



NEW BEDFORD FISHING HERITAGE CENTER

Date of Interview: 11/10/16

Pettway, Cindy ~ Oral History Interview

Madeleine Hall-Arber

Pettway, Cindy. Interview by Madeleine-Hall Arber. *Workers on the New Bedford Waterfront*. New Bedford Fishing Heritage Center. November 10, 2016.

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Background

Name of person interviewed: Cindy Pettway [CP]

Facts about this person:

Age: 56

Sex: Female

Occupation: Owner at CP Brodeur

Residence: New Bedford

Ethnic background: French and Portuguese

Interviewer: Madeleine Hall-Arber [MHA]

Transcriber: Amanda Peabody [AP]

Interview location: New Bedford

Date of interview: November 10, 2016

Key Words

CP Brodeur, Rochester, Caterpillar Inc., Provincetown, seiners

Abstract

Cindy Pettway was born in New Bedford, Massachusetts and grew up in Rochester. She worked at a motorcycle shop and then in 1979 she began working at her father's shop and has been working there since. She sells Caterpillar parts and engines to local fishermen with her husband. In this interview she describes how the industry has evolved and what her personal experience has been like.

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[0:00] Tape intro; worked at CP Brodeur since age 18 in '79; father started business in '69; has been working there for 37 years; run down of job description; father originally worked at Caterpillar.

[4:47] Born in New Bedford but grew up in Rochester Mass; lived in Padanaram at 18; interaction with fishing industry growing up; no formal training or tutoring in engines; family and ethnic heritage.

[10:48] No push back from men; friendships and neighbors in fishing industry; how the work environment has changed over the years.

[15:16] Continued discussion about how the industry has changed.

[20:00] Family business; working with a spouse; other employees; physical labor; few people in younger generations are interested in fishing industry

[25:01] Large immigrant workforce in the fishing industry today; changes in technology

[30:00] Effect of technology on office work; fewer individually-owned boats and more fleets

[35:00] Changes in communications (cell phones); favorite parts of the job; best years for fishing industry and her company; impact of consolidation of the fleet; importance of diversifying the customer base

[40:00] Negative effects on engines when a vessel is tied up for long periods; engine care; involvement with the Coast Guard; interaction with other parts of the country.

[45:09] Fishing industry as a community; importance of word of mouth and reputation in business relationships; thoughts about the future of the industry; vocational schools and potential replacements to take over the store.

[50:14] Dangers of the work; importance of their role in the industry

[55:02] Competitors in the industry

[56:02] End of recording

[0:00]

Madeleine Hall-Arber: So if you don't mind I'll just do this formal introduction. This is an interview for the New Bedford Fishing Heritage Center funded by the 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 transcript will become part of the permanent collection of the Library of Congress.

Cindy Pettway: Whoo hoo!

MHA: I am Madeleine Hall-Arber and today I'm speaking with Cindy Pettway at CE Brodeur in New Bedford and the time is 10:20. So can you just [adjusting sound equipment] put that a little closer-- could you just introduce yourself-- the people transcribing are going to love this [laughter] What's going on here. [Continues to adjust sound equipment]

MHA: It was working so well last time I tried-- I shouldn't have tried to move it because it's really-- this will pick up your... There. I think it's this thing here...

CP: Jeez it's like the blind leading the blind here.

MHA: [laughter] I know. You're my first interview for this set of interviews. I've done a fair number of oral histories in the past but for this particular project-- so you get to be the guinea pig.

CP: I'm the guinea pig!

MHA: Alright, now we can start. So can you just say your name?

CP: My name is Cindy Pettway, I was originally Cindy Brodeur that's where the name CP Brodeur comes in. My dad started the business back in 1969. I've sat here for 37 years and still waiting to figure out what I want to do when I grow up.

MHA: [laughter] Well actually that was one of the questions I was going to ask was how did you decide to join the company.

CP: I had no clue what I wanted to do when I was 18 years old and said, "Dad, you looking for somebody?" And he's like, "ah, sure come in." So, I've been here ever since.

MHA: And-- what is sort of your day-to-day routine?

CP: Day-to-day routine, there's myself and there's Donna over there, I mean, basically anything that could potentially . . . from gentlemen walking in that need filters for their boats or we do a

lot of work with the Coast Guard, we do a lot of work with NOAA; anything related to Caterpillar Marine Engines. Obviously starting out many years ago, it was strictly pretty much the fishing industry but you know when the fishing industry, back in the 80s, was not doing quite so well-- kind of reached out to some of-- you know, just basically she and I are... coming up with parts or sorting through parts or accounts payable, accounts receivable; basically everything to do with running the business.

MHA: So did you know anything about engines before you started?

CP: Absolutely not and I'm still learning 37 years later.

MHA: [chuckling]

CP: No, I can't say that I-- just obviously my dad would come home and had a little bit of a clue but-- I've learned a lot over the last 37 years.

MHA: So was your father-- did he really understand engines?

