

Name of person Interviewed: Sharon Cummings [SC]

Facts about this person:

Age (if known) 62

Sex Female

Occupation Settlement house, fish industry book keeping

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

Residence (Town where lives)

Ethnic background (if known)

Interviewer: Lynne Williamson [LW]

Transcriber: Janice Gadaire Fleuriel

Place interview took place: New Bedford Harbor Development Commission Office

Date and time of interview: Saturday, Sept. 25, 2004

INDEX (minutes:seconds) / KEYWORDS

KEYWORDS: New Bedford; Settlement House; Fish auction; Regulations; Two hundred mile limit; Seafood Producers; Lumpers; Dragging; Scalloping; Women; Shore industries; Nicknames; Fishing terms; Mug up; Norwegian; Portuguese; IRS; Tax issues

[Start of Interview]

00:06 Getting started in fishing industry
3:00 Ended up working for Seafood Producers 32 years ago, still in this aspect today; works part-time for lumpers since Producers went out of business
4:40 Still no computer in office, all by hand; Tracks pensioners, lumpers, beneficiaries; settlement sheets;
6:15 Worked from home for 6 months after breaking ribs;
7:35 Involved with the sail no Washington when had 200-mile limit; Contact with Coast Guard and National Marine Fisheries when boats needed help;
8:50 Seafood Producers did a lot of stuff like that; Coast Guard violations; seafood advertising; recipe books; Julia Childs on twin piers;
10:00 Press party with famous restaurants;
11:00 Port of New Bedford means fleet including Fairhaven;
12:00 Boat Sharon Noreen sailed on Washington; Protesting foreign nations raping oceans, factory ships; had a 3-mile limit;
13:20 Fishermen wanted 200-mile limit; allotments done through Hague gathering every 2 years at that time, not written in stone;
14:08 Nicknames
16:30 Sayings—"mug up"; grandmother's work in fish house kitchens;
18:00 "Mug up" and grandmother's work continued; fish house work only if boats came in;
19:00 Fish house jobs: cutters , packers, kitchens; filleters; jobs generally by gender;
20:45 Auction distinct way of doing business; funny story about auction partition;
22:32 Auction continued; fish sold on captain's reputation;
23:45 Highliners; dealer problems on occasion; attorneys for dealers, producers;
26:10 Conservation problems; fish limits—self-regulated then government; problems because of 200-mile limit;
29:40 Settlement office terms for payroll sheets; how shares were broken down;
32:50 Settlement office is bookkeeping office for boats, various tasks;
36:36 Numbers of boats per office; Had 5 major settlement houses in city;
39:30 Settlement offices / boats tended to cluster by ethnicity/geography;
42:10 Feds at harbor because of organized crime; "shack" (selling extra fish on own, no taxes, considered a tip); pension fund audits; PETA protests at docks;
47:30 Family work in fishing industry, mainly mother's side; Father's illness; Started work at 16, family kept her out of fish houses; Bookkeeping school; Work for Freonor(?);
54:14 Nickname "Legs";

[End of Interview]

TRANSCRIPT

[NOTE: LW speaker channel often not audible]

[Start of Interview]

[00:00]

LW: OK. If you could speak into it.

[00:06]

SC: Yeah hi. My name is Sharon Cummings I'm a part of the fishing industry. I've been her for like...*this* section of the fishing industry thirty-two years. I started... Oh god, I don't even want to tell you when I started it makes me too old.

I started working in the actual fishing industry when I started working for [Freonor?] Norwegian Frozen Fish. I was one of the original girls there. And, when I left there I went to work for Manpower, and they sent me of all places Hathaway Machinery. That was supposed to be a two-week job. I was at Hathaway Machinery for almost two years. They were paying Manpower for me. So they were actually paying double wages for me. But I had signed a contract with Manpower, for something like, I think it was three months, or six months. You couldn't take a job with whoever they had sent you to. And, they wanted me to work there. But it was kind of like, you know...you've got to pay me for another six months. This is kind of stupid. You know, I mean... Find somebody! I didn't want a full-time job. That's why I was working for Manpower at the time. I wasn't sure what I wanted to do. I was young.

I left there. I went to work for Old Colony, which did trucking for the fishing industry. So I worked for them. And then, I kind of worked for the poverty program. And then I worked for a real estate office. Went back to the poverty program. And... I saw that John Linehan had just done his tour over in Korea. He was teaching them fishing. And he was back. And he was working for National Marine Fisheries Service. And he was going to be working out of the city. I had worked with him at Freonor. And I knew him well. I asked him if he needed a secretary. He said, "I don't know who." And I said, "Me." And he said, "Yeah. But you have to take the civil service test." And I said, "Great. No problem." Went up to Gloucester. Aced the test. Came back. And they decided they weren't going to give him a secretary for six months. So, he said to me, "Gee. I know someone who's looking for a temporary *girl*. I'll refer you. And then, when you're ready, you can come work for me." I said, "That would be great, John."

So I went down and I applied to the Seafood Producers Association. And the fish lumpers.

At the time, what had happened was the fish lumpers and the seafood council just kind of piggybacked on whoever the Seafood Producers had as a secretary/book keeper. Because it was just a fish lumpers' welfare fund at the time.

