



NEW BEDFORD FISHING HERITAGE CENTER

Date of Interview March 13, 2017

Macedo, Antonio ~ Oral History Interview

Fred Calabretta

Macedo, Antonio. Interview by Fred Calabretta. *Workers on the New Bedford Waterfront*. New Bedford Fishing Heritage Center. Date of interview: 03/13/2017.

This oral history was produced in 2017 as part of the *Workers on the Waterfront Oral History Project* conducted by New Bedford Fishing Heritage Center with funding from an Archie Green Fellowship provided by the Library of Congress.

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Antonio Macedo interview, March 13, 2017

Background

Name of person interviewed: Antonio (Tony) Macedo [AM]

Facts about this person:

Age 47
Sex Male
Occupation Marine Carpenter
Residence Acushnet, MA
Ethnic background (if known) Portuguese

Interviewer: Fred Calabretta [FC]

Transcriber: Aneshia Savino [AS]

Interview location: Fairhaven Shipyard, Fairhaven, MA

Date of interview: March 13, 2017

Key Words

Woodworking, Fairhaven, scallopers, Kelly's, riggers, wooden boats, caulking, Mayflower, reconstruction, and shipbuilding

Abstract

Antonio Macedo describes his teen years learning to build and repair wooden ship by hand. after quitting school before eventually buying the business with his partner Duarte Da Silva in 1999. Macedo describes the changing waterfront economy and its effect on his business, shifting his business to interior repairs and historical restorations. He laments the lack of interest of younger folks in woodworking, and the decreased need of his trade on the waterfront as steel boats have replaced centuries old boats building techniques.

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[00:00] Tap Intro; Macedo was born on San Miguel, Azores and immigrated to New Bedford in 1978, learning the shipbuilding trade on the job, buying his own business.

[5:31] Work over the holidays, around the fishing schedules, feeling responsible for the fishermen's safety while at sea.

[10:14] Balance working quickly with making the boat safe, all work is done by hand, white oak wood, working in teams of six to twelve.

[15:20] Rough work on deck during winters, worked twelve hours a day, six or seven days a week when working on multiple projects. Use of antique tools from a century ago and some from his godfather. Built models to practice caulking planks at home.

[20:58] Different caulking techniques, must know the correct rhythm of caulking. There is a lack of wooden vessels to work on, and the loss of 200 years old crafts.

[25:21] Working in winter conditions – wind and precipitation, ice sheathing for hulls, captains and owners differing attitudes to the vessels, decrease in ice in New Bedford Harbor in the past 20-30 years and increase in steel boats. Adapting to interior woodworking. All work is custom. About once a year they get to repair a wooden ship.

[30:20] Keeping in touch with the old crowd, the challenge of working all unique angles, no two jobs are the same, lack of upcoming apprentices in the industry.

[35:22] Decline of wooden ships, increase of steel. Rebuilding boat interiors and having partnerships with marine plumbers and electricians.

[40:22] Boat-owner's impatience and working with difficult contractors, Macedo most enjoys the detail work and final touches on the woodworking, fishermen seem to keep the interiors in good condition when the work is well done.

[45:44] Macedo would love to see more young people interested and dedicated to traditional shipbuilding and woodworking, Describes steam planking and working aboard the Mayflower

[50:07] End of Audio

[00:00]

Fred Calabretta: This is an interview for the New Bedford Fishing Heritage Center funded by an Archie Green fellowship from the Library of Congress. As part of this project we're interviewing shore side workers in the New Bedford/Fairhaven fishing industry to record their stories, document their skills and knowledge and better understand their important role in the fishing industry. The recording and transcript will become part of a permanent collection at the Library of Congress. I'm Fred Calabretta and today I'm speaking with Tony Macedo. The date is March 13, 2017 and we're at the Fairhaven shipyard in Fairhaven, Massachusetts. Okay. And do you give your permission to record this?

Tony Macedo: Yes.

FC: Okay. So, just to start, maybe if you could give your full name and your date of birth?

AM: My name is Antonio Macedo. I was born 09/07/70.

FC: Good and where were you born?

AM: The Azores. One of the islands of Portugal. One of the islands. San Miguel. The biggest island.

FC: And when did you come to the States?

AM: 1978, June 24th

FC: So, you were 8 years old or so.

AM: I was going to be 8 because I came in June, so I was seven to be eight. Yeah.

FC: And did your family know other people here or have other relatives?

AM: Ah yeah, my aunt. Which is my aunt and uncle did the papers for us to come here with the green visa, you know. Legally and stuff like that. But, they're the ones that called us over the United States.

FC: And were you living in Fairhaven, or New Bedford?

AM: New Bedford. I lived in New Bedford for four years and then we moved to Acushnet.

FC: And how did you get into this business?

AM: Interesting. It was when I was going to school, next-door neighbor, because we had built our house, a brand new house, and he was building a house in front of them so I, he asked me in the summertime to give him some help build his house. Because he did it after work. He worked. At D.N. Kelley then. His name was Antonio Marks. And he worked for D.N. Kelley and he said, "You want to help me build the house?" and I said yeah, sure!" So. I liked carpentry and he'd seen I had a knack for it and he goes, " hey you want to work with boats?" And I thought he was joking, but I said yeah, sure I'll give it a shot". And I liked it. From then on he brought me on the weekends you know, working, after school, because he did side jobs. Back then there was a lot of wooden boats, eastern riggers and stuff like that. And I kind of fell in love with it and I just kicked from there and from then on I start working on boats.

