats; Puerto Rico; Long Island; Jones Act; OCMI; Coast Guard; Boat shows; Passenger vessels; Passenger Vessel Association; Waterfront development; Marine industry preservation; Wastewater treatment; Barrington, Rhode Island; Quahoaging; Dredging; Women's roles; Regulations;

Start of Interview]

[00:00] Personal and family background—Putnam Connecticut, Warren Rhode Island; Father's machine design work for Belding and Hemingway; Mother from Minnesota; Blount family oyster business background; Hurricane of 1938 destroyed Narragansett Bay oystering;

[05:05]

Hurricane of 1938 (cont'd.); Family kept land near river; Father's brother Nelson blount started soup company during World War II, supplied clams for Campbell's soup; Father's boat design to dump clam shell piles out to sea; Father's earlier boat designs; Father's boat design business growing by word of mouth; Infrastructure and boat needs after World War II, shipyard business took off;

[10:04]

Father's controllable pitch propeller; Sister company American Canadian Cruise Line; Father's involvement in shipyard until he died at age 90; MB's financial background/education; MB's earlier work at shipyard twice; MB's work at Roger Williams University; MB coming back to shipyard after father's death; Growing up in/near the shipyard; Description of shipyard setting/family houses nearby; Launching practices;

[15:20]

Launching practices (cont'd.); Story of boat that almost launched unchristened;

[19:45]

Father wasn't sure if family could carry on the business; Types of boats they build; Boats built for Puerto Rico, Long Island ferries; Blount boats have a recognizable look; Boats get bronze plaques inside with company name;

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Boats need a name/Coast Guard number before launching; Employee numbers and jobs; Sister's human resource work for the company; Employee pride in their work; Business protected by Jones Act; OCMI inspectors during construction; Niche industry, just a few other shipyards in U.S.;

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Company has name/brand recognition; Boat show attendance; Passenger Vessel Association; Advertise in trade magazines; Business by word of mouth, already being known; Project management of simultaneous boats at different stages of construction;

Boat delivery pilots; Story of father saving a piece of Warren waterfront land from condo development; History/mixed use of Warren Waterfront;

[35:07]

Story of father saving a piece of Warren waterfront land from condo development (cont'd.); Warren waterfront changes after oyster industry destroyed; Blount Seafood (cousins' business); Increasing pressure along certain parts of Warren Waterfront; Warren wastewater treatment plant starting in 1950s with uncle's gift of land; Difference between Warren and Barrington, across river; Concerns about residential reactions to shipyard noise, etc., if waterfront gets developed;

[40:00]

Story of father saving a piece of Warren waterfront land from condo development (cont'd.); Waterfront development pressures; Quahoaging from town dock; Town tax needs; Company's limitations in boat size because of river depth; Dredging expenses;

[44:57]

Dredging permitting; Need for company infrastructure repairs; Experience being a woman in a man's industry; Logo redesign; Fishing regulations need better management;

[50:03]

Fishing regulations need better management (cont'd); Need to save fishing industry too;

Respect for SMAST / UMass Dartmouth;

[End of Interview]

TRANSCRIPT

[00:00]

JGF: OK. Today is Saturday, September 27th, 2008. This is Janice Fleuriel in the Harbormaster's House in New Bedford at the Working Waterfront Festival. And I'm interviewing Marcia.

MB: Yes.

JGF: And how do you say your last name?

MB: It's M-a-r-c-i-a.

JGF: OK. And your last name...?

MB: Blount. [Rhymes with count]

JGF: I wasn't sure how you pronounced that. So. [sound check]

OK. Good. So we're good to go.

JGF: So usually Marcia, I do like to start by asking people if they can tell me a little bit about when and where they were born, sort of personal background, and your family background in the fishing industry.

MB: OK. Well..., I was born in 1947. Actually, on a farm in Putnam, Connecticut.

JGF: OK.

MB: Where my father was born, and brought up in Rhode Island, but he had—after he had gone to technical school he got a job at [?Belding] and Hemingway in [?] in Putnam, Connecticut. And he was in charge of designing machines that would produce the nylon thread for the parachutes, which was a brand new... Not only parachutes, but for the shoelaces of, I think mostly the Army. Because they had the cot—At that point they had either hemp or cotton and it was falling apart. So, at that point nylon was a brand new product. Or maybe it had been discovered but not developed. So they were beginning to try to manufacture nylon. And the uses were not only for shoelaces but for parachutes.

JGF: Right.

MB: Material.

JGF: Yup.

MB: So he was exempt from the war—World War II—until the very end, because he was doing this, you know, important function of designing and building the machines at that, that textile plant.

So, at that point he was in Putnam, and he married my mother, who had come from Minnesota, to...to see the world [laughs]. And she wanted to go to the east coast, and she got as far as Putnam, Connecticut [laughs]...

JGF: Wow.

MB: ...and she was a school teacher. And so he met her. And they got married. And he bought a little farm, where he—well he had the farm and he had his job at the factory.

So that's where I was born, 1947.

But the family—the Blount family—had been in the oyster business for, many years, in the 1880s, in Long Island.

JGF: Wow.