[03:00]

SC: And... They hired me as a part-time girl. They weren't going to give John a secretary for *another year*. The girl who had been working at the seafood producers for like twenty-two years had decided that she didn't want to work anymore, she was going to go to Florida. So they asked if wanted the job. That was thirty-two years ago. I'm still here. [laughs] I never left. The Seafood Producers left me, they went out of business. The Seafood Council, which was a union and boat-owner negotiated contract fund—they did advertising and we ran the auction room. OK?

So of course I was very involved with both aspects of it. *And* the grievance committee. They just died out. They went out of the contract. They were no longer in it.

The lumpers are still hanging on. And they still have me. Part-time! Because I always worked part-time for everyone but I worked a full-time job. Because no one could really afford to pay good money for a secretary/book keeper for the whole week. But everybody could afford to pay small amounts. So when you added the small amounts together, I made a really good living working in the fishing industry. I don't make a lot of money now, but I've been doing it for so long, it's like... I can probably tell you how to do it in my sleep. When I die, someone's going to shake me and say "Sharon, where's the...?" OK? I'm telling you they will. They're going to dig me up and ask me questions [laughs]. I mean, I've been around so long, you know it's... It's just normal procedure.

[04:40]

SC: We're so far behind we still don't do anything by computer. Everything is by hand in my office. I keep track of all my pensioners, all my current lumpers. You know? All my old retired lumpers that have died, that have passed away, that they have beneficiaries. I mean it's just... As I said it's routine I've been doing it for so long I just *do* it. I get *up*. And I go in. And if I do it. And if I need to spend a little extra time I do. And then I get comp time. I take another hour off, that way. They've been very good and very flexible with me since I'm the only person working there part-time. I *am* going to retire someday. It's just kind of hard finding someone who only wants to work a couple of days a week. See, the problem is, if they took over the work for me, they'd kind of have to work a little *more* than I do because, it's so routine for me, that I don't stop and think about it. I just do it. Other people, you know they'd have to figure out how to do settlement sheets, to figure out who worked what boat. And, look at the amount. They'd have to know whether that person iced the boat, worked two for three, was a boss lumper on the boat. They get different credit for what they do and how they do it.

And... As I said, I just—you know, I look at it. I *know* the guys that lump. I *know* the guys that boss lump. I know the guys that are winch men. So I *know* when there's strange-looking figures down on the settlement sheet. I can look at a settlement sheet and tell you where the lumpers are.

[06:15]

SC: So, it's... You know, it's just things that you pick up over the years. And, you know, it's kind of hard to explain to somebody.

So when I'm sick usually what happens is they drop the work off at my house or at the hospital or wherever it happens to be. I had broke my ribs, I was out of work six months. No one knew I was gone. Six full months! They didn't know I was gone. [laughs] That's because I got everything at home. [laughs] I made the checks at home. I had the phone calls relayed to my house. You know? I came back six months later for a meeting when we had a meeting and I said something about being out. And they went, "You weren't in work Sharon?" Yeah, so [laughs] that's how important I am. They don't even know when I'm gone for six months.

You know, it's like... They really... Their fist on me and their foot on me when I'm working, you know? They're right over my shoulder.

It's a one-girl office, so it's been... You know, if something comes up and I can't go in on Monday because I'm sick I just go in on Friday afternoon or whatever. It's like, I'll be down here this Monday cleaning up. So I probably won't be in the office. But I've got

to go in Wednesday and Thursday because it's the end of the month. So I know I've got to make pension checks and they've got to get out. You know? And I did a lot of work last Friday. So I've probably got about three days coming to me in comp time again. You know? It works that way.

If you have any questions, you know, there's a lot I can probably tell you about the way the industry worked.

[07:35]

SC: I was involved with the sail on Washington when we had the 200 mile limit. I used to call the Coast Guard cutter when we wanted boats to come in and free the boats from the ice. At one time we had a list... Well, there was a system in place through the Coast Guard, that you had to have a master's signed when you went out. You had to have a master's at the Coast Guard house, at the Custom house. You had to sign on and sign off. And... But what would happen would be the Coast Guard house wasn't open seven days a week. And a lot of our boats would want to go out. They couldn't go out. They didn't have the signed master's. So What we did was we got the Coast Guard to agree— National Marine Fisheries Service and the Coast Guard to agree, that what we could do was we could go out—they could go out with a signed letter from me, stating that I had seen the master, and that when they came in, then the notation would go on their master and it would be signed by the Coast Guard. So what they'd do is they'd sign it when they came in but if they were boarded while they were out fishing, they weren't violated or made to come back on shore.

[08:50]

SC: So, you know, the Seafood Producers did an awful lot of stuff like that.

It was a one-girl office again as I said. We had a general manager who just kind of was running every place. Because he did a lot of... He worked down in Washington, DC, he was up in Gloucester. He was, you know, National Marine Fisheries Service. Talking to representatives. And I just kind of held down the ship. You know, we did Coast Guard violations. We did, as I said, through our seafood council, Seafood Council Inc.... The Seafood Council, Inc. did advertising. The New Bedford Fisherman "We bring out the best in seafood" was a slogan we developed through the seafood council. We did recipe books. For example, we had Julia Child... When [Louie's on the Wharf?] was down here, twin piers. We had a real large gathering of well-know chefs, like Julia Child. And the ones like that.