CP: Oh my goodness, no, he was probably the first person along this waterfront-- he worked-- Caterpillar did have a facility along the waterfront back in the early 60s that-- I can remember, being about 4 years old, it was before they demolished a good part of the waterfront-- here it was all old factory buildings and such. He worked there for Caterpillar and he was so—I'm not really quite sure why he left but he ended up-- he eventually left. They closed the facility and they set him up as Caterpillar dealer here. He actually-- I think it wasn't until 1969 that he actually officially started the business.

MHA: And was it at this location?

CP: No. It was actually down on Union Street. Right in the heart of-- before-- obviously the waterfront did not look like this many many years ago. But yeah, right along the waterfront and then came here in 1978.

MHA: And what year did you join?

CP: I joined in '79.

MHA: And where were you born?

[4:47] CP: I was born here in New Bedford but grew up for the most part in Rochester, Mass, which is just about 20 miles away and that's where-- gosh until I was 18 years old that's where I lived and then moved actually-- no maybe I had another apartment first before I went-- and lived in Padanaram where Kirsten had-- she was my landlord.

MHA: So when you were growing up, did you have any interaction with the fishing industry?

CP: Oh sure. My dad used to-- many years ago there was a big fishing community down in Provincetown and that was-- back then it was a much longer drive, commute and so on and so forth, so the men very often would bring their boats here to New Bedford and he'd even bring some home for a couple of days, you know, if there was work to do for a week or so. I, my gosh, yes. I mean very very very much intertwined and connected with the fishing industry.

MHA: Was there anything about it that particularly interested you or attracted you as a young person?

CP: The funny thing is I have to say no. The one that I would have thought would be sitting here-- I have a sister who's 11 months younger than I am and very much a tomboy-- I mean she used to tag along with my father every day and she'd even have a wrench in her hand and she'd actually be down in the engine room working with him. She ended up becoming a lobsterman so-- and-- but I thought she would have come here and probably run this business but it ended up being the opposite. She still to this day does lobstering and does oyster-- harvesting oysters and here am I sitting here. But no there was-- I'm not quite sure how I ended up here but it's been a fun ride. It really truly has.

MHA: and your sister is based where?

CP: In Rochester, she actually still lives there at home with my mom at 55-years old.

MHA: [laughter] why not?

CP: Why not?

MHA: What is your ethnic heritage?

CP: French and Portuguese. My dad was full-blooded French, my mom was half French and half Portuguese, so I guess three-quarters French and the Port-- obviously, this community here, if you come from this local area, you've got to have a least a little Portuguese in you.

MHA: It's easier to gain acceptance.

CP: Well, I guess yeah, but it's just like, it just happens, whether you like it or not. It is just such a big contingent here you know of the Portuguese fishermen. It works that way.

MHA: So did you grow up learning any French?

CP: I tried to do it in high school. Didn't do very well at it-- can probably come up with a word or two here or there, but no, they were kind of-- my father's family was Canadian French which I

guess that even that dialect is like a little bit different from what you would learn in school. But I believe when my dad said when he was growing up, that when he was young that all he spoke at home was French. He knew a little bit more-- I think by the time he got, say in his 50s, he only knew a few words here and there, and my mother used to tease him. Like what happened to all the French you used. If you don't use it every day you kind of lose it.

MHA: So do you know when your parents moved to Rochester?

CP: When I was-- actually-- for the first, maybe, three years... if I'm 56, 53 years ago, back that up whatever number that ends up being. In the early 60s, lived in Tiverton, Rhode Island, I don't know how-- to be honest with you I'm not sure how they have been ended up there but my dad was a New Bedford boy, a north end of New Bedford-- big French contingent there-- and my mom was Acushnet which is next town over. I mean, all really local. We're always local families here for a very long time.

MHA: So do you still have extended family in the New Bedford Area?

CP: Not too too much. My mom and my two sisters and my dad passed away back in 2000, my goodness... it's been a long long time ago. It seems like a long long time ago now since he's been gone. That's pretty much all I've got left in the immediate family.

MHA: And how about cousins and--

CP: Oh, the Brodeur family is actually a very very large family. There's cousins and second cousins and third cousins and there's a lot of them. Actually, my dad's father, where my dad started working, was what's called Brodeur Machines, which is here in the city of New Bedford. Considered probably on the east coast, one of the finest-- doing some of the most intricate machine type work. I think they do a lot of, like aeronautical-- you know some big stuff but that's where his kind of background-- and I've got one cousin left that runs that. My dad's two brothers had run that-- most of them have passed on. A lot of family is gone and actually-- maybe one of the important people we should mention is-- when I started here, my aunt, which was my dad's sister, her name was Jackie Elaine, she sat here for many many years, so in the sense of a woman in this business she was probably one of the first in the sense that-- she was as familiar with the Caterpillar parts and everything as I am. She was with my dad... she's passed away probably 20 years ago. I'd say maybe up to 20 years ago she was here so-- let's say into the mid to late 80s, she was with my dad and was kind of his right-hand lady, I guess we would call her.

[10:48] MHA: Fascinating. Yeah, so that actually does bring up one of the questions... did you have any push back from the men?

CP: You know what funny-- not so much here from the fishing industry, maybe more so from some of our government people. I can remember a gentleman from the Coast Guard that would

always call and he needed to talk to a man that knew something. My personality was that I am the lady that can, you know, tell you.