MB: In Oyster Bay, Long Island. And when those waters were polluted and the production down, they moved to the pristine waters of Narragansett Bay. And so

they opened up... There was E.B. Blount and Sons, was his grandfather's oyster shop. And then his grandmother's father was also an oyster man. So... So anyway, I happened to be born at the time, you know, that he had a farm [laughs] in Putnam. But he was very much from a water-oriented family.

JGF: Oh, that's interesting. Yeah.

MB: So...

JGF: Huh! Interesting.

And now... I know that it says you run the Blount shipbuilding business.

MB: Yes.

JGF: So can you explain how you came into doing that?

MB: How I did that? Yeah. I'm currently president of Blount Boats, which is the family shipyard. And... Well, after the war, my father came back to Warren. And on the land where the oyster company was, which was on the Warren River, where they had their oyster sheds... Previous to that in 1938, the family oyster company was wiped out due to the 1938 hurricane.

JGF: Oh... Right.

MB: Because the hurricane came up Narragansett Bay, and had..., it had a—what do you call it? It was a surge, or... It was not only a surging wave, but it pulled up the whole bottom.

[05:05]

JGF: OK. Yeah.

MB: So what it did was it destroyed all the oyster beds.

JGF: Wow.

MB: Which were leased at that point. The oyster men of the bay leased the beds, and actually policed those leases. Because they were valuable property. So anyway, when the hurricane came up, it just upended the beds, and literally destroyed—that was in 1938—destroyed the family's business. My g—he was my father's grandfather, Eddie Byron Blount, my great grandfather, and he died the next year, in 1939. So he—you know, he was ruined. The family kept the house. But... So there was a parcel of land on the Warren River. And, then my father went off to Belding and Hemingway and was working there during the war effort. So after the war was over, you know, he came back to Warren. And he had—there was this plot of land that the family had. And it wasn't—you know, the oyster business, you know was defunct, at that point.

So, he also had a brother, Nelson Blount, who, during the war had started a soup company. Up the road. Also on land that the Blount—the Blount family did own some big parcels along the Warren waterfront, having to do with the oyster business.

So, he had started this company and he, was the sole supplier of clams for clam chowder for Campbell's Soup. Something which the company still has today.

JGF: Oh. Huh.

MB: So anyway, the problem with the clams, was when they shucked the clams, they created these huge piles of shells. And—that were just building up on the docks. And, the question was how to get rid of them.

So, my uncle came to my father. And I'm not quite sure how it happened but they talked. And my father said, "Well I have an idea of how to do it." And my father was very inventive. Very creative and inventive.

So, he came up with a—sort of a—two pontoons, with a... It was a barge type thing. With a slanted bottom. That you would fill the—fill it up with they oyster shells, and then it was—I'm not sure I think it was propelled with an outboard [chuckles]. And then it would go out. I'm not sure how far they went out in those days. And then obviously it would open and the shells would fall down. And they would get rid of the shells that way.

JGF: Huh!

MB: So... That was—you know, sort of the first—not his first boat. He had designed a kayak when he was young. He had fooled around with different boat designs. But this was...

So then—And he did it on the land that at that point his grandmother owned, because his grandfather had died. So then he..., there was someone who was interested in a sort of a fuel tanker. And so he designed a boat based on—like the twin tube, or the [Roity?] Oyster, was the name to the little boat that got rid of the oysters. And he built the William Bennett. And it was again based on the same type of design.

And then, from *then* he started getting others that were interested in building boats. Because, after World War II there was a huge need to rebuild the infrastructure of the United States. And that meant not only bridges and roads, but it meant the whole infrastructure of the waterfront. The working waterfront, in terms of passenger vessels. Yeah, you know, freight, [?], tugs. You name it. You know, the war effort, you know, concentrated on the military boats. And so there was just a great need for all sorts of vessels.

So... And this was in... I was born in 1947. It was 1949, two years later, that he came back. To Warren. And began that.

So it was during the early fifties when there was a huge push in this country.

So he sort of—The timing was beautiful that he was, you know, interested in boats. And there was a need.

So that's how the shipyard took off.

And he is well known for many designs.

[10:04]

JGF: Hm.

MB: His controllable pitch propeller.

He created... We have a sister company called American Canadian Cruise Line, which runs cruises. Small ship cruises. In Canada and the Caribbean, along the inland coastal waterway. And these boats can go where no other boats can go. He designed bow ramps so they go up onto the beaches. And he designed retractable pilot houses so they can go under the very low bridges in the New York State barge canal.

And so he's attributed with many interesting ideas.

So anyway... But he was very much of a..., I guess his own man. You know, he had five children. But he really perceived his operation as sort of *his*. We were *part of it*...

JGF: [laughs]

MB: ...buy, you know, he literally ran it until he was ninety. Literally until he died at the age of ninety. On September 24th, 2006.

JGF: Wow.

MB: Which was, just a couple days ago. Was the two-year anniversary.

So. He did have five children. He had a son. And he had four daughters. And..., I was the oldest daughter. And..., I did—Of the family I have the financial background. I am a certified public accountant.

JGF: Oh.

MB: And I have an MBA from Columbia. So...

JGF: Wow. That's great.

MB: Right. So, I... You know, we were all interested in working at the shipyard. And actually my two sisters—Nancy runs the American Canadian Cruise Line. And Julie has worked at the shipyard a very long time. I've worked at the shipyard twice. While he was there. And, he and I would knock heads over...

