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Santangelo, Robert ~ Oral History Interview

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Voices from the Fisheries
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Woods Hole, MA 02543

Interview with Robert Santangelo by Michael Chiarappa

Interviewee
Santangelo, Robert

Interviewer
Chiarappa, Michael

Date
August 10, 2016

Place
Phone Interview

ID Number
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Use Restrictions

Biographical Note
Robert Santangelo is a fishery market reporter for the National Marine Fisheries Service. He received his B.S. in Business from C.W. Post College in 1976. His father and uncle worked at Fulton Fish Market from the late 1940s to the early 1960s which meant that Santangelo was around the fishing industry from a young age. His first job for NMFS was as a clerk in 1979. Shortly after being hired, he also started working as a market reporter for *Market News* at Fulton Fish Market. He reported on the market at Fulton from 1979 until 2005 when the market was moved to the Bronx. He has been a market reporter for 37 years and is currently based out of Long Island, New York.

Scope and Content Note
Interview contains discussions of: Fulton Fish Market, *Market News,* commercial fishing, fish market reporting, technology, NOAA, NMFS, fish sales, fishing regulations, fish vendors, Hurricane Katrina, Exxon Valdez oil spill and the Deepwater Horizon oil spill.

Market reporter Robert Santangelo has been involved in the fish sales industry since the age of six when he would go with his father to Fulton Fish Market, the largest fish market in the U.S. He describes his early position as a clerk typing on a manual typewriter, mimeographing, and mailing the daily market reports before digital technologies existed. After several months of training, he began his job as a market reporter. He covered one section of the Fulton Market and interviewed sellers regarding the species and amounts of fish that had been sold that day. Fishermen then read this report to ensure that they were getting a fair price.

In this interview, he describes the sometimes difficult process of establishing trust and building a rapport with vendors. Most fish at the Fulton Market came from New England and southern states such as Florida and the Carolinas. On Mondays and Thursdays, the market was especially busy because foreign fish would arrive from the Caribbean, Central and South America, Canada, and Europe.

Indexed Names

Gordon, Leo
Petchevitch, Steve
Rafferty, James
Santangelo, Bob
Santangelo, Frank

Transcript

MC: Alright Bob, we're underway. This is Michael Chiarappa, the date is August 10, 2016. I'm going to be conducting an interview with Bob Santangelo of the National Marine Fisheries Service and this is for the Voices from the Science Centers project, and we're going to be talking about Bob's career working for the Fisheries Service and related issues pertaining to fisheries management. Well Bob, welcome and thanks for agreeing to do the interview. What I often—the procedure I usually follow is going to start from the beginning and kind of get a sense of what drew you to the fisheries and what education, formal or otherwise, that you had that prepared you for the job that you've been doing all these years.

BS: Well, my college education is a Bachelor of Science in Business, so I don't know how that would draw me to this. I think the main component was my Dad was in the business, my Father's brother was in the business. They started working down at Fulton Fish Market post-World War II, and they were there for…my father was there until the early 60s until he switched because he got into the frozen end of the business around '62, I guess it was, where he just dealt with frozen food. From the late '40s to the early '60s, he worked down there, probably about 18 years. He knew a lot of people down there in the business and that's what kind of got me—I needed to do something a little different than what I was doing. That's why I decided to give it a shot and maybe I'll work down there for a company, but he knew people in the government that he used to talk to and there was an opening back in the late '70s. They said, do you want to, you know? And I said, why not. I was looking to do something different and I had some familiarity with the fish business, so that's how I got started.

MC: So your father, was he actually one of the vendors down at Fulton Fish Market?

BS: Yeah, they worked for one of the companies, yeah.

MC: Ah, what company did he work for?

BS: He worked—he started with a commercial fish company, and then he went to Wallace

Keeney Lynch. I think both are out of business right now, but those are two he worked for.

MC: Wow. And again, just for the record, who was your father?

BS: My father's Frank Santangelo.

MC: And your uncles, were they also the same name, Santangelo?

BS: Yeah, he's my father's brother, yeah.

MC: So, I mean this is kind of an interesting sort of entry to the fisheries world. Do you remember—in terms of shaping your view of fisheries—I mean, the Fulton Fish Market's this kind of iconic place, at least as far as I'm concerned, in American life. Did that strike you from an early age what an interesting place…?

BS: Yeah, I used to go down there sometimes as a kid. My mom drove my father up sometimes and I would go down there from a very young age—five years old, six. Sometimes I'd see it. So, I got kind of a feel for it a very young age.

MC: Wow, that's interesting. Now, where did you study business?

BS: I went to C.W. Post College.

MC: Oh, okay…And what year did you graduate from college?

BS: '76.

MC: '76, and did you join the Fisheries Service very shortly after that?

BS: Shortly. I had a little stint in the retail business for a couple of years. Didn't like it, so that's why I decided to go to a different, take a different direction.

MC: Yes. Now, what was your first assignment and location with the Fisheries Service?

BS: My first assignment was the only one I had, so two years ago I was in lower Manhattan in between the Village and SoHo, and we had a car that we drove down to the market every day. That's how we got down there. My first, actually, job was as a clerk. I didn't start market reporting for about, maybe about four, five months into my service. I was strictly a typist and we would do the reports on stencils and we had to mimeograph them and mail them out. That's how we did it back in the day.

