Name of person interviewed: Dr. Leonard Roche [LR]

Facts about this person:

Age: 73

Sex: Male

Occupation: Retired fisherman, school principal

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

Home port: New Bedford

Residence (Town where lives): New Bedford, MA

Ethnic Background: Newfoundland

Interviewer: Madeleine Hall-Arber

Transcriber: Laura Orleans

Place interview took place: Fairfield Inn, Working Waterfront Festival

Date and time of interview: September 25, 2010

Abstract:

Dr. Leonard Roche is a retired fisherman who had a simultaneous career as an educator and school principal. He got his start lumping and was later involved in working with Gerry Studds to draft the Studds-Magnuson Bill he was also active representing the fishing industry on several organizations (Boat Owners United; Northwest Atlantic Fisheries Treaty Organization). Of Newfoundland descent, he describes the relationship between the fishing communities in Newfoundland and New Bedford. He talks about the creation of the auction as a means to end price fixing; corruption of the fish dealers; the strike; dissolution of the unions and more recent changes in the industry particularly the trend towards corporatization.

INDEX:

Keywords: union; lumper; groundfishing; 200 mile limit; regulations; Boat Owners United; Newfoundland; codfish; Fish Mary; foreign factory ships

000-3:00 UMD interview collection from 1970s; family background; Canadian history

3:00-6:00 Newfoundland economy encouraged emigration in 20s and 30s; describes own industry background

6:00-9:00 Representative of Northwest Atlantic Fisheries Treaty Organization; insights into history of regulations and politics; work on Studds-Magnuson bill/200 mile limit

9:00-12:00 Father worked in seasonal fisheries groundfishing in MA and trap fishing for cod in Newfoundland; Combining own career in education with fishing; fishing culture

12:00-15:00 Siblings didn't go fishing; Sister became a blacksmith; work as a lumper; Fish Mary

15:00-18:00 Story of Fish Mary putting a curse on a Captain; shoal fishing; changes in technology; old methods of navigation

18:00-21:00 working the hold; typical trips

21:00-24:00 size of fish in old days; Boat Owners United; foreign factory ships

24:00-27:00 role of skipper; log books with fudged bearings; owner operators vs. fleet owners; Seafood Producers Association

27:00-30:00 story of rogue sea; unusual catches

30:00-End changes in industry; drugs tarnishing the reputation of fishermen;

Conducted by Madeleine Hall-Arber; Transcribed by Laura Orleans

Tape 2

000-3:00 Changes in industry in late 1970s early 1980s (drugs, introduction of corporate fleets). Industry as one of last places that an immigrant can work his way up without a formal education; concerns regarding licensing limiting the entry of new people into industry

3:00-6:00 Best years of industry; importance of having an education to fall back on; corporatization of industry

6:00-9:00 share system; superstitions; women in industry; strike; corruption of dealers (scales)

9:00-12:00 more on corruption of dealers; strike

12:00-15:00 disintegration of union; union rules as related to conservation

15:00-18:00 role of auction, early years; price fixing; how auction worked in old days; recreational boats

18:00-21:00 lack of City support for industry in past; over-regulation; scallop industry;

21:00-24:00 impact of seal population (due to conservation) on cod resource; fish farming

24:00-27:00 navigation w/out radar, story of Uncle navigating in fog

27:00-End story of Uncle continued.

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LR I don't know if I, if this means anything to you, but at UMASS Dartmouth there's a lot of raw data out there that I used to do interviews back in the early 70s with fishermen from different areas. So the raw data is out there.

MHA Do you know where?

LR It'd be the history department I believe, it was Dr. Marty Butler was the gentlemen I gave the tapes to at that time.

MHA That's very useful to know. So what kinds of interviews were you doing?

LR Um, actually I interviewed various ethnic background fishermen and how they came here and what the fishery was like uh, and you know the whole shebang of it, idea of what fishing was like from different Nova Scotia, Norwegians, Newfoundlanders, Azoreans…

MHA Ok and about how long ago was that?

LR I'm gonna say about 1971

MHA Great.Great. Oh that's excellent because we, for the Festival we've been collecting oral histories for the last five years and so it's, if we could do some comparisons it would be really interesting. So uh, are we recording yet?

MT Yes

MHA Ok. Uh maybe you can just introduce yourself to the listeners.

LR Ok. My name is Dr. Leonard J. Roche. I live here in New Bedford. I've been here in the City since about 1938-39. Uh, my family came from Newfoundland. Uh they uh, my mother was Margaret Anne Devine from Kingman's Cove, Fromuse Newfoundland which is on the southern shore of Newfoundland near Cape Race. My father was Gerald A. Roche who came from Renews, Newfoundland. Uh, the Newfoundlanders were predominant in the fisheries here, back in the 30s, 40s and 50s. Uh, you often wonder why they left such a beautiful country as Newfoundland, uh, but back in the, after World War I the Newfoundland became almost a economic basket case.

And people don't realize it but it was an independent country. It was the dominion of Newfoundland until 1949. Just like there was the Dominion of Canada. And they gave up their dominion status because of a lot of economic problems. The economic problems came about because in World War I Newfoundland like all the commonwealth nations under England were

required to pay an assessment of the cost of World War I. The Dominion of Canada had its assessment and the Dominion of Newfoundland had theirs.

