

Name of person Interviewed: Louis Doucette, Jr. [LD]

Facts about this person:

Born: March 22, 1911

Sex: Male

Occupation: Retired Fisherman

Home port: New Bedford, MA

Hail Port: Edgartown, Martha's Vineyard

Residence (Town where lives) Fairhaven, MA

Ethnic background (if known) Canadian -American

Interviewer: Millie Rahn [MR]

Transcriber: Tove E. Bendiksen

Place interview took place: New Bedford Harbormaster House

Date and time of interview: September 25, 2004

Doucette Interview Working Waterfront Festival September 25,2004

Transcribed by Tove E. Bendiksen

Index

Tape 1: Louis A. Doucette, Jr., retired fisherman

100 McGann Terr., #110; Fairhaven 02719

interviewer: Millie Rahn

interview time: 59:14 minutes

recorded at HDC oral history station, September 25, 2004

summary: overview of several generations of life in the fishery--on Martha's Vineyard, Gloucester, and in New Bedford--during much of 20th c.

00:00

Born March 22, 1911, Edgartown, Martha's Vineyard. One of 8 children; 5 girls, 3 boys. Father "sailed around the world many times in sailing ships in the 1800s" and then went out of Gloucester in dories. Worked for bridge company in East Boston, then went to Vineyard. Fished on south side of Vineyard for cod and haddock. Went from "big boat in Gloucester with 20 men to a boat with 3 or 4 men." Mother born in Nova Scotia but moved to Boston as child aged 3. She talked lots about Boston's Old North Church.

02:52

Rescue story off Edgartown. The 32-33' long dory, *Priscilla*, saved 14 people's lives. Captain of cutter *Acushnet*—120 feet long—said "had I put my men in a lifeboat, it would have been disastrous. Only a fisherman could have gone to the rescue in a dory." Father got Carnegie Medal for that rescue (father's name Louis A. Doucette) and \$1000 reward. Bought "a little cat boat" in Wareham with rescue money. The 32-foot *Gypsy Maid*; renamed *Mary D.* for his sister.

Some of his story in Joe Thomas' "Spinner" magazine, third issue.

07:53

Began fishing at 7 years old, chopping bait. Got 18 barrels of fish first day he fished with father. Fished in Nantucket Sound. Spent every possible day fishing with his father; had 7 dories on main boat. "They fished from the little dory, not the big ship. A lot of men were lost from those boats. When a storm came up, all they had was a mouth horn... The story went in Gloucester that there was more men lost dory fishing back in the 1800s than was lost in World War I. Yes. That's why they have the picture of the man there in Gloucester... "one of the oldest, oldest fishing places in the world."

10:56

Fished with father every school vacation. Markets were Boston's Commercial Wharf for cod and haddock, and New York's Fulton Market for flat fish. "The Jewish people were big fish eaters" and a big market. On Fulton market: "Fish from Canada, eels and clams, all that kind of thing. There wasn't a fish you heard of that wasn't in that market... It was the biggest fish market in this country." Saw big ball games in New York; guys from lots of "Nantucket sloops" would get together and go to ballgames. M.V. had about 2500 people, but Louis went to games at grounds that held 55,000 people. "This was like a new world to me."

14:00

Grew up in "that business." Father had *Gleaner*, "one of the five biggest boats in New Bedford." About 73 feet long. Names other boats and owners in N.B.

Doucette Interview Working Waterfront Festival September 25, 2004

Transcribed by Tove E. Bendiksen

“This fish pier down there has changed over a number of times. When my dad came—we left Edgartown in 1924—and we came to New Bedford for the simple reason that there were ship yards in New Bedford. There was machine shops. Hathaway Machine Shops was in New Bedford at the time. Anything to do with boats was in New Bedford.” Talks more about various owners and their shops, including the Ashleys and Mayor Ashley, “who was very good to the waterfront.” Father would make sure they had absentee ballots if they’d be at sea, so that Mayor Ashley would get re-elected. More on politics. “First good buyer in N.B. was Linus Eldridge and Mrs. Eldridge and their son Bill,” from Mattapoisett. Became big fish buyers. Talks about surviving during the Great Depression. Mother “a wonderful cook...and with all the children they had, we never went hungry.” Mrs. Eldridge would deliver bags of money to the waterfront; never robbed.

21:32

On highliner *Addy May* (c. 1929-1930) with father. Would catch yellowtails and give out as charity to “people who were starving.” Also sent fish up to St. Mary’s Home. Had to make multiple trips to make enough money to survive. “Fish was so cheap....That’s what you had to do to make a living them times.”

24.29

Father’s boat hit submerged wreck on third trip going into Boston Harbor in February 1928. “That was a sad day for the Doucettes.” Had large home on Allen St.; lost it for \$2800. Eldridges and Portuguese family, Manny Correia, “bought lots of property up.”

26:06

Talks about mills in N.B., Taunton, Lowell and ethnic groups who worked in them, especially Portuguese families, and the loss of mills moving South, and “the houses that those mills built.” Talks about son, Paul, going to South Carolina to work in mills after he graduated from UM/Dartmouth and making lots more money than in N.B.

30:26

“Went into business myself” to support family. Had house in Fairhaven, but sold it to Walgreen Drugs in 2001 (?). Brother was rigger in navy shipyard in Boston during the war, then joined Seabees and went to Guam. Two sisters became nurses in Boston and Cambridge and “joined the forces” in South Pacific. “Out of 8 of us, I and two others are alive.” Another brother “in Atlantic war.”