FC: So, so when you got started, you learned a lot from him?

AM: Yes, basically, I learned everything in the trade off of him. You know cause he worked in Portugal and he went in the Navy. He worked on Sarks vessel, teak decks, the decking, planking on hulls, came here when he worked for D.N. Kelley. He also was a lot wood boats in the seventies, early eighties though. He used to work scallopers, especially. There was a lot around till mid-nineties. So, there was a lot of demand for wood carpenters, caulking, planking and stuff like that. So, I kind of pick up the knack from him, you know woodworking with him and pass it on.

FC: Learned some of the tricks...

AM: Yes, tricks of the trade, that's true

FC: And it sounds like it's something you liked and...

AM: Yes.

FC: As soon as you were around it.

AM: Yeah, yeah, I like it. And it's interesting. Hard work, you know, cause the planks, you know are all old fashioned, you know, the spikes, you got six inch spikes and drilled and ten-pound sledge hammer with the nails set. But so, I like it. Overall I did like it.

FC: And when did you start here? Or it was...

AM: Well, I started with him. He started as his house, He left Kelly's and started his own business. So, I worked with him in 1986. So, I quit school, I went to work with him. And, we just

kept on working till 1999. He kind of, I was going to go out on my own so he bought into the business with another partner, Duarte DaSilva. And till 2009 he kind of semi-retired, health issues. And just me and my partner Duarte DaSilva, still have the business going on, Working on the waterfront.

FC: And so, you just continued, when you started, you didn't have any experience. When you first started?

AM: Yes, no. No...

FC: You just continued to learn and...

AM: As we go on, experience like anything, like any job. you know as you go on you learn, try to improve things, to make it faster and safer. Because it's a lot of responsibility. You have a lot of people going fishing, relying on you. So the boat doesn't leak or sink; you know if something's wrong, needs to be fixed, we got to fix it. And mostly we do it, the scallopers would stop around the holidays would be, New Year's Eve till the second week after that and we'd just work through those weekends because that's the only downtime we had because back then they had to go fishing with like 13 men on the boat, you know so. It was cold and interesting.

[05:31]

FC: So, there's a definite season. Especially at that time where they, you got to get the boats done then, so they're to go when they, when they're ready to go.

AM: Yes, yep, basically. Make sure, basically they have to plan down time or any holidays that be in to spend time with their families, we'd work for those holidays so they can go out fishing and we'd rest, you know, to make ends meet.

FC: And how much of what you were doing at that time was new construction? And how much of it was repair work?

AM: Basically, it was almost all restorations. You know we had a few restorations, like the Jupiter, we rebuilt her at Fairhaven Shipyard in early 90s and I was, refastened her, re-caulked her, we did planking, bulwarks, covering boards, [indeterminate] back then had like six scallopers and it was one of the big scallopers gentlemen. Wooden fleet that was pretty big. He gave us 90 percent of the work, it was all wood. So, the only welders they had was just for the dredgers. Everything else was wood It would break down. We'd constantly be fixing about cause the dredgers would break a scansion it would go through a plank, put the sheeting, the bars would get ripped off, the wire, everything chaffing. So, we're constantly repairing these boats. Because it mostly was all repairing that we did.

FC: And that's one thing about wooden boats, you can't just leave them alone.

AM: No, no, it's high maintenance. There's always something especially scallopers because of the dredgers you know, coming up. And then the ocean, and the weather. It makes it a big thing. And those guys will be there in rough weather and sometimes it shocked me, you know, how they do it, but they had a lot of courage and, they did it.

Fred Calabretta: Well, if you have a plank let go or something yeah...

AM: Yeah sometimes it comes, the caulking would let go. And they go halfway through the storm and they have to pump it. You know come in we'd have to fix it, get it to dock, you know lean it over to one side, get it to float and caulk it, get it all tightened up and some of them we had to haul them out, you know. Because underneath below you can't get to it so you have to make plans to haul out, wait for railways, there wasn't travel lifts then, just railways back then. So, we had to wait for that and then schedule it. That way they'd stop their fishing and do their yearly hull inspection and repairs and go back fishing again.

FC: You know you mentioned before, the thinking about the sort of the safety part of it. I mean that's kind of interesting, I mean, that's sort of, it's like this pressure on you. I mean these guys that's, that boat keeps them alive out there you know.

AM: Oh yeah, and the thing is, the captains mostly, they just want to go fishing sometimes, and then they didn't, if there was something wrong, I'd have to go tell the owner. Say hey, you need to fix this, or you need to have to haul it out because you're going to have an issue and the only way to do it is to replace a plank. Because it's either worn out, shaving too much, because they're two and a half inches and it was only like an inch and half left, and you'd see the groove of the wire shave pin. And normally the owner he would just, he'd agree. He wanted the safety for everybody and we would just haul out the boat, fix it right and then put it back in the water, and go back fishing. Yeah, it's a lot of responsibility, sometimes you lose sleep, because when you think there's a storm out there, you think, you know, you know you never know, what could happen.

