

Name of person Interviewed: Kaare Ness [KN]

Facts about this person:

Age: 70+

Sex: Male

Occupation: Owns seafood processing/distributing company

Home port: Seattle

Residence: Seattle

Ethnic background: Norwegian

Interviewer: Millie Rahn [MR]

Transcriber: Sarah Smith

Place interview took place: Harbormaster's Office

Date and time of interview: September 23, 2005

### INDEX / KEYWORDS

**KEYWORDS:** Norway; Alaska; Seattle; scallops; processing company; fishermen's memorial; king crab; North Pacific Fisheries Council; Narragansett stern dragger

[00:00] Came from Norway in 1955; lived in New Bedford/Fairhaven for thirteen years; moved to Alaska in 1968; moved to Seattle in 1969

[01:53] Had a boat on West Coast; went to Alaska to check it out; met some people who were scalloping; they got forty thousand dollars together; he moved out there and chartered for a bit until he could scallop; found quite a few scallops; 1968 was a bad year for New Bedford; eighteen boats came from New Bedford to Alaska for scallop fishery; scallops were never very big; went into king crab fishery; partners bought him out

[04:30] First four boats out there were his boat, two owned by his partner, and one belonging to a relative; the rest of the boats came on their own; most of the New Bedford boats came back after four or five years; a few older boats sank out there; he built a boat in Seattle for king crab in 1971; fished king crab until he retired

[06:52] Family were fishermen in Norway; Norway was seasonal fishery; Norway wasn't great in 1950s so they saw America as land of opportunity; came from island of Karmøy; hundreds had come to New Bedford before him so he was familiar; his uncle had moved here; his dad had fished here; father traveled to New Bedford in the spring and went home in December; herring fishery in Norway started in January; guys would come back after herring season

[08:50] Changes have been unreal; mostly older boats when he moved here; in 1955 they were all wooden boats, no steel boats; in early 1960s the Narragansett stern dragger was introduced; much more comfortable because on the old boats the guys were all doing everything in the same space; Northwest has changed a lot; he has no family still fishing; some of his family is still in Norway

[11:16] Had a close call on Georges Bank; shucking scallops when a big wave washed him overboard; he doesn't remember getting back on the boat; he went back to fishing on the same boat; he only missed one trip because he was in the hospital; fished herring, cod, pollock in Norway; fished herring in the winter in Norway and fished cod in the summer off Iceland

[13:25] Comes back to the area regularly; goes to Boston Seafood show in March; runs Trident Seafoods, which has lots of products; catch, process, and sell fishery products; 1981 was his last year of fishing; he and his partner were both fishermen so they have a better relationship with fishermen

[16:13] West Coast fisheries in much better shape than East Coast; they had fish still when they started managing; tough to manage here; North Pacific council does outstanding job; hard to build back depleted fisheries here; guys don't go out to the West Coast from here because it's too hard to enter fishery; fishery already divided up into quotas and too expensive to buy in; somebody from the west may move out here to fish underutilized herring and mackerel

[18:40] Had thirteen great years in New Bedford; thought this was the greatest place on earth when they moved here; they have a big festival coming up in Seattle; his company is very involved in that; they have a place for kids to build little skiffs at the festival which is very popular; they should try that here; should have a fishermen's memorial on the waterfront; they have one in Seattle and it's very active

[22:15] They need some leaders to work on it; they had a memorial in Karmøy with 102 names of fishermen who had died in the U.S. since 1900

[24:20] They can use the festival to raise money for a memorial; they have 600 names on the memorial in Seattle; they have a scholarship foundation in Seattle as part of the memorial foundation where they have \$400,000 for scholarships; they have an auction every year to raise money; get a lot of support;

[26:42] Has to go back to Seattle for an auction for the Nordic museum; good to get kids involved in the festival to learn more about the waterfront

## TRANSCRIPT

[00:00]

MR: Um, I'm just going to ask you some background information and... today is... Friday, September 23, 2005. This is the second interview that I, Millie Rahn, folklorist and oral historian, am doing today, here in the Harbormaster's Office on the Pier 3 in New Bedford, and I'm with Kaare Hess – Ness, I'm sorry – Kaare Ness... who is quite a legend here in New Bedford, and we are very lucky that he just happens to be back in town this weekend, so, if you could give me a little bit of background information, your name, where you're from, where you were born, how you... became a citizen and with New Bedford, and then, we were just talking in the previous interview about your going out west and what you've been doing out there. So...