MC: When you say stencils, what is that?

BS: It was like a…I don't know how you describe it. You stick it into a manual typewriter and you type the report on that and anything else we were typing, and you attach that to a

mimeograph machine and that's how you printed the report out.

MC: Oh, I see. So, the office that you were working, you come in as a clerk and you're in lower Manhattan, your office and I assume, are you going to Fulton every day, is that…?

BS: Not in the beginning. I eased into it. They wanted to train me, so first four months I was strictly like a clerk. After a few months, they sent me down a couple of days a week just to get my feet wet and I stayed in the office part of the time and I went down there just in the morning and that's how I started until the need came later that year for me to work full-time down at the market. Unfortunately, we had some guy pass away unexpectedly and I just stepped right in after that.

MC: And your job, if you had to describe it, you would report once you went from being a clerk and then actually went into the field more consistently—how would you describe your job to someone, what you did?

BS: Well, I just considered it market reporting. I told him I'd go down to the market every day. We each had our group of dealers we dealt with. We grouped the market up into separate sections, so I had my section, the other guys had their sections. I would interview the owners or the salesmen. I had my little pad with me and I'd get down what came in, where it came from, how much came in, and how much it was selling for. That's how we got out information.

MC: Right, so you were basically keeping statistics on catch amounts and the sale of those.

BS: Yes. Exactly, yeah. It was a big deal to the fishermen because they would read this report and when they had to discuss how much they returned from the fish, they use our report as a guide to get an idea of if they were getting a fair price—if the guys in the market were giving them a fair price or not. So, sort of a benchmark for these guys for these guys to have a handle of what was going on down there.

MC: Yes. Now was the Fulton Fish Market the only location that you would do the reporting for?

BS: Yes. Yeah, that was the main one, that was the main one.

MC: Wow. That's quite a long time. You were pretty entrenched there for many years it sounds like.

BS: Yeah, until they moved, I went down there for about 26 years.

MC: People who were familiar with the Fulton Fish Market would appreciate this, would your day start as those very early hours when that market opens up?

BS: No, actually we couldn't get down there if we wanted to, because the guys wouldn't talk to us. They were very busy at that time. We got down there around 7:00. Things started tailing off a

little bit, they started—the big sales were over, they'd just be peddling some last-minute stuff. We'd get these guys on the side and talk to them. They weren't going to talk to us if they were in the midst—they weren't going to miss any sales to talk to us. We had to get these guys when there was a little bit of a lull, and that's what we did. But it took a while, not everybody's going to just stop and talk to us. Some say come back later, give us another 20 minutes, yada yada yada. We'd go around three, four times before we actually got everybody we needed to get. It wasn't so simple as just go there. Nobody just dropped everything to talk to us. We had to wait until they were able to talk to us. So, it took a couple hours at least.

MC: Right. This is something I'm sure you'll appreciate as someone who works for the government—and I've worked for the government for the National Park Service—was it challenging, establishing a rapport with these various vendors?

BS: Oh absolutely. That was key, that was probably the most important thing. This was all voluntary, you know. They didn't have to do this, which is the amazing part of the job that it lasted so long, because sometimes some guys weren't as friendly as the other guys were, but you had to really become like one of the guys down there. That was the most important thing—you talk to them about various things, sports, politics, whatever it is, you've got to be one of the buddies down there. They got to know you. You couldn't be standoffish, you couldn't be—you had to really be like one of them, they had to accept you as one of them, and that's what was the most important thing that you could do. Fortunately, I was pretty fortunate since I had a lot of history down there. My Dad worked down there, so I was a little more probably comfortable down there than most people, so it wasn't that big a deal for me. I was pretty fortunate to get friendly with most of the guys. Not everybody, I mean not everyone's going to love you, but for the most part I got a pretty good rapport with everybody. It helps get information. It helps.

MC: I know. Doing work as an oral historian, then as a field-based historian I know that that is often—and I've done a lot of interviewing fishermen in my career and as you described, you have to sort of gain their trust and make them feel comfortable with you, that you're not there trying to investigate them.

BS: Exactly [laughter].

MC: That's really…so you weren't the only field agent or field reporter it sounds like. Were there other folks with you that were doing the sanme?

BS: Oh yeah, there was basically—usually there was four. As people retired and the government wasn't replacing anybody, so it went down to three, and then for about ten years it was two, and for the last nine and a half months or so before they relocated, it was just me. So, that was a little rough, but usually…three was perfect, you could do with two, one was rough. Two to three was pretty, that was the right number to do it, especially on the busy days.

MC: Right. And who were some of the personnel that you worked with from the Service over the years? Were there particular people that—did you have like a mentor down there, or was it sort of you knew the business already?

BS: Well, I went down there and I trained in the beginning before I first started. I'd hook up with somebody and he would take me around, introduce me to everybody. He would do all the work, I would just kind of observe. That's how I started to meet everybody. Once in a while some vacation came up, they would send me on my own. But I had to have that little training for a few months just to meet everybody and see how they conducted their business and whatever. That's how it started. So, when it came that I had to be forced to come down there, due to circumstance, I was ready.

MC: Were there…so who, for the record, who were some of the people you worked with from the Fisheries Service?

BS: The people in my office?

MC: Yes…yes.