32.50

“I was in the fishing business for years and then I got a job in Woods Hole with Samuel Calhoun. He owned the Three One and One. Everybody asks me about that name. He had 3 girls and 1 boy. Then his partner from Vineyard Haven, Mass., had 1 girl. So that’s the Three One and One. I was with Sam for 10 years. This was the greatest man I ever worked for. He was wonderful.”

33:55

Retired from fishing in 1974. “I went home with my wife and I started to get fishing boats to mend their nets. I’d been mending nets since I was a kid. They’d bring me nets that was all tore up and then I’d give them the bill,” which wasn’t as high as elsewhere. Then friend, Eli, asked him to go into The New Bedford Ship Supply to replace him while he went to Nova Scotia. “On the Friday he said I’ll go pick up our checks. The paymaster said, ‘What do we pay your helper, Eli?’ ‘The same as you pay me. The man can do the same as I can do.’ So I got top pay right off the bat.”

Doucette Interview Working Waterfront Festival September 25,2004

Transcribed by Tove E. Bendiksen

35:40

Worked for Rasmus Tonnessen for 10 years, and inherited Eli's job when he didn't come back after Nova Scotia trip. "My wife told me this was going to happen. She's the one who make me quit; get out of the business." Would get nets from Virginia, New Jersey.....Talks about processing and cutting twine for 7 different kinds of nets.

39.41

Talks more about why wife made him get out of fishing business. Story of fishing out of Gloucester with brother right after war, and some of conflicts with boat owners he was skipper for. Was 10 days at sea with 4 days off. Went to sea on day of snowstorm, after a 1pm dinner at diner. Sailed briefly to get 10-15 tons of ice loaded in 10 minutes. "Cap'n Louie" spent war "150 miles off shore catching fish." Compares it to brother's war service. Another account of NYC owner, Mr. Kestenbaum, who had boats in N.B., including the *Lauren Fay*.

46.45

Talks about Hurricane of 1954. Got in in *Lauren Fay* before the storm hit. *Lauren Fay* not damaged, but lots of boats around it were sunk. All Norwegian skippers, Casey's Shipyard.

[Lots of sound dropout from here to end.] Tells of being "the fall guy" for saving Mr. Kestenbaum's boat; treated badly by shore captain Hank.

55.50

Talks about hardships. Wife died 1991. Walgreen's bought old house in Fairhaven. Now aged 93. Has "my health and my hair" and 4 children--2 boys and 2 girls. Talks of job, "it was beautiful in the summer, not so great in winter."

57.45

Conclusions: "Young boys today want nice toilets...we had a bucket. In old days, you had to be a seaman before you hit the pilot house."

Interview

[00:00] Track 1

MR: Okay, today is Saturday September 25, 2004, we are here in New Bedford at the Working Waterfront Festival doing an oral history with Louis Doucette and my name is Millie Rahn... why don't you tell me your name again, and where you live, and little bit about where you were born and how you got into fishing.

LD: My name is Louis Doucette, I was born in Edgartown, Martha's Vineyard...shall I say the date?

MR: Absolutely!

LD: 1911, the 22nd day of March. Uh...I was one of eight children, five girls and three boys, my dad sailed around the world many times in sailing ships and then he came to Martha's Vineyard-Oh, No! Then he went out of Gloucester and Boston dory fishing, in them times, way back in the 1800s...that was after he left the sailing ships, he sailed around the world many times. Then he went to work for a bridge company in East Boston, and then he left there and went to Martha's Vineyard...he'd heard about Martha's Vineyard and they were doing some fishing on the south side of Martha's Vineyard, catching codfish and haddock...so he had been in dory fishing out of Gloucester. So he was coming from a big boat where they had twenty men, to a small boat where there was only three or four men. He came down there and he went to work, and then he started to raise a family...my mother was born in Nova Scotia, but came as a little girl, two or three years old, to Boston. The Old North Church in Bunker Hill, that was all we heard from Ma, all the time! She was always speaking about them things, the Old North Church and like that...now, when I was around the boat all the time-oh! I'm getting ahead of myself!

[02:52]

The Island Steamers went into Martha's Vineyard, Edgartown at the time, they don't no more, the Island Steamer ship Captain got up in the morning and as he was looking out the pilot house windows, he looked over the south beach of Martha's Vineyard and he seen a big six master was ashore! This was in February, all the crew was up in the rigging...now the captain had his wife aboard and she was there too...they went out in a little boat called the *Pricilla* and they saved them fourteen peoples lives. The cutter *Acushnet*, after our river here, laid-and she was a big ship, she was 120 odd feet long, the Captain said 'Had I put my men in a lifeboat, it would have been disastrous...only a fisherman could go to the rescue in a dory, there were three men in the dory and the little *Pricilla* from Edgartown came out-she was only 32 or 33 feet long. Captain Jackson...my father had been with him dory fishing...you know...they came out of Edgartown and three men went in the boat, there were five total, that was Captain Jackson and Eugene Benefit, they had to have two men aboard the board the boat when the dories would come in to take the people off, it was freezing weather! They were latched in the riggings and they were freezing cold, so when they come with the dory with anybody in it, they had to take the people down below, they had to give

Doucette Interview Working Waterfront Festival September 25,2004

Transcribed by Tove E. Bendiksen

them hot coffee, and they were half froze to death...so it took two people to do that.

I got the Carnegie book at home...Andrew Carnegie...this is what he did with some of his millions...he donated a Carnegie Fund, that is still in existence today, it has to be a rescue that was more than the ordinary thing. In fact I saved a little boy from drowning in Fairhaven and the Carnegie fund wrote me wanting to know about it, but I told them this was just diving overboard and getting a hold of this little feller that had been down a couple of times and bringing him to the yaught which they took him away from me.