JGF: [laughs]

MB:how it was to be run. Or the best way of introducing, you know... Not new engineering ideas, which was *his* thing, but just..., you know...

JGF: The business?

MB:up-to-date business practices like using computers instead of slide rules.

JGF: [laughs]

MB: [laughs] You know. Computerizing engineers, so they could use CAD.

So he was, you know... In a way he was stuck in another age.

JGF: Right. And it worked for *him*. But...

MB: And it worked for him. But...

So, I tried working there twice. And then, we parted ways. Sometime less than amicably.

But anyway. So, at the point that he died I was actually working in the finance department of Roger Williams University, which was a nearby college.

JGF: Yup.

MB: So... But then when he died, the question was, you know—the family had to face, what were we going to do. So we had a meeting and then I was asked to come back. And be part of the shipyard.

JGF: Wow.

MB: So that happened in the fall of 2006.

JGF: Hm. OK. So just about, a two-year anniversary.

MB: That's right.

JGF: And is it a—It sounds like a move you're glad to have been able to make?

MB: Yeah. Yeah. It's—Yeah. It's been really quite an amazing..., you know, journey. I think for the whole family. So.

JGF: Yeah. And how did you come by going into the business field? Was there anything about your family's business growing up that interested you?

MB: Well we lived in the shipyard. [chuckles]

JGF: Oh. [chuckles]

MB: Well, because this was like a family compound. Where the oyster shop was. And, the family's house was just up the street. Their winter house was just up the street

on 11 Wheaton Street, that the family has lived in since 1903, was when the family moved from Long Island to Warren. So there's a house there. And... And then in the summer they would move down the street—it's like a five-minute walk. Down to the water, where there was some houses, where they lived. So they would literally summer [laughs], you know, on one street, and then they'd go down—They'd winter on one street and summer down by the water. So there were houses there. So we lived in one of the houses. So we had a garden. My father was big in the garden. We had a garden right next to where the steel was cut. The cutting shed. So we literally grew up watching these boats being built.

JGF: Yeah...

MB: So it was just—all the launchings. Our launchings are very elaborate affairs.

[15:20]

JGF: Hm.

MB: There is a belief that all our boats, you know, need to be blessed before they hit the water. We decorate the champagne bottles with *ribbons*, and the *netting*. And..., you know, we always have a ceremony. And it's got to the point where, you know, even our men in the shipyard, you know, say, "Well, we've got to do it right."

JGF: Wow!

MB: So we always make sure we have a sponsor. We have a blessing.

JGF: Yeah.

MB: And, you know, Blount Boats are known to—are known for their quality and that they, you know, they're long-lived.

JGF: That's awesome.

MB: [laughs]

JGF: That's so interesting.

MB: So anyway. So we grew up—so we lived and breathed watching, watching boats being built.

JGF: Yeah. Huh.

When you say a sponsor, what does that mean exactly?

MB: The person who christens.

JGF: Oh. OK. And how do they get chosen?

MB: Well, sometime—if it's for—for someone who's building the boat, they can choose.

JGF: OK.

MB: But sometimes they, you know, they don't care or they're not near. And then we get to choose somebody. So we have—you know, we run through all sorts of [laughs], family members, and then, we reach out to other people. You know. In the office. Or some—you know, we've had Miss Rhode Island do a few.

JGF: Oh, that's so cool.

MB: Or we've had the governor's wife and the senator's wife. We mix it up.

JGF: That's so neat.

MB: That's right. So that's called the—yeah, the sponsor christenings.

And it's usually a woman. We've had...

JGF: Is that traditional?

MB: Yeah it's traditionally a woman.

JGF: Yeah.

MB: Although I don't have a problem with a man. In one family, we did have a young boy do it. One of the young sons of the family. Otherwise it's been a woman.

JGF: Huh! Interesting. Have you ever done it?

MB: Yes.

JGF: Yeah? Do you have to like smack the bottle really hard to make it break?

MB: Yup. Yes you do.

JGF: [laughs]

MB: You have to hold it. We coach..., you know, you have to hold the stem of the bot—the neck of the bottle. And a lot of places score. We don't usually score. But you can't—the glass is thickest at the bottom of a bottle. So you've got to make sure that you hit where, you know, the bow comes.

So we go through a couple—and we show them how to do it.

JGF: Huh. So you're doing like a backhand.

MB: It's a backhand. Yeah. Usually.

JGF: Which would keep you furthest away from the breaking glass.

MB: That's right. That's right.

But we've had—We've had some.... One time—Sometimes you tie it at the top and the bottle hangs down. And then the sponsor just swings it.

JGF: Oh...

MB: And then in the old days, they used to let the boat go.

In the old days we used to have the high school band come down and play.

JGF: Wow.

MB: You know, we had bunting all over.

And..., And one time, though, the sponsor, she—it was a bottle hanging. And we never did it that way afterwards. And she *swung* it, and it missed. Meanwhile, the...you know, the ways are greased. You know, the men had been given the signal to release. So we had the boat going down the way. And with not being *christened*. So one of our workmen *jumped in*. You know, got the bottle and, [laughs], hit it. And it got [laughs]. You know. Splashed with foam, just as it hit the water.