[dog barking]

CP: Anyway that we can just hush him. But yeah-- actually was, I'd have to say basically through this waterfront-- pretty much well-received. I mean obviously thirty some-odd years ago when I started, I knew nothing. My aunt that sat here, she was a very nice lady, but she didn't share a lot of information, I'll say, with me. I kind of had to-- I guess prove what I could do and had to learn things myself and that was fine. It was-- I think there was a little bit more of a battle between us as two women in the office maybe, and-- but no, I think overall very very well received but still even-- there's not too many ladies that, still to this day, do what we do. But I mean, obviously you occasionally get the -- is anybody there that can-- a man will call-- anybody there that can help me? Any of the guys? No, we say, "just start with me first and then we'll see what you know, if you need to talk to anybody." Overall, I'm very well received.

MHA: And, do you-- well let's see, do you have any neighbors and friends that work in the fishing industry?

CP: A few, but it's funny when we leave here at the end of the day it's kind of like we try to leave our work behind and go to-- but no, there's definitely great people that we've met over the years and occasionally do dinner with. People that-- customers that'll just call to chat, not being-- not that they really necessarily need anything... A gentleman yesterday that my husband was working on his fishing boat up in Plymouth and I called just to see how they were all doing, so the customer answers the cell phone and goes, "hi honey how are you today?" Just been a friend for thirty some-odd years, so yeah, I mean we've definitely met some really really nice people over the years. A lot of good old-timers that were my dad's customers. A lot of them have passed on now, but some of them that we still miss so dearly. It was... it was a different business when my dad ran it, than when I do. And I don't know if this is right or wrong or indifferent, but that's just what it was. Back when I started in the late 70s, my dad would look at maybe a couple of mechanics in the shop and say, "You guys ready? Let's go for lunch." And it always turned into, I'll call it a liquid lunch. And it was acceptable back in those days. They'd go have lunch, they'd go have a few beers and they'd go back to work. And I can't even ever-- I can't imagine for myself or I can't imagine anyone that works here now, in the last 20 years ever doing such a thing. But there was a couple of important spots along the waterfront, men that were all in the industry, some of them being-- maybe insurance people that were in the industry. I'm just trying to think of some of the different men that they would meet-- or maybe boat owners or whatever. They'd all meet at a couple of these restaurants and just... and in some ways it's kind of like, it reminds me of what you'd see over in Europe these days. They'd take their afternoon like siesta or just their time off, and just go and socialize. I'm like here for 8 hours a day and we just work work.

[15:16] MHA: Yeah.

CP: It's just a different way but it's interesting that that was just so different back then.

MHA: So do you think that there was more of a sense of community?

CP: Oh absolutely, yeah. The waterfront is so much different these days as opposed to I think about it, I mean we probably had... we probably had 200 different boat owners back in those days, that, you know, every man owned one boat, maybe if he'd become prosperous enough that he was able to afford two boats. But what you've ended up happening here, you'd probably have now like, five or six good sized fleet owners that have bought out all of these fishermen that you know, they-- one boat wasn't enough they, you know, took away their areas where they could fish or the quotas and there wasn't-- they just couldn't make it with one boat so. So now you've got the Carlos Rafael's, and the Roy Enokson's and the Warren Alexander's and all of these Ray Starvish. You've got all of these big fleet owners now and it's sad because it has taken away the sense of community and a lot of those men are no longer in the business, and they're either retired or had to go and find something else to do. It's different, it's definitely very different.

MHA: How-- because there's still quite a few boats, do the captains take over some of the-- you know what I think I'm going to turn this off just for a second.

CP: Yep that's fine.

[16:45]

[Pause in recording]

MHA: Back on now...that's funny it seems like we're picking up some noise...

[Indistinguishable]

MHA: Some kind of background noise... oh well. We'll just continue. Alright so... let's see... can you talk a little bit about what special skills or knowledge you've gained over the years.

CP: That I've gained over the years?

MHA: That's needed to do the job.

CP: Well it's basically been a learn by, I guess just by being here, throughout the day-- you know, some people will come in and go how do you know so much about an engine and I go, "I've sat here for 37 years, if I haven't learned something by now, I might as well just pack it up and just... not that I've sat here and studied books but it's just through repetitiveness. I know even when my husband or some of the guys go out on a job, even though I'm never out in the field, I don't think I've ever picked up a wrench in my life. He'll be trying to figure out what's going on with an engine, and there I am sitting in the background like, can it be this or can it be this? And I have to-- I hate to say it but I'll bet you three- quarters of the time, I can kind of tell him what to look for, even, just from having sat here and just the experience over

the years but I mean... it's just all been learned through repetitiveness. From repeating the same process over and over again. Not really sure how to explain the knowledge or-- someone comes in and needs an overhaul, and I mean, recently there was a job say down in Cape Cod, it wasn't actually for a fishing vessel, for the county of Barnstable and needed an engine overhauled and they asked us to quote an engine and I'm the one that always does the quoting for an engine overhaul. So I had quoted it and they actually went to another competitor, the Caterpillar distributor. So the man was nice enough from the Cape, he says, "I'm going to send you their quote," he says, 'I want you to compare the two.'" So just through, I guess, just knowledge and experience we ended up changing a lot of the items on the quote from the factory to what I had quoted. They felt much more comfortable with mine. We ended up with the job, did a very good job and... it's just. Just from being here.