KN: Well... uh, my name is Kaare Ness, I'm a... I, um, I was an immigrant from Norway in 1955, and lived in New Bedford/Fairhaven area for... for, um... thirteen years. We moved our address, we moved from here way up to Alaska in 1968, we came down from Alaska in 1969, and... and, uh, moved down to Seattle, and we've been in Seattle ever since, which is a lot of years now.

MR: Yes.

KN: Mmm hmm.

MR: And you said you, um... you were talking about taking your boat out to the west, and could you talk a little bit about how you decided to go out to Alaska?

[01:53]

KN: Yup. Well I had a boat out on the West Coast, and he was in the King Crab fishery out there. I made a trip out there in uh... 1966 to see what it looked like, and I could see there was a lot of opportunities there, but of course I had a boat there and didn't exactly want to sell it, so I was looking at-at some way of maybe getting out there with the boat, uh, I met some people in Kodiak, Alaska on my way back, and there was a boat there that was doing little scallop fishing, bringing scallops in in the shell, so I was talking to some fish buyers as I'm already very interested in getting out there, maybe they would be able to get over to the state of Alaska and uh... and the National Marine Fisheries put some money together and get me out there, so after I came back home here to New Bedford, I get – I get words from them that they had gotten forty thousand dollars together, so if I were ready to get out there on my own, and do a charter for forty days, they would come up with the forty thousand dollars but they was committed for forty days after I get there... which was pretty risky, uh, in one way when I think of it, but uh, it was also a way of getting there, I thought, well, if I get there... I... I know we can always get into something that we could... if scallop didn't work out, I felt that we could, uh... make out in other fisheries, especially the king crab fishery. So we got out there, did the charter, found some scallops, in fact we found quite a bit in some areas, and this is

1968, before that year was over, the rumors went, you know, New Bedford wasn't too productive in – in '68, and before 1968 was over there was eighteen boats that came from New Bedford up to Alaska, although it never really turned out to be a big fishery, that summer was thought it was going to be, I only fished in it for about a year, and I – and I sold out, and uh, I built like king crab boats, so... I wasn't in it too long out there, but my partners bought me out and I started in the king crab instead.

[04:30]

MR: Did you actually recruit those eighteen boats to come out? Did you...?

KN: Huh?

MR: Did you set up those eighteen boats to come out or did they just hear about the fishery out there?

KN: No, I had nothing to do with them...

MR: Nothing to do...

KN: ...or the boats, they came on their own, although I was – I was partner with uh... with a man Eddie Lowe, and he had two of the other boats that came out there. Two of the first ones that came, and then there was a relative of mine that also came, so the- the first three boats that came after us, they were, two of the three were – were my partners. After they got out there, the four boats, four original boats, we – we kind of made it into one company, so we were partners in all of the boats.

MR: Ah hah...

KN: Of four partners, yeah.

MR: And they were – they were doing scalloping when they went out?

KN: They were all doing scalloping when they came from here, and the ones that followed the four original ones they also did scallops... some of 'em did scallops over a... more than probably four or five years, and some 'em fell off little by little.

MR: And, you were saying that most of them came back.

KN: Well, quite a few of them came back, eh, I think a couple of 'em, uh, a couple of 'em, they sunk out there, a couple of the older boats, but also a quite a few of 'em came back here... uh... maybe, I don't know exactly when, maybe in around 1971, some of 'em left and came back here, yeah.

MR: And what did you go on to do?

KN: Then I went on to fishing king crab, really... I, I built a boat down in Seattle, a new boat, built just for king crab in 1971, so, I did king crab for many, many years, myself, before I kind of, um, retired.

[06:52]

MR: Were your family fishermen, in Norway?

KN: Yeah, they were kind of a combination fishing and whatever little other work you could find, it was mostly season fishing in Norway, hailing on the coast, and hailing up in Iceland, and uh, so there was – so a lot of time in between, there was really nothing to do. I did fishing myself in Norway uh, for five years before I came here... and, uh, Norway was... back in the mid-50s the... that wasn't all that great to be. So we saw, we looked on uh... on America as the land of opportunities for us.

MR: So, as – as America being the land of opportunity, how did you choose New Bedford?... How did you decide to come to New Bedford?

KN: Well, we came from this island of Karmøy... and uh... there was maybe hundreds of them that had left for New Bedford before me – I did, so... we were very familiar with – with the name New Bedford, we had never been there but, I had an uncle that left Norway in nineteen – 1928, and he ended up there in Fairhaven too, or in the New Bedford area, so... and my dad was over here before me...