JGF: [laughs] Oh that must have been great.

MB: [laughs] That's right.

JGF: A little extra drama.

MB: So after that, we did it that, you know, we hit it.

JGF: Yeah. Is it done right where the bow comes together?

MB: Yes. Exactly. So we usually have sort of a little podium that we drag over to it.

JGF: Yeah.

MB: So we're a bit elevated when we do that.

JGF: And who will do the blessing?

MB: Usually we use all the clergy, in the town.

JGF: Yeah. That's neat.

MB: Or if they have—we did one for the [?Borkstroms], out of Chicago. And that was a Swedish family. So it was the Windella that was christened and they asked for a Lutheran minister. So we'll—whichever, you know. Sometimes we have the choice. Sometimes, we don't, but. But we let everybody, in town, and adjacent towns, so... For a clergy, it's sort of fun because it's unusual.

JGF: Absolutely.

MB: Yeah. To do something like that. So they get a kick out of it.

JGF: That's neat.

MB: Yeah. That's right.

JGF: Oh, that's such a neat thing. I love it. Wow.

[19:45]

JGF: So how long—And this probably varies. Does the business still build a lot of different kinds of boats?

MB: Yeah. We do. We do. We are busier than we ever have been in years.

JGF: That's great. That's great.

MB: You know? And I think my father really—He wasn't sure, you know, that the family could carry it on. And so, I think he might be...

JGF: He might be happy.

MB: Yeah. I think he might be. Hopefully he's pleased! [laughs]

JGF: [laughs]

MB: Up there—we know he's around. We can—we know he's, he can see it.

JGF: Yeah. So far your newfangled business practices haven't killed the business.

MB: That's right. That's right.

JGF: [laughs]

MB: That's right.

JGF: So what are—I know you mentioned some designs from earlier. But are they—What kinds of boats are they building? Are they pleasure? Or fishing?

MB: No. These are all commercial. We do not build pleasure. We build commercial sixty-five to a hundred and sixty-five feet steel and aluminum.

JGF: Wow. Wow.

MB: And we delivered the hundred and sixty-five foot Cayo Largo, which is a passenger ferry from Fajardo, Puerto to Vieques. The island of Vieques.

JGF: Oh, how nice!

MB: That's right.

And then we've been building four little water taxis—forty-nine passenger water taxis—for the mass transit system out of San Juan Puerto Rico. So... In fact, one of those little water taxis was delivered on the deck of the Cayo Largo. So we had two going to the Puerto Rico Port Authority.

JGF: Oh neat.

MB: Yeah. This July.

JGF: But they all get built in Warren?

MB: They all get built in Warren. That's right.

And then we have another vessel for the Puerto Rico Port Authority. We've actually built... The Cayo Largo was the twenty-second vessel we've built for them over, you know, fifty, sixty years.

Then we have a lot of clients coming back to us. For second, third, fourth boats. So, we're building a double-ended car ferry for Shelter Island, Long Island. For the Clark family, which has the longest running ferry in a family's hands. I think they said they started in 17..., I don't 49. They said the Clarks were running boats out to Shelter Island. So we built one for them in I think 2001. And now we are building a

second one. And then another old client came back. The... Ed Mooney from Fire Island Ferries. We signed a contract to build another fast ferry.

JGF: And Fire Island is...

MB: For Fire Island, Long Island. That's the southern end of Long Island. So that's under construction.

JGF: Wow.

MB: So we've got old clients coming back. And then we're also..., you know, looking for—looking for new work as well.

JGF: Yeah.

Now that brings up—It sounds like clients are all over the place. Well, I would say internationally, except Puerto Rico's not *exactly* but.

MB: That's right. Our boats end up all over the world. Because they last so long.

JGF: Yeah. Wow.

MB: They get resold and resold. And..., people—You can recognize a Blount Boat.

JGF: Just by how it looks?

MB: There's a design look. You can tell by the pilot house. You can tell by the rake of the bow.

JGF: Wow....

MB: There is a look to a Blount Boat. When I—I remember I took the Panama... I took the summit cruise through the Panama Canal and we went up on the western side of Mexico to Acapulco. And we went into the harbor and I got on deck and I looked around. I said, "*That's a Blount Boat!*" [laughs]

JGF: That's neat. That's neat. Huh.

MB: And it *was* a Blount Boat. I know, we sold it to Enrique [?Braun], who was a Mexican, a long time ago. And it had been—the aft had been changed a bit. But there was still enough. I said, "That's one of ours."

JGF: That's interesting.

MB: Yeah.

JGF: So these unique designs, does that involved carefully guarded specifications or anything? Or is it just that...?

MB: Well, yeah. We—obviously on the title block of all our drawings—you know, there's a proprietary interest.

But, it's... It's just a *look*, that after a while people know. I mean, someone could copy it. But there's just...

JGF: It would be a Blount design even if they did.

MB: It would be a Blount—yes, that's right.

JGF: Huh. Now do they—Did the boats get stamped with the company name anywhere or anything like that?

MB: Yes. Oh, yes. And we have—A lot of people, yeah. They—There is a bronze plaque on every boat, you know, saying, "Built by Blount."