[20:00]

MHA: So, how long have you been married?

CP: 32 years and actually, been together for 37 years, actually the year I started here is the year I started going out with my husband. And he-- how we met was through motorcycles. I always-- I actually I was the parts girl at the motorcycle shop. So maybe that gave me a little bit of... basically the same thing just in much bigger form here. He was a customer that used to come into the motorcycle shop and we started dating-- they would always-- the motorcycle shop he was-- he worked at a different motorcycle shop during the winter there wasn't much going on so my dad finally said, you know you want to come during the winter and do some stuff and here he is like 30-- I think he's maybe been here for maybe close to 35 years now so. But no, it's one thing that we've always said about the business. If something happened to him tomorrow or if something happened to myself tomorrow, neither would want to do it without the other. I know that what he does out in the field, we know it gets done right, he and the guys from the shop. He has no interest in doing paperwork, moneys-- I mean he'll help Donna and I quite often if we have a question on a part and can't figure out something but he wants nothing to do-- so it-- even though we work together every day, and sometimes we're in the building all day it doesn't-- for the most part it works well. There's the days though that he calls-- how does he word it-- some days he says it's like fire and gasoline.

MHA: [laughter]

CP: Most of the time it's pretty darn good and we couldn't imagine it any other way.

MHA: That's great. How many people do you have who actually do installation and repair and maintenance--

CP: Actually right now it's just Corban and two other men in the shop sometimes. There's been, five or six of them--depends, people come, people go. It's one of those hard industries that sometimes you get someone trained to do this work, and all they really need is a set of tools and they kind of go to you-- why am I going to work for you? I'm going to work for myself and that's happened, actually pretty much... in the Caterpillar Engine business. There's probably another half a dozen men along the waterfront that do what we do. Every single one of them at some point started out here. And they all... we all have a, I'd say, very still good relationship, whether they've left over the years, but for the most part, a good relationship with all of them and they all respected my dad, even though my dad like I say, should have been an ambassador versus probably doing this. He was known as a very, very, very good mechanic. He was-- but yeah, it's... it's hard work. We had a good gentleman leave us last year that was here for maybe six or

seven years. The most tiring things that these men that work on these say all the time, climbing over very often because there's so many boats in the fleet. Sometimes a boat's four boats out. And they say that's the hardest part of the job is climbing over-- they're never equal, and you know the way that they, and you know in between them-- it's just not easy work and so much of it is just such heavy equipment and parts and you know...there's pieces very often three, four, five hundred, 12 hundred pounds. It's just not easy work. So it's kind of hard. We had a good guy, like I said, leave us last year who has gone to work for the distributor... who's not working on marine engines now but he's working on Caterpillar engines just in a shop that, basically-- he said, I just can't climb. Well he just turned 40-years old and he said, I just can't do this anymore. So I look at my husband at 55 and you know, we've, one of our very good customers who worked for us for many years and works for another company now-- 67 years old. It amazes me what he can do. He still does. Most of the men in this business, I think we were talking about it the other day, there's only two young guys. One that works for us who's 31 tomorrow.

MHA: [chucking]

CP: And another 30-year old, but most of the men around this waterfront are late 50s to mid-60s. The next 10 years is going to be very very interesting to see what happens. Young kids just don't want to do this work anymore. They want to go to work somewhere where they're can sit at a computer all day. They don't want to-- luckily, we've got a new 18-year old here who kind of came from I'll say a farm maybe background. Used to hard work-- brought up working hard with his hands and you know, that's what they enjoy so. But they're few and far between, I promise you that.

[25:01]

MHA: I've heard that about even the crews on boats.

CP: Oh my goodness yeah. A gentleman that was just here, I know he says he's one of the lucky ones. He owns a boat himself and then he works for one of the big fleet since they have so few days at sea these days. He can captain three boats during the course of one year. But he said-- he feels he's one of the luckiest. He's had a crew for I think for about 8 years. But they're not Americans. They're all Mexicans. And, like he says, they're all a bunch of wonderful guys but again no one-- no one's raising their young kids around here these days to say, "you want to go out and be a fisherman," you know? It's mostly the migrant, immigrants that are coming here that are doing this work now. So it's... this area, like even in the fish plants here basically are loaded with Guatemalans, a lot of Mexicans. I mean even this used to be such a huge prevalent Portuguese community, it's not even considered so much-- it's more Mexicans and Guatemalans now. The melting pot of America.

MHA: I knew that was true in the processing plants. I didn't realize--

Siri: The answer is approximately 0.2 miles.

MHA: [laughter]

CP: Where did she come from?

BOTH: [laughing]

CP: Okay Siri, no one was talking to you.

Interview with Cindy Pettway, November 10, 2016

MHA: So I-- but is-- it sounds like it's prevalent all over now?

