

Name of person Interviewed: Ray Houtman [RH]

Facts about this person:

Age:

Sex: Male

Occupation: Longshoreman

Residence (Town where lives): New Bedford, MA

Ethnic background (if known): Cape Verdean, West Indian

Interviewer: Janice Fleuriel [JF]

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- Union
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TRANSCRIPT

[00:00]

JF: This is Janice Fleuriel. I'm talking with Ray Houtman about longshoremen work at the Working Waterfront Festival on September 24, 2005. And usually what we start... is just asking people some general questions about their own background and then go more into specifics. So could you tell you where and when you were born?

RH: I was born June 6, 1955 right here in New Bedford, MA.

JF: And how long has your family been in the New Bedford area?

RH: Lets see... my grandparents on my mother's side, I think they came in the early 1900's and I would say on my father's side, about the same time. Basically, about the same time.

JF: And where were they from?

RH: They were from Cape Verde. My mother's side, they were all from Cape Verde. My father's side, because of the Houtman last name, they were from the West Indies. My great grandfather is from the West Indies. My grandmother from my father's side were Cape Verdean also. So I have a lot more Cape Verdean blood in me than West Indian blood. The name holds true for West Indians.

JF: Not that I would know; this is great for me to know. So your grandparents met here? Did I get that right?

RH: Right, my grandparents met here, on my father's side. On my mother's side, my grandparents met in Cape Verde.

JF: What part of Cape Verde? There are all kinds of islands there.

RH: Right. There's ten islands that consist of the Cape Verde Islands. My grandmother is from 'San Antone', Saint Anthony. It's one of the largest islands of all the islands in the Cape Verde; and one of the greenest islands.

JF: But the whole place is called Cape Verde, which means green?

RH: At one time, it was all green; but now, I'd say within the last 50 years, it's just experienced all kinds of drought, so it's very difficult for the islands to stay green. But this one did, so happens it did.

JF: So what was their reason for coming over; was there problems economically there, or were there other reasons, do you know?

RH: According to what my mother told me, my grandmother just said it was time to move on and she up and left on her own. She wanted to come to America to see what the life was about, to get a better life. Especially for a female, it was very brave; she had to get permission from her parents at the time because they wouldn't just allow females to travel back in those days. It was O.K. for the males to do it.

JF: And did she have anybody here that she was coming to meet, or was she just really...?

RH: To my knowledge, no, she didn't have anybody; she came out here and established her life style and got her citizenship.

JF: So then were your family...I should ask you, could you define longshoremen work for me... but was your family involved in that kind of work before you?

RH: Oh yes, my father was a longshoreman for more than 40 years. I, myself, have been a longshoreman for like 32 years, off and on over the past few years. And I have my brothers, my cousins... there are a lot of people who work down the waterfront

throughout the years. Its mostly longshoremen in this area, of the locals in this area, there's basically 90% Cape Verdean, and it's been like that since about 1936. That's when the Union was formulated.

JF: I saw the plaque.

[04:02]

RH: That was a very nice dedication; I wish some of the older men were still around here to see it, because they worked hard to establish that Union and maintain the work down here.

JF: Is that a story in and of itself?

RH: Yeah!

JF: Before we get into that, maybe could you... I have it that you load and unload, but is that all of it, though?

RH: Basically, yeah. It's the loading and unloading of large vessels; not like you see out here today; you see the fishing ships. The ships we unload and load, I'd say at least ten times the size of these ships here; with the depth inside the hold, about 40-50 feet; there's different levels, but when you get to the bottom, it's about 50 feet from the top to the bottom. About four or five levels. We work under all kinds of conditions you can imagine. But these individuals here, they work... like a fine tuned instrument; one hand knows exactly what the other hand is going to do. I can explain the different operations to you?

JF: That would be great.