JGF: Wow. That's neat.

MB: Right. And it has the year. So if you can't—you know, if you go on board, any of our boats, you know. We do have people coming back...

JGF: Where does it get put?

MB: It gets put, usually in the interior spaces. You know, no one place. No one place.

JGF: It could vary.

MB: Yeah.

JGF: Interesting.

MB: Right. Right.

JGF: And will the people have their boats named before you christen them? Because you would have to paint it on the boat.

MB: They have to get the boats named to get a Coast Guard number.

JGF: Oh, OK.

MB: Yeah. They can't go unnamed.

[24:58]

JGF: I see.

MB: When we start them, they're unnamed. Usually unnamed. But, by the time they're launched, because, as part of the christening, you have to say, "I christen thee..."

JGF: Oh right. OK.

MB: And then you say the name of the boat. And then it's right on. It's painted on. So, by then we have to know, what name they choose.

JGF: Huh. Well that's interesting.

MB: Yeah.

JGF: So how many people work at your place?

MB: We have about fifty-four?

JGF: And what are the different jobs?

MB: We have different departments. We have ship fitters. We have welders. We have machinists. Inside and out machinists. We have our pipe fitters. We have our carpenters. We have our paint shop. So, we've got, you know, about six specialty departments.

JGF: Yeah.

MB: And most of our foremen have been with us for twenty, at least twenty-two years.

JGF: That's wonderful.

MB: Yeah. Our yard supervisor of thirty-five years.

JGF: Yeah.

MB: So, there is a skill set, in creating these hulls. They're almost like works of art. You know, they're like... Before they're painted, they are actually very, very beautiful to look at. The designs.

JGF: And what does it mean to be a ship fitter exactly?

MB: Ship fitter means that you are fitting—you're cutting and fitting the steel or aluminum pieces into the shape of the design.

JGF: OK. Huh. And does it have a skeleton?

MB: Yeah. There is. Yeah. It always starts with a keel.

JGF: Is that metal, too?

MB: Yeah.

JGF: Yeah. OK.

MB: Yeah. Metal. It's either steel or aluminum. Yeah.

JGF: Wow. That's interesting.

And what does your sister do?

MB: She is—the [?EVP]. She handles, sort of the human resource end of it. The hirings.

JGF: OK. It must be—It sounds like it's a real point of pride for people to work there and produce these boats.

MB: Yes. That's right. One of our—Our men are so *proud* of the boats that the build, that, you know..., you know, they'll do it until they feel it's right. So [laughs]

JGF: That's wonderful. [laughs]

MB: So, yeah. And they know all the hulls that they've built. Yeah.

JGF: So, today is... One of the questions I was going to ask in terms of like the international aspect—It sounds like in the beginning business built up by word of mouth.

MB: Mm hm.

JGF: And did that change at some point to be more active marketing? Or has it just grown by word of mouth? Like over the decades.

MB: Well, it's a very small industry, actually, nationally. There's only several shipyards in the northeast. We're one of the few.

JGF: So you're a niche, like?

MB: Yeah, we're a specialty niche. And we're protected by the Jones Act.

JGF: Which I don't...

MB: We are a protected industry.

JGF: What does that mean?

MB: It means that if we weren't protected, people would be building their boats in China.

JGF: Oh...

MB: But, there are regulations on the book that passenger vessels, that are inspected by the U.S. Coast Guard, must be *built* in the United States.

JGF: Oh... interesting.

MB: That's right. Which means that—you're right, we are... I'm a free trader but [laughs] but not for boats [laughs].

JGF: Yeah. Well, you know...

MB: So I mean part of that I think was for safety reasons.

JGF: I would think so.

MB: Just to maintain the regs. Or to have *control*, over. And we the OCMI out of Providence. Which, he almost lives in the yard.

JGF: The OCMI?

MB: That is the Officer of Construction Management, I think. I think something like that. So, the Coast Guard—within the Coast Guard office in Providence, they have a person who is a liaison to the shipyard. Which literally watches the construction of all our vessels.

So we do have to—we do [?host] testing on the weldings [interruption from phone ringing/answering machine message]

JGF: Sorry [laughs]. I didn't want to hang up on somebody, because they might figure that Laz [Harbormaster] hung up on them and they wouldn't know what was going on.

MB: OK.

JGF: He's a very highly regarded person here. Sorry. Thank you. So the OCMI, yeah.

MB: So all our vessels are inspected as they are built. By the Coast Guard. But that is part of the Jones Act. That, that is what happens within the boat building business in the United States.

But it's a very small business. There's only about... We have one competitor in Massachusetts. There's about—one in Maine. And then there are quite a few shipyards in the south. Probably in Louisiana.

JGF: Right. Yeah, I hear a lot about Louisiana? Is Alabama also?

MB: Alabama as well. Along the bayous.

JGF: Right.

MB: And... Primarily I think they sprung up because of the oil industry in the Gulf. They began building the boats, that supplied... The service boats for that. So those are our competitors.

JGF: Yeah.

[29:58]

MB: However, we have... What do they call that? Name recognition, and a brand name. So that, when we go to the boat *shows*,--There's a big boat show in New Orleans. Every year in December. November, December.

JGF: Good, past hurricane season. [laughs]

MB: That's right. That's right.