MR: Did he ever move here, your father?

KN: No, he never moved here...

MR: He just fished here, okay.

KN: He – he – he traveled forth and back every year for the years he was there he came – came here in the spring and went back home in December again, so they fished from spring till December, and some of 'em went herring fishing over there, which usually started in January, and when herring fishing was over they came back here again.

[08:50]

MR: Wow... Amazing... What are some of the changes that you've seen... in the fishery, um, in your life time?

KN: Oh, man... that is almost unreal you know the way it has changed, for uh... for instance when I came here in, uh, '55, it was mostly older boats and I – I think they were all wooden boats, I don't think there was one steel boat here...

MR: Wow...

KN: ...at the time. Then, uh, I don't know when, probably in the... early sixties, they built the little, uh, stern dragger... down in Rhode Island called the Narragansett, and that

was probably the first first... steel boat that was around here was the Narragansett, I think. It was all wooden boats, very old and not – not much... comfort to be on, because you see the scallop boats they were... eleven, sometimes twelve man... and, uh, they all lived up forward in the foc'sle, all the cooking was going on there, and, that's where you slept, and that's where you woke up, and that's where you doing eating, and so that was... not nice convenience on the boats...

MR: And that's really change now.

KN: You wouldn't believe it, ya, it's changed a lot, ya. Especially, it probably changed more out west than it has here I think.

MR: Hmmm!

KN: But I'm talking about west, I'm talking about West Coast.

MR: Right... especially the Northwest coast, right?

KN: Ya, Northwest, yes.

MR: Do you have any family that are still fishing?

KN: Uh... no, no lady, I don't have any family that is fishing, no, no.

MR: Okay.

KN: Neither here or in Norway, I still have some family in Norway, but they're not fishing either.

[11:16]

MR: So, did you have any close calls when you were fishing?

KN: Oh, ya, I had one very close call on Georges Bank.

MR: What happened?

KN: Uh, we were uh, we were running on our way home and we had a deck load of scallops. And the weather was not good at all, we were working on deck, and uh, I was on the shucking box, shucking scallops. A big wave came and before I knew it I was overboard. I was so close that I can't even remember when I was picked up.

MR: Wow...

KN: So that – that would be what I would – would call a miracle.

MR: And – and you still went back out afterwards?

KN: Huh?

MR: You still went back fishing afterwards?

KN: Oh, ya, well, I think I took off one trip because I ended up in the hospital, I get some trouble in my stomach, so I was only a... on the beach for one trip and I went back fishing, ya. Same boat.

MR: Wow... because some people say when they've had a close call like that, they won't go back again.

KN: Ya, it didn't affect me, although it was a close call, but I never thought of not going fishing again.

MR: Hmm... did you ever fish in Norway?

KN: Ya, I fished in Norway, I fished – I fished herring, and cod fish, pollock, and... but mostly herring. We fished herring in the wintertime on the Norwegian coast and in the summertime we used to go up to Iceland and fish herring.

[13:25]

MR: So, is this the first time you've been back in New Bedford for awhile, or do you come back...?

KN: Oh, no, no...

MR: ...regularly?

KN: ...I'm here, uh... quite often, I...

MR: Ah hah...

KN: I'm uh, I'm uh yearly in uh March, because I go to the Boston Seafood show...

MR: Oh yes!

KN: ...because our company has a stand up there every year.

MR: And, what company is that?

KN: That's Trident Seafoods.

MR: Okay... and is that... what do you, um, promote?

KN: Eh?

MR: What – what products do you have?

KN: Well... if would be better if you asked what product we didn't have.

MR: Okay. [laughs]

KN: Because I think we have them all, ya.

MR: So... you got out of the actual fishing, and now you're doing processing and... is that it? Yup...

KN: We do catching, processing, and selling of fishery products, yes, uh huh. So I – last year I fished was probably in 1981, I think was my last fishing year.

MR: Does it help to have been a fisherman to then go into selling the product? Does it make a difference?

KN: I think it did in our case, because my partner, he was also a fisherman, and uh... I think by being a fisherman going into processing and selling of product I – I think you have a better relationship with the fishermen, because after all they are, the fishermen are your most important resource.

MR: Right.

KN: Ya. So I think uh, by being a fisherman of trade, I think I was – I'm almost sure it would help. Lay it on, ya.

MR: Cause they know that you know what goes into that job, yup.