[10:00]

SC: And... A lot of them from Boston that had famous restaurants. They all came down and we did a large news press party. For photographers and newspapermen throughout the country, came to this time. And we had like Congressman Studs there. And Senator Kennedy. And, names like that, also. And, we just simply showed them what New Bedford and New England seafood tasted like. Primarily New Bedford.

And when I say New Bedford I'm talking the ports of New Bedford and Fairhaven and then Westport.

[A bit of blank tape—mike cord came off]

SC: Are we OK now?

LW: M cord came off. So I think we're back on track.

[11:00]

SC: Yeah, what happens is, when I say New Bedford—When most of us say the Port of New Bedford, we're not really talking about New Bedford per se. We're talking about any of the boats that were in the New Bedford fishing fleet. They tie up on both sides of the river.

So, you know, I don't want to..., have everybody think that we're just ignoring boats that are tying up on the other side. They're still a part of our fleet no matter where they're tying up. OK? And, even the boats that are tying up or are based in Fairhaven, are still New Bedford boats. You'll see "New Bedford" on the back of their boats. Because the Port of New Bedford is what we're talking about when we're saying New Bedford is the port.

And then... We did—Oh God, there were so many things we did.

[12:00]

SC: We had one of our boats—the Sharon Noreen—did sail on Washington. What we did was we had a *whole* bunch of people get on board that boat. Including Representative Silva and a couple from—he was from Gloucester up in that area. And, Congressman Studds met us down there. And, we sailed *down* the Atlantic, *up* the Potomac, as a protest showing that we needed at 200 mile limit. Because we needed protection.

Environmentally and as far as our species went to *catch* it."

I mean... The foreign nations were just raping the oceans at the time. They were coming over with factory ships. And they were just gobbling everything up. [chuckles] If it *swam*, it went in that ship. OK?

LW: So, at that time, they could come closer?

SC: At that time, they could have fished here in the river if they wanted to. We had a three mile limit.

LW: Wow.

SC: So a three mile limit is... you know, you're looking at the islands. I'm not talking Nantucket I'm talking about the Elizabeth Islands. They could have fished off that if they'd wanted to. They could fish anyplace they want. We had a three mile limit in this country.

[13:20]

SC: And... What had happened was, the fishermen really wanted a 200 mile limit. How we really did our conservation at the time, and how we knew what everybody was supposedly allotted, was, we had a large gathering every two, three years over in The Hague. And it was like a law conference. It was the Law of the Sea Conference. And at that time that's where they did the species. And, decided who could take what and when. OK?

So, it was kind of a lot of countries getting together but it wasn't written in stone. They could pretty well do what they wanted at the time.

[14:08]

LW: Thank you [to person entering/talking with him]. Tom just brought me a list of nicknames.

SC: Oh yeah! Oh yes. There's a lot of them. There's a lot of them that aren't on there because we can't write them down [laughs].

LW: [?]

SC: Yeah. You'd really, you know... A lot of them were—they may have sounded as though they were denigrating. You know, like you'd have Swede. OK? And it was

simply, the person was probably Swedish. And they called him Swede because he had an accent. I mean, nobody thought anything about nicknames around here. I mean, a nickname wasn't used because you were being discriminated against. A nickname was used just simply because a nickname was used. My husband mentioned one. They called him Creampuffoly. And the reason they called him Creampuffoly—Creamcakeoly I'm sorry. And the reason they called him Creamcakeoly was because when they brought the grub on board, before the boat went out, he was the cook. And, he used to make sure that the guys that brought the grub on board had a piece of Drake's cream cake, which was a *great cake* at the time. And a cup of coffee.

LW: Ah.

SC: He made sure that he put it out for the ship's chandlers to take. So they started calling him Creamcakeoly. And the name stuck! And, you know, I think until the day the man died they called him Creamcakeoly. Even when Drake's stopped making cream cakes he was still called Creamcake.

LW: [laughs]

SC: Some names were really duplicate nicknames. I know two Punchies. Both because they were fighting. Now *one* person had a nickname that was a man's name. They called him Jimmy McLaren. You know? Don't ask me why they called him Jimmy McLaren.

His name was Manuel Camara!

LW: [laughs]

SC: He went by the name of Jimmy McLaren. I know he was a fighter years ago. So it could have been that. He could have fought under that name. And, you know, nobody really remember why they called him Jimmy McLaren. They just did.

I mean... So there's a lot of strange things that we do down here in this industry that *we* don't consider strange. We just kind of, consider it...

[16:30]

SC: The phrase "mug up" is another phrase. And the only reason they called it "mug up"... It really started in the fish houses. My grandmother, for example. She was a... She worked in the kitchens. At Eldridge's.

We—Ah, yeah! You've got a surprised look on your face. At, one time, this port had a lot of fish houses that had kitchens. And they actually cooked the fish or the scallops. And then they packaged them and they sold them under their brand names. So...

LW: Who would they sell that to?

SC: To different...

LW: Was that for immediate consumption?

SC: No, no, no, no. This went—Yeah, this went nationwide. They sold them all over the place. They were the main buyers. Eldridge. LVD. [Tishon?] They all had kitchens at the time.

And... They had coffee breaks. But, as I said, we tend to use a lot of descriptive terms down here. We don't necessarily say, "Hey, we're going for coffee." So what would happen is someone would say, "Hey," you know, like, "Let's go for a mug up." And all they meant was they were taking a coffee break. And when you drink coffee, you have to tip your mug *up*. That's what the term came from. It's called "mug up." So, we just kind of...

