

Name of person interviewed: Paul Lane [PL]

Facts about this person:

Age:

Sex: Male

Occupation: Shore Captain

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

Home port: New Bedford

Residence (Town where lives): Fairhaven, MA

Ethnic Background: Sicilian

Interviewer: Markham Starr

Transcriber: Laura Orleans

Place interview took place: Fairfield Inn, Working Waterfront Festival

Date and time of interview: September 26, 2010

**Abstract:**

Paul Lane works for Fleet Fisheries Inc. as the Marine Operations Manager and Safety Officer. Prior to this he was the Shore Captain. Currently, he is responsible for attending council meetings, handling licensing and permitting and running safety trainings. He describes the company which is a family owned and operated company including a fleet of boats, a processing house, a wholesale fish market. He talks about the current controversy over permit stacking which is causing tension in the industry. He tells a funny story about a safety drill gone awry.

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Key Words: stacking; oil spill; regulations; safety; family business

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3:00-6:00 growing up on waterfront, description of Fleet Fisheries Corporation

6:00-9:00 describes job at Fleet; discusses permit stacking issue

9:00-12:00 description of Lars Vinjerud CEO of Fleet; impact of having commercial fishing in popular culture (on television and in movies)

12:00-15:00 Linda Greelaw; description of company; family business

15:00-18:00 regulations; permit stacking; how Fleet crews work on multiple boats

18:00-21:00 Fleet's fish market; impact of oil spill on shrimp fishery; diversity of Fleet's operation

21:00-24:00 Value of giving tours to the public; safety drills

24:00-27:00 funny story of safety drill gone awry; industry funded research; stacking issue dividing industry

27:00-End closing; value of book – Voices from the Waterfront

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MS Jim Kendall didn't show up so...

PL I'm a lot better looking than Jim Kendall...

MS Is that right?

PL He's ugly, he's a ugly bastard.

MS How's your voice? Is it better?

PL My voice is better than Jim Kendall's too. No Jim's an old friend.

MS Yeah, no he thought it was at ten, so but we've got other people scheduled so I'm just going to run as separate recording here

PL I hope my voice holds out. Well I already talked all day yesterday and I'm getting a little hoarse now, yeah.

MS Ok Well we'll start right in just because time is short. I'm Mark Starr and we're here at the New Bedford waterfront fishing festival in 2010 and we're doing a quick interview with Mr. Paul Lane who works for

PL Fleet Fisheries

MS Fleet Fisheries, sorry I had forgotten that. So if you could just start by stating your name and when and where you were born.

PL Ok, when I got up this morning I was still Paul Lane I was born in Fall River which is you know 15 or 20 miles from here, but I've spent my entire life in Fairhaven. I had a career with the Shell Oil Company, was unhappy left it, came back to the fishing industry and worked in shore support [phone ringing] and uh worked in shore support and have been able to earn a living doing what I enjoy so I'm a very fortunate person, I guess that's the best way of putting it.

The industry is, I've watched the industry come from you know just about being destitute to being back on its feet. I'm a person that's been around so long your clothes are back in style you know? But it's a wonderful industry to work in. It's, what's the best way of putting it? I guess its independent people that really enjoy what they do for the most part. We could all do a lot of other things, we choose to do this. I mean my degree is actually in business management. I started out wrenching engine parts, you know and rebuilding engines and general maintenance and I just enjoyed working with my hands and for the past four years now I've been in an office and that's been a pretty big adjustment for me.

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Conducted by Mark Starr; Transcribed by Laura Orleans

MS Was your family in fishing at all or any connection to the...

PL Yes my mother was a Pareezi, and that is a Sicilian fishing family since forever. My father would go back and forth between the fishing industry and tug boats so we've always been on the waterfront. I mean as a kid I painted pen boards for ten cents a piece and unloaded lobsters, you know.

3:00

The waterfront even as a kid, if you could do a man's work you would get a man's wage and you know like ten cents a pen board doesn't sound like much but you know you paint a few hundred of 'em and you made a day's pay. So the industry has always been a good place to earn a good, a decent living. I mean, we've had our years when you didn't know what Christmas was gonna look like, but now through the efforts of the government and the industry and the industry banding together into organizations like the Fisherman's Survival Fund, we're able to fund research now so the industry works better as a group now. And that we never had.