[16:13]

MR: What do you think is the future of the fishery? East Coast or West Coast?

KN: Oh, West Coast I think is in much, much, much better shape than the East Coast. The reason I say that, we had a resource when they started managing the resource. Here the resource are very depleted, and it's hard enough for them to manage a – that's more resource they have, I'm talking, especially around fish now, not so much on scallops, but on fish for sure. Because we had a resource that... when they started to manage, and they have been doing an outstanding job managing the fisheries on the North Pacific Council.

MR: Hmm... Do you think there is a future here on the East Coast for the fishery?

KN: There – there is a future but it's going to take a long time to build back the resources that is very, very depleted, ya.

MR: Hmm... Do you see any people from here in the East coming West?



KN: Not anymore I don't think...

MR: No... okay...

KN: ...because uh, uh... the cake out west is all divided up, and for people from here to get in... it... of course you can get in, but it takes a tremendous amount of money to get in. If you're going to buy the fish quotas and all of that stuff it's just really expensive... uh, that's why I – I really don't see anybody moving from here to there.

MR: Okay. And certainly probably nobody from there is going to move here.

KN: No, I don't think so, unless they uh... there could be some maybe that's look – that you had the herring and mackerel here that's not fully utilized...

MR: Mm hmm...

KN: Here's maybe a possibility that maybe – maybe somebody from there would look at that and come this way, but... I'm not sure.

[18:40]

MR: What are some of the other things that you'd like to say about New Bedford and the fishery, or the fishery in general?

KN: Oh, well then I guess that be, we lived there thirteen years, we had thirteen wonderful years in this area, we had a lot of friends, still have some, of course a lot of the old timers, they're gone, but... we were very satisfied, the years when we lived here. We thought when we came from Norway this was the greatest place on earth which it was for us. After I made a trip out west to take a look at it, I think I made a good move by moving from here. Because the future, for me at least, was better out there.

MR: Yeah. Do the fishermen out there have festivals like this one...?

KN: Ya!

MR: ...and talk about their industry?

KN: Good thing you asked that question because we have a big festival coming up, somewhere around the tenth of next month.

MR: Uh huh...

KN: ...which goes on for three days.

MR: Ah hah! In Seattle?

KN: ...which is pretty big. In Seattle, ya, mm hmm. Ya. So that's coming up next for us.

MR: And are you in...?

KN: And uh, and they've been going on for years out there, there's nothing new.

MR: Okay. Are you involved in that?

KN: Our company is very much involved, ya.

MR: Okay. Try to...

KN: Very much involved. And we have something that may be worthwhile here, they have a lot of things for kids, like uh... oh, they have the guys coming in and painting people and... but our company for year have had, uh, two by four put out like a – like a skiff...

MR: Uh huh...

KN: And they can put masts on, there's nails there, they can rig 'em up with a sail...

MR: Ah!

KN: And they're so popular, there's hundreds of kids that stop by, you know, to make them little boats out of two by four that is put out like a skiff, which I think would be great here to get some of the kids involved.

MR: Well, I will pass that along to Laura, because, um...

KN: Ya, why don't you do that?... Ya, because there's a lot of things they can do for the kids, I see in Seattle there's so much kids coming around it's almost unreal.

MR: Well, you know, this is only the second year...

KN: Yeah, uh huh...

MR: And... every year – this is the second year, but already this year there's been some new things added. I think that's a great suggestion because...

KN: Ya, ya...

MR: ...you're looking at future consumers, you're getting kids interested in a potential... you know, work, certainly to appreciate what goes into the fish that they eat...

KN: I think there's another thing here, although I've seen it off and on in the papers, they've been talking about it, but I don't think they're getting it off the ground, and that is a fisherman's memorial. We have one in Seattle and the – the thing is so active that's it's just unbelievable. I thought here if they had – could – could get some key people together to get that thing going, because... they have it up in the – in the church here, but, I think what they need is a fisherman's memorial down on the waterfront someplace.

MR: Yes.

[22:15]

MR: Well, you know, it's interesting you say that because... you know, I was telling you that I lived in Newfoundland for awhile, and a couple years ago, there are no fisherman's memorials in Newfoundland, and a couple years ago a few fishermen came down to Gloucester...

KN: Ya, ya, uh huh...

MR: ...and, I was with them and, they met with various groups there and, they were going to start a fundraising campaign to start a fishery memorial up there, because a lot of the names that are on the monument now in the Gloucester waterfront were New Foundlanders.