And then there's a Passenger Vessel Association show once a year in some city. So we always have a presence there.

And then there's certain trade magazines where we always put ads in.

But... A lot of it is, you know...

JGF: You're known.

MB: There aren't that many *people*, you know, building boats. It's not like a retail commodity.

So, yeah, we are known. So we're approached many times by people.

JGF: Interesting. And do you have somebody that would be responsible for, sort of like, scheduling, like figuring out how long a boat's going to take?

MB: Right.

JGF: And making sure it's done and then the next one comes in?

MB: That's right. That's right. Well, it gets complicated when you have five projects going at, you know, various stages. And to be efficient you have to make sure... Because, a boat goes through a very defined sequence. Because you start with the ship fitters, and the welders together, you know. And then when it's ready for the engine you have your machinists. And then your pipe fitters, begin, you know, putting in the pipes. And.... Then last you have the carpenters and you have the outfitters.

So, to run an efficient yard you have to have several projects at different stages.

JGF: Oh right.

MB: So your carpenters aren't just sitting...

JGF: [laughs]

MB:waiting for the ship fitters and welders to finish the hull. So, what we've tried to do, you know, once we took over, is that we stagger. We try to—as best as we can, since you can't *completely* control when contracts come in the door. But *stagger* it. So that we have delivery times scheduled throughout the year. So we're using our men. And so, you know, there is project management involved.

JGF: Right. Huh.

And who pilots them to deliver them?

MB: Oh, we have various people. We have the captains of our cruise line, which we use. We have summer employees that have got their hundred ton license. And then there's other people that we now and then, just are freelancers. And they deliver.

JGF: That's neat.

MB: Yeah.

JGF: Wow, that's fascinating.

MB: Yeah.

JGF: I'm trying to think if I had any other... I *think* that covers my questions on the boats.

MB: OK.

JGF: I might come back if I think of...

MB: OK.

JGF: I did want to talk—the other thing that I had in my little bit of information is that your father was very instrumental in saving the port from development?

MB: Yes.

JGF: Could you talk about that?

MB: Yes. Well, the waterfront of Warren..., is on the Warren River. And on one side of the river is the town of Warren and on the other side is the town of Barrington. And Barrington is a bedroom community for Providence. So it has very little industry. So it has some very beautiful, beautiful homes along the waterfront.

However, Warren was always a mixed use commercial/residential port.

And actually in the old days, Barrington was farms. And then it got developed as a suburb of Providence.

So it was along Warren waterfront that you had all—First you had the whaling, a whaling industry in Warren. That occurred about the same time obviously as the whaling in New Bedford and Nantucket.

And then... So you always had, you know, docks, and activity. And then, when that died down then you had the whole oyster business come up. And that's, you know, what my family was part of. From, about 1880 to 1938, when the oyster industry was destroyed in Rhode Island.

So, that... I would say that the—I wouldn't call it a port, because Warren is a town of about 10,000.

JGF: OK. It's more like a waterfront.

MB: Waterfront. But it had a very active waterfront. It did have one textile mill, that was placed sort of at the north end of the town, on the river. That... They ran... Well, they did run turbines because the channel is narrow and the tidal action is so swift. A very swift channel. So they were able to use that for..., and I think in the old days they actually were using water wheels to generate mechanical—not electricity—but mechanical, moving parts for a textile mill.

[35:07]

MB: So... So, what has happened though, as waterfront land has become scarce and valuable, there has been a lot of—and the oyster industry was destroyed, so during the '50s nothing much happened. The '60s. And then waterfront began—people began to look at waterfront not industrially, but maybe to live there.

So there has begun to be pressure along the Warren waterfront. And there's parcels... Our cousins have the Blount Seafood, which was the clam processing

plant. Then there was a big parcel that my uncle actually gave to the town for a sewer, for the town waste...

JGF: Uh huh. A treatment plant?

MB: A waste treatment plant. Which was, in its day, in the 1950s, that was quite an environmentally forward looking thing.

JGF: Yeah. That's way before the Clean Water Act.

MB: That's right. To provide some land on the... And at that time they took it to the waterfront. And, then, nowadays they don't really have to do that. But anyway. And so what's dividing the shipyard from my cousin's location on the Warren waterfront is the wastewater treatment plant. And then to the south of us is the town beach. And then if you go north, you start going into some very beautiful old buildings. And then you've got the big textile mill at the north end. Well what's *happened* is some developers were coming in, sort of in the middle. There was a middle chunk that they had bought the land, and they were going to put very high price condos.

And, Warren is sort of a mixed place. It has a very beautiful historic area from Water Street to Main Street. That is beginning to be preserved, and which our family houses—my sister Julie now owns the old family house. And I own another house, almost—very, one street over. So we're in that historic district of where the houses are being renovated. But we're not near—right on the water.

So, this firm bought a block. And they were going to put some very high end condos. And the town is really a blue collar town. It's not an upscale, Barrington town.

JGF: Yup. It's like working class, right?

MB: It's working class. That's right.

So, this would have really—It was the first condominium development that the town would have seen on the waterfront.

JGF: Oh... Yeah.

MB: And it was going to be very high end. So the question—And it was right in the middle of all the industrial sections.