Everybody used to be a lot more independent. I find everybody now is much more businesslike. My generation got the education that our parents, most of 'em didn't get, you know? They came from large families and you went to work to help support the family. Where now, we all stress deferred gratification I guess is the term, you want better for your children so every generation gets a little smarter I guess. But it's, like I say, it's a very unique industry and it starts early in the morning and you have your afternoons to play golf so...that's probably the best way of looking at it.

MS Now Fleet does what type of fishing?

PL Fleet is a pretty diverse company, and that's one of the things I really enjoy. I'm the Marine Operations Manager and the Safety Officer for the entire company. My job now has gone to where I handle the licensing and pretty much anything government. I do all the meetings and I handle all the safety briefings and drills and I take care of all the licensing, you know.

Now Fleet, when I say diverse, Fleet has got fourteen boats in four different fisheries. They have 8 scallopers, 2 offshore lobster boats, a shrimp boat and some longliners that fish for tuna and swordfish. So keepin' it all sorted out is, the permitting is just so much, between the permitting and reports, it's a full time job with that because you have high seas permits you have federal permits, you have state permits. You have tags that you have to have to put on things like lobster traps have to have a tag with the name of the boat. You've gotta put them on every year so there's just, it never ends. And now, at least now the reporting is electronic, because every week I have to report on did we catch any fish. We're scallopers, we don't want fish. We used to send, we send in a monthly report if we don't fish.

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If you send that report in you'd think it would cover the rest of it, because we didn't go anywhere, but no I gotta go on line and you know punch in each one. At least the paper trail is lightened up. But it's really surprising with you know how much that is. It's evolved into a job, basically between that and fisheries issues. I've got four days of fisheries issues this week. So I won't even be in the office 'till next Friday. And hopefully it's a half a day.

MS When you said fisheries issues, what is that?

PL I attend all the council meetings, like we're working on leasing and stacking is a big issue right now. The industry is pretty well divided on it. And I don't, it gets voted on at next Wednesday's, so the following week we'll try to mend fences, you know. Get everybody back on the same page. But you know it doesn't get personal with most of us. Some people take it personally, but it's not, it's your job. And all of us are doing what we think is right, whether or not, who's to say, but you know everybody in that place is not gonna come out of there satisfied, I don't think anybody is. If there's three people in that entire room that are satisfied, I'd be amazed, because I know I'm not gonna get what I want. We're gonna get something, but the guys on the other side aren't gonna get what they want either. So somewhere in the middle, somebody'll be happy. I'm just not one of them I guess.

MS Now before you were doing more work-- not strictly the more office type thing and safety, you were the on shore captain.

PL I pretty much managed the maintenance and overseeing the boats and day to day to operations and maintenance of the boats themselves. But now I have the next generation of Vinjeruds coming up. When I moved into the office, I had been grooming his son to replace me. I have a network of people I deal with and that network was you know given to him so that he can continue what I started. And now it's four years later, it's his program. People don't call me anymore because I tell them to call him, you know that's his job now. If I'm on the boats it's for a safety drill or something. So the next generation of a family business. And it's funny when somebody asks you about you know, my son and you think to yourself, am I sharpening the knife that's gonna cut my throat? And I had to sit down and think long and hard and I trust my boss explicitly. We don't always agree or see eye to eye, but he's a good, caring person and yeah, I can't say I would do that for a lot of other people, but yeah I would do it for him.

9:00

And I did and I'm well taken care of. I got, like I say I've got the same complaints as everyone else. I never make too much money, you know things like that. But all in all, I can walk in his office, or go to his house and talk one on one to him at any time. So it's, he's a self-made man  
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that really hasn't changed a lot. He's a personable person. We're both big, loud and stubborn. So we've worked through that. But like I say it's a really fun business. There's something every day for you. I do miss being, the outdoors part of it you know. I walk around the plant probably 4, 5 times a day just to, just to walk.

MS Marty [sound man] actually had a question with all the fishing programs that are on TV now Deadliest Catch and all those

PL Life on the Line and Lobster Wars.

MS Right. Have you seen those? Have you watched those?

PL I actually ran a film boat for Life on the Line which was, it was comically. I mean its television. You know it's just like the movies.