FC: Yeah, that's an interesting part of the work. It's like an extra thing to worry about now.

AM: Yeah, yeah, you got to make it like triple safe you know. What you do and you got to be safe, make sure it's right and done right and um, because the caulking, you got to put the caulking and the oakum and then you have to horse it in and put the compound. It's quite a few steps. It wasn't that very easy. It was hard work too.

FC: So, were you pretty much involved in everything, planking, frames, caulking...

AM: Yes,

FC: The works?

AM: Yes everything. Yep, new stems, repairing keels, sometimes they crash out there. Boat accidents, in the night time back then technology wasn't that advanced like it is now. You know, GPS, there was no GPS, all by maps and they'd have some accidents, bows crashing, some boats, we replaced the whole bow. You know they'd come in, get out of the water and be out for a couple of months we'd do a new stem and planking that's all we did. stanchions, you know, cumber boards. Did all of that.

FC: See had to do all of that stuff. Had to get, did you have to, especially when you were, earlier, when you first were getting going, were there certain jobs you enjoyed more than others, or?

[10:14]

AM: Ah, no we had to get the job, no, I liked basically all of them because it was work and we had to do it. We had to get the boats ready to go fishing. And if they, the sooner you get it done correctly the sooner they want to go out. Because back then there was no regulation on days. And scallops was cheap, you know, and there was 14 men on board. You hear 14 guys saying, "hey, we going out today? We going out tomorrow?" You know they'd be hiping and hollering, and say we're doing the best we can, you know we're doing it right. It has to take time. You couldn't rush things. You just had to take the time to do the job right.

FC: So, you must have been, you must have felt a little bit of a squeeze at times, you get pressure from these guys cause they got to feed their families?

AM: Exactly. That was the other thing. Because some people, you know had kids to feed, and some people would be at the bar and be broke and they want to go back again. Especially the fishermen back then, I don't know about now, but back then, you know fishermen would, they come from fishing, they'd go to bar and then they're done. They want to go back again to make some more money. But yeah, we did but that all we could do. It had to take time to do the job right.

FC: Yeah, you can't rush it and do it right.

AM: No, and it was all manual labor, you know what I'm saying. There was no machines, no nothing, you know, and basically, you had planers, you know and then skill saws, to cut the

planks and drilling. It's all hammering. It's a slower process, procedure. It's not nailing plywood in a four by eight sheet. You know what I'm saying. And done with it. It's not that easy.

FC: Yeah, Not when you're fitting planks...

AM: No twists and angles, and caulking seam, and bevel edges, you know and caulking the butts, making sure there's a proper caulking, seam the caulk evenly, so it takes certain measurements required, certain feet to make sure it fits nice and tight. The right type of wood. You can use pine, had be white oak, you know. Red oak is porous, so we couldn't use that unless it was for shaping gear, which is protecting the white oak which is fine. Where the dredgers came up on the belly of the boat, it was what we call it sheathing, we did that and then every six inches, we put spring steel back then. They don't. It's very expensive now, but back then, so it used to be three eights by three. Had to be drilled every 16 inches and nailed with drive screws, which they don't make anymore, but yeah, that was fun.

FC: And where were you getting your materials, pine and...?

AM: We never really used pine, but basically was white oak.

FC: White oak.

AM: Pine was only for checkers for the fish holes, for dividers. We wouldn't use pine because it's very soft, you couldn't use it. It was mostly white oak. And we got from local sawmills. Used to be Delano's sawmills, Gurney's up in Freetown.

FC: So, you could get enough of it and...

AM: Back then yes. Not now, but back then yes. We could get plenty of it. There's this place up in Connecticut that had a lot, an abundance of white oak, [indeterminate]. So..

FC: And did you did you have a supply here that was seasoned and,,

AM: Yes, We did back then there was demand, we had plenty of it in stock, which air dried some of it, and some of it was already at the sawmills, because we required it and they knew there was such demand they'd have stacks we could go through various thickness and width to pick from and lengths also. Basically, they kind of saved that for us for the boating industry versus people that want to use it for farming, you now. They get the worser grade. We'd get the better grade cause it requires woods with no knots, minimum knots anyway. Solid knots, no rots in it, so, we'd pay little more but you needed it.

FC: So, and mostly with this kind of work, it sounds like you're working with a group of guys, I mean you're not on your own?

AM: Yes, ah, we, we, were a group of then we used to be group of six. There was Tony Marks, me, my dad, Joe DaSilva, his brother, Jose DaSilva, and sometimes his brother Manny. So, it was like a family thing. The business was like family when we had a big job. They'd come in. And then you know we'd have two different jobs, we'd split up you know depending on what the project is, some projects you only need three people. And some projects you need six, seven people because lumber's heavy. The beams, we put deck beams on boats, you know, you kind of...there was no cranes. The only cranes was manual labor, you know.

FC: Had to do it the hard way...

AM: Hands on, Yes got some rollers and pipes and slide it off the deck you know. Sledge hammers basically. Make the crowns on the boat for the deck planking and use a lot of fir. The decks used to be out of Doug fir and some pine, depending on the boat, the type of boat, where it was built. Most of them were built up in Maine.