RH: A ship comes in; it's loaded with cargo. Now back in the day, I'm going to say like 30 years ago because that's as far as I can go back for you. But back in the day, everything was loaded and unloaded by hand. So the ships would come in loaded with cargo; for example frozen fish was one of those things. We would take those, you put them on pallets, it was a certain pad and you had to put it on pallets, so it would be the right level. You would have ten men that would load these pallets up. You would have a wench man which was the crane operator. A crane operator is one of the most responsible people on the job because without the crane operator, the job does not work. The crane operator's job is to take the loaded pallets that the pens load from the ship, onto the dock, to the truck or to wherever they are going to go. But in between there, you have a sign man, which is the eyes of the crane operator, of then wench man. Like I say, the hole is so deep at times, the winch man cannot see all the way down to know what's going on. So you have the sign man whose job is to give signals the man when it's time to bring the cargo up and where to land it. The reason they give signals, they call him the sign man, is because the machinery is so loud that you can't just yell and talk to him. And you have to tell him what direction to put the crane and you use your different signals to do that.

JF: Are there certain signals the sign man learns, are they standard in the industry?

RH: They are standard in the industry and it takes a long time. Not just anyone can be a sign man. A lot of the requirements, one of the requirements, is you have to be a certified winch man or a certified crane operator, that way they can communicate more easily with each other. It takes time; and people will watch and they learn the system. It works out nicely. If you have a good sign man and you have a good wench man, you're going to have basically a good operation.

[07:12]

JF: How fascinating. I'm a scuba diver, so I think about how you have to talk under water, they would probably have to make sure their signs are... they are pretty far away from each other, the crane man and the sign man?

RH: They are both out of harms way, but one is closer to the operation, but the sign man can see the job in progress. So what he does, a sign man can never talk with his hands when he's talking to people in the hole. When he talks with his hands, that what the winch man is looking at.....

JF: So you have to be careful which way...?

RH: That's right! But there are signals for the individuals.

JF: When he's talking to the crane man, I would imagine that it be very big and clear for them to see?

RH: A lot of the times, they have to wear white gloves or florescent gloves now. And they have different operations; if you rub your thumb and forefinger together, that means to bring the crane up nice and easy. And if circle your two fingers, it means you can bring it up a little quicker. And when you give the big whip of the hand, it means just take it right away, just go for it. Once he gets it in his view, he can handle it from there.

JF: Somebody else has to actually hook the crane onto the load?

RH: That's right. And that's where the hold men do. Not only do they load the pallets, they have to hook the pallets up. So once it's taken out of the hold by the crane operators and it's on the dock, and we have two men called landers. They're job is to unhook the load, and we have forklift drivers who will come and take the lift, bring it back to the warehouse, transfer from the warehouse to the trucks, to where they are going to go. So it's one operation; everyone knows what they have to do to get the operation to roll. And if you are not there, that one particular person is not there, it disrupts the system and you have to wait.

JF: Do you have certain teams that you all work in?

RH: Yes, it's called a gang structure, what we have. The large ships that I explained to you, they have at least four cranes, one for each hold. And the holds are pretty large, like I told you. It's usually one gang per hold. These gangs consist of two winch men, because they relieve each other; one sign man who's job is to give the signs. You have one relief sign man, just to give him like and hour break. And you have two forklift operators which would be on the dock, and two landers which would be on the dock – those are the people who will unhook the cargo. Then in the hold, you have like ten laborers, because that's what they do. They are the ones that load the pallets. It comes out to about 18 men per gang when you have loose cargo like that.

JF: And will one gang always work together or is it not always like that?

RH: One gang usually always works together. Men are hired by the seniority down there, down here. Most of the time, the men will always come together. Like my father and his certain amount of guys, they always worked together and they know how each other work, so they are always hired together; they are more proficient at their work. As you need more people, that when you get less experienced people and it takes time. So everybody has to put their dues in before they are hired in that first gang or that number one gang as they call it.

[10:46]

JF: So it's almost like working on the fishing boats; hang around and finally get a spot.

RH: And after you work so many man hours, you're entitled to join the Union. Then you are really entitled to a job, so it works out well.

JF: So, some of you then are actually full-time, let's say permanent employees of the Union. Is that like the company?

RH: We don't work for one particular company; we are our own Union. What our jurisdiction is the waterfront. Whatever company brings the ships in, they will hire us and we will hire our men to do their job – we have our own hiring process which is called the shape-up. Whenever there is a job going on; back in the day they used to put it in the paper, there will be a shape-up. Now you have to call the Union office and see when there is a shape-up – they tell you when there is a shape-up, you show up half hour before the job begins and that's when people get hired. Once they are hired, they are all good to work.