3:00

Unfortunately Newfoundland was such a poor country, the price of fish at the time was so low coming with the depression that they became an economic basket case. They were not able to afford their assessment. 1933, they gave up responsible government and there was a commission of governments set up by England that ruled Newfoundland until they joined Canada in 1949. The end result of all this was starting in the 20s, a lot of the young people of Newfoundland could not survive economically on the island. Even though there was plenty of fish, they couldn't get any money for the fish.

My father as a case had the SHAMROCK, a schooner called the SHAMROCK and he had to give that up and come up to the states. A lot of 'em went to Brooklyn, New York and worked with the boss of the Fulton Fish Pier which was one of the largest fish piers in the world. The others went to Boston and worked out of the Boston fish pier, living in South Boston and Dorchester. The New Yorkers lived in the Bayridge, Brooklyn, not far from the fish piers. A lot of them came up seasonally to work for the season and then returned home using the money to survive there. A lot of them stayed here and never went home.

My father went back and forth a number of times starting in 1923 and then in 1937 somewhere, I was born in '37, we came here and stayed here permanently. And most of them, as I said, they were in New York and Boston, eventually they moved from there. The people from New York went to places like New London, Connecticut to fish from there and the people from Boston, and they eventually ended up in Nantucket. Nantucket, at that time, had a large fleet of small fishing draggers that worked from the island because it was close to the fishing grounds. Unfortunately, the cost of getting ice and transporting fish was too much so they ended up coming to New Bedford.

So, in the 30s and 40s you saw a great influx of Newfoundlanders, Norwegians and they combined with the Azoreans made this fishing industry what it is today, the largest fishing industry in the United States. Like all young Newfoundland families, I ended up on the waterfront as a fish lumper, that's what you usually started out as. From there I went, became a fisherman and from there a boat owner and eventually, later in the fisheries, back in the 60s and 70s and in addition to that I became an educator, spent 35 years as a school principal in New Bedford, the inner city schools. And I fished for many of those years.

I did both inshore lobstering and off shore dragging. My wife is from Newfoundland, she's a Catigan from Logan Bay. And we have five children all grew up in this City and all educated in this City.

6:00

The fisheries back in the 70s, I was the, industry representative on the Northwest Atlantic Fisheries Treaty Organization for the U.S. Delegation. And in those days, we wanted regulation of fisheries, but we couldn't get it. The treaty organization's purpose was supposedly to provide quotas and preserve the species. Unfortunately its real purpose was to use fisheries as a pawn in international politics.

For instance, the Danes wanted to get into the salmon fishery, they were experts on clobbering salmon long before they came ashore. So in trade for a navy base in Denmark, they got the salmon. And that's the type of thing that was happening with it. The Russians had a huge fleet out here and they were clobbering everything taking every species. The Russian Ambassador once told me that the purpose for their being here was to get protein. And twenty years from now, meaning in the early 70s they would not need the fisheries anymore because they would get their protein from other sources. So they really didn't care what happened to the fishery. So we were up against that type of thing in our dealings.

Eventually we had a young man come down to the waterfront tell us that he was going to run for congress. And that was Gary Studds, and we took him around to the waterfront, to the boats, introduced him to fishermen. In my office, we sat down and wrote what became the original Studds-Magnuson Bill Extension, you know the 200 mile fisheries limit. And all of the work for getting that through Congress was not done by expensive lobbyists, it was done by a bunch of us lobster fishermen from Maine, Chesapeake oyster fishermen, myself and a few others. And we learned how to go to Washington and talk to the assistants to the congressmen and the senators and they're the ones that took our information and eventually in 1977, the bill was passed. The 200 mile limit was passed. Let's see, I'm is there anything else [laughter] I've tried to cover a lot of things.

MHA Oh it's just fascinating. It's hard to know where to start. What, you said that you were born here?

LR I was born in Melrose, Massachusetts, my father was up here fishing in the season, in Boston.

MHA And what was the season? What was the fishing season in those days? I'm sorry. What was the season?

9:00

LR The season, actually they went by the Newfoundland season, which summers, they had the trap fishery in Newfoundland and so they would come up here and fish in the winter in the states. And if they were going back, they would be back in Newfoundland for the summer, the spring and summer fishery.

MHA And what were they trapping?

LR Uh, codfish. In those days, codfish were so plentiful they could put a basket in the water and pick one up, you know. Or if you wanted a salmon for supper you'd just run down the river and get one. Uh, very, very plentiful at that time. They only, at that time, they were getting 2 cents a pound for fish and a quarter of a cent a pound for livers, for codfish, codliver oil

MHA Right. I remember those. [laughs]

LR Well we had to have it every day. We were required.

MHA Yuck! So, um, let's see…I have a whole list of questions, but you've answered a lot of the questions already

LR That's fine.

MHA To see what I'm missing here. Um, did you always know that you wanted to go into fishing at some point?

LR Well it was something that you know my family's in fishin' for 200 years, back in the, when they first came from Ireland to Newfoundland. And it was something we always did. Now our parents always wanted us to do something different, that's why we became, my brothers and sisters became educated, formally educated. But with me it was always, I always wanted to be part of the fishery, so…even after I received my bachelor's degree, I went back to it. As a matter of fact, I became a school teacher and my first year's pay was $3800 and I fished that summer and made $7500. So I almost had no choice but to stay close to the fisheries which I did for many years.

MHA Uh huh. And you said you always wanted to end up in the fisheries, what was it about the fisheries that attracted you?