[15:20]

FC: And, so, if it was like you said, it was like a family crew, everybody get along okay and...

AM: Yeah, mostly, yeah. I mean basically, everybody got, everybody has a bad day like anything else. I mean it's pretty normal. It's not perfect every day. Some people don't want to do the heavy work, wants to do the light work. We kind of shared you know, everybody was kind treated evenly. You know, so everybody wouldn't get burned out and tired because, everybody was considerate and they know we wouldn't take advantage of anything because we know how hard it is at night when you go to sleep your pains and aches next morning, you don't want to go to work. We have to go to work, you know. But I liked it, you know. And when you like something, you like doing it, you don't mind. The pain goes away.

FC: You put up with it.

AM: Yes. You live with it.

FC: Yeah and it can be rough on you. If you're working on your knees, working on the deck...

AM: Yes. Yes, Sometimes there's three, there's like three to four weeks, we got a whole deck to caulk, reef, and all that stuff, and back then there's no such things as knee pads, you know. We had the cotton, we used them rolled up, as four inch like loaves rolled up round. And we used to use them as knee pads one on each one because so many days, it doesn't matter what position

you're in you can't even kneel, you can't lay on your side. Sometimes you got to take a break and stretch your legs cause they get numb. But we had to do it. We had to do it.

FC: What kind of hours were you working at that time?

AM: Oh, at that time, well there was, it depended cause we were so busy. Minimum was 12 hours a day, 6 days a week. Sometimes seven days a week. Because there was a high demand for it. You know and there was not too many people that did it because it was heavy labor and didn't want to do it, and didn't have the experience either. So, we had a high demand, so, we kind of tried to, did the best we could.

FC: That's a lot of hours.

AM: Yes, it is.

FC: Get to take some breaks?

AM: Yeah...well, yeah, we were back to 8 hours, once in awhile, you know what I'm saying, but basically, we didn't take, basically we didn't take too much breaks because a boat was always breaking down. That's the thing, a wooden boat, there's always something to fix. So, they sprung a leak or something. They hit bottom like they do now, I mean, hit a rock, you know, so.

FC: Did it ever sort of feel like, almost overwhelming. I mean, you're working on one boat and you know that there's three more fishermen out there that want to get their boats in...?

AM: No not really because then, back what we'd do. We'd put one person each one at least to get taking stuff part to see what the problem is so make them happy. So, we wouldn't make them wait. So, there was some progress being made, not much, but at least they were happy. So, we wouldn't make them wait. So, there was some progress being made. At least they were happy somebody was already finding out what the problem is to diagnose it and try to fix it properly, so.

FC: So, you could give them some attention and kind of get the process started.

AM: Yup. And sometimes you needed, you know, more people and would tell them you, hey we got to finish that job, because ahead of time, because they'd understand, they do. Because uh, especially a lot of it was have to get a welder, because they put some steel plating on the bulwarks, where the dredge comes up, so, there was steel. So we'd say, we need the steel removal first before the works so it would give us enough time to go finish the other one and to jump back on that one. So we kind of played back and forth, you know, so, overall.

FC: You're making some progress on a couple of different...

AM: In between. Yeah we had to, you know, we had to.

FC: Did the, like if you were working on the fishing boat, how much were the fishermen around? I mean did you have them leaning over your shoulders and like...

AM: See the thing with the fishermen...every morning, like from eight to noon, they're there. After that they gone. Don't ask me where they go. I know where they went, but I don't ask questions. [laughing] And every day, they say, you're going to be done today? You going to be done today? I says, we're going to try. But after noontime, you wouldn't see them till next morning.

FC: And plus the boats like a member of their family anyway.

AM: Yeah basically. That was their bread and butter so they...

FC: Check on it every day and...

AM: And yeah, they wanted, they wanted to go out there and make money, you know. Because they had bills and like everybody else, you know...

FC: So, like when you first started, did you have your own tools, or did the...?

AM: My godfather had the tools. So, basically got tools from there. But there's like caulking tools are from the early 1900's, The caulking irons, drew irons. It's hard to get that stuff then. The caulking mallets, still antique. Still have those today. And um, it had to be special wood for the mallet, because of the certain noise. You have to know how to caulk, it's all by sound and your fingers, controlling the cotton. And you have to make like a rope strand, to get, in order to get it tight, depending on what the seam is, you control to with your hand and it was an experience. He made me learn at home. He made a four by four and out some pieces of wood with different grooves so you could learn. That's how I learned. And he'd say, you're too tight, or tighten it little bit back. It's all in the wrists. You know, or back, and that's how I learned. It was homework after work.

[20:58]

FC: So, that's interesting...So kind of setting up almost like a model...

AM: Yes basically, made up a model, four by four of wood, basically or the caulking especially. Because you got to know what you're doing. It's not just putting cotton in a hole cause it can go right through. Because sometimes, the boats was 30, 40 years old, the inner seam was kind of worn from the water and it was soft. So, what you have to do is caulk back. You make that rope strand instead of caulking straight. You caulk a degree back, you know 15 degrees or so or 30 degrees depending on what the seam is. Sometimes the seam, and sometimes you have to put rope. Because the seam was so big, you had to get a rope, put it in and then put caulking on it. So...