CP: In the sense of, you know, like-- I think in the fishing-- the processing plants here you know where all the fish and-- I know the clam boats have dropped, the north terminal here. I think most of all of our workers in all of those plants are mostly Guatemalans, I think, and Mexicans. But I know a lot of the crew members now aboard a lot of the boats are a lot of Mexicans. We've even got, actually, someone who ended up becoming a friend, who did some painting for us, Vietnamese. And actually we used to have-- we've lost some of them. We used to have quite a few Vietnamese fishing boat owners here but I know, their names are B____, nice nice guys. They're painters, but their dad and a couple of brothers have been crewmembers on a lot of these boats for many many years. I'd forgotten about the Vietnamese because there really aren't too many left. It's funny how we kind of go through the different nationalities and they come and they go but, like I say it's the melting pot of America these days. But like I say, no one's raising their kids here in the city of New Bedford say, "you want to be a fisherman." Doesn't seem to be happening.

MHA: So, do you also-- you're a distributor?

CP: Yes, correct.

MHA: And so... do you have to go to sales shows and things of that nature?

CP: They've always liked us to in the past. And you know what? We've always said-- our motto has always been, we've got a nice customer base we're really not looking to expand our customer base, we're happy what we're doing, no one's ever forced us to do these shows. I know they have Newport shows. They've actually always have the shows here in New Bedford. We just like staying in our little office and we're-- and everybody leaves us-- pretty much leaves us alone. But yeah we try not to do those. The shows. Some people really enjoy them. We'd rather be here working and taking care of the customers.

MHA: and how has the technology changed?

CP: Oh my goodness yeah. I mean that's obviously huge in the sense of when I started 37 years ago I mean you would... Caterpillar had a facility down here in Mattapoisett that we would do all of our parts ordering through, and you'd have to call them in, long before fax machines or anything. So I mean everything was just done out of a parts book and you would call one of the two, Judy or Bob, sitting down there and you would call them in an order parts and then a couple days later-- I mean obviously now everything is computerized. Ours go to, all of our ordering goes to a central place up in Milford Mass. It's all a click of the mouse. You look up all of your parts now for the-- can still go to a book. But for the most part you look up all of your parts online. You know, everything from fax machines I can-- you know, used to be years ago... you-- when fax machines first came out, as opposed to, you know, calling in those orders you could at least write them down and start to fax and that just saves so much time. We still even find to this day.... not part of so much the fishing industry but the US Coast Guard, they're just so far behind.

[30:00]

They still fax over stuff quite often, as opposed to doing stuff through scanning it over, but no. Obviously stuff is different. I can't imagine everything was done through ledger sheets and everything here. Whoever

owed some money, it was always kept, done on index cards from my dad, so he'd go through the index cards and go, "why don't you call so and so and see why we haven't been paid yet". I mean everything was just manually done and I think, what would we do without, I mean, since you've been here, I mean, Donna has basically been glued to that computer clicking here and there. Just everything, even searching for parts these days, if something that's say not available through Caterpillar, or discontinued, we've got a whole network of places and, you know, everything's just done in the click of a mouse these days. It is kind of sad though that you, we have lost the personal touch. A gentleman that we do some business with out in Phoenix, hadn't talked to him in probably a year or two, and I saw online recently that he had some equipment that I was interested in and it was nice, as opposed to him answering my email, just picked up the phone you know? What has this come to that we can't even talk and, you know? It's just easier sometimes to do everything through your emails or... but it does keep a nice also, record of I sent you that email or I sent you... just totally different way of doing business.

MHA: And you-- I was going to ask you also about change in the industry, you mentioned a couple times some of the change--

CP: I think the biggest change is going from individual boat owners now to so many big fleet owners. And that's... I mean obviously I guess it's good for the big fleet owners, but it certainly has hurt the individual-- you know they used to be able to fish 365 days a year. They could bring in as much cod or haddock or whatever they want. I mean, I'm not saying that it has not been good for the fishing industry to do some of the quotas that they have now, but I mean it obviously, has put a lot of the small individual boat owners. You've got, I can think of one customer who's got... some, let's say 40-foot boats so he's had to buy 4 boats with 4 licenses to basically keep going to make a living. He fishes one until it runs out of the allotted time that he has. It's just the nature of the beast, but look at the scalloping industry these days, I mean I can remember back in the early 80s it didn't seem like they were worth anything, a scalloping license you could have bought one for \$20,000 if you wanted to go scalloping. You cannot buy a boat with a license now for probably under about \$6,000,000. What was I thinking? But yeah... it's nice. I'm happy for a lot of these individual boat owners, but I mean it just puts so much of these other big fleet owners into just a category of their own that no one could ever even begin to compete with them. But yeah it's different from the-- I think of so many customers that are gone from the business. We used to have the tuna seining boats that used to come up here. And I mean that industry was done away with in the last 10-15 years. They would all be up here even-- we still got a few herring seiners that used to be a big business that's gone-- I mean the whole industry is just... it's getting smaller, other than these few fleet owners it's definitely different then what it used to be.

MHA: and do you see the effect of that on your business?