LR Actually with us it's a culture

MHA Uh huh.

LR Everything we did, everything, you know from what happened at home, how we did things, the music we had at home, the songs that they sang were always about the fishing. Everybody we dealt with was from the Newfoundland community. Your friends were probably children of Newfoundlanders, so it was always, it was there. It was always like a hate/love love/hate thing because don't go fishing, but you know it just was in your blood.

MHA Right.And how about your brothers. Tell me how many brothers and sisters you have.

LR Well I have two brothers and one sister, yup. My oldest brother went fishing very briefly.

12:00

He, after he got out of college he went on to be an educator he was head of the English Department at Boston Latin High School for 30 some odd years. My other brother didn't do any fishing he seemed to stay away from it. My sister, it's interesting my mother's side all of my relatives going back to Ireland were blacksmiths as well as fishermen, and they made a lot of the riggings for the vessels as well as shoeing horses. My sister today is proudly continuing that tradition, she has a horse farm and she is a certified blacksmith.

MHA Fascinating. So um, let's see, what was your first job? You said a lumper?

LR Uh, a fish lumper.

MHA Do you want to talk a little bit about that?

LR A fish lumper is like a longshoreman who unloads fish. And there's not a very special skill to it because you have your own fork which is something like a carpenter having his own tools and you had to be careful how you handled especially flounder you know you could damage the fish that type of thing, cod fish you just scooped it out you know and even the scallopers we used to unload the scallopers as well. But mostly it was unloading the draggers. And in those days, I mean New Bedford dragger could come in with a hundred thousand pounds of cod and haddock.

So it was long day's position. You know. We used to get eight dollars pay for that job. And we used to get six dollars for icing a boat, which is putting the ice aboard. Today, the manager stands there with a machine and stares it through a hose. In those days, you had to pack it by hand. And it was all lumpy ice you know. It was a very heavy job. And you know we were young, we could do it. I think I weighed a hundred twenty five pounds and I used to be able to shovel a lot of ice.

MHA Did you happen to know a lumper, Mary?

LR Oh yes. I knew Fish Mary.

MHA Fish Mary, Fish Mary. That's right.

LR She was quite a character, like the many characters we have on the waterfront. Dealing with her was very, very different. She always had this thing, when we were unloading scallops, she'd be in the other pen and you know the basket would come down and you'd put three bags in, up it goes and you start again and the basket's back and you pour it out again. The next thing, wait a minute, where's Mary? Mary would be over there opening up the scallop bags and taking some scallops and putting them to take home.

[Laughter]

And then when she'd get caught by the skipper, I remember Skipper I don't know if I'm supposed to say names, it's alright, ok Skipper Paddy Davis and he fired her. And she said, Pat Davis, I'm gonna put a curse on you.

15:00

Well, the next trip, the name of the boat was the NEWFOUNDLAND and she was out off of Nantucket Sound, beautiful, perfect day and they had a collision with the AMELIA. And as they were all getting off the boat quickly, Pat Davis was heard as he's up on the bow jumping onto the AMELIA, says I knew I shouldn't a fired Mary. I knew I shouldn't have fired her.

MHA [Laughter] Oh goodness. And how about some of the other characters that you ran into?

LR Oh it's hard to remember them all know. Actually, there's a document out there that Paul Swain organized and put together that we have all the nicknames for all the fishermen, it's probably three or four pages long. And there were different people, there were off the top of my head right now I can't think of any others. If I hear a name, I probably know it, you know.

MHA Ok. Alright.

LR If it comes to me I'll…

MHA Alright. Um, so what kind of fishing have you personally done? You did a

LR Ok Cod fishing, flounder mostly. The Newfoundlanders and a couple of the Norwegian skippers were very good shoal fishermen. In those days there was a lot of fish on Nantucket Shoals and it took very special skills because Nantucket Shoals is like the, like underwater mountains. And the difference of going here to there is your net will be ripped to shreds, but they were good at going around the Shoals, Half Moon, Asia, whatever it was…and they didn't have the equipment that they have today. Some may have had radar. We didn't have radar in those days. We had an old fashioned Loran and very primitive equipment. But yet there were, they

could go out of here in the thick of fog, never see land or see anything for 7 or 8 days and return here with a good trip of fish on Nantucket Shoals, you know.

MHA How did they do that?

LR It's amazing because I think it's, I've figured out over the years, a good skipper never slept. And he sensed the boat. And if you're on boats you know that a boat has a feeling. And I can remember I had one uncle that was very good skipper, Captain Dino Roche and he knew when the boat was off course. And I could never figure out how until later, years later, but I found what he, of that particular boat, whenever she went to the starboard, the water used to rush by the transducer and make a certain vibration.

MHA Huh

LR So he would never sleep and he would know 2, 3 vibrations, she's goin' this way. And he'd be right up on the deck and wanna know why the boat's off course. It's amazing!