FC: And it's a seam, so, it's got to be done right.

AM: Yeah, so it's got to be done right exactly! You know.

FC: Is that one of, you know, maybe one of your maybe favorite skills, or something that...

AM: Yes. Because that, I liked it, and I didn't like it at first but it's kind of challenging and you got to have to know it because it's a technique you can't teach. Either you have it or you don't. Just how you hit, is got to make a certain sound, you can't, it's not like a little hammer, you put in a nail tick, tick, tick, tick. That doesn't work. It's like a rhythm. Like, every two seconds, you got to swing that hammer just right. It's got to be the same beat every time. You know it's got to be like a certain noise, like, click...click. Then click again. You know? But some people, you can tell. You can try to teach them but some people can't get it. The just can't.

FC: Do you ever have a second where you kind of step back and you kind of say I'm doing something that guys have been doing for 200 years? I mean it's a skill that goes way back...

AM: Yes. Sometimes, I don't really think much about it but now that you mention it, it's true. And it's a dying trade. Because there's barely any more wooden vessels except historical vessels now. Like the Mayflower, Ernestina, you know sailboats. But in the fishing industry there's none, scallopers anymore, they're all gone. It's into steel but yeah. I kind of am going to miss it, because you can't pass it on. I would like to pass it on like it was passed on to me, but there's nothing out there to teach them and how to do it.

FC: Does that feel like a sort of a sad side of the industry? Is that the wooden boats are gone, or going?

AM: Yeah it is but everybody is looking at the modern technology because they're high maintenance. That's the thing you know. Steel, you don't have to do nothing for a long period of time. In a wooden boat, even though it's brand new, every couple of years you have to do some

work, Because the wire shaving and the wood, you know the wire outlasts the wood and makes grooves, so, there is always repairs.

FC: Yeah, yeah. Did a whole bunch of things here, but, so, was most of the work you were doing was outdoors, not in a big shed or...

AM: No, everything was outdoors and cold most of the time it was always cold. In the summer time we did outside. But unless it was in the galley sometimes, we had to take out a floor to find a leak, to trace it, you know. Because sometimes you think the leak is in the bow but it's actually midship, going through the frames and then up in the bow, the cavity in between the frame and the wood, it travels, so it's like a guessing game and sometimes you have to take the interior out to pinpoint it. Because if it's out of the water, it all looks good. You know you can't, it's not, you kind of mark it and then you go on the outside. You check seams. We used to check with ice picks. Some boats had brown seam compound, and the hardest ones is the one that, I don't know why they did it, but they put hydraulic cement on some boat. When the seam gets too big, they get hydraulic cement because that's what holds everything in cause the compound will fall off if it's more than a half an inch. So, those were harder to check, because everything was hard until you pull out the hydraulic cement.

[25:21]

FC: And you, you just mentioned the weather, that that seems like that's a big part of it, winter work and...

AM: Yeah, we had to make tarps and the next morning they were gone, but it was like we had to do it. Because the boats would get beat up the most was in the wintertime. Because of the ice, we had to put ice sheathing. Especially on the bow because it was like a knife and some boats literally go out there and there was a quarter inch going through and it was water leaking and they couldn't figure it out. Or they cut through the plank because of the ice. We, now it's not as bad. Back in the 80s and this waterfront used to ice up and as soon as they go out there, you know in here out in the ocean its fine, there's no ice, but out, just getting out over time, you know it just cut slowly and slowly and nobody paid attention, and that's why end up putting ice-sheathing as a chafing gear that goes through that first. And when they'd hull we'd replace that to keep up with it.

FC: So, was enough of a problem that I mean you had to deal with it regularly?

AM: Yeah, because, it was so many. It has so many boats. It was not just one and some guys, they were not the owners, they were the captains, they didn't really care. They were out there to make their money. You know what I'm saying, so and some of them were conscientious and you know to look after the boats, even though they weren't theirs, they're running for somebody else,

the owners. But that's why we're so busy. Some guys just took off and they wanted to make their money.

FC: And you really notice a difference in how, as far as ice out here and you now, 20 years ago, 30 years ago?

AM: Yeah big difference. We used to walk on the waterfront pier 3, on the other side. Especially on flow, we could get flow, we'd walk out on ice. You know try to pinpoint if with a rope, hanging down just find out where a leak is. Now it's totally changed.

FC: Yeah, that's interesting. Yeah. But um...so...you worked on new construction projects too? I mean, did you build boats?

AM: The new construction we worked started in the late 90s was the interiors of steel boats, because steel was coming in. They were building new steel boats and they was older steel boats that needed new interiors. So, we started doing the construction of the whole inside. Woodworking inside the interior which we had to true bolt or shoot nails through steel, two by four basically. Almost like a house, but not a house cause it's got angles and twists. And we kind of make a skeleton, put two by fours put the fairings so you'd see like the ribs. One by threes, and then we put the plywood, make the bunks, you know make the custom-made cabinets with all the angles and twists, so. We started more and more into that because the wooden vessels were less and less. So, to survive we kind of had to flip, flip the switch the switch to new construction.