And obviously as a shipyard, we are certainly worried about people not wanting, noise.

JGF: Exactly. And smells, right?

MB: Smells. And then we blast and paint. You know, there's certain things we've got to do.

JGF: That's right.

MB: And... So, I mean, for that reason, as well as perhaps altruism, the... What happened was these developers came in, and they had their whole plan to do this and they went before the town council. And the town council was agonizing over to accept it or not. And the town didn't really have the zoning in place to either, stop it or, you know, to force them to do certain things.

So, you know my father who is—was the master of drama, [laughter], you know, during one of these big debates, to approve or not to approve. And they thought they had it all sewn up, that, you know, before the vote my father stepped forward to the mike. In a town meeting. New England town hall meeting. And said that he

would..., he, you know, that he would give the town—I can't even, you know, he had a real accent. He had a *real* New England...

JGF: Oh, like a Yankee...

MB: ...*Yankee* accent.

JGF: [laughs]

MB: Which I don't really have. But he said, he said, "I don't want to see this in my town." And he says, "And I'm going to give the town a million dollars to buy it."

JGF: Wow.

MB: So that parcel was—I'm not sure whether they had a—they had the plans and they had the option to buy, so anyway. So he stepped in and he bought the parcel of land.

JGF: Wow. Did the room go dead silent?

MB: Yeah. The room was [laughs].

[40:00]

JGF: I can only imagine.

MB: Yeah. The room went dead. So.

And he put—And so, there was a group of people in town who was helping this happen. The money actually went to the Land for Public Trust...I'm trying to think, I think that's the name. The Land for Public Trust? The Public Trust for Land? It's out of Boston.

But anyway, there were certain structures on it. The area was turned into a town dock. And it does have some buildings on it.

He did specify that the area that he paid for was to be kept for marine jobs.

JGF: Yeah.

MB: And, it has come under assault. Even, about two months ago, we attended the town hall hearing where this woman wanted to have a restaurant in there. And it was contending it was marine use. And they did—It was just by a vote of one it was voted down.

JGF: Mmm.

MB: So, there's all, you know, sorts of assaults. Meanwhile, the big textile mill at the end of town has been sold. And they are developing condos up there.

JGF: Right. Wow.

MB: So, the pressure is continuing. One area was stopped, in the middle of the whole commercial district. But, on that north end, that is going to be a huge condo development.

JGF: Yeah... It's coming, sort of.

MB: That *is* the problem You know, the prices people are willing to pay. And, you know, how do you keep a viable working waterfront when there's no fishing industry? We have a whole bunch of quahoagers that go out from the town dock. We do—the two big industries on the waterfront are Blount Seafood and Blount Boats.

JGF: Right.

MB: So... So that's the story.

JGF: Has the town—I wonder, have they considered anything like... Where I live out in Buckland, Mass., out in western Mass., a few years ago at town hall they voted to have Buckland called a farm-friendly community. And I remember turning to someone saying, "What's the point of this?" And he said, actually the point is really

that, as more people move in who might not be agriculturally oriented, they'll know this, and they won't be able to complain about tractors in the roads...

MB: Oh, right.

JGF: ...and that kind of thing.

MB: That's right. That's right.

JGF: It feels like—that's almost—that's like the next best compromise or something.

MB: Oh, OK. OK. To...

JGF: I don't know if the town is trying to do anything along those lines?

MB: No. See, the problem—this is the problem, they town... They want their taxes. It's the taxes. And obviously, the higher priced the residential area, the higher the taxes. So there's just a political pressure on them to raise taxes.

JGF: Yeah...

MB: So, to give commercial entities a break, when they are on—I mean, I have to say, the three acres that we have, have probably the most spectacular views. Not only do you look across to Barrington, to the mansions over there. But we can look *down* the river, to the mouth of the river, and it's just a *stunning, stunning*, view. Which anybody would just love to look at. From there.

JGF: Have you gotten people actually approaching you? Or, not yet? [laughs]

MB: I don't think anybody ha—you know, well now that the real estate boom has burst. But... I think they knew my father was not approachable.

JGF: Right.

MB: So. So we never began to entertain anything like that.

JGF: Huh. Wow. So in the meantime, you'll carry on. Yeah?

MB: That's right. That's right.

JGF: It looks like the business is good for the indefinite future?

MB: That's right? The business is—Well, yeah. Yeah. There are—We have a terrific brand name, whether we're in Warren or not, is what we realized. Because, we're national, and people—I mean they *come* to Warren. But it's not like we're—we're not a destination because we're *there*. We're there simply because it's family land and we started there.

One of our problems is that the river is shallow. And we are precluded—you know, we have people come to us, you know, for like the LNG tugs, the deep water tugs. And some of the offshore support vessels.

JGF: And you can't get them out.

MB: We cannot get them out. We cannot launch them. So we are cut off. We are actually in just a segment of the boat building business. And we have to make some critical decisions. Do we... You know, do we go into the smaller, shallower, big boats?

JGF: Right.

MB: You know. Or what do we do? And the dredging now is so expensive. It's *hugely* expensive to dredge. To even maintain our waterfront until you get to the channel.

[44:57]

JGF: And if you tried dredging, you think you'd run up against environmental...?