MHA It is amazing. And uh, let's see, you fished uh, mostly flounder you said…

18:00

LR Mostly flounder and codfish, but uh, the flounder boats, there was good money in flounder in those days. And there was a lot of flounder on Nantucket Shoals you know. Till the Russian fleets came along, they cleaned it all out you know. Yellowtail flounder was a very easy fish to fish cause there was very little care of it. You know. You just open up the bunker plates and pour it down nice and it's going down. Regular flounder you had to be careful. They always had to be belly up in the pens and so you'd have to keep them belly down in the bushel baskets. And I would be a hold man and my job was to hang the basket down and the boat would be rolling of course and you'd use that and when you gave him the signal he'd let the basket go and you roll it this way with the roll of the boat and you spread the flounder out so all belly up and you ice 'em down you know and then wait for the next one building the pens up as you go. Haddock, cod, course you had to gut every one of 'em, that was a big job. But the easiest fish was the yellow tail flounder. And at one time it was plentiful. I can remember, one of my uncles, they left one morning and were back the next day with 25,000 pounds of yellowtail flounder

MHA Wow!

LR Yeah. Just hit it and when you hit a school like that you, to get the net back you can't, you can't get it back you have to split the bag, keep bringing it in little, by little. One 24 hours they were back at the dock with a full load of fish.

MHA What were the trips normally? That was a special occasion I think.

LR Trips would be 7 or 8 days most days. Tows would be anywhere from a half an hour to an hour and half the most. Today I mean you could tow almost all day and get nothing, you know. And when you haul back you had quite a load. I mean everything you could think of. The underutilized species we called 'em. We never used. I mean there was no market for 'em, you know. A fish that we called a "daylighter" was little flounder and you'd get 'em at daylight. They're so thin you could almost see through them. Well with marketing years later, they, that's called a sand dab. Now you got money for it. You used to throw it away before. Used to be a lot of lobsters out there that were incidental catch that you got with your when your net came in it would be off shore lobsters that was it and we always had tanks on the deck for that you know.

MHA Did, was there a lot of discard? Were a lot of things were thrown away?

LR Yeah there was because of the underutilized species really, you know. I mean as far as flounder and everything else there was very little to throw back, I mean you had a lot of good sized flounder, you know. Lemon sole, a lot of lemon sole. Matter of fact when I was a teenager really, uh, we used to get Halibut big enough that we'd put 'em in the hold one at a time.

21:00

And they would go down through the slaughterhouse to they were too big to fit in the pens, you know? We used to get Sturgeon at one time out here, but this and a lot of fleets cleaned that all out. The Yellow Tail Flounder ended up as fish meal. They never through anything back. We brought a net once into Reidar Bendkisen one time was an organization that we started, Boat Owners United and he brought a net in that, a Russian net that had been lost and it had a liner inside of it and we brought it in, we hired the crane to pull it up into the state pier, spread it out on the state pier and we called NOAA, we called everybody else, but they didn't want any part of it. They didn't want to see it. But they didn't want to hear what was happening out there, you know. We testified before congress at one time about one particular night on the, what they call the Channel which is just beyond Nantucket Shoals and the Russians used to do what they called "pulch fishing." The fishing manager would send a fleet out in every direction, if he saw a Yankee American boat and see what they were doing. And you saw smoke stack on the horizon, one Russian would come. Well in that particular case, by 24 hours there were 45 of them there. And we, it was lit up like a city, yeah. And we went from I don't know what it was, 40-50 bushels of dabs which was a flounder, down to one or two bushels. And then we had to get out of there. You know. But that's what the used to do back in those days, you know.

MHA So what changed Congress' mind?

LR I think what we did was we were told that we had to get by the I think it was Foreign, two committees, one was military and the other one was, uh, it'll come to me. It was two major

congressional committees that the tuna association and all of those people lobbied very strenuously and prevented any legislation from coming out. And we as I said we used to go to Washington and meet with the administrative assistants, have a beer with him and we'd bring samples of fishing nets, so we'd bring samples of Russian, we'd tell them the stories. And then we would put our packet together and we would just give brief information at the hearings. I can remember Senator Stenhauss was the chairman of the committee which it'll come to by name, and poor old guy I think he was propped up in his chair

MHA Ooooh

LR And, we just made our spiel, but all of his assistants and the others had already had the information and had already put the bug in their ear. And we were able to get that out of committee and that broke the log and by 1977 we had our legislation, you know. Course I think it was too late by that time, you know.

24:00

MHA And when you were fishing, who decided where to go and when and…

LR Usually the skipper was pretty smart at it. These guys were experienced from years of being out there, especially shoal fishermen and they had their own little logs that they kept, you know little books, which would be no good to you because in case they lost if all the bearings were slightly off.

[laughs]

Which was uh, you know…

MHA Right

LR the way they did things. But they were savvy of many years of being out there, learning from skippers ahead of them, you know?

MHA Mm Hmmm

LR Stuff that was passed down, you know.

MHA So were most of the boats owned and operated by the same people or were

LR There were a lot of boats; there wasn't big corporate fleets that you see today. Most of the boats were individually owned. Some of the skippers actually lived on the boats. Some of the, there were maybe one or two boats in a family. The uh, you would have for instance our organization originally the boat owners organization was called The Seafood Producers

Association and I was the Vice President of that in ’66 ’67. And I was the President I think ’68 ’69, the youngest president of the association. We found that they weren’t answering our needs. And they weren’t paying attention to what was going on. These guys had made their money and they didn’t really care what was going on. So we set up Boat Owners United, and yes they were owner/operators mostly. And uh, that’s changed I think a lot. I think you see multi-boat fleets, you know owned by corporations. I mean we’re all incorporated of course you had to be for insurance reasons, but mostly individually operated you know?

MHA And tell me again how many children you have?

LR I have five children.