FC: So, what other changes sort of affected you with new materials, new technology, you know, or affected your job, our work?

AM: Well basically, there was no demand for the heavy lumber anymore because there was no construction or rebuild to be done on vessels. Basically, it was going the interiors was more like housing, comfortable for them sleep. Quarters for them to eat. Cabinets, so, basically, we deal with plywoods now, two by fours are out of fir, they don't have to be out of oak or anything like that particularly because it was just the protection to hold the walls together and the bunks together, so. It started off with paneling. Now we use Formica, which is a better product and it lasts longer. Marine-grade stuff...

FC: Easy maintenance?

AM: Yes, very easy maintenance versus the paneling after 10 years. The varnish would fade away, it would delaminate because of salt water, and Formica, it's very easy maintenance. You clean it off and you put the sheets four by 8 and you put the trim, you know mahogany trimming and stuff like that, so. It looks nice and stronger too.

FC: So you're still doing some work with, like, like the mahogany trim and stuff where you

AM: Yes, yes, with the mahogany, yes. yes. We, we still do molding, we custom made all our stuff because you can't buy it from the store, you can't use pine, because it turns black and it stains the mahogany and teaks is one of the woods that can take salt. It doesn't fade, especially inside. Teak has oil in it, and mahogany is very closed grain. You know what I'm saying, so it's very hard to penetrate and any water, it will do after a long period of time. But as long as you keep up the sealant and urethane, it'll last forever.

[30:20]

FC: So, for like some of that trim, do you do the milling here?

AM: We do the milling here, we get it rough sawn, dried, air dried, we store it here, and as we need it, we plane it, join it, mill it, sand it, varnish it and then install it. And in different boats moldings do change because of angles and twists and shapes. So, every boat's kind of different, We kind of have to modify certain moldings, especially around the windows of the wheel house. They're all different depths, different shapes. Then some want to cover the holes, so the windows, the bolts, the bolt them. Some want them exposed, uh, so it's always different angles and shapes we deal with.

FC: Do you enjoy that kind of work? That sort of joinery or trim work? and finish work?

AM: Yeah, I do, I do like it, but I still like the wooden, I kind of miss it once and while because it was more, I did it for so many years. The other stuff is nice and it's, I have to do it, now, but it kind of once and while, we do have a boat, probably in May we're going to have Shenandoah that comes up and every two years, we do have some work to do on then, you know the caulking, checking the fasteners for the Coast Guard. It's Coast Guard regulated. You now and then the once a year, at least, we have one or two boats that we work on that brings back old memories.

FC: Keeps those skill...

AM: Yeah, keep them sharp. That's correct. Yeah, yep.

FC: Um, what about, what about the people you're working with now, compared when you first started it. You have a good crew? And people get along pretty well and...

AM: Yeah, um, yeah, I mean my godfather, it was all his family, they all went their ways. You know what I'm saying, some working in industry, up in Providence, Newport, but once in a

while, we touch base if we see each other and the crew we have now is more like interior construction, not structural, but just, you know, just the living quarters basically. So there's not much of that risk you have to worry about. The plywood has to hold the boat up, it doesn't. The steel does the work for it so there's no that much responsibility. It's more putting up to, securing it properly so it doesn't fall. So, it's still challenging because of the angles you know, it's nothing square, nothings level. And you know, you got to take your measurements off the bulkheads. Basically, off the bulkheads is what you go off of it. To do the partitions of the rooms and stuff like that.

FC: You're not working with a square box or a square room.

AM: No, no, no, no. It's like V-shaped, round you name it. And one side's never the same as the other. [laughing] No, no. Definitely not. Sometimes you think it is but it's not.

FC: So, you have to spend a lot of time fitting...

AM: Making angles...yeah, shapes. It took me, what we do is make patterns. We get some furring strips, we make a pattern, so it's a lot quicker and faster and just put it on top of the plywood, scribe it, and then you don't have to play a guessing game because the floor, especially on steel is not even. When you weld, the heat warps. And same thing with the overhead, with the frames, with you tack weld. And they weld the plates solid on the ends, uh there is some movement of the steel and... and we have to take into consideration, you know, when we make our patterns to follow that shape, at least to look more uniform. You know?

FC: Do you...Are there young people working with you? Do you have a chance to teach the way you learned?

AM: Ah, we, I had, we had, a few guys about three years ago. But nobody, this younger generation, it's all modern technology. Everybody wants computers and push a button and everything's made. But...and it's sad because there's still a lot of, in the waterfront, there's a lot of demand for some woodwork. But nobody wants to, it's too much work, it's too heavy work. You know and it's not even heavy, compared to what, when I started. That was heavy work, but for them now, it's too much heavy work. Sanding and planing and varnishing, they'd rather sit at a desk, punch a button, you now, and solve something else which is fine, but somebody, who's going to do that in the future, that the thing. The people that are all my age basically, and 20 years from now, what going to happen? I don't know. Somebody will pick up hopefully. But normally somebody does. That's the thing. You get one in a few that normally picks up and likes it and can make a career out of it.

[35:22]

FC: And that's interesting, because there's always going to be a need for craftsman and people that know trades cause there are always going to be boats and houses and...