CP: Luckily, not terribly so. We're lucky in the sense that there is such a huge fleet of Caterpillar engines. Especially among all of these big fleet owners. So I mean, we're as busy as we want to be. We'll put it that way, these days, yeah.

MHA and how about New Bedford? Does it still consider itself a fishing town even though--?

CP: I think would like to, yeah. It still would be. I mean I think here on this northeast coast, I mean it definitely is still considered the fishing capital of the area. We still have a few customers up in Boston, a couple up on Gloucester. But I mean, years ago, I mean we talk about technology and such and I think

when my husband used to spend a lot of time up in Gloucester or P-town or in Boston and had a big herring seineing a company up in Gloucester that we used to do.

[35:00]

And I mean gosh, 25 years ago before cell phones I say how did we ever do this? He'd leave home maybe 5:30 in the morning and maybe he'd get home at maybe 6 or 7 o'clock at night and I would never know where he was all day, if he was alive, if he was dead, if he was you know, safe, if you know? And it's like, now if we're not in communication every half an hour, an hour it's like where are they? Is something wrong? It's like how did we live with, getting back to the technology being with cell phones and such these days but have they made our lives easier? I'll get a text during the day order me this or do this or put a note on my desk. It's a secretary and a phone now, is what it is.

MHA: What do you consider the hardest part of your job? And you can talk about either now or over time.

CP: I'm not really sure that... I've loved what I, you know... I still wouldn't know what I would do any differently so I can't, you know, I mean. Pretty lucky about-- I think most people would go collecting money but that truly has not been. No. I-- if I think of something I'll. . . , but nothing that I can really think of as being difficult, because I've really enjoyed it.

MHA: can you pick out anything that you particularly like best about the job?

CP: Oh, the customers. I love my customers. I love dealing with most of the men, you know, you get some of them that are... but no. I really enjoy the customers and taking care of whatever their needs may be, and getting them parts. You know, we've got customers all over the United States that could go wherever they want to go and they will call and go, "I know you can get this for me, I know that if I just call and tell you what I need, it's all set," so. I think that's probably the best part is the trust that a lot of them have put in us. You know selling men these quarter million dollar engines and, you know, they'll just come in and drop off a check and they'll trust that we will do the right thing for them. And that's been good.

MHA: What were the best years you'd say for the industry and for your company?

CP: The industry. I... I would say in the last 10 years... if you take the industry in the sense of the scallopers, not the draggers who, you know, for fish-- the last 10 years for the scallopers have just been... they still like to complain that they've only got 30 days but then they say, oh we're making X amount of millions of dollars and I'm going like, okay, I wouldn't mind working 30 days a year and heading off into the sunset or wherever. I mean, literally some of them can and do, tie up the boat for the rest of the year and just go enjoy and travel or golf or whatever they do so. The scallopers for the last 10 years cannot complain. I can ascend to the draggers, I don't think any of them, you know, you've got someone like the Carlos Rafael who's got 30 boats so he's able to, he makes it work between the draggers and the scallopers and mixes and matches and makes it all work. The draggers, though... I don't think they could really say, any of them, that they've had a good year probably in a long time. A few of them, if they've got-- some of them have different permits that over the years they've bought and they've been able to stack the permits, so occasionally somebody will come in and go, "you know that guy over there on boat x, you know he can do really well because he's been able to stack three or four different permits and keep going", but it's been a long time since the draggers have really-- uh the lobster guys, I think they had a good year, it

sounds like this year, prices were up, I think. There wasn't a lot of lobsters up in Canada which usually keeps their prices low and seems to affect the guys down here, but it sounds like the lobster guys have had a good year, so I think, there's ups and downs every year. Ourselves? I want to say the last 20 years have been really really good. We can't-- and like I say, we kind of diversified, adding in others, the tug boat firms, big company is Boston Towing, is a very very good customer of ours. We've been able to-- what used to be strictly commercial fishing-- which is probably still 60-70% of our business, we've had to diversify and come up with some other ways and luckily we have.

[40:00]

MHA: One thing that-- a thought I had when we were talking about some of the people tying up the boats, several months at a time, does that affect the engines?

CP: It... Yes.

MHA: Short answer. Yes.

BOTH: [laughter]

CP: What's funny and it seems to have more of an effect... or it used to on the pleasure craft industry where there are only, again you know, like you're saying, tying up-- they're only used say... June to September, we'll say. They come in and go, my engine only has 700 hours, whereas if it were used in the commercial fleet, it wouldn't really have a problem until 7,000 hours. What we find, the more use the better for an engine, when they do get shut down and just laid up like that, condensation gets in them and such. Things... an engine does better running than it does just sitting. The short answer is yeah. They're not as-- they were better when they were fishing 365 days year. But then, without all of the hours for the most part-- lost a little business because they're not putting on all of the hours, you're not getting quite as much use out of them, and not spending quite as much money on them.

MHA: Are there things that they could do to take better care of them when they are putting them, tying them up?