MHA And did any of them go into the fishing…

LR No my oldest boy did a little bit of inshore, just briefly. But I guess we kept ‘em away from it too. And uh, fisheries was changing there was not money in it anymore at that time. And they all have very successful careers elsewhere, so…

MHA Um, did you ever have any close calls when you were at sea?

LR Not me. My family members have had it. I don’t think I…just a few minor things, you know. When I say minor, I mean, I think I’ll always have a guy, an angel that when a block would let go would take my hat off without hittin’ me and things like that but nothing of sinkings or anything like that, you know.

27:00

Although a boat I owned uh I wasn’t on it, but they got hit by a rogue sea and she was a very heavy boat too, called THE CAMDEN and uh, luckily they were steaming and everybody was up forward and they had bolted the engine room doors, course people didn’t take as much as they should so just in case, and she got hit and pitch poled over and flipped back up again and she was cleaned right off. I mean 500 pound doors in front of the net were over the side

MHA Wow

LR Nets were over. The pilot house wind, uh doors were knocked off, the windows were broke, uh it was a big uh vent over the fo’c’sle ripped right off you know so it only took about two or three minutes time, you know.

MHA Wow!

LR And they limped home. They were able to get the engine started, no communication or anything else. No gear, again because of the ability to navigate, they brought her home.

MHA Wow. That's amazing. Uh, and, did you ever hear of anything on yours or any of your friends boats that were unusual that came up in the net?

LR Uh I think everybody's had unusual things over the years. I can't recall particularly. We just, we'd be so busy working, 'cause we only had short small crews, but pick up and you'd look at the things that you throw back on deck and you'd get back to work, you know. And I mean at the time we just weren't cognizant of these things unless there was some outstanding thing. But I say every tow you had something, especially on Nantucket Shoals, cause that's uh, you know at one time that was, there were trees growing there I suppose. But, it was that area probably there were some sandy areas most of it was hard bottom, so I think if anything was probably moved elsewhere. But you'd pick up parts of planes or anything else, you know, parts of boats.

MHA Hmm. Interesting. You've talked a little bit about how the industry has changed. Do you want to elaborate on that?

LR Alright, ok. The industry, the culture has changed. If we just take the fishermen themselves, the scallop industry, you know originally we had the culture that came here, the Norwegians, Newfoundlanders, Nova Scotians, Latvians, there was a big Latvian population, Greeks, there was a small community of Greek fishermen and the Azoreans, uh,

30:00

the scallop industry gradually got a negative connotation because people who had nothing ever to do with fishing through their culture or their families started coming into it because it was big money to be made in the scallop business. But that money was used to go in the arm. And that became a real sad commentary, to the point that there word "fishermen" where it used to be a well-respected term became oh you must be a druggie. And that was the sad part of it. I mean fishermen from Norway and Newfoundland, they would actually be dressed up when they came down to the boats in the summertime a straw hat, shirt and tie, and uh, considering that they had no real facilities for uh, showers or anything else, like they have today in them, but these guys would take their nice clothes, fold them up, put on their fish clothes and work. All that culture changed. The people that were coming into the scallop industry from major part of them were there only to get enough money

End of Tape

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to shoot up and that was a change in the culture. The individual boat owner vessel that started to change to companies that were you know ten twelve fifteen boats.

MHA And about what time what year was that?

LR Oh boy. I gotta say in the late 70s and early 80s. Because originally because for instance, the Azorean Portuguese fleet which started around '66 they had a good culture. A young man, as a matter of fact on an Azorean boat, you didn't touch your food until the skipper came down. And you stood up until he sat down. Well the younger people were in that culture, so they kind of stayed close to it. When you got away from the old timers and they were going out of business or retired then you got the younger people who allowed things to happen and drugs became prominent even among some of the Azorean and Newfoundlander, younger Newfoundlanders and Norwegians. But I'd say probably after the Azorean culture lost its influence on the next generation, probably late 70s into 80s. Then it was really bad in the 90s, you know.

MHA What would you say, makes a good fisherman?

LR Somebody who doesn't mind work and really is interested in bettering themselves. That was the thing. Most of them had no formal education, or very little formal education, but they were very smart men. And this was one of the last places where you could come here with that background and become a fairly wealthy person, you know. I admired, I watch, I see Vietnamese, I see Guatemalans now and I am pleased on that, it really makes me feel good to say, now it's their turn, you know. And without the formal education and Mexicans, the Mexican population, and it's passed on, like it's gone from each ethnic group down the line which is the way it should be. My fear is that government regulation is gonna make licensing such a thing, you know it's an old book I read many years ago that licensing is not to true something as to keep people out. And I fear that these people are not gonna be able to meet the educational requirements that they're looking for. And I mean I can show you great fishermen over the years who knew more about the ocean and navigation than the admiral ever knew.

3:00

But I fear that these people will eventually when the licensing gets too rigid and you know you have to get this you have to get that you're not gonna see those kind of people coming into the industry again.

MHA Do you still keep contact with people in the industry so you can keep track of what's going on?

LR Yeah I kind of drive by the pier every morning. I still, and I have my coffee in different places and I was tellin' one of my friends the other day, it's getting to the point I don't know

anybody anymore, because all the old timers are gone, you know. One time, event two or three years ago, I'd drive down what we used to call Pier 3 and now Fisherman's Wharf and you know you'd see people that you knew and you'd talk, see what's going on. But all those people are fading away. And uh, but I do meet people whose families are in the industry, so we kind of keep together that way and uh, we have a beer once in a while and talk about the old days.