MB: No. You can—we can be permitted by all the... There's a permitting process of four entities, including the Army Corps of Engineers. You can be permitted to do it. But, it's costly.

JGF: Hmm. Wow.

MB: It's very costly. So we... So just in a natural setting, where we are, we have issues. Which my father never wanted to deal with.

JGF: Right.

MB: He... You know. The shipyard, you know, became almost a sideline to the cruise line.

JGF: Oh...

MB: And the cruise line boats were all shallow draft. And so for quite a while that was the focus. And the shipyard was a support—is still a support facility for the..., for those boats. But we're facing—you know, he never really did the infrastructure maintenance. So we are now looking at, like millions to revise our docks and our lift dock. And even dredging. So...

JGF: And does that make you wonder if you'll end up moving one day?

MB: Well... It... You know, we have some very big decisions, as to what path we're going to take.

JGF: Right. Wow.

MB: So. To be a viable business.

JGF: Huh. Interesting.

MB: Yeah.

JGF: Wow. Neat.

MB: Yeah.

JGF: Well I don't think I have any other questions.

MB: OK. I didn't know what time it was. Oh it's over there. Ten of 1.

JGF: I like to wrap up with two last sort of...wrap-ups.

MB: Sure. OK.

JGF: And the first thing is, is there anything I didn't ask that you would have liked to share about your own experience with the business or the waterfront?

MB: Uh... Wow...

JGF: And you don't *have* to have anything.

MB: Yeah, I know. I'm just trying to think is there something that I didn't.... Yeah, well, what is interesting is, the shipbuilding and even the waterfront, it is a man's business.

JGF: OK.

MB: You know. We are probably the only shipyard in the United States that has...

JGF: Oh...

MB: We have an executive team of three women. And it's Julie, Nancy, and myself.

JGF: Right.

MB: And... You know, really—there may be some small repair yards that have a wife or something who's the president, but. To really run a multi-million dollar company, we are unusual. And it is a very—it's really a man's world.

JGF: That's interesting.

MB: Which made it very interesting when we went back, when we wanted to make—when we were trying to understand our name and our brand. The name—what did the name “Blount” mean? And we redesigned our logo. We spent a lot of time deciding how masculine...

JGF: Oh...

MB: ...we needed to make that log. And it was very interesting. Because we had some ideas that we really liked. And yet, in the end we felt that we had to come across, *strong, bold...* And so, it's interesting how—you know, that' we're—we're literally breaking, you know, new...

JGF: Yeah! Was there any sense of having to prove yourself? Or by being associated with this particular business you sort of weren't?

MB: Well, I think, certainly having the last name... I mean, makes it, easier.

JGF: Yeah. Right.

MB: You know? We've all kept our names. You know? Whether we've been married or not [laughs]. We're all Blounts. So.

So that makes it easier. *However*, we were told after Dad died and we took over, that we were being watched. That the industry was absolutely watching, what was happening.

JGF: Wow...

MB: So the fact that we..., you know, we have a yard full of boats under construction, means that, we are successfully pulling old customers back.

JGF: That's great.

MB: Yeah.

JGF: That's great.

MB: Yeah...

JGF: Well good! That's super.

MB: Good. So that's it.

JGF: I'm glad you brought that up.

MB: Good.

JGF: Last year was our them on women in the industry.

MB: Oh was it? Oh [laughs].

JGF: And I would have thought to ask that. But this year the theme is ports or whatever, so.

MB: Oh OK.

JGF: It just didn't even come up to me. And my *last* question is what would you want festival visitors to leave understanding about the waterfront or the fishing industry?

MB: Well... Only because, you know, I have a brother who's in the fishing industry.

JGF: Yeah.

MB: To me, I think it's been very mismanaged. The whole... What I understand about it, because I'm not right in the trenches, the way he is, in terms of limiting catches, and boarding boats, and, jailing people.

[50:03]

JGF: Yeah.

MB: Or... I think this country does need a viable fishing industry. And... I'm not sure..., either the politicians or the scientific community, is you know..., understands that.

JGF: Yeah. Yeah. They seem not always to have that perspective.

MB: They don't have that perspective. I think they are so terrified that we're going to run out of fish.

JGF: Right.

MB: But the question is, how do you manage..., how do you manage both the stock of fish, and how do you manage the industry that catches it?

JGF: Right.

MB: So that you don't destroy the industry...

JGF: Right.

MB: ...while you're trying to save, you know, the stock.

JGF: Yeah... Yeah.

MB: So.

JGF: That's interesting. And that's probably going to be a question people are trying....

MB: I know.

JGF: I do get the impression, in New Bedford, which is nice, and I don't know what your brother's views would be, but... That SMAST in Dartmouth, UMass Dartmouth. They have garnered quite a bit of respect from what I can tell from people.

MB: From the fishing community?

JGF: Yeah. I can't say it's universal or whatever, but.

MB: Yeah.

JGF: It seems like maybe there's some hopeful steps in the right direction.

MB: Oh, OK.

JGF: Would you say there has to be management, but it just has to take the industry into account more?

MB: Absolutely. Absolutely.

JGF: Good.

MB: Yeah.

JGF: Alright. Thank you. Well thank you.

MB: OK.

[End of Interview]