BS: Well, Leo Gordon was one of the guys. He's the guy I worked with last. There was Steve Petchevitch, he was in charge most of the time I was there. James Rafferty. Those are the guys I basically went out to the market with.

MC: Were there particular events or things that happened there that were very memorable?

BS: [Laughter] Quite a few, actually. The guys could get a little raucous from time to time. The most inconvenient things to happen were the bad storms that occurred when the whole market would flood, and I'd be like knee-deep in East River, trying to get out of there [laughter]. I had that happen quite a few times at the docks before they put the seaport in there. They didn't have the bulkheads running that high and any kind of bad coastal storm, everything would overflow and there'd be four or five feet of water in the street. Crazy. So, that's probably the more memorable things that occurred and it happened quite often. It's not very pleasant to be stepping foot in it, especially in the winter time in water that's up to your knees. Things like that. There would be some incidents down there, the guys would…there's a lot of traffic down there back in the day and some people weren't very kind trying to get through traffic and get on the guys case a little bit and they didn't care for that so often. So, there were some altercations over the years. Nothing major, but you know, these guys are pretty rough hombres so you couldn't really get really pissed off [laughter].

MC: I had to do some work at South Street Seaport in '96, and I stayed at that hotel, that Best Western, that was right there at Peck Slip and South Street and I—it was just before the market was moved to Hunts Point—so I was determined, I wanted to see it. I got up really early and I wanted to watch the whole scenario and people told me to be careful because there's so much movement and activity that you could get hurt just by getting hit by a forklift or something like that.

BS: Exactly, that's why we couldn't go down there that early. There's no way these guys were going to stop and talk to us when all that stuff was going on. By 7:00, 7:30, things had calmed

down a little bit—you make some last minute sales and people start packing, icing up and putting stuff away—that's when you could talk to these people.

MC: Right, right. As in any job—I'm sure you can relate to this because, you know, working for the government—times change and the political contexts change and priorities change. Over the course of your career, as you describe, your job was pretty consistent, but could you characterize any of the sorts of changes or things that went on in your work that were affected by new policies the government was enacting or things along those lines?

BS: I guess sometimes when the government-issued conservation stuff. Some people were more open-minded to it, some people didn't like it. When they limited the striped bass many years ago. Some people felt the need—they realized they were overfishing, they realized there had to be some steps had to be taken to save it. Some people were open to it, some people were very short sighted. They just thought, "hey, if I can't catch the amount of fish I need, how am I going to pay for my boat? How's it going to affect my business?" Other people saw the need for it, so they bit their—they suck it up and they realize they had to do what they had to do and they worked accordingly. Some people didn't, weren't to receptive to it. So, that's probably the biggest thing, when they put the restrictions on the catch, even the red snapper. The seasons were very small, they had to condense it in a very small period of time. Sometimes they couldn't get the price they wanted because of it. These are the government stuff that they didn't take too kindly to.

MC: Did any of that every affect your job or the way you had to function?

BS: Well, sometimes they took what the government did out on us [laughter]. Some guys were—actually stopped talking to us for a period of time and we had to work to get them back again. Things of that nature. It wasn't my—I wasn't doing it. It was the government, yes, but it wasn't *me.* It hurt their business, and they blame the government for it, sometimes we catch the heat for it.

MC: Yeah, because you're kind of the point man. I mean, they're identifying this—

BS: Yeah, I'm the government. Exactly.

MC: Even though you're not, you're just reporting data and you're not involved in necessarily the actual sort of implementation of the policy.

BS: No, no exactly. But I was the guy they saw every day, so I was the guy they yelled at [laughter].

MC: Yeah, no I can imagine. I've had fishermen say that to me. They ask me am I going to get these regulations taken off, and I always have to remind them, well, that's not what I do.

BS: Exactly, yeah.

MC: That's interesting, being in the field like that. So how long, when you were down there and

you were collecting your data every day—in a workday, would you spend so many hours collecting the data and then go back and write it up? How would that, how would your…?

BS: We spent about maybe an average of two, two and a half hours down there. Then we go back to whoever's writing the prices for that particular time, everybody would sit down, report what they got. We'd write it down and have all the information posted on worksheets. We'd crunch the numbers, we'd wrote up the report. Then we typed it up and in the old days, we send it to somebody and back in the old days we'd send it to somebody and they'd mimeograph them and they'd fold them a certain way and we would address them. We put them in a sack and we would take them down to the post office, and that's what we did until like the late '80s when the technology started getting a little better. Then we'd so everything electronically.

MC: Right. And would that data get send to Washington?

BS: Well, what we did first, we mailed it out. We had a mailing list, so we mailed it out to people who subscribed to our report.

MC: Oh, I see. I see.

BS: That's how it worked back in the day. Then we had a fax service for a while that you'd call a number up and they would print out—you'd get a print out of the prices. We did that for a while. Then when the internet exploded, that's when we put everything on the internet which was great because we got same day coverage. We used to mail it out, send it out third-class mail, and these people would get the report three, four days later. Now it was instantaneous. The internet really rekindled the interest in the report because people were getting it in true time, so to speak.

MC: So, the recipients of that data were—what groups actually got that data? I could see where the government would want that.

BS: Well, the groups most interested were the fishermen because they could see what the prices were going for and when they had to negotiate with the dealers, they had an idea what the fish went for that day. So, they were the primary recipients of it.

MC: Oh, I see.