JF: So now what's your job today?

RH: Today I'm a forklift driver for on the dock. It took me 32 years to get out of the hold... but my dues are paid. It's fun work; don't get me wrong; I always love doing that kind of work. But as you get older, you have to move on and do what the older guys did; so I finally got my opportunity.

JF: That's what I was wondering, that again, it's a little like the fishing boats where you might start off on a part share and eventually become captain. So is everyone trying to get up on the docks?

RH: Yeah, everyone is trying to get out of the hold. And that's where one of the sayings come from, in baseball, they say so and so is up at bat; one is on deck, another one in the hold. Well that's what it is; the hold is from the ship that you go from the ship on the deck and then you go at bat off the deck. That's where one of the sayings comes from.

JF: So, how long would it take to unload...? I suppose it depends on the size of the hold?

RH: Most of the ships that used to come in, they were filled to the brim and you would clear one deck and you would wait for the crew to open up the next deck, then you would clear that. When the ships are full like that in that respect, and you have to unload it by hand, it can take anywhere from 3-4 days working 10-12 hours a day. It's good work; it's good honest work. From the statistics that I learned when I was younger, that you could... the longshoremen had the second longest life span, due to being out in the open air and working physically hard labor. There was some conditions that were extremely dangerous, as far as the cold temperatures, especially in the Northeast, we have very cold winters. You go from the cold winters on the pier, you go inside the ship and you're doing frozen cargo, that's sub-zero too. So we had to be entitled to at least a 45 minutes break, but it still wasn't enough. People learned to adjust; it took awhile. When I first got started, you bring the right equipment – you re-invest in your job. You save a few dollars and buy some mittens next time, or you buy some good boots the following time.

[14:21]

JF: You must have special gear?

RH: Yeas, we have special gear to wear now for these cold operations.

JF: So even like in the middle of July, if you're going to go into sub-zero...

RH: It will go from 80 degrees to sub zero so you're getting dressed as you go down and getting undressed as you go up.

JF: How heavy – I always just pictured longshoreman work as totally back-breaking – are there certain maximum weights you are supposed to lift at a time?

RH: No. As far as fish cargo is concerned – fish used to come in frozen blocks, as far as boxes – some were like nine pounds, some were 20 pounds, some were 45 pounds, and some were 66 pounds. You had to load them up by hand; each person would grab one. Then we had other ships with bails of cotton that would come in from the South that would go to the factories at that time, and those were put on pallets; they were huge bails – I'd say half the size of this room – and you had to hook them up with steel hooks and there's a certain weight a hook can haul up. Each bail had to have 6 hooks on it so it wouldn't fall off. If you didn't hook it up correctly, those bails could come back tumbling down on you and it could be very dangerous. Another different piece of cargo were the bones. Bags of bone. These bones were used basically to make film; I think it was, the Polaroid shipment to make film. And these bags were very awkward and it took two men to do it. You had to have a good partner, because these were at least 300 pounds per bag and you had to load approximately 14 bags per pallet. This was all day long – it was one of the most back-breaking jobs I ever had. Just to see the job being done. The only way to really experience how to do it correctly is to watch the older guys because they have been doing it so long, they have it down to a science. I don't know if you ever known this: a longshoreman symbol is a fist holding a hook. You might have seen it; I don't have any now – we used to have pins – but they are obsolete now. We're trying to get them back in production. That hook was the guiding tool that longshoremen used to pick up these awkward bails or pallets, or just to move things around. It was used almost constantly all the time, these hooks. My father and I, we were just talking about it today, he goes; "I got one more hook that I want to bring down to the Union Hall." I said; "Dad, just sit on it." We're going to save it because hopefully one day we'll have a museum down here so people will know.

JF: So people would have their own hooks?

RH: They would have their own hooks, yes. And you'd grab the bags in such a manner, rather than really break your back. You'd get hooks into really in the Union, so you were breaking their back! [laughs].

JF: Is it that the Union would sell them?

RH: They would give you the hooks.

JF: They would give you the hooks, ahh, so it was like a welcome to the brotherhood almost? I see. Now, are hooks like some other tools, where people get one and they like it the best because it fits their hand better?