AM: Exactly and it's less and less. Back then it was abundant, you know if people wanted to work and learn and stuff like that and but now it's very hard. Even the kids who try to get from the school, the first week, yeah, it's fine and dandy after that, they'd rather play on their phone than actually work, you know.

FC: Yeah, um, let's see here...What's, well I guess, I know you talked about it quite a bit, but he major changes that you've seen since you first started. I mean a big thing has been decline of wooden boats...

AM: It was more steel boats, basically, it got to a point where it was so expensive and it was harder to get the wood and it got more costly. It got to the point, it was getting too expensive and people started slowly converting into steel, because steel was, it wasn't cheap, but in the long run, it would be cheaper to maintain. And then, we had to convert also, because we needed to work. We lived on the Waterfront and that was the new thing coming in also we had to adapt to that. We started slowly. You know what I'm saying? By repairing cabinets that were broken down, a boat caught on fire, that was our first step to get in, you know what I'm saying? It caught fire, so they need somebody to reconstruct it. And then you go, went out for bid, and we got a bid and it grew from there. And then some of these boats were too far beyond old, falling apart, from plumbing to wiring problems, so they figured they'd strip it, instead of buying a new one. It would be cheaper to rebuild and then it started, year after year, more and more people and they started seeing, oh this looks good, why build a new boat. I can reconstruct my boat and it'll be like almost brand new. As long as the hull was sounds they would put money into it. And today 90 percent of the people on the waterfront that's what they're doing. The steel boats, they're all rebuilding them.

FC: And so, you have to kind of have a partnership with the steel guys and the welders and the...

AM: Yes. We do. Uh...Especially because one of the reasons if there's a rotted hole we have to take the interior out. And they can't weld, or else there's going to be fire and we normally have to take a room or depending on the situation, a pipe burst, you know over time, it's rotted and we have to take those quarters apart in order to do that. So, he can do his job, and then we put everything back together. So, when you do a rebuild, whatever there's rotted, they're going to fix. And then we put everything together...the new wiring and the plumbing, there's another there's another crew of people that do that. We don't do that. We just do strictly the woodwork.

FC: And does, you still, you know, are there still times where you kind of feel pressure because the owner's in a hurry to get his boat back and...

AM: Yeah, well, mostly the owners sometimes they have a deadline. We try to accommodate their deadline, unless there's a major problem with the steel and then the deadline goes and there's not much we can do. If the problem, the boat's rotted, that can expose – normally on those boats they put cement and that was the worst thing they did, because it holds the moisture in between the engine room and the main deck. It was holes, water going through and so ninety percent of the time when we take out the cement it just, has to replat the main deck. And of course, especially now with the ... their quotas, they have to go fishing at certain periods of time and they want to do it in the summertime. They don't want to do it in the winter, but some of these people always wait for last minute, you know. We got to go, go go. But sometimes the shipyard, were in the shipyard, today we get some pressure. Trust me, we do get pressure. It's not easy. It makes it hard, challenging. Some, we try to... do the best we can and they'll at the end they'll see, because there's only so many things you can do in the day. And it's not because of us that things get delayed. Its stuff that fell behind, and stuff that catches up with us, because we're the last people on the boat, Because we have to get finish for them to go. So, yeah we do get a lot of pressure.

[40:22]

Fred Calabretta: And probably no matter what you do you get you're going to get people who gripe about what they're paying, or gripe about how long it's taking...?

AM: Exactly, it should have been, you know, it should have been the last week ago....it's not done yet...exactly, but you get used to it after a while, it's like, like the early days, the fishermen where worse. The owners I can live with, trust me, you know. I can, that's easy enough. That's only one person. When you get 14 people on you every day, you know, till noon. Is it today? Is it tomorrow? But...

FC: ; So that helped. Prepare you for today.

AM: Yes. Yeah. Yes. It does. It does.

FC: What, uh...what are the hardest parts of the job? Or what don't you like about it?

AM: Like in what? What aspect?

FC: Well uh, are there certain parts of a restoration job that are just kind of miserable and you can't wait to get them done and are there certain parts of it that you just, you know...

AM: The only problem is that sometimes is that you get frustrated and it, it's not, sometimes the plumbing or electricians are supposed to show up and they don't show up for weeks and that screws up our deadline. And that's what makes it frustrating, especially working with those type of people that, normally we find a group that we work together and make everything go smooth. But once in awhile, they're busy too because probably took on too many jobs and don't have enough manpower. So they're jumping around, here, here, and there, and it affects us, it affects the other people and especially when we have a deadline, and it gets frustrating after a while. Then we get a lot of arguing, you know. And that can be in a tricky situation.

FC: So, that's dealing with outside contractors and it's just like the home building business too?

AM: Yes. Yeah. That...exactly. Yeah but...

FC: You can't do the walls until the electricians done.

AM: Yeah exactly, and the thing is we didn't hire them. The owners do so we have to work with them we can't say who were going to pick for a plumber or electrician. It goes out for bid and they pick whoever they want and we can just suggest somebody but we can't tell them who to do because I don't know what their prices are and what they're charging. That's beyond our control.

FC: That's interesting, because if, you're working with somebody but even if they do a different type job, but they're inside you know what to expect, you know them, but if you're dealing with somebody from the outside...