KN: Oh ya, ya, uh huh, ya....

MR: And there's nothing there, in some ways... it's almost like... this is – the fishery has been so much a part of New Bedford life that people don't think about it, you know, because everybody has a story about their family...

KN: Oh, absolutely, ya ya...

MR: ...or their neighbors, and... things like that. But I think that's a great idea. And this could be a good way to, um... to raise money too.

KN: Ya... I think they can raise the money if they can find somebody, some leaders to push it on, takes some good leaders to get it going, but... I – I – I firmly believe, you know, that they could get it going there if they wanted to, ya... ya... we, uh, we put up a fisherman's memorial togeth – also on the West Coast and uh, people here in New Bedford... back home counted, I remember we came from, and from 1900... I think there's one person in 1899, and there's a hundred and two names on the fishermen's memorial in Karmøy that...

MR: And how do you...?

KN: ...that lost their lives in U.S.

MR: Huh!

KN: They all lost their lives in U.S. Hundred and two names. Fishermen, only fishermen is on there.

MR: Wow.

[24:20]

MR: And how do you spell Karmøy?

KN: Huh?

MR: How do you spell the name of that island?

KN: Karmøy. K – A – R – M – Ø – Y. Over in Norway they have an Ø which is an O with a...

MR: Oh, right...

KN: Ya...

MR: Okay. I'll look it up in the map when I go home.

KN: Ya, that's a just a bit outside of, north of Storvejno (?)...

MR: I think that's an excellent suggestion and...

KN: Oh...

MR: That could be something that... this festival could be very instrumental in doing.

KN: That's what I was thinking of, this festival is going to be an ongoing thing, that is one thing they could put on the agenda, raise some money and... get a fisherman's memorial going.

MR: Absolutely.

KN: Ya... we – we have six hundred names on the fisherman's memorial in Seattle, over six hundred. And, uh, five years ago, we started a scholarship fund within the – within the memorial foundation, and they award four hundred thousand dollars in the scholarship fund.

MR: Wow...

KN: They gave a big thing every fall, where they have an auction, and a lot of people give things to the auction, and a lot of people bid, way above what is worth of course, and... and it's meant to be for – for kids, wives, or uh... close relatives of the deceased

fishermen. And we have had people that has graduated from college out of that scholarship fund already.

MR: That's wonderful...

KN: And there's over four hundred thousand dollars in there, to be used.

MR: That – that is wonderful.

KN: The – the backing for the scholarship fund was unreal, how much it was backed, by the whole industry and private.

MR: That's amazing.

KN: And it's, right here too, we talking the fishing ind... there's a lot of industry on the beach that is part of the fishing industry, like the fish buyers and the suppliers and... so... so, so for me if – that is one thing that is lacking here in New Bedford is that memorial for the fishermen.

MR: You're right.

KN: And they have a lot of waterfront where they can put one up...

[26:42]

MR: I just noticed you're wearing your Trident shirt.

KN: Ya, ya. [laughs]

MR: [laughs] Good thinking, a good business man, always advertising. Now you said you're not going to be able to stay for the whole weekend?

KN: No, we are leaving tomorrow morning.

MR: Leaving tomorrow...

KN: I would love to be here, but...

MR: Aww...

KN: I have to be home on Sunday and the reason I have to be home on Sunday, in... in Seattle there's a museum...

MR: Right...

KN: ...that is, they call it the Nordic here, the museums, and there's five countries, the Nordic countries, there's five.

MR: Right...

KN: There's Iceland, Finland, Denmark, Sweden, and... and Norway. And they have their yearly auction on Sunday. They have an auction like where everybody gets together to raise money. Otherwise I probably would have been through Sunday, ya.

MR: So you have to be there, um... well, we'll get you next year.

KN: Yeah, mm hmm...

MR: We'll get you running the children's program, starting the pitch for the memorial...

KN: Yeah, maybe, that'd be... I think that'd be a terrific thing to get some kids involved... families, bring 'em down on the waterfront and they get to know... know a little more about fishing, and...

MR: Well, and part of it is talking to people like you who... have... seen fishing in different countries, and been involved in, you know, taking it from the boat into your processing company, and, you know, you have such a perspective in other parts of the states, and... Norway, um... okay... is there anything else that you want to say?

KN: No, I think we cov...

MR: Okay.

KN: ...I think we covered most of that with...

MR: Well, I want to say thank you very much, and I'm going to turn this off...  
[28:52 – END]