RH: Right, some people know how to use the hook right off the bat and they are really adapted to it. They are more happy with it; other people are just not happy with it, can't get adjusted to it and would rather use those hands. Those are those big poky guys... they have enough brawl to do it on their own. We have a lot of different cargo that came through here.

[18:13]

JF: The bones are fascinating; what kind of bones?

RH: I don't know what kinds of bones they were. Days like today – in the sweltering heat, like we've had the past few weeks – it was just unbearable down there, because the ventilation was poor. Once you get lower into the deck, there's less air swirling around. Like today, we're on the dock here; you can feel the breeze; when you're in the ship, you don't feel that breeze. You get the walls of the ship – the sun is constantly shining on you and creating its own heat and you're working in your own heat – it can be brutal at times.

JF: So how long would you go in freezing, or really hot before you would have your breaks?

RH: The longest any person would stay down there before having their break, would be three and a quarter hours. It's a long time. That's the person that takes the last break or the person that takes the first break. Once they come down...

JF: So you shift out...?

RH: Yeah, you shift out; one at a time. It breaks up to five breaks per work period.

JF: People drink lots of water?

RH: Lots of water. Water is very important. When my father was younger, when he first started, they used to have what they called a water boy. And his job was to run around each boat and give people water. He said he got paid \$1.47 per hour when he started in 1946.

JF: The water boy or your dad?

RH: The water boy.

JF: Now what do people do today, they don't have that anymore?

RH: They don't have the water boy. You get the containers that they will bring into the ship so its easier that way.

JF: Now what are the hours; lumpers work whenever the ship comes in – how do you all do that?

RH: Well, we work when the ship comes in. Whatever day the ship comes in, that's when we work. Mostly, shape-up will start at 7:30AM and work will start at 8:00am. Work period will be from 8-12, from 1-5, and from 6 to whenever, usually 6-10 – so it's like a 12 hour day sometimes. If it's important, if the ship has to leave a particular day, you would work into the night. Once you go past midnight, you get an extra amount of money.

RH: So the ship is just paying according to how long, maybe into overtime?

JF: Now how much notice will any individual guy get in terms of, "you have a job tomorrow"?

RH: You have I'd say a day notice, if that. You have to keep calling constantly, just so you know when the ship is coming in. That's why it's difficult now because, like I was explaining earlier on a panel, back in the day, the ships were more constant. Now with palletized cargo and more cargo being transported in containers, our port isn't big enough to handle that, as far as storage and dock space. But now... I lost my train of thought.

[21:36]

JF: In terms of the schedule and how they know when to work?

RH: So whenever they come in, you would start the day at 7:30am but you would call or it would be in the paper earlier on, so you would just look everyday in the paper. And you had the times. It was coming in more constant. So you could afford to make

this your full-time career. Now that it's less frequent, a lot of people have other jobs and if it falls on their days off, then they'll show up and work – which just happened to myself.

JF: So you have another job along with this then?

RH: Right.

JF: What's your other job?

RH: My other job currently, I work for the United States Government. Airport screener, security at the airports. And prior to that I just retired from the Department of Corrections in Massachusetts. So whenever it fell on my days off I would come down. I always loved this kind of work and never wanted to see it fade away. I would never give it up.

JF: Now does it ever come that they can't get people for the boat or is there always somebody they can get?

RH: Well, if it ever comes to the point where they are short for people, they'll go out and find anybody hanging around who needs a job, basically. They'll come down, if they haven't worked down there before, they'll show them how the job should be worked and coach them through it. A lot of times first-timers when they come to do this difficult work, usually you don't see them the next day.

JF: There's probably a self-screening process, right?

RH: Yeah, that's a good way of putting it. It separates people who want to work and those who don't want to work; you find out very quickly.

JF: The waterfront is just fascinating by the number of people who... it's built on people who are willing to work.

RH: That's what it is basically. I think, don't quote me on this, but I think that's why there was more Cape Verdean men as longshoremen, because so many people did not want to do the work. But Cape Verdean men, that was the only kind of work they could get and their bodies were adapted to doing that kind of work so they survived through it.

[23:56]

JF: Now was that because in Cape Verde they were doing mainly physical labor kinds of work?

RH: Cape Verde was all physical labor work, to my knowledge.

JF: Farming and fishing?