BS: The boaters got most of it.

MC: So, it's going back to the fleet, they're seeing what the vendors at Fulton are paying for it every day—

BS: Selling for it every day, not paying for it.

MC: Selling, right, the catch that they were bringing. And the information that they're getting, is that what the fishermen are selling to the vendors, or what the vendors are selling to the public?

BS: The vendors are selling to the public.

MC: Oh, I see. I see, okay.

BS: And that was always a little cause of concern because if they didn't want to—if the vendor didn't want to return that much money and the fishermen would say "well this is what's on the report", sometimes that would get back to us saying we were showing the prices too high, tone it down a little bit. We don't want to not show proper pricing, but we didn't want to get the guys upset if we were showing too high a price, so we had to kind of balance it so we showed a good price but we had to keep everybody happy, and that was the biggest challenge.

MC: The vendors that you were dealing with, so they were the intermediaries between the fleet and these other buyers, correct?

BS: Yeah, they were selling to restaurants, hotels, cruise ships. This is what they, you know. And stores. This is who they were selling to.

MC: Were any of those vendors, were they owners of any boats, or were they simply commission agents?

BS: No, they just had their own business. They were—they had their own business down there.

MC: I see. So in a sense, there could be a little bit of tension between those folks and the fishermen, I assume.

BS: Absolutely, because the fishermen—this is an odd business. You paid, you got your money after they sold it. You didn't buy the fish first, pay the guy, and then sell it. They sold it first, this is what I got for it, this is what I'm going to give you. It's kind of a weird way of doing business. It sounds very strange. But that's why the pricing was so important. The return was after the sale was made, you know. That's how it worked.

MC: Oh my, I can see where that might engender a certain level of sort of distrust [laughter].

BS: Yeah, yeah. It's kind of a unique way of doing business.

MC: Wow. So they must have worked out like a percentage with the vendor.

BS: Yeah, they had some kind of deal going which I wasn't privy to, but they worked it out eventually.

MC: But basically you wanted the amount that they were selling to the hotels and to the fish restaurants.

BS: I really wanted what the going rate of the fish was, and the boats wanted that same price. This is what they're selling for it, return it based on the profit margin they arrived at.

MC: Right, right. It sounds like a fascinating job [laughter].

BS: Well yes, it was interesting because you had to keep everybody happy, you know. There's a delicate balance we've got to strike. Keep the integrity of the report the way it should be, but don't ruffle too many feathers. I could probably say that was the hardest part of my job, besides getting up at 4:00 in the morning every day [laughter].

MC: No, I can see where you're right because you're sort of—in a way you're brokering this information and so you have to really maintain a stance of objectivity so that nobody thinks you're privying one group over another, correct?

BS: That's the idea of the government doing, to be unbiased and that's the reason the government started it in the first place.

MC: Yes, that's…wow. So, it's interesting—in the process of collecting that data, you're getting the information from those vendors, but did that lead you to have certain interactions with the fishermen themselves? How did that kind of work out?

BS: No, I didn't have too much interaction with the fishermen.

MC: Right.

BS: No. Unless for some reason or another we weren't showing off a certain species enough, that maybe we didn't get enough coming in and they wonder why they weren't show swordfish for a couple days or something. We had to show prices based on some quantity. Some had a couple boxes of whiting and that day we didn't show a price on two boxes so we had to wait until there was some volume to report. Some of the days they'd wonder why some prices of fish weren't shown on a particular day. That's the only interaction I had with the fishermen—or stores, for that matter. People who read the report and wanted to know why certain species weren't shown on that particular day.

MC: Oh, I see. So, you had to have enough volume to sort of come up with a…?

BS: Absolutely. Sometimes I'd have two boxes of fish for a day selling for a dollar, I can't—that's not representative of anything really, so we just wouldn't show it that day. We'd have some kind of vibe to say that was a fair market price.

MC: Right, right. Was there a particular vendor or client or however you would want to characterize that—I know we often say an oral history informant, that sounds often like a criminal investigation, but it's not that—a person that you would work with, or a company that you worked with, that was particularly helpful, that you enjoyed working with?

BS: Well yeah, some were more friendly than others. It's just human nature. Some people didn't want to give the information out and somehow they did anyway so I was always grateful. As I

said, this is totally voluntary. But there were some companies that were more friendly than others, but I try to strike a balance. Some guys I talk to the owners, some guys I talk to the salesmen. That's who I talked to. But most of the guys, for the most part, I didn't have too much of a problem with the people I spoke to, really. I was pretty fortunate that way. They could see how long I spent down there. I had a pretty good rapport with most of the people.

MC: Did the—I should know this—did the fleet bring the landings, the actual fish they were bringing in…Now, I know a lot of the fish that comes in there is being driven down from say, New England, is that correct?

BS: Yeah, exactly. Yeah. New England, Florida from the South. Florida, South Carolina, North Carolina. They all came from there.

MC: So, at that point, it wasn't like the earlier years where the fleet actually came into the market and sold it right there?

BS: Yeah, no. That was before my time. No boats were landing there by the time I got there.

MC: Oh, so everything was being trucked in from various locations?

BS: Absolutely. I think maybe at the very beginning, when I first started working in the early '80s, there was a couple of boats that would pop in once a week or something. One of the guys would get some information from them, but that went away very quickly. All the stuff that came in would be trucked in from—or even by air sometimes, depending on where it was coming. But, it would come from the South and from New England.