MS Well Marty was actually wondering, how do you think fishermen view those programs? Are they beneficial although it's a lot of high drama in them? Do you think it's helped the industry? Hindered it?

PL I myself, I'm fortunate I mean I've got to meet people involved in all of it. Like I've got to sit down with Phil Harris and Jonathan Hillstrand and have a couple of beers. But then it's not TV personalities, it's waterfront people. And you know you're guard is let down. I think in Life on the Line, the Eagle Eye II Scotty, I worked for Malcolm for many years. I've even gone down to Puerto Rico and worked for him. Lobster Wars we unload close to some of those guys you know so we all know each other. You know like the guys on the East Coast Life on the Line, we're all personal friends. How is it perceived? I think favorable because these are people you know and you know that TV likes to build in the drama, how else would you get a guy like "Chomps" on TV. Is that what you want? This is our industry? You know five minutes of him on television you know he's a knucklehead. But it's part of it. That's the living color, that's the way it really is and that's...but I wouldn't say that's putting the industry's best foot forward, but drama of it is what people watch on TV. If, they don't want to see a happy family. That's the last thing you want. But a boat is small enough without the drama, but television wants the drama. So I think the people you know, like Linda Greenlaw, I mean Linda, I was talking to her in a hardware store.

12:00

She's a real person and I'll tell you what, she's not a fluff on there. She's the real deal. Linda Greenlaw can catch swordfish. And I think you're gonna see next year with her back on the Hannah Boden, that's gonna, that'll be a big part of next year's program because that was the boat she was on for the deadly storm. But the people on these things, they're real and I think that

is what fishermen look at and say yeah, this isn't some Hollywood thing. There's a lot of drama in it and stuff like that, but we all know those people and they're the real deal.

MS Getting back to your business now. Tell me how many people work for the company roughly.

PL Oh boy. It's gotta be over a hundred now if you include all the boats with the crews and the plant and everything. The company has grown dramatically over the past eight years that I've been there. I came on board this company and we had 8 scallopers and I think the whole unloading facility was less than ten people, that includes the secretaries and everything else. And you know 8 years later and we're in this million dollar building that's gorgeous and we're diversified into four fisheries so it has been one heck of a ride with a very positive person and that's full speed ahead. The philosophy hasn't changed a whole lot. A lot of us are doing a lot of different things and we still multitask. And like I say it's been one heck of a ride for the past eight years. I drive trailer trucks to New Jersey 3, 4 times a year. I get to do a lot of things. It's fun to be a part of something and be part of a family business to where you feel like a member of the family most of the time. We have, like any other family we have our times, but for the most part it's a fun industry, it's a fun business and I work for a fun guy.

MS Does he have other family members besides the son you mentioned.

PL The whole family's involved in the business. We have the market and he just opened Fathoms the restaurant over here so his wife's very involved in the market and the, you know he's still the king and we all know that and it's his name on your check, you know. But his wife is very involved now, his daughter does bookkeeping, his son runs the maintenance and his youngest son was fishing on some of the boats. He's been, the youngest son he's gone scalloping; he's also off-shore lobstered and stuff. They're coming up through the business which is, you know that's every parent's dream is to have your son come into your business or your family.

15:00

So that's been a big part of it. And you know what it's like for the boss' son trying to earn respect. It's not an easy task and the oldest boy Lars he's doin' well at it; he's gettin' there. He's starting to realize how big this whole thing has gone. And he's handling it a lot better. And he's earning respect and that's gonna all help out. I think that down the road he'll be fine.

MS The crews for the boats, is there, do you have separate crews for every boat? Do they jump from boat to boat or multiple crews for boats?

PL Well it all depends what fisheries we're talking about. With the scallopers, that's why we're so interested in this stacking or leasing thing. You have a multi-million dollar investment that can only work 90 days a year. So we basically, each crew works two boats. Now fishermen by nature are hardworking people. They don't want to stay at home. They want to work. And so if we didn't put 'em on two boats, they'd go work on a job on another boat and we might lose them. So the crews pretty much stay together, but they'll fish two boats. Where the other fisheries fish year round so the off-shore lobsterboats, the crew don't, they don't change much. And neither do the longliners or the shrimp boat. The shrimp boat is a family on the boat. It was funny because when I was doing all the permits I started looking at all the last names and I'm going uh oh? You know what have we got here? Deliverance? But they're really good people to deal with. It's funny but we're to the point where I've never met the people. I deal with them on the phone. And I've never even seen the boat. But yet I handle all the licensing. You feel like, I wanna go down there and meet these people.