CP: You know, I mean there's things like there's a water conditioner that gets put into the water system. There are fuel additives that can get done. I think a lot of the boat owners, even though when they're tied up, somebody checks them, you know, every day or probably once a week, they get started up and generators run, keep the engine rooms warm and such, I mean, they don't technically just walk away from them but they're just not getting the use that they did.

MHA: Let's see... do you belong to any industry associations?

CP: Can't say that we do.

MHA: That's okay.

BOTH: [laughter]

MHA: I'm just curious about it.

CP: Yeah I know it's funny, like I say, we've always just kind of stayed just in our own little corner down here, we take care of business and I guess maybe I don't know if it's good, bad, or indifferent.

MHA: Well how did you get-- you mentioned diversifying and involvement with the Coast Guard and some others-- how did you reach out to those folks?

CP: Well years ago-- and I'm not sure who's terribly familiar, it's been probably close to 20 years ago, we used to have here in the city of New Bedford, 270-foot Coast Guard cutters that were based here and actually some prior to that. So it started back in, let's say, the mid-80s. And I don't know why, my dad was always just so much into the fishing industry and then there was some problems in the 80s with-- there was some strikes and such that went on back then, and I don't know, I think we had a couple Coast Guard guys start to come in here, and they'd be like, 'oh, didn't know you guys were here, didn't know you could do this' and then it spread from like New Bedford-- Coast Guard's a neat little industry. They've got a big base up in Boston that we, basically on a daily basis, we do something for them, it's kind of like, "oh you know those people down in New Bedford that"-- I mean gosh. That's gone from Boston-- we do a lot up in Maine, we-- probably on a daily basis almost-- Coast Guard's really based in Norfolk, Virginia and Baltimore-- talk to those people almost daily... California-- it's just-- they're-- how do I word the Coast Guard? The Coast Guard is... a... they're like a big family. they're a small-- as large as they are-- they're a small entity and they're always good at-- since they-- they change roles every couple of years, in the sense that they only let someone that's what we call an MK aboard a boat now. He'll be in Boston for two years and all of a sudden it's [snaps] he's gone. It's like, where did he go? Oh, he got shipped to so-- so they kind of take the information with them and go, "oh, call this lady she'll"-- so it becomes nationwide and you'll lose some that may go to a different kind of job that doesn't-- so we lose some altogether that don't get put into the same type of job. But lots of them has been really neat that we follow all over from coast to coast. My husband has gone as far the island of Attu which is five and a half hour military flight from Kodiak, to do a couple of weeks work up on a Loran station.

[45:09]

That was the longest we'd ever been apart in 37 years, he was gone for 17 days. So they're just a bunch of neat people. So we enjoy them very-- yeah so that's-- diversified there. Done a lot of work, like I say for NOAA over the years. A lot of the people jump from-- they may start off in the Coast Guard and then they be-- and then they leave the Coast Guard, they may get an engineering job on a NOAA ship or whatever. It's... overall the whole industry is small, be it fishing or the marine industry that you know you've got to... one man that's been on the NOAA ships I know, this week he's gone. So he's left all of our information for the new man that's taken over his job. He called yesterday and he's like, "I don't know who I should talk to, you know, I was given your name, your company's name that you people would be the ones to help me." So we got him straightened. Yeah it's a very small industry overall.

MHA: So a lot of word-of-mouth it sounds like.

CP: A lot of word-of-mouth exactly.

MHA: And you have a good reputation.

CP: I think so.

MHA: That's very cool. So are you mentoring anybody coming up?

CP: No one wants to do this [laughter]. No one wants to be me. No, no we haven't really-- we're only 56, so I guess we figure we've got a ways to figure that out. Have dogs instead of children. No nieces or nephews that are quite interested in doing this line of-- so no there hasn't really been much thought going into that yet.

MHA: Well eventually I would-- I know that New Bedford had-- don't they have a vocational school or something?

CP: They do. Exactly.

MHA: That would be...

CP: Sure, no exactly.

MHA: --An avenue or something.

CP: --Avenue at some point in.

MHA: Just in the future.

CP: Just to-- yeah we're just not-- I go 37 years it seems like a lifetime but at the same time it's just gone by. Yeah. Snap of the fingers and I go, "37 years?"

MHA: Yeah. So what do you think the future holds?

CP: I don't know and I think a lot of that is going to be up to National Marine Fisheries for what the future holds. I know originally they'd even—I know all the fishermen said they decided they were changing their rules for scalloping they weren't going to start their days until—instead of, what, March 1st, it's April 1st. Somebody was in here yesterday said no they've changed that back again. So I mean, so much of that-- I truly do see these large fleet owners are here to stay I know that they've tried to pass that consolidation for a while that you could-- that if you owned four boats and each had 30 days can we take 120 days, instead of having 4 boats worth \$6,000,000 you know you just put all of the days in one boat and let it be done that way but I see that probably will happen at some time.

MHA: So how do you think that will affect your business?

CP: Obviously less boats, less business. But I don't know that we would have a-- you know there's so many of these regulations that I mean, we have zero say and you just go with the flow you know and that's when you know that's what you again, getting back to diversifying into other businesses that, so far so good.

MHA: So all of your work though is marine?