In my father's, three men in the dory were Henry Kelley and Pat Kelley and my Dad.in the book, sometimes my Dad would tell us the story, I still have the book at home...I thought Dad said "I made seven trips"...Henry...no, Pat made four trips, Henry made five trips and my Dad made seven. Ah, this is right in the book, about this...he was something, course he had been in sailing ships all his life, well... then from the medal, he got a Carnegie medal, which I have at home... "Greater love hath no man that lays down his life for his friend"...this is what it says, on the back of it is my Dad's name is right in there...

[06:42]

MR: And what was your Dad's name?

LD: Louis A. Doucette.

MR: A-ha!

LD: I'm a junior.

MR: Okay.

LD: See...anyway, it's right in there...nobody can take that off. Also, he got a Humane Society handshake...two men shaking hands...he also received a thousand dollars...one or two? I can't remember now, I think it was one...could have been two...he went to Wareham and bought a little boat called the *Gypsy Maid*, she was a 32 ft open cock-pit boat, and I got pictures-I wish I could bring these with me, but I can't...I'd have to have a big bag with all this stuff with me. Anyway, with the money he got from the rescue, he bought this little catboat-the *Gypsy Maid*, after we had it a year or so, he named it after my sister Mary, the *Mary D*. When I was seven years old I was around that boat with him every minute that I could be. One day in the wintertime, it came a beautiful day-like today, and he said, "Boy, do you want to go fishing?" of course I was seven years old, I said "Sure Pa!" so we went fishing. We got eighteen barrels of fish that day, he did all the work...anyway, he always spoke about that and what a good days fishing we had. That was my beginning of going fishing, seven years old- I've been Joe Thomas's book, you know, the Spinner magazine...the third issue I was in. That was my beginning.

[08:41]

MR: And you were fishing in Edgartown or here?

LD: We fished down in Nantucket Sound, down to Tuckernuck Shoal, now...um...after that every school vacation I had, I spent with my Dad on his boat. He had that boat for quite a while and then he sold it for a bigger boat, he

Doucette Interview Working Waterfront Festival September 25,2004

Transcribed by Tove E. Bendiksen

was dory fishing then...he had seven dories on the port side and seven on the starboard side. I was a little guy and I was running around the boat, I seen them chopping their bait- like the Ernestina! I could go aboard there and say they had oak pieces all around the cabin-house...that's where the men chopped their bait and baited-up their hooks for trawling. Now when they went, they stretched them dories out...they fished from the little dory, not from the big ship. They were stretched out five or six miles...a lot of men were lost in them boats, because when a storm would come up, all they had was a horn to blow on...a mouth horn. A snowstorm would come or something...a lot of them never made the big ship. Some of them were picked up by other ships that were fishing with them, but a good many men was lost from them boats. The story went, in Gloucester, that there was more men lost dory fishing-way back in the 1800s, than was lost in World War I...

MR: Hmm...

LD: Yes. Ah, now...that's why they got the picture of the man standing there in Gloucester...Clayton. Clayton...I knew his name and now I can't think of it. Anyway, the Gloucester Fisherman [monument] he's looking out on the water. Gloucester was one of the oldest, oldest fishing places in the world. I fished out of Gloucester myself in the latter years...

[10:54]

Well, anyway, I went with my Dad every summer vacation from school. We were running to Fulton Fish Market in New York City...that was a flat fish market, if we had codfish and haddock, we went to the Boston market; Commercial Wharf. But flat fish, we went to New York City, Fulton Fish Market, the Jewish people were the big fish eaters in New York City...ah, and Fulton Fish Market had fish from everywhere! Any place that had a little harbor in the United States, from the Great Lakes-everywhere, there was fish in that market...and fish from Canada, eels and clams and all that kind of thing...there wasn't a fish that you ever heard of that wasn't in that market. The market opened at six in the morning and one o'clock you would go through there and it was all washed down...stainless steel, big trays that held fish...the trucks was unloading at midnight putting the fish in the market. It was the biggest fish market in this country. It was enormous! You couldn't believe at one o'clock when you went through...everything was washed clean and the fish was all gone. I went there for many years with my father...a little kid coming from the island of Martha's Vineyard...I think we had a population somewhere around twenty-two or twenty-five hundred people on the whole island...there's five towns in that island. And here I am, my father loved baseball...I'd been rooting for my Red Sox, but frankly to tell you the truth, I should be rooting for the Yankees because that's where I seen the big ball games! We would go to New York, and my father loved baseball, and they'd be three or four boats from Nantucket...what they called the Nantucket Sloops. We'd all get together and go to the ball game...of course I was only a young feller. Here, a kid...like I say, I left home...the island that had about twenty-five hundred people...here I am in the Polo grounds in New York City, this is before Yankee Stadium was ever built, where they held fifty-five or sixty

Doucette Interview Working Waterfront Festival September 25,2004

Transcribed by Tove E. Bendiksen

thousand people. This was like a new world to me! Then, where Fulton Fish Market was...up the street was the Stock Exchange, and now they've moved the market further up somewhere...Fulton Fish Market's been moved. It was right near the Brooklyn Bridge...anyway; I grew up in that business...