MS Where are they?

PL Well because of that BP oil spill, they've moved up into South Carolina right now and they're fishing up there. You know the oil spill made a mess out of everything.

MS But they were in the Gulf?

PL They were yeah. They were fishing in the Gulf. But then that all ended. The longliners move up and down the coast. They're fishing up here right now and they'll work their way down to Bermuda and stuff like that and the Carolinas for the winter. I don't know if we're gonna go back to Puerto Rico or not for the winter. And right now the (F/V) Growler is on the Grand Banks. So we fish from the Grand Banks all the way down to the Caribbean.

MS How did they decide or why did they decide to take in a shrimping boat, at such a distance?

PL Well, the world's a small place now with air freight and stuff. He got into these fisheries to guarantee the parent company product.

18:00

And we try to work the boats so that we have a constant supply from our own boats. If you walk into Fisherman's Market, chances are the scallops are off of one of our boats or the lobsters are off our boats. And we do buy from other people, but it's a different story when you walk into a fish market and you can see the people cutting your fish and stuff like that. The stuff comes right from that plant; you can watch them cut it. And the prices are good. So the market has, it's kind of showcased the building and the people that are working in it. And we've had a really good feedback from the market. I don't have much to do, I've got enough on my plate, but you know,



you walk in there or you look out the window and there's a line out the door, you know you're doing something right.

MS So he, you have your own boats and the boats come into your own plant and then you have your own fish market. Do you also sell outside or do you handle your own fish only?

PL No we're a wholesaler and that's how it all started. He, we, the company has two trucks a day that handle Logan Airport and because of the air freight the company ships almost daily to the West Coast, Florida. Our scallops have been served at the Kentucky Derby. It's a pretty diverse company because we handle everything. I mean we're not the biggest, but we try to be one of the best. And most people focus on one thing and do it really well. A good example, Eastern Fisheries--a first class operation. But they do just scallops. And they're the best at it. With us, we run the full gambit, we have scallops, we have storage for almost 50,000 pounds of live lobsters in there. Then we have the fish division. We have the swordfish and tuna department. And we also fly in fresh Halibut from Alaska in season. If the salmon's in season, we'll fly that in fresh. We also have some frozen products depending on the needs and the time of year, because you wanna have it on your shelf. So the company is into a lot of things. We're not focused on the one thing. I mean we buy scallops from other boats and the auction. But like I say, we're probably more diverse than most.

MS Do you have facilities for freezing and packaging all that?

PL Oh yes. Yes we do. We have that plant. Have you ever been to the plant? You should stop down there some time and we'll give you the tour. We do everybody else. We're really tour conscious I guess. That's another nice thing about Fleet.

21:00

I do, I get to do a lot of work with kids. Even when the Coast Guard boarding officers come down, if one of their classes comes down and tours the boats. So they get to know the industry. And we've found it, we've been doing that for about 5 or 6 years with the Coast Guard and we find that it kind of breaks down the barriers, especially in communications. 'Cause when the Coast Guard comes on board now, and the boarding officers most of them now have been through the program and when they come over the boat they say "oh yeah, I've been on the orange boats before." We're known as the pumpkin fleet because of the orange color. And the boarding officer "Oh I was on one of the orange boats..." and it breaks down the barriers gets the conversation moving. They're not looked at as the enemy so much anymore. Fishermen will always complain "Oh I got boarded by the Coast Guard, I didn't have any violations, but I got boarded by the Coast Guard." Oh ok, everything's fine, "Yeah it's alright, but I got boarded by

the Coast...” That’s fine. We do our inspections daily. Most of the safety stuff on these boats you want it working. We don’t have a need to hide some flares or something like that you know.

So you want all that stuff to work right so we do the annual inspections, we do the safety drills. It’s, you want people to respond instantly. You don’t want ‘em runnin’ around. So we do the drills constantly and a lot of question and answer stuff. We support the safety classes that they have down at Fort Rodman. It’s a wonderful thing. I mean most people don’t know the correct way to shoot off a flare.