[18:00]

SC: I automatically... Even now... I mean, I don't work and I'm in an office. But every now and then I'll jokingly I'll say something like, "Oh well, guess it's time for mug up." Because I heard it all the time I was growing up.

My grandmother—if I wasn't in school... Or, during vacation. I'd trot down to the fish house. I'd get her coffee, and like, coffee for some of her friends, and like that. I'd get five or six cups of coffee. She'd give me the money real early in the morning. Because she got up—six o'clock in the morning she was down there. Because lots of times, they didn't know if they had a job or not. They just showed *up*. And then if the buyer had bought that day, then they worked. If the buyer didn't buy, because someone outbid him, and he didn't buy as a secondary buyer from someone else, then, they went home. And they didn't get paid for showing up. I mean, they didn't get—you know, four hours pay because they set foot in the door. They just—they came down. Sometimes they would be told, "There won't be any work." But generally, they just had to go. They got dressed. They went down, six o'clock in the morning. And they waited around to see if they had work. Sometimes they had work left over. Other times they didn't.

[19:25]

SC: That was the kitchens. The cutters definitely had to see who was in. And who bought. Because, if they didn't have fish frozen in advance, then they definitely had to buy and cut the fresh seafood. So it was no sense going.

LW: Was it who would come first get the job.

SC: No, there was seniority. There was very much seniority. Most of the fish houses were organized. They were *loosely* organized by Joe Silvia but [laughs] they were organized.

And... For example, the kitchen—sometimes the kitchen would be organized. And the cutters and packers were non-union. OK? And they'd have a shop steward. Or a shop stewardess. Generally in the kitchens it was a shop stewardess. It was mostly women that worked up there in the kitchens. There were not too many men. They were downstairs doing cutting. You had a lot of women filleters but more men. The women tended to do more packing than they did cutting.

I'm not going to ramble too much about the fish cutting or packing or kitchen. Like I said, kitchens—people may not even think to bring that up. Because so many people just think that everybody knows we had kitchens down here.

[20:45]

SC: That's what I mean about being in this industry. There are so many things that *we* just take for granted that they're not here anymore. *We know* they were here. And I just kind of figure everybody knew they were here. I really do.

It's just like the auction. The auction was such a distinct way of doing business. It was so different from anyplace else. For the auction room.

OK. I don't know... Are you going to have Jimmy Dwyer doing oral history? Because he'll probably talk about the auction. Jimmy did a lot of..., of signing the auction.

I can tell you some of the funny stuff about the auction. For example, we were trying to get the auction—I say *we*, I'm talking about the people, the trustees for the Seafood Council that paid to run the auction. They had to repair some of the auction. They didn't like the way—At one time we just had a bar across, and then everybody would just stand in the back. And it was driving some of the dealers crazy to have, you

know, nine thousand lumpers in there, nine thousand fishermen in there. I mean... They didn't want everybody in there. So what they decided to do was... They were going to put up a partition. And they were going to have everybody that was non-essential personnel be behind the partition, and everybody else would be in front of the partition. Well, that didn't work too well. We put the partition *up*. We took the partition *down*. Then they put the rail *up*, they took the rail *down*, they put the rail back up again. I know, because I had to pay for the carpenters to come in and take things *up* and put things *down*. We put one rail that had like sliding glass... [laughs]. So the glass got broke. Because they—That didn't work too well.

[22:32]

SC: Primarily what happened was... Everything was done in about a half an hour. Total half—That was it. In the morning you had like a half an hour. And that half an hour... *millions* of pounds in a fish in a year went over, and were sold. In that half an hour. Sight unseen. They did not *visibly* take the fish off board the boat. Fish were sold on a captain or a skipper's reputation. OK?

If *you* were a fisherman, a boat—you know, a boat owner, or a captain who was..., a messy captain. You didn't take care of your fish. You didn't put them in the bins right. You didn't ice them good. Maybe, at certain times of the year you gutted them, you didn't gut them. You may not have good fish when you brought it in. Buyers weren't going to buy from you. They just weren't going to do it. And if they did buy from you, if you were someone who decided you didn't like the price, you were going to hold your fish for a week. [laughs] You were going to get a *much* worse price, a week later. OK.

[23:45]

SC: But there were certain people in the fleet that we called *highliners*. They always brought in loads of fish. And they always brought in good product. And they got good prices for their product. Because of the way they worked.

You had, some dealers—Most of the dealers were good. Most of the dealers..., gave a price and they stayed with that price. We did have problems. There were times when a dealer said, "This fish is no good. I'm cutting you." Especially in the later years.

We had, two attorneys. One for the seafood dealers, one for the seafood producers that also represented the Seafood Council. And, they would literally go down to the fish house and look at the fish. And, that was really the reason, and what we said as to whether the fish was good or not. Now sometimes, it would happen that the attorneys would agree, the fish house was still agreeing they weren't going to pay the price they had bid. *We* would make up the difference through the Seafood Council, through the Industry Promotion Fund, of what that fish—of what they were supposed to pay and what they actually paid. And then the attorneys would take the dealer to court. For the money.

But there were times when we had a boat owner who said, "Oh no, my fish is good." And they got to the fish house, and the dealer said, "No, it's not." The attorneys went down and they said, "No! He's right! It's not!" So, you know, "Either take what he offers you or take your fish back." So, you know we pretty well worked out problems that came up that way, without very much of a problem. It sounds strange, but they kind of self-policed themselves. And, a lot of it was bought because people *knew* the reputation again as I said.