MC: Boy, that must have been interesting, the logistical issue of having…Did those issues, in terms of fish coming in from New England or from Florida or being jetted in from some other distant local, did that factor into your work at all?

BS: Well, it factored in on the days, particularly on Mondays and Thursdays when all the southern fish would come in. It made our job a lot more difficult because sometimes they would come in late, they were still unloading, guys were a little cranky [laughter]. Those days made it a little more difficult to get information—we'd have to stay there longer, wait a little while longer to get the information. Those days were rough because they were still a little chaotic when we got down there, and if it was chaotic when we arrived, it was a rough morning because the guys are real tied up with still getting their fish.

MC: Right, yeah. So, that was on Mondays and Thursdays?

BS: Yeah, those were the heavy days when southern stuff would come in.

MC: And what other locations were there? Were you often struck by some of the—I don't want to say exotic locales—but were you often struck by the source areas that were supplying the fish to the market?

BS: Well, we were getting a lot of things from, at that point, from Central America, South America, a lot of the Caribbean countries would send in some exotic looking fish that you didn't usually get just from locally obviously. Stuff like parrotfish and the mahi-mahi would come in, and things like that. A lot of the salmon would come in from as far as Faroe Islands. The imported stuff is becoming more and more prevalent towards the end. The salmon was coming in from Norway and Canada and not as much from Washington State like it did in the beginning. Things like that—even the snappers, when they put the restrictions on the domestic snappers, they would come in from South America, you know. Things like that. The locales, the venues were becoming more and more varied over the years, instead of traditional places.

MC: Wow, that's an interesting…I think most people, they often go to a fish restaurant an they'll see these things, but I don't think they're—I think a lot of people still figure that the old terms of coming into the auction at Gloucester, Massachusetts or the boats coming in and they see the old photos of Fulton, they think the boats are coming in. Boy, it really speaks to a global marketplace, doesn't it?

BS: Absolutely, absolutely. They were coming in from everywhere and anywhere. It was a change—you could see a change over the years.

MC: So, in a sense, your data is a bit different form the kind of data that's collected when they talk about landings, the actual fishermen reporting on how much whatever, groundfish they caught or whatever.

BS: Yeah, exactly.

MC: You weren't really—you're dealing with a totally different sort of scenario, it sounds like.

BS: Well, it was a lot of local fish, of course. Some Long Island, Jersey, things like that. But the stuff like tuna and things like that, they were all coming in from overseas, and that got to be more and more as time went on.

MC: Right. Was there—I know how this, the work that I do with fishing communities and again more as a historian—it's interesting how target species change and the dynamics of the fishing community might change and so forth. When you were…well, you're still doing, I shouldn't say when you were because you're still doing this job [laughter]. Did you—any of those changes when new species were being pursued or changes were going on, those kind of dynamics—did they ever enter into your sort of daily deliberations or interactions with the vendors.

BS: No, I can't say it did. No, I wouldn't say that. Just that they were just acquiring different species and it was just interesting to see species that I didn't normally see. You saw the cod every day and the whiting every day and the bluefish every day, and we started seeing the exotic stuff come in—the parrotfish and things like that. It made it a little more interesting to see different types of fish you weren't used to seeing before, but I'd say that was about it.

MC: Right, because I was thinking of the oyster community that I study in the Delaware Bay and I was interviewing some fishermen and they were—I guess for some reason they had this incursion of albino eels. Again, they all of a sudden inadvertently saw them and must have caught some, I don't know if it was bycatch, all of a sudden they realized they could sell these—I guess particularly to the Asian market. So, all of a sudden they jumped to it [laughter]. So, it was interesting, that process by which they kind of exercised a certain versatility in moving to another species because all of a sudden they realized this was a way to make some money. So, I'm always struck by that issue, sort of how nimble a fisherman can be depending on… obviously Fulton shut down what year again?

BS: 2005.

MC: Oh, it was open that long?

BS: Oh yeah, until November of 2005, yeah.

MC: Yeah, because when I was there, I know there was a lot of—this was in '96—there was a lot of…I'll put it this way, there was a lot of concern because I guess the Giuliani administration was coming down on them or whatever and the investigations were going on.

BS: Well, he changed all the unloaders, that's what Giuliani did. He got the old unloaders out and he put the new ones in [laughter].

MC: When you say "unloaders", what's that?

BS: These are people unloading the trucks.

MC: Oh, I see…I see. So, they stayed open and then they moved over to the Bronx, correct?

BS: Yeah. I had seen articles going back to the '50s about the market moving to the Bronx [laughter]. That's how long they'd been talking about it. That's why nobody ever believed it was going to occur, because they'd been talking about it for so long.

MC: Right.

BS: But it was amazing when they finally…I didn't—I thought I'm going to believe it when I see it, you know [laughter]. But it eventually did come to pass.

MC: Right. So, you were making that trip into the actual Manhattan location and then obviously since 2005 you've been going to, I assume to Hunts Point now?

BS: Oh, no, no. Unfortunately, that reporting stopped in 2005.

MC: Oh.