[14:02]

Ah...then in 19--, my father had one of the first big boats in New Bedford, a big schooner...her name was the *Gleaner*. He bought her in Gloucester, she was about 72 or 73 ft long...there were five big boats in New Bedford at the time: the *Anastasia E*, the *Mary*...that was Danny Mullins' *Mary*...*Mary R Mullins*, the *John Merley*...a few others, the Avilas...the Avila boys, I was just talking to one of them down on the pier here. He was saying, I'm like his kid you know, he says "I remember you, Louie, when you was just beginning in the business" he's only a young kid, alongside of me...they are wonderful people...they are the Portuguese.

Now, while we're on the subject, I'll have to tell you this, this fish pier down here has changed over a number of times. When my Dad came, we left Edgartown in 1924; we came to New Bedford for the simple reason that there was shipyards in New Bedford. There was machine shops, Hathaway Machine Shop was in New Bedford at the time, it moved across the river after...ah, anything to do with boats was in New Bedford. C.E. Beckman, which is still doing business, C.E. Beckman was one of the pioneers of New Bedford, Mr. Kelly of Fairhaven, Kelly's Dock, he used to come with his chauffer every morning to see what boats was in and if they needed hauling out or whatever. Then there was Andrew Pierce, he used to come down to play crib [cribbage] with some of the boys on the old wooden shack on the dock...he'd have his chauffer bring him down so that he could play a few games of crib. Charles Ashley, our great mayor of New Bedford for many years, the Ashleys...I have a love for them, many times-my Dad when I was younger-had me and some of the crew go up and get an absentee ballot because we were gonna be out fishing when the voting came and we wanted to make sure Mr. Ashley got our vote. He was very good to the waterfront. I don't want to leave anybody out, but there's others that was in the business, that was great people...

[17:04]

Down the pier they had a wooden shack where out fish auction used to be, it's a brick building out here...there was a wooden shack there and the name of the Wharfinger was Bertrain West, he was there for many years when I was a young man. Anyway, as I came along, I stayed with my Dad for a while and then I went on my own...Oh, no my father took sick...oh I don't want to forget these people-

The first good buyer [fish buyer] in New Bedford, the name was Linus Eldridge and Mrs. Eldridge and their son Bill...these was the first people, he tried to get down on that fish pier for I don't know how long, they had one guy down there [pier] nobody could get down there, this is politics. After a while Mr. And Mrs. Eldridge came from Mattapoisett and they told me stories...they would buy sea

Doucette Interview Working Waterfront Festival September 25,2004

Transcribed by Tove E. Bendiksen

scallop- I mean bay scallops from Nantucket and Martha's Vineyard and quahogs and clams...and Mr. And Mrs. Eldridge told me they'd sit in their garage with a heater, so that they wouldn't freeze, they'd bought them that night and before they'd get them to market they had a heater going to keep them from freezing...they became big fish buyers, wonderful people, I loved them. Bill Eldridge had a name that he got a little rough...that he was a bad boy sometimes...well; there was a lot of us that were bad boys at times. His father said, "Bill gets into trouble every now and then, but he's the best buyer around here" and he was...they used to get into little scraps now and then. But, Mrs. Eldridge was the whole thing, she was the whole business...Mrs. Eldridge used to come down with a paper bag, and this was in 1929... when people was hungry. There was no money around, in New York City the crash came and they was jumping out of skyscrapers!

[19:28]

Millionaires...millionaires tonight and broke the next day! Brother can you spare a dime? That was the song going on then...they had soup markets everywhere and in our family I never went with a pail to get any soup anywhere, my mother and my father somehow managed...my mother was a wonderful cook, she could make something out of nothing. But anyway, with all the children that they had, we never went hungry...um...the Eldridge family, getting back to them again, she used to come...Harriet, her name was...from the bank. A few boats that was in, buying fish...fish was selling anywhere from a quarter of a cent a pound to one, two, three, four cents a pound...this is what they were, Mrs. Eldridge would come down with a paper bag from the bank...everybody knew what was in that paper bag. There was a coffee house on the end, John Jesse's, where we'd go and have a sandwich or a cup of coffee if we had a quarter or a nickel in our pockets...lots of times we didn't have it, but anyway, Mrs. Eldridge would come down, everybody knew what was in that bag...but she was never robbed. This is the kind of people there were in them days...they were hard-working people and some of them were darn hungry.

Now...my Dad, we was in a boat called the *Addy May*, and there were a lot of yellowtails off of "No Man's Land"...and we would go, in a days time we'd get fifteen or eighteen thousand pounds of yellowtails and we'd come in here and sell. The last tow my Dad would make, he had a big five hundred pound box empty, the last tow he would say "Put the fish in the empty box" so, all the yellowtails would go in that box. The reason he had that was that people would come down with pieces of burlap, pieces of wire, and get fish...he would give them that fish...people were starving. There was one colored man that spoke seven languages...years later, after my father had passed away, I used to meet that man once in a while down on the pier...and he would say "Is your Dad alive yet?" and I'd say "No" and he was getting a little forgetful, because he had asked me shortly before that..."Oh, he was such a wonderful man! Them fish that he gave us and the other people, kept a lot of people alive" I said, "Yes, I know". He was-my Dad would send so many up to St. Mary's Home, where all the people were at, no

Doucette Interview Working Waterfront Festival September 25,2004

Transcribed by Tove E. Bendiksen

charge...he said "If we can sell fish for a quarter of a cent a pound, I can send a couple hundred pounds up to St. Mary's Home" and it didn't mean that much to us, because we weren't getting much of a share.