Do you want me continue talking or just...?

LW: Yeah, go ahead. [?]

SC: OK.

LW: [?]

SC: Right.

[26:10]

SC: Some of the other problems that we had here in the industry were conservation. At one time, we only brought in so much yellow tail per man.

LW: [?]

SC: OK. Sometimes we had—As I started to say, we kind of did our own conservation years ago. It was set up in the contract, for example, for yellow tail flounder—Yellow tail flounder was getting scarce. So what they did was they set up a 500-pound-a-man limit on yellowtail flounder when a dragger went out. And that's what they brought in. And they didn't bring in any more of that. With a, you know, set scale. You couldn't bring out fifteen men and bring in 500 pounds a man. I can't really remember the exact—whether it was six thousand pounds or eight thousand pounds. You know, it was around there.

And...everybody lived up to it. Except that the government decided that we were doing something incorrect by doing it that way. They said that we were looking to do—and I can't remember the words now. They sued us, anyway. Because they said we were fixing the price—price fixing. [chuckles] OK?

So, we had to stop doing it. And then, you know, a couple of years later they just slapped quotas on yellow tail flounder, and you couldn't bring any in at all. It was ridiculous. *That* was one of the main problems after the 200 mile limit. We got the 200 mile limit in. And, it was *better* than what we thought it was going to be in one way. But, it gave us so many problems in another way in this industry. It really did.

One of the problems was, everybody figured they were just going to kind of continue the way they had been doing for years. You had—Most of your quotas were given to you by the states you lived in. So, for example, you had a three mile limit. Inshore draggers had it much worse than offshore fishermen. Because offshore fishermen were going to the Banks. They were going to the lighthouse. They were going all over the place. They were outside the three mile limit. They brought in pretty well what they wanted.

LW: [?]

SC: Well, the stocks were higher. And, they weren't really limited to what they were bringing in. Now, inshore draggers, at the same time, were going out, overnight. One or two-day trips. Or, mostly overnight. And they were catching within the three mile limits. They were under the state restrictions. Now I'm not talking lobster or anything. I'm talking regular fish. OK? I'm talking fish, scallops, that type of thing. I'm not talking crabs, lobsters, oysters, clams. That's all state regulated. And, it's a different type of species. We do have those boats in the port. They were not members of the Seafood Producers Association. So, I didn't have the much to do with them. OK?

We mostly had ground fish, draggers. And we had, scallopers, in our association. And that's what you had in the union, was draggers and scallopers.

[29:40]

SC: And, sometimes, you might hear the term that said a *clear forty* or a *broken forty two*. All that was, was the way the lay was broken down. The lay is what you got when you brought in, the product, and you sold it. You had a lay. That's what they called it. That was the total amount of all the species. And then, what you got for it. Settlement

office then does a payroll sheet for you. That's what the settlement office was doing. You got paid—The same day you brought in your fish. Unless you brought it, you know... The settlement office got—

I'll tell you how it worked. The boat came in. Sold at auction. As soon as it sold, they had all kinds of funny little signals, so they knew what dealer they were going to. When they went to the dealer, they were unloaded by lumpers. Most of them. When the lumper unloaded, it came down the conveyer belt, it was weighed, went into the fish house." Then there was a tally slip given. To the settlement house, along with a check from whatever dealer had bought the fish. OK? That was deposited into the boat owner's account, the boat account.

The settlement office then took that check. And they said, "OK, fine, they had..." Let's do a scalloper because it's easier. They had, two thousand pounds of scallops—which is ridiculous, no one would bring in that little amount. But they had two thousand pounds of scallops, they sold the scallops at a dollar a pound. So, it's two thousand dollars. Now out of that two thousand dollars, they broke it down. They have, an owner's share and a crew's share.

Now, some things came off the top of the stock. Maybe everybody paid for lumpers. Everybody paid for ice. The crew *only* paid for grub. The owner paid for oil and water, but the crew paid for part of the gas. OK?

So, this is the way it was broken down. Once they had taken all—they would figure out what the share was, if a scalloper was broken down to a sixty-forty, say. Sixty percent of that went to the crew. Forty percent of that went to the owner. They would *take* that amount. And they would take whatever expenses had to come out, that the owner owned of the forty percent. They would take whatever expenses that came off of the crew out of the sixty percent. If they had, stuff that was paid by both of them, they would take that out first before they broke it down into forty and sixty percent. *Then*, everybody would get the check. *That same day*. This was the settlement office. This is what settlement offices did.

LW: [?]

[32:50]

SC: No! Most settlement offices worked with maybe two, three people. And it was not unusual for them to do ten, twelve boats a day, very easily. Now this was just a part of what the settlement office does. The settlement office also took the taxes out. Of the lumpers. Out of, some crew members, depending on whether they were self-employed or not self-employed. OK? Which was a big problem that the IRS came down, we had—God, *three* years, we went through, *legal, maneuvering*, trying to get it changed. Because, we had always said that if you had under a certain number of men, you were employed. Over a certain number of men, you were self-employed. And the government changed the meaning of the way we were doing it. And... So, you know, it was a big, big problem in the industry. But I'm getting off the subject, which I do all the *time*.