RH: Fishing and farming, that is what it was right there, exactly.

JF: So they were just used to it.

RH: Right.

JF: How many people are in the Union, do you know?

RH: When I first started, the Union was a lot larger. Our Union now basically has 30 people in it. When I started, it was up to 120 people. As time goes on, people retire, people pass away. We have a lot of people who've retired. And the work dwindled so the people go in search of other jobs just to make ends meet, they end up giving up this kind of employment.

JF: Now are there certain ports in this country where longshoremen, there are more because the ports will handle constant... like out west?

RH: Boston handles a lot more. Providence handles a lot more. There are a few in Connecticut. Because their ports are bigger; they have better access to the sea.

Another deterrent here in New Bedford, due to the size of the ships we have now, they won't be able to come to this port because the dredging – they'll get stuck on the bottom because of the river.

JF: How much depth do they need?

RH: I couldn't tell you but there's not enough that we have right here. And also with the size of the ships, another deterrent, a lot of them won't even be able to make it to the port because of the hurricane barrier. It's a standard size; some ships can't get through that. It's like 150 feet across and some ships are much wider than that.

JF: Is that much more of a modern thing, that ships have been built much bigger?

RH: Yes. Because in Providence, they have... we work in Providence - the ILA will call us if they need the extra men and we do the same; we help each other out, because we go and get to the street – I forgot to mention that. In Providence they have the foreign cars will come in on ships and these ships are humungous – they are 12 decks deep – 12 stories deep full of cars and they need individuals to take the cars off the ship. A ship like that would never fit here.

JF: So taking a car off, is that like a tow?

RH: No, you drive it right off!

JF: Have you ever done that? Is that fun?

RH: Yes, that's very nice. Driving brand new cars. I would never have one myself, but it's very nice just to drive for a minute.

JF: Any fancy ones?

RH: Very fancy ones. \$80,000, \$60,000. A lot of Volkswagens, Saabs, BMW's, very nice vehicles....

JF: Any Jaguars?

RH: They won't let us touch the Jaguars. I saw a couple but they were going to a different port, so we didn't get a chance. But, very nice vehicles, ones that I know I'll never drive.

JF: Me either; I'll always have other things to do with my money. So would you have to get trained on how to drive each car or do you just figure it out?

RH: No. If you can drive a car, you'd be fine. A lot of people don't drive standards, so if you can drive a standard, that's a plus – that will get you hired. A lot of times in this work force, what you do is, once you get hired, especially if they don't know you, you're working to get hired the next time. So if you're a good worker, they'll remember you and hire you for the next time.

[27:29]

JF: You mean the ship, the company, the Union....?

RH: That gang boss. The gang boss's job really depends on the productivity that gang can do. So if his gang is not producing, they'll get someone else to be a gang boss.

JF: I think I know the answer to this question but I have to ask: are there any women?

RH: Yes there are. It took awhile for women to break the barrier. There's no women currently in the Union but they do come down and they try it. And if needed, they get the job. Sometimes their work is tedious, and they have to start – like you say, everything is by seniority, so you start inside the ship and a lot of times they don't return – but still they make the effort to come down, which is good. There's no discrimination in that aspect. Not like the old school guys.

JF: I imagine that something like that, where people work so closely together all the time – it happens anywhere – but is there some kind of joking culture that would exist: would longshoremen joke with each other in certain ways?

RH: Oh, absolutely. Of the longshoremen I know and I've worked with, I've learned more ways to crack on people's mothers than I've ever heard before in my life! They have a way of just making you laugh, making you happy. When you have down times – especially when you work frozen cargo – if it rains outside and it hits the deck and the hold inside, it's going to turn to ice, so you can't work under those conditions, so they'll close the ship up. We'll go and hang around which is called stand-by time. So we'll stand by and those are the times when people are going back and forth joking with each other, telling old stories – it's the best time I've ever experienced.

JF: So that's really the time for someone to go with a tape recorder?

RH: Absolutely! "You remember when such and such did this and that?" It was a great time, those stand-by times were the best times – especially the old timers; they had the best stories. I wish I had... unfortunately I don't. My memory span is minute. I wish – if I had known then what I know now, there would have been a tape recorder.