MHA Uh, what do you think were the best years for the fishing industry in New Bedford?

LR The best years?

MHA Mm hmm and you can define it any way you want.

LR Uh economically I think probably mid-70s on for about ten years, because banks were interested in investing. There was an old saying at that time that if you had two legs and could walk they'd finance a boat for you. Ok so that way, but before that, banks, you know, we used to have to put up 50% to own a boat and that was difficult. I mean boats weren't as expensive as they were today. I mean you could buy a boat for what it cost for electronic gear today. But the days, in those days it was a nicer industry. I mean everybody made a living. You know, you didn't, you know if you had a decent boat, you know you didn't have these multi-million dollar boats that you have today. I think that was, as far as the, being a good industry for people working in it, I say before the bankers came in and started building all these un-needed boats.

LR And have you, do you have advice for young people now, whether…

MHA As far as the fisheries is concerned? Um, it's hard to break into and you're not gonna be able to do what was done before as far as owning or buying boats. The only, if they wanna go into the fisheries, I think today they will need an education and they're gonna have to become part of these larger corporations. Uh, as an individual I don't think you have a chance anymore.

6:00

Um, so it's not gonna be the same.

MHA Oh I know, how did you get paid?

LR Uh, we were paid by a share, you know. When you started out you got a, what they call a half share, you know. Uh the break down was at the time the union was very active until they were phased out. But it used to be like a 40/60 breakdown, you know. Course the fuel and the grub came out of the crew. The fuel came off the top and the crew would split up the 60%, the skipper would normally get 10% of the owner's share or, if he was a good skipper he would quietly give him an extra 5% on top of that you know. So that's generally how it was done.

MHA Were there, besides uh, Fish Mary, were there any other women?

LR Uh, no not really. It was a culture back then you know that uh superstition, especially Newfoundlanders, Norwegians, they didn't want women on the boat. It was very, some of them were serious about it, you know? Um I don't recall you know it was, I think the first woman that I remember on that boat was one of the Sherman's from Westport. They were famous Yankee fishing family and I think she was probably one of the first that I recall, being as a crew member on a boat, you know. Course that's all changed which is great. In those days was pretty restricted.

MHA Yeah. Tell me a little bit, were you around when they had that big, uh strike, uh the union strike and then the breaking of the union?

LR Yeah.

MHA Do you remember when that was exactly?

LR Um, we had we tied up the fleet. That was Boat Owners United and the fishermen that uh, because at the time uh, the deal is the scales were so far off that uh, we used to go to Newport and accept a penny a pound less, and come out with more weight for the same number of bushels that we were count, especially flounder that you counted by the bushels. You had so many bushels to a thousand. And with that same count coming into New Bedford, uh or going to Newport and getting a penny a pound less in Newport and we came out with more money because the scales were so far off.

9:00

We tried to get the dealers to go along with something where we would buy the scales and have them inspected and they didn't want any part of it. On a box of a hundred twenty five pounds of fish you can be sure there was at least fifteen or twenty pounds more of fish in that box, you know? And I kind of proved that one time when I was young and brash

[laughs]

I was on a boat and [phone in background] and they kept throwin' fish in so I stopped the trip. I was the mate and I was up on the deck. And I took every single fish that was flounder out of the box and wiped them down and put them in another box and it was a hundred forty pounds when I was done. So felt pretty good about it, you know. But unfortunately the boat was owned by the fish plant owner so when I went up to get my check I got my pink slip.

MHA [laughs] Oh dear. So how did, what happened when you tied up the fleet?

LR Uh, we were tied up, I can't remember how much time it was but we got the dealers to concede on certain things and weights and we set up a, the other thing was boxes of fish used to disappear so we set up a system where we hired fish weighers who were technically employees of the city, appointed by the city, but recommended by this committee that we had of boat owners and fishermen and paid for by the trip. And they would have these receipted books where the owner of the boat would get one part, the fish dealer would get the other and a third would go on the box, all numbered. And we found that made a difference for a while. But they always found they had some way to get around. We had a mayor come on that appointed a fish weigher and we had always recommended a retired fishing captain, he recommended one of his cronies and the idea was that he would subvert the system. And, but those were the things we were looking for. It used to gall me when you saw a man who worked hard off shore, on a nine and three watch, nine hours on, three hours off, going through things that people wouldn't believe, all day long for 7, 8, 9, days and come home and get robbed. You know, it used to gall us. That's one of the reasons we said this has to stop, you know. I can't remember anything else about that, it was so long ago now.

MHA Well from what I understand, there was a in the 80s I think there was a controversy where the boats were tied up for a time, but then the dealers I think broke the strike at some point.

LR Um that might, I think they broke the union at that time.

12:00

That was a, Teamsters took over the union and I think that was the end of the fishermen's union as far as, you know, before that well that's, like I talked about, we were successful in that one. The other one it was an attempt to break the union and I think they did succeed, you know. After that the pension system went down the tubes, the health and welfare system went down the tubes, the marking, we used to take one half of one percent of the gross stock to put into marketing and we always showed these guys how marketing will increase your, you know your ability to sell your product and get a higher price, all this stuff went down the tubes then. The union went out. Everything. And then it was free for all after that. Boat went out at all hours, probably paid what they felt like paying whatever it was, you know it changed totally.