You'd probably need about fourteen hours with me. And I'd still be talking.

One of the things that settlement office does is they keep track of the taxes. Just like a regular book keeping office. They're a book keeping office for the boats. They pay the boats' bills. They keep track of taxes. They do the banking for the boats. They pay for people to come in wash pen boards. You know, they do everything that book keeping office would do, except that it's kind of for boats, so it may sound strange. OK? It's...

If you do book keeping, you can learn to do a settlement without too much of a problem. OK?

But, you couldn't just walk through the door, sit down, and do it. Because the terms are so different. Like a *clear forty-two*, you'd have to know which dragger had a contract that was a clear forty-two. Which simply meant that somebody was getting something without anything taken out. They were getting forty-two percent of that stock, period. With nothing for expenses or anything taken out of it. OK?

A broken forty-two meant that they were getting certain things taken out. Those were dragger terms. They weren't scalloper terms. OK? Scallopers pretty generally had a sixty-forty.

All the boats, if they weren't union, pretty well settled under the same terms that the union boats settled under. You did have—Union boats, if they came into the port of New Bedford, union boats were supposed to go on board the auction room. There was no *ands*, *ifs* or *buts*. They were supposed to sell through the auction. OK?

But what would happen would be—If a boat came in after the time, they'd have to wait over until the next day. OK?

But, non-union boats also sold through the auction. They had a separate side. And they had their own markers that went, and marked the board, for non-union boats. So they pretty well—they just weren't, using union men. They didn't have a union contract. They didn't pay into the welfare and pension funds. But that was about the only difference between the boats. Other than that, a union boat and a non-union boat pretty generally did the same things. But they weren't locked into anything. If they changed their mind, they changed their mind.

[36:36]

SC: Let's see... I'm trying to think of anything else.

LW: How many boats altogether would settlement office handle?

SC: Let me put it this way. Between scallopers and draggers, we had about three hundred boats in the fleet. We had about a hundred and fifty draggers, and a hundred and forty scallopers at the time. Sometimes you had more, sometimes you had less. Because years ago, what happened a lot of the boats... The scallop fleet kind of dwindled away. Because we were—the scallops kind of were disappearing.

And, you had boats that changed over. Certain times of the year, they'd go up on the [?ways] and they'd changed over from scalloping to dragging and then they'd changed back. Sharon Noreen was one of the boats I was talking about. That's what they used to .

Let's see. You really had about five major settlement houses in the city. And, some people did their own. You know? Maybe, OK... If Tichon owned a couple of boats, he settled his own boats out of his fish house. If, Biffy McLean owned a couple of boats, he did his boats out of McLean's. Although he actually didn't, but... He *could* have, let me put it that way. He had a book keeper. Byron, owned boats and settled boats. He had some boats that weren't his but, mostly he had a fleet of boats, or was partner with boats that he settled. Now, Kevin Dawson had a settlement office, didn't own a boat. He had a large number of boats. Leif Jacobsen[?] owned part of a settlement office with his sister.[Solvay's?]
—It's called Solvay's to this day, it's owned by someone else. And, they settled Leif's boats along with a lot of the Norwegian boats, they settled. Dawson settled a lot of the Portuguese boats. You had, John Dunne[?]. He was there first. He went out of business. It was Tuttle, then it was Dunne. Then he went out of business. Well actually, I

think, it could have been [?]. . . You had Marine Service. She's still in existence to this day.

Of the major settlement offices, you still have three, that are still her. You have, Edie and Marie—I'm sorry, they worked for Dawson's, and then they left and set up their own settlement office, two of the girls. So you have, Edie and Marie, you have Marine Service, you have Dawson's, you have Solvay's. They're your main settlement offices in the city. They're, still today. OK?

[39:30]

LW: Was it a language issue that certain offices had certain boats? Like Portuguese, or, Norwegian boats?

SC: It was and it wasn't. The Norwegians, no. The Norwegians really weren't a language issue. They all spoke English. *But*, a lot of them lived in Fairhaven. So it was a lot easier for them to tie up in Fairhaven, and to settle in Fairhaven. That's the reason they did it. Not necessarily because they wanted to, you know, be with other Norwegians. It was because that's the way it worked out. They lived in Fairhaven so they settled in Fairhaven because they tied their boats up in Fairhaven. And, when you're going down to your settlement office, you don't necessarily want to travel an extra mile if you don't have to.

The Portuguese fleet on the other hand. . . Years ago, no. Years ago, they didn't translate anything. The guys who came in that owned the boats, were Portuguese, spoke English. In the late late seventies, seventy-nine, and in the eighties, then it became very much of a problem. They had to have Portuguese interpreters. I mean, they did have. . . Dawson's had someone that spoke Portuguese that worked there, and so did Marine Service for years. But, primarily they spoke English. But it was just, the Portuguese tended to be more cliquish, as far as, where they were going to settle. If a friend of theirs settled there, and you know, it was always, certain groups that hung together. And, that's where they were settled.