[22:49]

Now...how did we fish for so cheap? We'd make four trips into New Bedford, then we'd go out and on the last trip we'd get a big trip and take it to New York City. When we came back from New York City, we'd stop again...we would come right by "No Man's", we'd stop again and get another trip to go into New Bedford. Then we would settle-up...it wasn't that much when we got the money, but that's what you had to do to make a living in them times. My Dad, there was a fishing book out called The Atlantic Fisherman, my Dad was noted in the *Addy May*, as a highliner out of New Bedford one of the years...I think way back in '29 or '30. Then after we had our *Gleaner*, and we came to New Bedford in '24 from Martha's Vineyard and then my father was in partners with A.E. Wordell on Williams Street...he had farming tools and farm equipment. He and my father were in partners for a number of years. If the farmers had a good season, they paid Alan off... if they had a bad season, Alan had to wait until the next year. So, my Dad needed a new engine for his boat, so he told Alan about it and Alan said "I can't afford to put another engine Louie, my money's all tied up" see, the farmers had had a couple of bad years, so my Dad bought him out...ah, we had the boat all fixed the way he wanted it. This was in 1928, and he made three trips in Boston Harbor, the third trip going into Boston, he hit a submerged wreckage...it was in February, they were very lucky to get on the beach, get ashore without anybody getting lost. That was a sad day for the Doucette's, we had a big home up on Alan Street near Brownell and Brigham...um, we lost it for \$2,800. Mr. Eldridge...and then there was a Portuguese family that had the market down on Alan street...oh, I knew all the boys and now I can't...my memory goes like that every now and then...um, Correira.

[25:40]

Manny Correia and...the Correia brothers, they had a big store on Alan and Dartmouth Street, very close to Dartmouth, they bought all kinds of property up...and so did Mr. Eldridge. Houses was going for nothing, people that had worked in the mills- You know, I'll say this about this, I hear our presidents talking about PhDs, now I'm gonna get into that! I couldn't even begin to have one of those, but everybody...all people in our nation haven't got PhDs., because a lot of them would like to have them but they haven't got it. You've got to have carpenters, you've got to have plumbers, you've got to have shoemakers, you've got to have- look at this great city of ours! New Bedford, Fairhaven, Lowell, Fall River, and all the other Taunton and everything...the beautiful mills we had in this town, that these Portuguese people, and French people worked and slaved...um, they worked for a living in these mills and it was nothing bad! The only bad thing about it, in [what] Joe Thomas's book is about, they were getting young children...you know, hiring young kids to go into those mills, that's the only bad thing I could see about it. But there was Portuguese people that lived near us that had nice families, men worked hard, their wives worked hard, they

Doucette Interview Working Waterfront Festival September 25,2004

Transcribed by Tove E. Bendiksen

grew their families up good...they had beautiful homes, was done in these mills...these mills that we gave away to China! We 'didn't need them in this country anymore'...we still need them mills! We had shoe shops, when I was a young boy they had shoe shops in New Bedford, 'Oh, who wants to be a shoemaker?'...Hey, there's are a lot of people today that would love to go into a mill as a shoemaker...so then our mills went on strike and moved to the South, this was a heartbreaker. All our mills, them beautiful mills that were knocked down...a lot of them, I have a son who's in that business...he went to college, he should have never taken that up, but he did...and he made big money in the business. But he couldn't get it out of his system and he tried to do the impossible...he went up the ladder like that. I say to him, "Look at these beautiful homes, these three deckers, these two deckers, go through the North end of New Bedford, go to the South end of New Bedford, see them beautiful homes!" They were three deckers, two deckers, but they are nice homes...this is what the people worked and saved and bought. Today, our mills- look you see one all smashed to pieces, it's a shame! But time marches on I suppose...Mr. Millican, that my son worked for, he was the biggest money-making man in the Carolinas, his place...Spartansburg was the showplace of his company. I don't know how many mills he owns, big ones, he had his helicopter...he used to fly around from plant to plant, that's what my son went for. When he graduated from the school out here in Dartmouth, New Bedford was paying \$5,000...\$6,000 was tops for a graduate. My son had a friend who was working for Mr. Millican...Roger Millican; he said, "Paul, come this way, I'll get you a job here." So, he got my son a job with Millican, starting pay fifteen-five...a graduate of our school out in Dartmouth, here...and that's a lovely school. Betty Ann went to that school and Paul, my son.

[30:23]

Now, I went into the fishing business myself...I had a family to support and we had a nice home that we bought in Fairhaven, after a number of years...I just sold that to the Walgreen's drugstore here, a few... '92...I think it was-no, more than that, 2001, I think...when I sold my place. You know, in Fairhaven when you are coming out of the shop there...Stop & Shop?

MR: Hmm

LD: Across the street Walgreen's in there...

MR: Oh, yeah...

LD: That's where my home was. Anyway...

MR: I was going to ask you, did all the fishing families sort of live in the same neighborhood? Or all throughout the town?

LD: Ah...my family...see, I was the only...ah, no, I had a brother. My brother was a, he was always around shipyards and stuff, he was younger than me, then he ended up in the Navy Shipyard in Boston as a rigger. During the war, of course he was a young man, and the people in Boston would kid him, "How come you're not in the service?" so, after a little of that, he joined the Sea Bees and he was sent out to Guam and Saipan and all them places. I also had two sisters, nurses, ah...one graduated from the Cambridge City Hospital in Boston and the other from the Mt.