Yeah it’s funny, but the first time I heard that I called the Coast Guard and the Fire Department and said “I’m gonna be shooting flares here” and everything else and it’s one of those things like, you know men have big egos and we have that testosterone thing, do you know how to shoot a flare? Course I do. The flare went off. It went across the deck between all of us, hit the hand rail went up in the air, went about a hundred yards and landed between a bunch of people working on another boat. So we all know the correct procedure for shooting a flare now though I can guarantee you that. And if that wasn’t bad enough they lit off a smoke flare. So they put it down and they all ran away, ‘cause now the smoke is bellowing out of it. I looked, they put it on top of the intake for the engine room. So now I grab the thing and I move it away and I open the engine room door and it was like walking into a London fog only it was orange. It took us weeks to get that out of there! We had all the exhaust fans going. It was like, you talk about a safety drill gone completely wrong, I mean, the only good part of the whole thing was nobody drowned.

24:00

But the entire drill was a disaster. It took me a long time before I tried that again. So now I encourage them going to Ford Rodman for that day long safety school because the Coast Guard comes down there, they do a damage control thing. Rodney Avila, Ted Williams from IMP go down there and they bring flares, they bring rafts so the guys get to wear survival suits, have to jump into a tank, have to get into a lifeboat or into a raft. And if you’ve never done it, it’s very awkward, because you find out you have anxieties you never knew you had.

And I just went and re-certified with the off-shore survival ‘cause my captains license, I had to upgrade some stuff, what they call an NCTW program, firefighting school ... So you put on your survival suit and you jump in the water and that’s awkward enough, but I don’t like having my face covered. Now you got to put a bunch of people into a life raft and it’s got a cover on it. I got in that life raft and there’s a guy in there bigger than me and I took one look in his eyes and I said, “why don’t you sit by the door?” And he looked at me and I says, “You’re gonna sit by the door.” “You’re right, thanks.” He was going through claustrophobia; you could see the terror in his eyes.

When I go down, like I go down usually like once a year and watch the class because you can always learn something. You know I've been an instructor since '92 and when I took it we had to jump in the canal at the Mass Maritime between the ship and the dock. So you actually got to jump off something. It was about a ten foot drop. Course I was a lot younger then and boy it was fun. Now I dread it. I gotta do this again?

Like I say the industry takes much better care of itself now and a lot of, most of the, we do our own research now, industry funded. Most of the scallopers on the East Coast now are part of the Fisherman's Survival Fund. We do our research, it pays for our legal fees and to me this is the first time in my lifetime that I see the industry banded together. So when I was telling you earlier you know we're gonna go through this stacking and leasing thing, the industry is very well divided on this. And next week we're gonna spend a lot of time mending fences and keeping everybody, get focused on what's good for the industry and all of us. Right now the feelings are a little strained, but we'll be fine.

27:00

MS Great. We'll thank you very much. We appreciate you coming in on such a short notice. I'm sorry it's such a short time. But it's great to have some of this down. Hopefully we can get you back.

PL Yeah. Short notice, short notice is

MS How you work!

PL Yeah well. Kirsten Bendiksen is good for short notice. I love her to death, but it's like, can you come help me, in a panic mode. And Laura, Laura pulled it on me today, so. It's alright, I don't mind you know I'm here anyway.

MS Well we really appreciate it.

PL Well I have to say that I, I've been approached by numerous people; people have knocked on my door about the book [VOICES FROM THE WATERFRONT published by the Working Waterfront Festival].

MS Oh Yeah? Good!

PL Yeah. And the book was so well received it's been amazing. I have people stopping me on the street and everything else. It's really been uh, it was something that was really worth doing.

MS Well you guys have been so nice about letting people on your boat and encouraging. And I think it really does make a huge difference in the industry. Because the more people understand,

it's not that they don't want to, it's they don't usually have the opportunity. And I think getting that opportunity is a large part of

PL It's great being able to give something you really enjoy and love a positive image. And it starts with the city and the towns and the people. There are some, where else could you meet a Carlos Rafael. Have you ever spent any time with Carlos?

End of Tape