MHA Do you think that those union rules helped the conservation at all?

LR The union rules of the fishermen's union?

MHA Yeah. Cause didn't they

LR Yeah I suppose in a way uh, you know scallopers were limited to 11 man crews and a thousand pounds. Draggers, yeah I guess in a way with the days in. You know the days required

to be in. You know years ago you came in one day, had one day off and went out the next day. And time that you could go out. At five o'clock if you weren't gone, you didn't go till the next day. Possibly in that day it may have helped. I don't know what effect it would have had on the stocks, but possibly.

MHA Um, let's see, do you, when you were active do you remember about how, what the size of the fleet was at that time?

LR Oh boy, it wasn't that big a fleet, there were probably 120-130 boats. After the 70s let say. As I say anybody who had two legs and a brain got a boat. But the number of boats, you know, that may have been a conservation thing in itself, before they started and after. I mean the scallopers started, I can remember when a scalloper brought in 50,000 pounds of scallops. I mean that's an unbelievable amount of scallops and an unbelievable amount of work. I mean they did anything they want and all they did was really hurt themselves because the price would just plummet.

MHA Right. Do you think that the uh auction helps now?

LR I think the auction was very important and when we lost it, uh, that was a big place which is a now a uh memorial, a fishing museum over there. And the seven o'clock scallop auction, eight o'clock. Yes it was very important.

15:00

The reason it was started if you go back, when the fleet came to New Bedford from Nantucket, you know they'd go to Tichon and Paul Hervey Tichon would say I'll give you x cents for your fish and then they said ok thank you we're gonna go check with Eldridge, see what he'll give us. Well Tichon would call Eldridge and then they, you know. So by havin' the auction it was open that way. So I think the auction was an important thing. And now, the display auction is also probably even more important. Those days, you accepted the fish based on the reputation of the skipper. Whether his fish was gonna be quality or not.

MHA Hmmm. And were there big differences between skippers? Were there big differences between the skippers?

LR Oh yes, absolutely. Some skippers knew how to keep the quality in their fish, you know. Some skippers didn't care, you know. And the dealers knew who was gonna have the quality fish, who was gonna have the junk.

MHA Did they get, did the fishermen with their quality did they get a higher price?

LR Not really, not much, a little bit, little bit. Those days they used to go by this 0-5. The dealer would bid on it say they'd give 15 cents on say yellowtail and the next dealer would say 15-0-5, then the next guy would do 15-10 so not even a cent at a time. They'd play games to run the clock out, you know. And so generally, if you wanted the trip bad enough it he needed a certain quality for an order, then he would start, uh, 16 cents, like that. But otherwise would be 05, 10, 15, go on for twenty minutes.

MHA That's so sad. Now when did the recreational boats start coming into New Bedford?

LR What do you mean?

MHA Like the anglers, the charter boats…

LR Like Captain Leroy and those boats? They've been around, Leroy was around for a long time, long time, I mean, I don't remember when, but he was always there. I've never been aware that there was that many of them maybe like the cape they have a lot but I don't think we have that many, we have, I know Leroy had two boats, there's a couple others, I don't recall too much about that.

MHA So there's never a conflict

LR Oh I don't think so, no. Most of those guys were hand line fishermen that went out probably down No Man's or somewhere like that, you know.

MHA Now how about the community of New Bedford, did they appreciate the fishing industry?

LR I think the community appreciated it very much and they had great respect for the fishermen before the druggies came in.

18:00

The City, did not for years the City gave nothing to the New Bedford fishing fleet. Once in a while they do some repairs on the docks. In fact we even told them at one time, there's only two things that keep us here, there's a bowline and a sternline. So you need to start doing some stuff and then they started putting some money into the docks. Now they've realized, of course you've had the good Mayor like Scott Lang that realize how important it is. I mean we used to always tell them, four dollars for every dollar. And that's a lot of money for this City. But the community did appreciate fishermen. They understood them and they respected them for what they did.

MHA That's good. Yeah.

MT Four dollars a dollar?

LR I can't hear you.

MT Four dollars a dollar what does that mean?

MHA He's asking what you meant by the, why the four dollars per dollar.

LR Ok, I'm sorry. Ok, it was figured that every dollar that the fisherman got, created four dollars in New Bedford, yeah, which today makes it a billion dollar industry.

MHA What challenges do you think the industry is facing now?

LR Government regulation for one. Uh, over regulation, the opposite of what we could get. There's always been a culture of the government does the opposite of what we want. It's always been that way. We wanted regulation, but they wouldn't give it to us. Now they got too much regulation. Uh, a challenge is to uh, to somehow get government to see the fisheries aspect. If you could see today's paper were the scientists, various scientists who work on the, NOAA's research are all signed a letter today saying that what they do is important and it's right and the government should continue doing what they're doing. It's not right. I mean a perfect example is when we, when the guys, the scallop men showed them that they were doing their own research that there were so many scallops that they were drowning each other. But government wouldn't listen. So think that's the biggest challenge is to get government, if they're gonna regulate, make the regulations with the help and the cooperation of the industry, not just totally dictating. That's a major challenge. The stocks, codfish is never gonna come back, as long as there are seals in the ocean. Newfoundland had so much fish there and the distant water fleets really didn't affect it that much because they didn't come in close. But the seal population when the seal industry, Greenpeace did all there thing, it killed the seal industry. The herd went from 2 million animals during the cod moratorium which in Newfoundland, they closed the cod fishery for five years, during that moratorium, the seal herd went from 2 million to 6 million animals. Today it's ten million.