Doucette Interview Working Waterfront Festival September 25,2004

Transcribed by Tove E. Bendiksen

Auburn Street Hospital in Boston and my sister Loretta joined the forces...she landed out there with my brother, out there in Guam, Saipan and Pearl Harbor and all them places. When she landed there, she was like a regular GI...she had to wash her face and her helmet all that kind of thing, she lives in Falmouth today...she is younger than me, a few years, but she's still alive...out of eight of us, I and two others are alive...a brother-he was in the Pacific, I mean the Atlantic War...Dick.

I was in the fishing business for years, then I went to...I got a job in Woods Hole with Samuel Calhoun...he owned the Three-One and One [3-1-1]. Everybody asks me about that name, "How come he named it that?", he had three girls and one boy, then his partner from Vineyard Haven, Mass had one girl. So, that's the three and one and one! [chuckle]

Everybody always asks me about that...I was with Sam for ten years, he was the greatest man I ever worked for, he was wonderful...and his wife and his children...I still get letters from his daughter that's up in Maine, she was in the office, she used to settle us up. They were wonderful people.

[33:53]

Anyway, then I was retired from fishing in 1974, I went home with my wife and I started to get fishing boats, to do their nets, because I knew nets...I'd been mending nets from the time I was a kid. I did that for six or seven months...or a year, and then in the end, they would bring me a net-all tore up, I would give them the bill and they thought it was terrific, and I would tell them "I'm not even paying half of what the twine loft would charge you" so, my friend worked for The New Bedford Ship Supply, he was going to Nova Scotia for a vacation...and he called me and said, "Louie will you come into The New Bedford Ship Supply and take my job until I come back?" I said, "No, I told Rasmus I'm not gonna take that job..." he said, "Do me a favor, come in and work a couple of days with me before I go to Nova Scotia". I went to work two days with Eli, on the Friday he said, "I'll go pick up our checks", he went to the paymaster...the paymaster said "What do we pay your helper Eli?" and Eli said, "The same as you pay me, the man can do the things I can do." So I got top pay right off of the bat...I worked for Mr. Rasmus Tonnessen for ten years and he was wonderful. Then Eli came back from Nova Scotia and he didn't come back to work! The job was mine if I wanted it...my wife told me this was gonna happen, she was the one that made me quit and get out of the fishing business...but, anyway, it was great experience to do this thing. I loved my work we gave seven nets... we used to send anywheres from the Virginias, New York City, New Jersey, and all around here; Maine and everywheres else...seven different kinds of nets! I cut the twine, they'd send in bundles of twine and you had to cut it...you know to explain to people what that's like, like this shirt you got on...see it's wide up here and then it narrows down...well, you had to cut that twine so they'd be a hundred and fifty or sixty meshes across the wide end and then it would taper right down to the bottom where there was only fifty meshes...that has to be tapered right, now you are cutting twine that's \$4.50 or \$5.00 a pound, you've got to be pretty careful what you are doing.

Doucette Interview Working Waterfront Festival September 25,2004

Transcribed by Tove E. Bendiksen

[37:22]

Ah...I spent ten years there, in that shop, and I was down on the State Pier one day and...Mr. Sanchez come driving in a truck in there and I was cutting bails of twine, a thousand meshes wide and a hundred meshes deep...and he looked over, "Is that you, Louie?" I said, "That's me." He had known me going skipper all the time, never...who's this guy in here cutting twine? Anyway, I knew what I was doing and I was there...Mr. Tonnessen, the first four days I worked for him-after I took the job, he come in and looked in the doorway...it was a long narrow strip of building that I was in...he looked in there, and I seen him, and I said "Rasmus", he said "How are you doing?" I said, "I'm doing alright, Rasmus, but I don't know where everything goes, you know... I got to find out, like we had one section for the three quarter net, the next section was fifty-two/seventy-two, the next section was sixty-three/eighty, the next section was a hundred and ten..." I said. We cut stuff so that if you came in, you owned a boat, you would walk in, you'd say "I want the three quarter net, or I want the fifty-two/seventy-two" and I'd go right there and give you the whole works: the bellies, the square, the wings and everything else...ah, so...my candy's getting under my teeth.

MR: Do you want some water?

LD: Anyway, are you...Do you like what I'm saying?

MR: I love what you're saying! Absolutely. Now...but tell me why your wife made you get out of fishing.

[39:40]

LD: Well, while this was going on while I was fishing...my brother-in-law had a boat, he didn't go in the business, I was in the business for years before he got into the business. We were down in Gloucester and my brother was with me out of Gloucester, I had ten men in that boat I was in...brand-new boat, we got tired of riding back and forth. We decided, you know-the owners was getting a little rough...demanding this and demanding that...so one day we went down, it was a snow storm...we used to drive down in our cars...we had four days off, see. The fourth day we had to go back to work, ten days at sea. So, they were putting the groceries aboard our boat, and my brother, he was in the Sea Bees in the war, and he could do anything...Herb, anyway, Mr. Larkey-one of the owners said to him "Hey, where did you guys come from?" he [Herb] said "Well, I'll tell ya something! If I was the skipper of this boat, she wouldn't leave the dock today in this snow storm, storm warnings up and everything!" "But" he said, "You're not the skipper of the Boat, you're brother's the skipper." He said, "My brother's crazy" he didn't tell him that he was, but he was about ready to tell him...so, he said something sassy to my brother and my brother answered him. Now he had just come back from Saipan and Guam and all them places, where they were building air fields and they were shooting at them and everything else, he was just lucky to be back home- that he hadn't gotten killed. I came aboard the boat with my little handbag, this was a routine time...we got there- we went to dinner at one o' clock in the diner there. We left that diner, we all came aboard the boat, she sailed over to put the ice in...they put in ten or fifteen tons of ice in about ten minutes there...Boy, what a rig they had up there in Gloucester, then we went to