JF: But from what you said there is still some of them [old timers] about? So maybe what Lauren needs to do next year is hire you to do these oral histories because they would probably talk to you.

RH: Maybe, we'll see. You're doing a good job though; don't give this job out to anyone else.

JF: One day will you become a crane operator do you think?

[30:29]

RH: Hopefully yes. I'm in the mentor program work where you go up there and train with an experienced crane operator and that's how you learn. Back in the day, the company doesn't like you using the... the ships personnel doesn't like you using the ships as much. Back in the day – when I say back in the day I mean 30 years ago – we would go up there on our lunch hours and go up there and play with the crane and see if you could get some experience that way. And as the guys see how you're doing, they would let you try it. You'd go up on your regular break – every man gets a 45 minute break – and just stand there and watch the crane operator and every now and then he'd say; "Hey, you want to take one out?" And he'd let you take one out to see how you would do. And you'd gain your confidence. But the crane operator is the most stressful jobs there, because you have everybody's life in your hands. That's on the list of things to do.

JF: Do you have to have a special license; you wouldn't need a CDL, commercial license?

RH: No. There is a special criterion to be certified. You get certified by a fellow crane operator, as far as I know. It's all in the realm of the longshoremen.

JF: Does the Union own the crane?

RH: No, the crane's come with the ship; they are part of the ship. We call them winches – some are winches, some are cranes. The cranes are more mobile. Winches go from one spot to another.

JF: So this is not like the cranes you see on land?

RH: Nope, these are cranes that are on the ship itself. They look like dinosaurs, like the old dinosaurs. They just come down – drop in the hold, come back, drop it on the dock....

JF: So are the cranes pretty standard from ship to ship?

RH: Yes.

JF: So it's not like; "This is a new crane, I have no idea"?

RH: Right.

JF: It's almost like Harbor Pilot then?

RH: And a crane operator, like I said, the ship from the deck to the base is like 40-50 feet – but the crane, when you operate the crane, the crane operator goes up another 30 feet, so he's looking down. That's why I say you can't really see down into the hold. He's already 30 feet above or 20 feet above the deck itself before looking into the hold.

JF: So is he actually in like a little cabin?

RH: He's in a little cabin moving around.

JF: So he can't be afraid of heights either?

RH: No, he can't be afraid of heights!

[33:19]

JF: I suppose longshoremen, there will always be a need.

RH: I think there will be. A lot of things travel by ship and by truck and we're responsible to unload ships and to load trucks on occasion. We haven't loaded trucks in awhile; usually it's the warehouse that loaded the trucks. In the past we used to have a warehouse crew here at the State Pier and whenever we brought cargo in, we'd bring it into the warehouse and the warehouse crew would take it to the truck and the trucks would be rotated on a regular basis.

JF: So what do you know about the story of the Union getting formed? Was there something specific that caused them to do that or just conditions...?

RH: It was basically safe working conditions. These guys worked under the dangerous conditions; the Union was formed in 1936 – I know they worked well prior to that. These individuals here just decided to get together. There were maybe 30 or so got together; "we have to do something to get ourselves together – get the working conditions together". The only way you're going to do that is power in numbers. They decided to apply to have a charter to the International which granted them a charter in 1936.

JF: So International already existed?

RH: Yes, ILA already existed. Basically the ILA, International Longshoremen's Association, was mostly, if you go to all the other ports, consisted of Irish and Italians – so they ran the show. It's unique to have ports that was predominantly people of color; there's only three that I know of around in the country, maybe more now, but I know Providence and New Bedford are two of the primary ones.

JF: They granted you a charter, the Union, and then was there then a process of making the U.S. Government or the ship owners abide by what...?

RH: Now that's unclear to me.

JF: That's where the old timers would come in?

RH: The old timers would have more idea. But it had to be under that understanding. This charter that we have here in New Bedford, we call New Bedford State Pier our

jurisdiction. So if a ship comes in, by right, they come and see us to unload that ship and its been like that for years. To me, its like a given. If it came to Fall River, we had a charter in Fall River, we would be notified and then we would go over to Fall River and unload that ship.

[36:20]

JF: But were there strikes and things that had to happen in the course of the Union?