BS: Yeah, stopped reporting the fresh fish in 2005 because at that point my partner retired, I became a one-man office and the Bronx—I don't know if you know the logistics of New York—the Bronx would be like an hour and a half trip from my office in Manhattan and that was after me making an hour and a half trip from Long Island to Manhattan, so it was not feasible for us to do it anymore. So, we had to stop doing it. What I'm reporting on now is strictly frozen fish, not fresh anymore. So, that had to stop which created quite a stir at the time we did it, but there's no way I could get there in time. I couldn't get to the Bronx, I just couldn't get there.

MC: So, you couldn't get manageably from your Manhattan office to the Bronx?

BS: No, no. And they started working even earlier. They work until like 7:00 in the morning, and they're closed. They used to be open until 9:00, 9:30 down in Manhattan, so it would have be impossible to get down there. It just would have been totally, totally impossible. My boss at the time took a trip with us once, and he realized how far it was. It was like an hour and fifteen minute subway ride, like another fifteen, twenty minute bus ride—it just was not doable and we had to stop doing it unfortunately.

MC: And the concern that arose, did that arise from the fishermen now that they felt they were…?

BS: Yeah, sure. That's where I got a little flak from, it was all the fishermen saying "how are we going to judge the prices now? We're flying blind, what do we do?" I said, "you know, it wasn't my decision—we just couldn't do it anymore." We didn't have the personnel to do it anymore and the logistics just weren't working. That's a pretty huge place down there even if I could get down there for one person to navigate that, it would have been impossible and they weren't going to hire anybody.

MC: Right.

BS: Everything I'm doing now is by phone and by emails and whatever, so there's no personal contact anymore. It's all done electronically.

MC: Was there ever any discussion of actually having an office for you at Hunts Point where you could just operate more manageably?

BS: I bet they discussed it, but it didn't really go into anything. I wasn't too thrilled about it myself, that's a hell of a schlep for me to make every day [laughter]. It wasn't something I would have been too happy with. Manhattan was a piece of cake, you know, it was no big deal. Going to the Bronx was a little bit of a challenge, so that never really materialized. I tried at one point to try to get it by phone if I could, but these guys weren't as cooperative doing it that way as they were doing it in person. We just had to shelve it. It was unfortunate, but we just couldn't do it.

MC: Yeah, that's…what a shame. When you once had a staff of it sounds like three or people, and now it's just you?

BS: We had a staff of *ten* at one point.

MC: Ten? Wow.

BS: Yeah, we had ten. That's when we were doing the printing and what have you, but as people started leaving one way or the other—either retiring or passing on or whatever—they made a decision back in the '80s that they weren't going to replace anybody. So, it dwindled and dwindled and dwindled. We had six people up in Boston and ten people in New York, and it went down to one and one towards the end. That's the way it is.

MC: Do you have any idea, if you can speak to the issue, of why they didn't rehire people?

BS: I guess they didn't feel they…some people came in, the new people who came in, I guess, felt it wasn't a priority. The older people felt it was a priority, and as time went on, money became tight, I guess budget restraints, and they just didn't feel it was worth doing.

MC: In many respects, it sounds like this is kind of interesting because people like myself who study the fisheries and the interactions between say, policymakers and fishermen, or scientists and fishermen, and people like yourself who are looking at things from the economic standpoint and fishermen, those relationships and interactions are pretty important it seems. Of course, it sounds like you were really doing this service for the fleet, really. For the fishermen, right?

BS: It was a service to the industry, really. Everyone thought it was a pretty important service, but sometimes you can't control what goes on in Washington, you know. [laughter] When the money's not there, they'll appropriate the money, whether it's taking away money from somewhere else and they choose who's going to be sacrificed and *Market News* seemed to be the one that was going to take the hit.

MC: Oh, that's right. That's the name of the publication, *Market News,* correct?

BS: Yeah, yeah.

MC: That has the data…Now that you're saying this, yeah. I can imagine, knowing the way commercial fishermen can be, that they probably—as you often know—they often feel like they're the target of everybody's ire. I can see where they may have taken this personally [laughter].

BS: Yeah…yeah.

MC: In a sense you're kind of covering—in a way you kind of have their back as they say, right?

BS: Yeah, exactly. That's what we were here for. We were kind of like the go-between, liaison if you want to call it that way [laughter]. As I said, I don't make the policy. I tell people I only work here. I've got to work with what they give me and that's the best I could do.

MC: Right, because we all know the fishermen often feel kind of vulnerable because they show up at market or their product shows up at the market and you've got to sell it. You can't just like, I'm going to go home, take my toys and go home. You have to really deal with…So, I can see where your work comes in and gives them a certain sense of—a little more control maybe over what's going on in their lives.

BS: Exactly, exactly.

MC: Yeah, that's really…Since 2005, you've been doing this work as you say, more by phone and other types of electronic communication?

BS: Exactly, yeah.

MC: Now, when you say you're just dealing with the frozen food, the frozen fish—

BS: This is frozen shrimp, lobster tails, things like that, squid. These are contacts I have over the years, same as the fish market actually, that we have a relationship with them and they send us their prices and same thing as the fresh, just a different type of fish, that's all.

MC: Right. And in a different—the fish that you were dealing with before, was it frozen or fresh?

BS: It was all fresh.

MC: It was all fresh, I see. So, it's still coming in and then the vendors are selling it and so forth, and so then they'll trace, I assume your readership, the folks reading your reports will again look back and see what that frozen box of lobster sold for.