CP: Is marine, correct, yup. We basically, if somebody calls us and says it's in a tractor or a truck or in a motorhome, we go sorry you'd have to call a distributor. We just do strictly caterpillar marine boat engines and it's just always been Caterpillar.

MHA: And how-- well let's see your father worked-- he worked for--

CP: Yeah, he worked for what was the local distributor here back in the early 60s and then they just started to give him a dealership here so.

MHA: So, is there anything that I haven't asked that I should have?

CP: I'm just trying to think I mean we've kind of covered you know where the customer base, you know, it's just so different in the sense, like I said it used to be a lot from Gloucester and Boston and Providence won and there's really no fleet left there so I mean that's kind of been, kind of covered and how I got here, where I'm going who knows--

BOTH: [laughing]

CP: When I'm going who knows. Um, no I-- the one thing I think I would love-- maybe my husband to have chatted with for a few minutes is just how-- people just don't understand how difficult their work really is. It's heavy and it's dangerous which-- it's dangerous and I-- every day I kind of go... but you know you try to be as safe as you can and things still do happen so.

[50:14]

MHA: What are some of the dangers, I mean you mentioned climbing over the boats--

CP: Yeah I mean very often if an engine needs to be overhauled, they have to-- like let's say they can be working with an 8-12,000 pound engine, a lot of the engines need to be what they call lifted up off the oil pan to access up underneath to get out pistons and liners. The engines will always be held up with what they call welded padeyes, but sometimes he'll go down a boat to start a job and go, there's nothing overhead to rig and engine to, because I mean, it all gets done with hoists and chains and it's all-- you know, chain falls and it's all done basically the old fashioned way because you just don't have the machinery down in the engine rooms. My husband and I were over on a NOAA ship a few months ago trying to figure out how-- they build boat around engines now as-- you know, there's just no room very often to do the work but yeah it's just lifting stuff and it's very often the crank shaft that may weigh 1,500lbs if it's bad it needs to come up through the stairwells of these fishing boats and again it's all done with chain falls and rigging and it's not easy and like I say... I hate to say it's dangerous because I don't want to curse anybody today but yeah it's tough work and I can understand-- and like I say these young kids these days... luckily there's a few young kids today. At least initially interested go this looks like fun this looks--

MHA: Oh yeah.

CP: Give it about 10 or 20 or 30 years-- you're going to change your mind and it's going to become a job.

MHA: I was going to say they're young and--

CP: Exactly they're young.

MHA: So we talked about-- we mentioned early on this is-- part of this is going to be going into informing our next exhibit in the museum. So if you wanted your part of the-- a little corner of the industry depicted, how could you-- what would you envision our saying or having there?

CP: Well I mean, be it our company or anyone else along the waterfront that does this-- we're pretty darn important people. Without your engine, you're dead in the water-- you know, these-- obviously these guys go 200 miles off shore very often, most of the vessels, be it a Caterpillar or be it whatever brand engine-- they have one engine. They're dependent upon that to get them out and get, obviously, they can call the Coast Guard but the Coast Guard might be you know well, you're going to have to drift for two or three days until we can get out there and get you. It's a really important industry be it-- we also service, besides the main engines, all of the vessels usually have two generator sets aboard which gives them all of their lighting and everything. And I mean, if they lose a generator or, actually I just saw Mr. Rafael I don't know if he came in here, but in the sense of-- a lot of these larger vessels, some of them have freezer units and such so these engines-- the generator engines are responsible for keeping the freezers running, to keep the product cold and still, most of them still-- the scallopers use ice and such but a lot of them are started to go over to refrigeration so.

MHA: Herring boats also.

CP: Yep. Exactly. So I mean, just pretty important little part of the industry. Not that everyone doesn't have-- be it the refrigeration if... even if our generators are running if your refrigeration does that's a different company, say, here in the city here. We've got electricians that get into the electrical end of the generators but no, I consider our business a pretty important part of the waterfront. They just depend on these engines getting them out and getting them back home. Look at the weather they can-- be it-- I know my husband will say, look at the money some of these guys are making and I'll be like I don't care how much, or you couldn't-- there's not enough money to get-- you know, and Michael that was here just a short minute ago I mean he's been a fisherman for 35 plus years and he can't imagine being like shore side and I say the opposite, I'm like look at all the life you've missed here when you-- family and friends. You're gone so much of the year but they just find their own solitude out there and they just can't imagine being here on land all the time. It's just-- but no, getting back to your question; I consider this a pretty important industry.

[55:02]

MHA: I would say so. And one thing I never did ask is who do you consider your major competitor?

CP: There are two Cat dealers, others, they've been set up; there's pretty much enough business out there for everybody. Caterpillar is the main business here... jeez there's a few Cummings Engines but we don't even have-- well we have a small little Cummings dealer. It's funny, I don't think any of us really consider ourselves all that much competition. Everyone's kind of got their little customer base and we all pretty much keep to ourselves and it's-- not a competition.

MHA: Well that's perfect.

CP: Exactly.

MHA: Well Cindy I really appreciate talking to you.

CP: It was great, like I said it can take my back on memory lane.

BOTH: [laughing]

[56:02]

End of interview