AM: Yeah especially sometimes in the waterfront they say they are plumbers or electricians yeah they think they are, but they're not. That's the problem. And we know, I mean, we see stuff that's done wrong and we try to tell them that's not the way I think it should be done, but they say they know what they're doing, so we just stand back and let them do it. At least we try to help them, we've seen enough done that we can see the rights and wrongs and it gets to the point that they want to do it that way? Fine, we just let the owner know it's "I don't think it's done right" but some of them will fix and some of them don't. And then when there's a problem down the line we have to take it apart and fix it. Then the owner can't complain we didn't warn them.

FC: Yeah, it's not anything you did.

AM: Exactly. It was not our problem. It's beyond our means, you know what I mean? We try to help as much as we can.

FC: Yeah

AM: And every boat's different. You know, it's like even in the steel boats, no boat is the same. The shapes and the state rooms, the way it was built, the length wise, the width wise the height-wise, some boats are too tall and some are short, you know, but have to accommodate.

FC: And what's, what's the best thing about the work? What do you like most, or when do you walk away from here and say, boy that was a good day?

AM: That's hard. Basically, when it's almost done. When the project gets to the end I like it the most because its coming. All the frustrations are out now it's the nitpicking, it's all little odds and ends that's easy fixing, which is not a major, a few moldings here we have to touch up or we have to address. Or somebody damages something, otherwise people are working the crew that we have to repair like moldings. Nothing really major, but it's all knickknacks you want it to look pristine and look as nice as we can. All professional wise. And you know the thing about it is these people now that we're doing interiors, they're looking nice and their keeping it nice because the boats before used to be, like run down, look miserable and now you go into a good environment, it changes the whole mood of the crew people to give them incentive to keep them clean, you know, they'll throw stuff anywhere, dent walls, you know, the boats come in they send a crew lady to clean the boat she makes all look sharp and when you look at it, the job that I've done 10 years ago, it's like almost the day you left before because it still hasn't changed.

[45:44]

FC: So you think the boats are being better taken care of?

AM: Yes. Most definitely better taken care than did before. And one of the reasons is the product is better. It outlasts. Before the paneling wouldn't last it just fall apart because of the grooves, the laminate, people wouldn't care, after a while it would look rundown. You know just throw stuff all over the place. But that other stuff, that marine grade plywood, that makes it look nice and they kind of don't want to do it, because they'd be picked on. Especially by the owner [laughing].

FC: So, well, I should let you get back to work, but is there anything else that you'd like to add that we didn't cover?

AM: Ah...

FC: Anything you can think of?

AM: Well yeah, I would like to see younger generation would be more involved, especially through school or you know, because 20 years from now, what's going to happen, I don't know. The boats are always going to be here, some form or what...fiberglass; it's still going to need some wood craftsman to work in them regardless. And it's going to be sad because I don't see any young blood trying to learn the trade, to be apprentice. That's the only really thing but uh... hopefully somebody will pick up, different states I hope, you know especially on the waterfront it been number one so many years in the fishing industry, it's kind of sad to let it die out in maybe 20 years.

FC: And skills that are important to you and that you've learned...

AM: Yeah, you can't pass on if... you've learned, especially the caulking the old vessels, scallopers sailboat that we've worked on. That's a trade you have to, you can't read a book, has to be hands on. And somebody has to guide you what's right and wrong, so you can't, by reading, you have to be learning on the job as you go on. As technology is so advanced with computers and all that stuff it doesn't you know, how do I say, trying to think of the word but I can't think of it right now. It doesn't do justice versus to get the experience and knowledge with your own hands working with the product. Especially twisting steaming planks, that's the best part I used to like. Because we used to have jokes with the guys and we used to get a three-inch board, 30 feet long and were going to bend it in four feet and twist it and the guys at first say I'm crazy. Because the steamer plank is an inch an hour we have to make our own boxes, you know put it in, get the torches, boil the water and make the steam and be like a rubber duck and take that plank. That was, I love that the most. Because you can do, you see something straight and you twist it and then you let it cool and take it off, it's like a piece of art, you know? And people say it can't be done. Yes it can. Yes it can. We had the bow, we had the plank on the bow of the Mayflower here about 10 years ago. And the bow is really round and were two, me and two workers, we had the steam box down here. And one of my guys here I told him you're going to bend that plank on the bow all by yourself. He says you're crazy. So we tacked the plank on and I says, just keep pushing and thought he's going to get sprunged off and I says keep pushing and he couldn't believe it. We got it in. It's amazing what we can do with steam.

FC: Yeah, yeah. That's an example of those skills.

AM: Yeah you can't teach that, that's what I'm saying. That's one of the things I'd like to teach on especially steaming planks and frames and Novies where we build the a lot of Novies, 45 footers, from Maine and that was the same thing. The one by three frames you know you slide them in with a hammer, you put them, hit them down, the guy down below with the clamps, shaping them in letting them cool down. But it's going to be a lost skill

Fred Calabretta: Each planks a work of art you know.

AM: Basically, it's all different, and shaped and twists yeah. It sure is.

FC: Well that's great. Let's stop...

[50:07] End of audio