Some of the boats bounced around. I mean, they'd stay with someone just so long. And then they'd go across the river to someone else. And then they wouldn't like Margie, or someone in that office. So they'd go down to Marine Service. And, you know, they'd make the rounds. You also had other settlement offices that came and went. Some of them would work for a settlement office, think it was a great idea. Start one themselves, you know, "I'm going to be in business." And, either they couldn't get enough boats or, they just found it was too work-intensive for them to do by themselves. Or, maybe they had a problem as far as [chuckles] not being too good a book keeper. I can think of one person *that* was a problem with. IRS had a field day with the boat she settled afterwards, because she was fouling up their taxes like there was no tomorrow, and she was doing taxes for all the fishermen. And, *boy*, she got creative. [laughs]

LW: [laughs]

[42:10]

SC: Yeah. You know, I mean. . .

And then of course, we have been. . . The feds have been down here and gone through this harbor I don't want to tell you *how* many times they've gone down. And, looked for things that were wrong on this waterfront. *I've* been in front of the Grand Jury personally three times. Because every time I turn—*not*, I wasn't indicted they just called me up as a witness or to explain different things. I mean, *they* just came in and said,

"Who are you?" And when they found out, *Aha! The mother lode*, and just subpoenaed every file I had for twenty-two years.

LW: What were they looking for?

SC: Organized crime.

LW: Really?

SC: Yeah. What they actually found was shack. [laughs] And, I mean... And some of it was really strange. In fact, we had one case of the shack—Shack is when people are taking a certain amount of the fish or the scallops and selling it themselves. So they don't pay taxes. It's not through an office or something.

But one person was actually selling it for his boats. Through his fish house. And he wasn't taking taxes. Because it was shack! It was just kind of like, something extra. You know?

LW: Is that s-h-a-c-k?

SC: S-h-a-c-k. Shack.

And, what ended up happening was, they fined him. And he had to pay all the money for the taxes. And I mean, he didn't take any of the money. He gave it to his crews. [laughs] You know. Because, he was really a very honest man, but... He just got, kind of like, behind the eight ball and was stuck with it.

What they were looking for like I said primarily was organized crime. They had heard there was so much of it down here. And there really wasn't. I mean, it's been—Primarily it's been, you know—with the exception of things like shack or something like that, that everybody knew was happening. It was just kind of like, "OK. Hey, you wait for somebody." At the time you didn't put your tips in. Tips were just kind of considered extra. Everybody down here on the waterfront kind of considered shack like a tip I think. OK?

I didn't know—I never got shack. I worked in an office. I was lucky if someone gave me a pound of scallops for Christmas. But, primarily, this is what they did. It started out—they were taking it home to eat themselves. OK?

So, it just didn't go in as part of—they'd save out a bag of scallops, or a basket of fish or something. And they'd split it up to take it home. And then, someone discovered, "Oh, gee, I'm getting paid by somebody on the dock for it." Paid? Wow! You know? So that's really how shack evolved. They'd give it, kind of—like I said, a tip almost. Which is very much a no-no, because it's supposed to be taxable, because they're selling it.

Basically, what they found in the Port of New Bedford—they didn't find very much organized crime. The organized crime they found was the last few years, for basically different people that they said were involved with, you know, other people in New York. But I think what happened was, every time they went to New York, and they found that down on the docks they had problems, they looked around and they said, "Wow! New Bedford's the largest seaport in the country." [laughs] "Let's go to New Bedford."

And then, of course, they'd come in, and... I've been audited by IRS, for example. My welfare and pension fund. I've been audited by IRS three times, in thirty-two years. I They didn't find anything! Because [chuckles] I don't do anything wrong! I mean, it's—you know, the money comes in! It goes in. What bills to pay the fund is necessary, like salary or taxes, or the attorneys, things you have to pay goes out. And the rest of it is paid for insurance, or for pension. Which is what you're supposed to do. But for some reason they just like to audit me. I actually said to the State one day, "Do you come down..."

When you're looking around, you're getting ready to retire and you say, 'Oh, gee, I have to do two more audits. Oh! Let's do this audit, because we know it's going to be an easy audit? We'll find nothing wrong?'" And he actually laughed and said to me, "Well as a matter of fact, yeah, we did kind of pick your name because we know you're clean." Like [laughs] "Thank you, so much!" I mean, just to make my life interesting. Yeah, it's like that curse, you know, "May you live in interesting times."

LW: [laughs]

SC: In the fishing industry, believe me, you live in interesting times. If you stand still too long, some disaster is going to occur someplace, somewhere. You know? I mean, for example, you're going to have PETA come along. Protection for fish. [laughs] OK? And put signs up, on the dock! I mean, people are insane! You don't come down to a dock and put signs up that say "You're massacring innocent fish!" I mean, they're not well liked. You know? I mean [laughs]. Especially as they're standing there with leather boots on.

LW: [laughs]

SC: I mean, give us a break. Yeah!

And, it's different things like that. And I know I'm babbling over my time.

LW No! This is great!

[47:30]

LW: We probably do need to wrap up.

I wanted to ask you about your family. How does someone like you get so, interested in, so tied up in, this life of work? [Asking next interviewee for 5 more minutes]

SC: The funny part about it is, do you realize, my family, did—My grandmother, my aunts, my uncle, my brother and sister-in-law, all worked in the fishing industry years ago. My brother left. He became a prison guard. Then he retired. My sister-in-law left too. She works with children, got her graduate's license, works with children.

But, primarily on my mother's side of the family, they were all working in the industry. I was like sixteen and I needed a job. We had a lot of problems, my father had a heart attack. He worked at the mill. And, the union was horrible. I mean, they got like, ten weeks of, you know—seven dollars a week is what they made for, this is what you got to live on. And, he was out of work for a year. Because, the heart attack was so massive. Well, how long ago it was, Dilantin was just coming into play. It was a *miracle* drug.