21:00

MHA Wow!

LR Yeah, that herd is coming off of New England now there on Monomoy Island. You never saw seals on Monomoy out here. Each one of those seals eats 40 pounds of codfish and salmon a day. Multiply that by the number of seals and that's more than any of the distant water fleets combined ever took, you know. And the cod fishery will never come back until they cull the seal herd. And it's interesting; the seal only eats the belly of the codfish.

MHA Yeah

LR It comes up underneath them, takes the belly out and leaves the fish. But they're absolutely destroying the fishery. And that's politicians don't want to touch it because, even in the European Union has banned seal meat and seal meat is great tasting meat. It was a mainstay in Newfoundland, flipper pie, it was like anything; it was great. But you can't sell it. In the meantime, the seals are destroying the cod fishery. That's never gonna come back while the seals are there. That's the type of thing you're up against.

MHA How about fish farming? Has there ever been fish farming in this area?

LR It never took off around here. There is aquaculture in Newfoundland it's doing pretty good. Probably, I don't, you know the inland waters may not be, may be too polluted to do it, that's my assessment, I don't know that much about it. Um, it's a cunning thing, but also you have to remember first if you take the salmon, farm grown salmon, it's not the same as ocean grown salmon, it doesn't event taste the same, you know.

MHA How about that Frankenfish?

LR The what?

MHA Have you heard of this Frankenfish?

LR The what kind of fish?

MHA Franken?

LR Franken?

MHA Franken, like Frankenstein? [laughing]

LR Well what do you mean…

MHA There is a genetically modified salmon that they're trying to get FDA approval

LR Yeah

MHA Right now so…

LR Well I saw that, I think I just read about that recently.

MHA Yes. It grows twice as fast.

LR Oh that's what it was. That's exactly, 'cause I can remember they showed the pictures of the two. Again, I mean what kind of taste?

MHA Right. [laughing]

LR I mean we farm animals, maybe there will be.

MHA Do we grow twice as fast if we eat them?

LR Hey look at the kids today, they grow twice as fast.

MHA It's true!

LR But you know like in Newfoundland, there's uh, what do you call it, oyster fishery and salmon farms and they had a cod farm for many years. But I don't know how it will work here.

24:00

MHA Well I think we're going to wrap up, cause I want to take a picture of you if that's ok.

LR I don't mind.

MHA It's ok I'll just take your face.

LR Ok, alright.

MHA But before we quit, I just want to ask you one last question. Is there anything that I haven't asked you or you haven't said that you would like

LR Well I think we've covered it pretty well. Well we probably didn't get into the mechanics of the politics of fisheries around here, between the association and the unions years ago. But I think other than that I think we've covered it pretty well.

MHA Ok uh.

LR I can't remember everything

MHA Well it's hard to talk for more than an hour at a time.

LR What?

MHA It's hard to talk more than an hour

LR I, you know, I've thought of things I've forgotten, it comes with age. But no, I think you've covered it pretty well.

MHA You have a very interesting history.

LR I, you know I'm a school principal by trade, but I'm a fisherman at heart. I mean that's never gonna change. You know and we still think that way. Even our thought process, even when I'm on my pleasure boat I'm thinking of fishing all the time. I thinking of navigating without radar and everything cause I wanna prove that I can still do it.

[laughs]

Yeah I used to lobster with no radar or anything out in the bays and I had to learn the way my father taught me, you know.

MHA And how was that, how did you do it?

LR Easy, you know for instance, smell, if you smell seaweed you're too close to the shore. That type of thing, you know watching the water as it's moving and counting the minutes between buoys, things like that you know when it's foggy. And little things you learn, tricks as they call them.

MHA Were you, when it was not foggy, were you able to see landmarks on…

LR Oh yeah, when I was inshore lobstering I used to look out the bay, out between the islands and all that, you know. When it's foggy, I'll tell you a little story about one of my uncles who was a great fisherman and we left here one time for eight days and we didn't even see Palmer's Island Lighthouse, that's how foggy it was and we went through Quicks' Hole which all the rest of the boats were moored there waiting, they didn't dare go through and this guy, he was just amazing, so we went through and then we went up to Nantucket Sound, we were fishing for seven days trip and on the way back we were coming down Vineyard Sound and in his Irish brogue he says, "Now boy, get up on the bow and look for Quicks' Buoy" and I very stupidly said, "you're not gonna find Quicks' Buoy in this fog" he was insulted! He says, "What do you mean? You don't think I can find that buoy, you get up there, you're not only gonna find it, you're gonna touch it!"

27:00

And I'm up there 3 o'clock in the morning and I'm soaking wet, the water's running off my oil skins, I'm lookin' I can feel the boat slowin' down, he says "Are you ready?" And you know something? He brought it right up to the buoy. I mean just, you know, and people are here with these boats now with $50,000 worth of electronic gear in their wheelhouse and on a clear day they bump into each other

[laughter]

That's a side light, but I had to say that.

MHA Before I take a picture, I'd like to ask you to, this is the release. Um we'd like to be able to play it at times

LR Sure. I'm signing here right

MHA Yes.

LR Ok

End of tape