Doucette Interview Working Waterfront Festival September 25,2004

Transcribed by Tove E. Bendiksen

sea...the men was all aboard the boat-nobody left that boat then. Uh...I went in the wheelhouse after I got there with my handbag, I walked into my stateroom and Mr. Larkey, one of the owners, was right behind me...he says, "Hey, Captain Louie!" I said, "Yes?" he said, "That brother of yours is a fresh little guy isn't he?" I said, "Why? Did you have a set up with him?" he said, "Yes, I did." I said, "Ray, this is no day to get into a little set up with my brother or anybody else...snowstorm, storm warnings up." He says, "You know our agreement Louie" I said, "Yes, I know our agreement, that's the only reason I'm going through with this." But I said, "Don't get on my brothers tail, he just come back from Guam and Saipan with the Japs firing at him and he's a lucky guy to be home, so he won't take too much from you- he'll jump all over you."

[43:18]

So, that was the end of that...before we sailed, he came to me and said, "You better tell your brother to harsh down a little." I said, "Ray? Where was you during the war?" he said, "I was in New York City on a big tour boat" I said, "You were lucky, so was I, though I did go a hundred and fifty miles offshore in my boat to catch fish which we didn't know at anytime could be torpedoed or something, but please don't be on my brother's back, 'cause I don't know what he might do." So, he said something to me...and I said, "Ray, you've said enough now. I've been in this boat for a year and a half, now you're after my brother...I think what you'd better do, while I'm out this trip-I'm not gonna let you down, I'll make this trip...but when I come in, the boat is yours. You look for a skipper while I'm out." All the crew packed up but one man when we got in...we had a big trip and we all come home.

I was home maybe...I was working for a Jewish man from Riverside New York City, and he had four or five boats in New Bedford...I had the *Lauren Fay*, and Mr. Kestenbaum was my buddy...he used to come down in a big, brand new caddy [Cadillac], but he wanted to use my Buick all the time, he loved that Buick! I had a nice Buick car...sedan...ah, me and him got along great, no problems. When they wanted fish, he'd say, "Captain, do you think you could find time to get me a couple big lemon sole? All we want is to cut the head off, cut the fins around the sail and the tail...we want the whole fish with the bones in it and everything. That's the way my wife makes them." You can't beat the Jewish people and fish boy...they are the best! So, I would fix him up, I'd fix all the fish he wanted...I'd send him home and he was happy as a little kid. I worked for him for close to a year...then one day he came to me and said, "Somebody tells me I should have a shore skipper" I says, "Is somebody looking for the job?" he says, "You know Hank?"...that was the man that owned part of the *Vivian Fay*...I said, "Yes, I know Hank." [he said] "Do you think he'd make a good shore skipper?" [LD] "Well, I think he's a pretty active man, young man...yeah, I do." He asked the others...I don't know what the others told him.

[46:34]

Anyway, months later Mr. Kestenbaum, went...unknown to me...to New York City- ah, I mean to Europe for a vacation. So the hurricane of '54 came...

Doucette Interview Working Waterfront Festival September 25,2004

Transcribed by Tove E. Bendiksen

We got in with the *Lauren Fay* before the storm hit...we were all running for our lives- all the fleet, we made it in, and the other boats...I tied my boat up next to Maclean's shop on the north side...the next day, there was boats sunk all around me...there was boats on the dock...oh, what a mess! The *Lauren Fay's* port rail, up on the bow, had lifted up a little bit where she'd gone up against the dock, you know...but no damage...she was a brand new boat, all they had to do was knock it down and put some new bolts in. A couple of days later all we did was go and look around at the other boats, the damage...oh, they were piled up there at Casey's Shipyard...what a mess...our boat was all ready to sail.

[47:51]

There was all Norwegian skippers...and I love the Norwegian people, don't take me wrong with what I'm saying, there were all Norwegian skippers on them boats...I was the only outsider. Ah...I come down a couple of days later and met Hank...Hank said, "Oh, I was looking for you Cap" I said, "You were?" -Oh, I'm getting ahead of myself...

One day- see he [Hank] was supposed to see when we needed new wire aboard the boat, he was the shore skipper, he was to see that if we had any work on the boats to do-he had to take care of it. Now, we wasn't all in at one time, but this time his *Vivian Fay* was in with all kinds of problems and I was in...so, he was supposed to put new wire aboard our boat, mark it...they do that...and put it on the winch and have it spliced, on the end of each wire. I came down, the day I was gonna sail, and two big spools of wire was laying on deck...my crew was all grumbling, "What's this?". Which, I didn't blame them, but I went up looking for Hank...and when I met Hank, he says "Louie, I've had so much trouble with my *Vivian Fay*...I couldn't get around to doing- I was supposed to do that wire for you and stuff...would it be alright? I put the spools of wire aboard, you put the old wire off...take it off and then splice in the new wire? And mark it on your way out fishing?" Now, I couldn't do this alone, I had to have some of my crew help me! They didn't- they were going fishing, not splicing wire...not fixing up. I did the splicing, I'm ahead of myself...but anyway...So, I did it. We got the end of the wire in, threw the spool overboard, wound it up and marked it the best we could- both spools, that was two hundred fathoms of wire on each drum...that was four hundred fathoms had to go on... I did him the favor.