BS: Exactly.

MC: How has that dynamic and that sort of situation—how has that affected your job or has that changed?

BS: Well, it changes where I went from being a field agent to being basically just coming to the office. The way I deal with people is not as personal contact as it was in the old days, which in some ways I miss because you always had that kind of—you kind of chat with these guys about everything and anything, develop a friendship and a relationship over the years. Here, basically by phone, many times they just email me their price information…I don't even talk to them that much. So, it's kind of like a—sort of like the electronic age we live in now. It's not as personal as it used to be. People don't talk to you any more, they text and they email [laughter]. It all falls into that, kind of like life in general, how it's turned into. It's less personal now and it's more—

MC: Right [laughter]. Oh go ahead, I'm sorry.

BS: --that personal touch is kind of gone, you know. It's very—I don't even know what the word

to describe it is—it's very impersonal as opposed to how it used to be.

MC: That comment kind of brings to mind the issue of—were you, I know you were doing your government reports or you're doing your work for the *Market News* that the government was putting out—were you an important contact with other groups? Did other folks rely on you for information and contact for, again, a variety of issues related to the fisheries?

BS: Well, people—I've gotten a lot of people who do trend analysis. People call up and say, give me information for the last ten years on your reports so I can see how they've gone up, they've gone down. I've got college kids calling me up saying they're doing reports on fisheries, give me your information for the last five years or something. People do things like that. People call me up when they're getting into the business, they want me to explain certain, how the business works, what certain things mean, things like that. Things of that nature.

MC: Yeah, because I can imagine folks that I've known that have worked for state agencies and the federal government, they're important contacts for people in the field, in the profession. You become like go-to guy for certain things. How about the media, newspapers, were they ever folks who…?

BS: Well, when there's any kind of natural disasters. When there's—going back to Katrina and the Gulf spill we had a few years ago in Louisiana, that's when I get all the CNNs and the FOXs and the Times people calling me up trying to get how it's affecting the fisheries. So, I do a lot of interviews with them. I call my people up and say what's going on, what's happening with you guys, so I have an idea what I can tell these people. If I get a lot of that and there's a catastrophe on the horizon.

MC: Oh, I see. I see. I would think that again, because you're sort of—again, you're where the rubber meets the road, you know, so if they wanted to get a real sense of when you think of going from water to the dinner table, you're right in the middle of it all [laughter].

BS: Yeah, exactly. If there's any kind of problem, I have to make sure I know what's going on so I can tell these people the situation. So, I get that when all these natural disasters happen. Some people want to know what's going on.

MC: Was there a particular event, natural disaster, or otherwise that comes to mind that really left a lasting impression on you in terms of—

BS: Well, Katrina was a big one because that affected the Gulf fisheries for quite a while. They weren't fishing there for a while, they shut things down for a while. Even going back to the Valdez in Alaska, that created a big environmental problem in Alaska, and that's going back you know, 25 years. So, those three things, the Alaska thing, Katrina, and the last Gulf spill—not the spill, the leak I should say—those are three things that really stood out that affected a lot of things.

MC: Yes. I mean, boy, that is really—again, I'm thinking back to my oyster research and people

who like to say the Delaware Bay oysters ended up in England—but it's interesting. Here you are in New York and all this far flung fishing activity is kind of roost right there.

BS: Yeah, yeah.

MC: I find that's really…I mean, if you're interested in fisheries, right, this is the kind of thing that kind of keeps you going [laughter]. For some people, who this isn't necessarily their area of interest, but the whole dynamics of—I mean, I guess that's why I find you work interesting. I was always interested in all of these, the variety of issues—economic, political, environmental—that entered into the fisheries scene…You're in a much more sort of public position than some people who are doing their research out on the ocean.

BS: No, no. I bear the brunt of some of the things that happen [laughter]. Absolutely. There's a problem, that's when my phone rings a lot.

MC: Yeah, no that's….you don't have the—you're not as insulated, if I can use that phrase from the—

BS: Yeah, you're right. Absolutely.

MC: So, at this point you're continuing. Are you based out on eastern Long Island now?

BS: Yeah, for the last two years I've been out in Patchogue, yeah. We've had a statistical office out here for many, many years. But they wanted me to leave Manhattan, there was room out here, there was space here, so they threw me over here.

MC: And you were in Manhattan up until two years ago?

BS: Yes. Since 2014, yeah.

MC: And again, if you could clarify that, how close was your office to the Fulton Fish Market?

BS: Well, we were taking the subway towards the end, we didn't have a car anymore…Maybe a ten minute subway ride, fifteen minute subway rise. That's all.

MC: So you were fairly close, yeah.

BS: Yeah, we weren't too far. That was an easy commute from our office.

MC: Yeah, I imagine getting back and forth. Aside from the logistics of it all, do you think that the move form Fulton to the Bronx, was that a good move for the industry?

BS: Well, I guess it's holding its own. I have heard a few businesses have gone under since then. I don't know if that's related solely to the move, I don't know. I haven't had too much contact with them since they moved. It was more expensive to do business there than it was in Lower

Manhattan. I think they had a little more of a better deal with the city on South Street than they did in the Bronx, so it affected them that way. But I guess the biggest companies survived and maybe some of the small ones couldn't cut it, so. But they're still in business, they're still there, so they're surviving.