OK. He had the heart attack. It was so massive, they couldn't move him to take him to the hospital because it would have killed him. He had a blood clot right in his heart, and they were trying to dissolve it. So, needless to say, we didn't too well. I mean, our money was really running out. They had money put to one side for our college, and everything. And they used everything they had. Because they had to live! And I mean, when you have, no insurance... Because the mill insurance was only for while you were working. And it lasted for like two weeks after that and then it closed. And when you had a heart specialist and a nurse coming to your house once a day doing a cardiogram, along with your family doctor coming to the house... Of course in those days they came to the house, but still, three, four times a day. You ended up with not too much money. I mean, you know, you were happy to eat French fries, you know, one potato sliced and cooked and that was what you were eating.

So, as soon as I turned sixteen I was going to work, part-time while I went to school. So the first thing I did was, "Hey! I'll go work down in the fishing industry with Nana and the rest of them." And they blackballed me in every fish house in the city.

LW: Why?

SC: Because they didn't want me in the fishing industry! They wanted me to work in an office, and to make something of myself.

So, the next thing I did was... OK, I went to work in a factory. Nights. Big difference. I would have made more in the fishing industry, actually. I went to work basic pay. My first—six, five—well, no I'm telling a lie. It was what, August, September, October, November, December. Four months. I made a grand total of \$340 and I worked thirty-five hours a week. That's what I earned for the four months working in the mill. I mean, minimum wage was like fifty-five cents an hour.

I then, got out of school. Because I knew I couldn't to college, the money was gone. I went to book keeping school. Campbell's. And, I graduated from Campbell's and I thought, "Hey, great! I'll go get a job in one of the mills, as a secretary." Uh uh! My father blackballed me in every mill because *he* didn't want me working in the mills! He wanted me to have a nice job like a teacher, or work as a secretary-book keeper in a nice industry, other than fishing or mills.

So, OK. I went to work for a wholesale grocer. And I was there maybe three months. I learned, computers on the job. Freonor opened. Mr. Linehan who lived across the street, worked for Freonor, said, "They're looking for a girl in computers. I know you can do the job." Went down, they interviewed me, hired me.

And that kind of started me in the fishing industry.

And then it just seemed like every time I did something else, I just kind of fell back into the fishing industry. And after I had been in it, I got offered other jobs. You know, like, I had worked for the poverty program. When they needed an assistant director, I had been doing the job without the title. They hired a man over me because at the time they didn't think a woman could do the job. So I left!

And, when the man quit, the director came back and asked me if I would like the job back as assistant director. Well by that time, I was working for Seafood Producers and the Lumpers, and I was waiting to work for John Linehan. Which still would have been the fishing industry, but through the federal government. And, so I said, "No thank you."

And after I had been working for the fishing industry for that six or seven months, and John found out he wasn't going to get a secretary for a year, I told them, "Well, yeah, I'll take the job for a year." And then after that, it was kind of like, well, I've been doing it for a year. Oh, what the heck! I may as well just...

So... Like I said, I've been here ever since. And it's kind of like being... I won't say a big fish in a small pond. But I'm comfortable. Because I know the job. And I know the people. And I kind of know the industry, from having a background before I came into. And from *working* in it for so long.

I kind of consider myself—if I'm *talking* about the industry, jack of all trades, master of none. I can tell you a little bit about everything, because I've been surface involved with it all. I'm not *in* that particular portion of it. But I've been involved with it, because of working for one of the other funds.

So, you know, it's been fun over the years. You know?

[54:14]

SC: I had a nickname too, but my nickname was Legs. [laughs]

LW: Your nickname was Legs?

SC: Yeah. One guy used to think—Well, it started out that one guy though I had *great* legs. So, what he thought was that, I should be like Betty Grable, my legs should be insured by Lloyd's of London. OK? So, everybody kind of picked it up for a while, so they were running around calling me Legs, right?

LW: Can I ask how old you are?

SC: Oh, God. I'm going to be sixty-two. Yeah. That's why I keep saying I'm going to be around forever.

LW: [laughs]

SC: They're going to dig me up to ask me a question. Because... I don't know, I'm not sure who's going to disappear first. *Me* or the job. Probably me. [laughs]

LW: [laughs] I don't know, you're one of those ones that just keeps going.

SC: Yeah.

LW: It's just great.

SC: Yeah.

LW: Thank you so much.

SC: It was my pleasure.

LW: This was wonderful.

SC: Thank you.

LW: And it may be that Laura will want to talk to you again on another occasion. Because we're opening up some great lines of questions.

SC: Right.

Well Laura doesn't remember. She came into my office originally when she was first here, because she was researching into Fish Mary. And she doesn't—I *know*, you know I've just never had the opportunity to say to her, "Do you realize that you came into me when I was up on South Sixth Street." I know she doesn't because she was just kind of looking for sources in the industry. And at the time I was kind of directing her to other people. You know?

LW: Well, that's good, you go back a long time. Thank you very much. We'll complete the interview at 2:10. And we'll talk to you again sometime soon.

SC: Great. Thank you.

LW: Thank you, Sharon.

SC: Yeah. Bye-bye.

[END OF INTERVIEW]