RH: Right. If they weren't hired, if the company refused to hire us, there would be pickets. If we were in a contract dispute with them, after we worked with them for awhile, there would be pickets, there would be strikes. Some strikes worked in our favors, some strikes hindered our progress. It worked well early on; in the late 70's and 80's, we had strikes, and it came back to drive ships away – that's how we lost a lot of work. We had the strikes and the ships didn't come; they went to other ports.

JF: That's interesting; so you all would strike in this port. They'd go to another port and the ILA workers there wouldn't stand by you and not... I suppose they couldn't really do that?

RH: The beef wasn't with the ILA or the ports, the beef was with the company's that are paying the ships to come in. We don't hold that against any other Local, that's work for them. But we figured if the companies did right by us, these ships would come back and that would be work for us. I guess it sometimes worked in our favors, and sometimes... that's the role of the dice on the strike sometimes.

JF: So who administers the Union; do you have managers and things that do the...?

RH: Sure, we have an Executive Board which consists of a President who's also our business agent who will go out and tries to get us more business. We also have our Vice President, also have Recording Secretary, which is the position I hold right now. We have a Treasurer and we have five Executive Board members that are chosen – everyone is chosen by the Union, or Union members. We meet once a month; we took the summer off, so we'll be back, October will be our first meeting, we'll be back trying to make things right for people on the waterfront.

JF: Maybe that's like every group; nobody really loves meetings, especially in the summer. I just have one more question, well, two sort of. One is: One of the big things that always comes up for the fishing industry, is the issue of regulations. DO you all run into things with regulations affecting how you can do your work?

RH: Basically, what we do is usually by the book; whatever we do is done correctly. OSHA always has jurisdiction over everyone as far as work environment. So they come down to check to see if everything is running correctly. Now the majority of the time, things are running correctly; if it's not running correctly, it's either the ships problem; if the company has a problem, they will let us know, we'll take care of whatever fault is ours. There's not a problem with regulations.

JF: You don't feel stifled by them the way fishermen do?

RH: No. I feel for the fishermen because they keep getting cut back and back and back. We're fortunate that we don't have to go out; the catcher boats, the load comes to us.

[39:40]

JF: Do you ever run into ships these days where the conditions are such that people don't want to go on them, or are they pretty up to standards, the ships?

RH: The ships are pretty up to standards; like I say, back in the day, there were certain ships that were just unbearable. Because you had these older ships, like a said, the bones, the ship with the bones, some of these ships would take on water and it would sit in the bottom hold. And it would just fumigate...

JF: Oh, just fester...

RH: And we couldn't even breathe right down there. There were occasions where the guys just walked off the job and said, "Look, we can't do this." And would come up and either clean it or they would offer you more money or give the gentlemen masks to wear down there, just to finish off that compartment. But a lot of times it just wasn't worth it.

JF: So I suppose it's in the ships interest to clean up their act?

RH: Right. And we haven't had ships that look that bad in a long time, but it has happened. Like I say, if you walk off a ship, you stop operations, the company is going to want to know why. We don't just do it for anything; these guys will work through a lot of different conditions; strong men as far as will is concerned.

JF: That's true; strong muscles and strong will. My last question is just what would you want the average Festival visitor who knows nothing about what you do – what would you want them to understand about your work?

RH: I would want the average person to know that the majority of the time, something that's on their plate that comes from overseas, has been moved by a longshoreman. For example, Granny Smith apples. The majority of the Granny Smith apples does not come from the United States, they come from Africa or Brazil, South America somewhere. The clementines, the majority of the clementines, that come to the United States... people don't know these things, but we unload these ships and distribute these to the trucks that take them to the supermarkets. I would just like people to know that we do move America, we are part of what makes America work and if there is some way of getting that out, it would be nice. I experienced – I went to Baltimore in the late 80's – and on their waterfront they have a little museum dedicated to the longshoremen and its up on the tower and it gives you a birds eye view of what a crane operator sees, but it's a video camera and video film so you're looking at it exactly like they see it. That's something that would be nice and would be appreciated down here. As long as America realized that we are helping in part to move America. That's all I ask.

JF: I saw a bumper sticker on someone's car in Maine that said if you use toilet paper, thank a logger. From now on I'm going to eat my Granny Smith apples I'm going to think of this. Well thank you so much.