[50:24]

So, months went by and Mr. Kestenbaum went to Europe...after the hurricane, Hank came to me and said, "I've been looking for you Louie" I said, "For what?" he said, "I got a letter from Mr. Kestenbaum." I said, "Hank, you're telling me something's wrong. Didn't you tell me last trip Mr. Kestenbaum's in Europe?" he said, "Yes, he is." [LD] "Then what's this letter about?"..."Well" he said, "I can give you the letter and you can read it- after I go, you read it." So, he passed me an envelope with a letter in there...so, I got one side-he took off, and I looked at the letter; "Dear Captain Doucette, As of now, your service is no longer required. Due to the hurricane, we are very upset with the a lot of the boats that can't go fishing, but your *Lauren Fay* is sitting there and not a thing has happened to her

Doucette Interview Working Waterfront Festival September 25,2004

Transcribed by Tove E. Bendiksen

aside of the railing on the port side which has to be re-nailed"...which is nothing, they could do that in a couple hours time... "So, seeing that a lot of our men that's been with us a long time is without a boat now..." in other words, I'm the fall guy. One Norwegian skipper was in the *Ruth Moses*, was a personal friend of mine...when he heard about it, he said, "Louie, I'm so sorry to hear this. If anybody was to get fired it would have been me, because I'd been broke down a lot. You were going all the time!" This is what that man did for me, that I spliced the wire [for] that he was supposed to do...but now Mr. Kestenbaum's in Europe, what can I do? It was signed by his son-in-law...Hank and his son-in-law got together on that deal.

MR: Hmm...

[52:43]

LD: I never seen Mr. Kestenbaum until probably six or seven months later, and when I met him, I was coming out of the National Bank in New Bedford and he was coming in there. He stopped and he said "Oh, Mr. Doucette! I haven't seen you since I've been in Florida! And by the way, what happened?" "Well," I said, "Mr. Kestenbaum, I'm glad to see you..." I shook hands with him... "But, look...it's all gone under the bridge now, I'm not gonna cry to you, I'm fishing...but, it was a dirty trick." He said, "What was a dirty trick?" I said, "Mr. Kestenbaum, I just don't want to do it. I'm fishing, I got a boat, and it was a dirty trick-what they did to me." [Kestenbaum] "Who did what?" I said, "You'll have to ask-when you see your friend, your shore skipper...you ask him. And you tell him that I wouldn't tell you what it was about, but I want him to tell you what happened." We shook hands and I left...I haven't seen Mr. Kestenbaum since, that's the way it went.

See...things that happen, you can cry about it...young lady, I'm ninety-three years old, I've got all my hair, my eyes are pretty near gone, I got my health...my home that my dear wife and me struggled to pay for, there was times we didn't know whether we could or not...she was there to help me in every way. The drugstore come along after she passed away in '91...a great big beautiful home that- people see me now and they say, "Oh, every time I go used to go by that house, I felt so bad them tearing it down." My daughter, that was with me today, Betty Anne, oh, she's here...while they were knocking down that house, she came and she used to sit in the yard and cry. She'd see the home that my wife and me and them had...it was a beautiful home.

[55:30]

Now, after I sold my home to the drugstore, I did pretty well as far as money went. I made out a little gift to my children- I have four children, two boys and two girls. I wanted to leave them some money, and in the bank I left each one of them a good sum of money, that when I pass on I think they'll...this one here is pretty well set, my daughter Betty- she's the best one I got, she's the one that does everything for me...this one here. So her and her husband are pretty well set, he retired from AT&T and she retired from the school- schoolteacher. But, just the

Doucette Interview Working Waterfront Festival September 25,2004

Transcribed by Tove E. Bendiksen

same, they're all in there on that piece of money, the only thing there was, if I needed it...like if I live to be a hundred and twenty-five, maybe I'll need it.

MR: You'll still be telling these stories I hope.

LD: Huh?

MR: You'll still be telling these stories I hope...I'm looking at the counter and...

LD: Yes, yes...I gotta get going!

MR: How would you...it's been a good life for you.

LD: It's been a good life, yes.

MR: And that's kind of what you were saying...you've got all your fingers, I noticed and...

[57:00]

LD: Yup, it was beautiful in the summer months...not so great in the winter, but this is what you put up with. All jobs are the same, whatever it is, you have your good parts and your bad parts. You've got some more people to interview?

MR: Yeah, some of them just came in...you're welcome to stay.
Plenty of time Louie! You just take your time, old-timer! We don't care...

LD: Who is it?
*None of your business! Just sit there and keep on...Linus Eldridge is coming, I gotta offload it tomorrow morning...I gotta go aboard the **Star of David** [fishing vessel] there a little bit later...*

LD: Yeah... *[Laughing]*

MR: Let's give Louie a little rest; he's been talking solidly...

LD: Yeah, well...No, I'm ready to go.
No we don't want you to leave, we want to hear some more...

LD: Let me just say this, all these young fellas behind me there are all young kids as far as I'm concerned. I made a statement when I was on the platform there, I said it and I said it right...these young boys today go aboard beautiful boats- not some of the slabs I was in, the go aboard beautiful boats...nice toilets, which we never had...
You had a bucket! You out to be happy with it!
[laughter]

LD: That's right, we had a bucket...and whether it was freezing weather or whatever, but you had to be a seaman to start, before you got near a pilothouse...today, you don't have to be anymore! The kids just walk right into the thing- like I told you about my son, he's got a car there that if was a truck driver and had to go to Philadelphia or New York City, a certain place- that car would take him right there...see? That called it long-range navigation...now they got it in trucks.

MR: Yeah...

LD: Alright, I'm...

[59:06]

Doucette Interview Working Waterfront Festival September 25,2004

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