MC: Right…So, again, if you could just recapitulate how many years now has it been since you started?

BS: How long I've been working here?

MC: Yeah.

BS: I started in 1979.

MC: '79. Wow. And how many more years do you expect to continue?

BS: That's…[Laughter] that's an issue I play with every day. I don't know. It could be tomorrow, it could be a couple years from now.

MC: Given that long tenure that you've had there, do folks in the office kind of rely on you as an institutional memory person?

BS: Yeah, I guess so. I'm their last guy standing. I guess so, yeah [laughter].

MC: Have you been involved in any publications or reports that the Fisheries Service has put out? I know you put the data into the *Market News*. Do they require you to do the authorship of any other fisheries type of…?

BS: No, no. Solely the *Market News*.

MC: It's been a lot of statistics, right? Statistician in a sense, is that accurate?

BS: With me, I basically describe myself as a *Market News* reporter. That's technically my title. I do—you could call it data analysis, you could call it that. That's what I'd describe what I do.

MC: *Market News* reporter.

BS: That's my title, yeah.

MC: Right. If someone was to ask you, and you've kind of touched on this with some of your other responses, what has—we talked about some of the challenges—in terms of the rewards of the job, obviously anybody that's done it as long as you have obviously enjoys your work. What would you say would be the particular rewards that you've derived from your work over the years?

BS: I enjoy interacting with the people. The fish market wasn't as bad a place to go to every day as people might think. It was in my blood a little bit, so it didn't bother me as much as most people [laughter]. I enjoyed the fact that I was providing a service. It was a free service, so anybody could go on there and look at it. If it helped them make business decisions easier, I was happy for that. Just putting out something that people thought was important. That they felt they needed to have. That was probably the bulk of it.

MC: And I guess I didn't really ask you this question earlier, but did you have much interaction with any of the scientists? I've interviewed a number of scientists from this Northeast region and did you have much interaction with those folks?

BS: No, not really. Like apples and oranges, we didn't really interact too much at all, no.

MC: Well, if you have nothing else—is there anything else you want to add?

BS: I think we about covered it all.

MC: No, it's really fascinating. Believe me, I understand because similar to yourself, it was my exposure to being around these arenas that led me to do what I'm doing now as a historian and as an anthropologist, really is the best way to characterize what I do. It was always my fascination with the work, you know, that whole work environment.

BS: Yeah, right. Exactly.

MC: Like you say, it's always interesting when people like yourself who kind of grew up in the business, you're already literate in the field. There was somebody, I was talking to someone they were referring to somebody up in Gloucester, Massachusetts, and the person had a particular—it was a scientist who apparently had grown up in the Italian-American fishing community there. So, he already kind of had a certain level of, how would I say it, literacy, sensitivity to the issues which kind of empowered him on one level and made him more effective at his work, I think, than somebody who was in cold. But if you think that's it, Bob, this has really been very, very useful. Very helpful. I knew you'd have some good stories [laughter].

BS: I'm glad I could be of help.

MC: No, this has been very, very helpful. What I'm going to do—I have your email, what I'm going to ask if you could do is I'm going to send you a permission form, we need to have you sign a permission form which allows future people, researchers, to use this material. So, if I send that to you as a PDF, can you then download it, sign it, and then rescan it for me and send it back to me?

BS: Yeah, I can do that. These things you're doing, have you notified the main office about this stuff? Because when you ask me to do stuff like this, I always have to make sure the main office is aware of all this stuff.

MC: Oh yeah. Your name was given to me with a list of scientists who—you see, I teach at Quinnipiac University. I thought at first I'd be doing more of the interviews at the Milford Oyster Lab, but that didn't—but I'm down here in southern New Jersey for the summer so they asked me to do these interviews with folks in what they see as closer to New Jersey. So yeah, this is all, everybody that I'm interviewing is either currently or retired from the National Marine Fisheries Service. What this all stems from is really history often gets short shrift, but it's an attempt to just interview people and just to have this historical record. It's going to go in the NOAA archives, I assume, in Silver Spring. The money, it's all being directed out of Woods Hole, at the facility up there. So, they're all onboard. They all know what's going on and so forth. We're all in the loop here. Again, they're interviewing people in Maine, in Woods Hole, in Milford, in Sandy Hook. What happened is some money became available to do these oral histories and that's when they approached a number of people. Ideally, people were doing these one-on-one, but in a lot of cases because of distance we've had to do them by phones. So, it's all sort of everybody—the fellow who's directing me, he's based up at Woods Hole. We're all set.

So again, that permission form is pretty important just because for oral histories we have to have your permission to use your words and so forth. Nothing's going to be done with this—it's going to be transcribed, they'll make a printed version of it—but somebody had asked me is this going to be used for an upcoming publication. At this point, we're just collecting the information so that future researchers will have it and will know who Bob Santangelo was and the work that he did [laughter]. But I'll send you that form and if you could send it back to me. So look for that email and that attachment and again, if you download it and then sign it and then rescan it and send it back to me, that'd be great.

BS: Okay.

MC: Okay Bob, well again, I really appreciate your time. This had been very helpful and I'm sure that future researchers will be happy that we have your words in both digital and in printed form.

BS: Okay.

MC: Okay Bob. Thanks a lot. Again, I appreciate your time.

BS: Okay, thanks Michael.

MC: Take care. Bye.