



NEW BEDFORD FISHING HERITAGE CENTER

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Ameral, Natalie ~ Oral History Interview

Madeleine Hall-Arber

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Background

Name of person interviewed: Natalie Ameral [NA]

Facts about this person:

Age 24
Sex Female
Occupation Government Contractor/ Port Sampler
Residence (Town where lives)
Ethnic background (if known) Portuguese

Interviewer: Madeleine Hall-Arber [MHA]

Transcriber: Amanda [AP]

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Key Words

Port sampling, otoliths, scales, fish, Rhode Island, AIS, NOAA

Abstract

Natalie Ameral describes the daily routine of a port sampler and the challenges she faces being only one of seven port samplers for the region in her company, as well as the only female. She has been working with AIS since she graduated in 2015 and is now switching over to a new position working for the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission, but located in the Jamestown, Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management.

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[00:00] Tap Intro; government contractor at AIS Observers; Background--- born in Fitchburg Massachusetts in 1994; brief job description, collecting lengths and other biological samples such as otolith based off a list given to her by NOAA Fisheries; only member in her family that is interested in the fishing industry; started as a port sampler the year after graduating from college.

[5:01] Natalie explains her seasickness and apprehension about working at sea; gives overview of a typical day; describes the training she went through for her current job, her relationship with her coworkers, with the fishermen and how her experience has been like working as a young female in a male dominated field.

[10:09] Three step process—collecting data, organizing data, sending data to statistic scientists; disconnection between her department and other scientists such as aging and stats; sampling data influence on further research continued by other scientists; unpredictable schedule.

[14:45] A breakdown of how the work is divided into quarters; 30,000 lengths per quarter; three year old sampling contract; thoughts on video monitoring; discussion about British Columbia and Natalie's hopes of working at Woods Hole in statistical analysis.

[19:28] A list of organisms Natalie sees on a daily basis; climate change, being the only girl on the waterfront.

[24:33] Continued discussion of being the only female working on at the waterfront; Natalie talks about her new job as a fisheries specialist at Atlantic States Marine Fishery's Commission at the Jamestown Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management

[30:30] MHA: Port Judith in Rhode Island; interest in employing more people to sample, having more ports and connectivity with other ports; bringing awareness into the community about her job

[40:00] Sharing information amongst her coworkers; her experiences working with other companies as a contractor; overall reflection of her job; further discussion on video monitoring.

[43:36] End of Audio

[00:00]

Madeleine Hall-Arber: What I'm going to have you do is introduce yourself so that I can check to see that the recording is... up to standards.

Natalie Ameral: Gotcha.

MHA: Okay? So if you just tell your name and who you work for.

NA: Okay, my name is Natalie Ameral and I work for AIS Observers.

MHA: Okay, great. Just on time [indistinguishable]

NA: [laughter] Perfect!

MHA: Okay, so this is-- I'm going to give you a formal introduction, which I just realized I forgot for the last one. 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 the New Bedford/Fairhaven Fishing Industry to record their stories, document their skills and knowledge, and better understand their role in the fishing industry. The recording transcript will be part of the permanent collection the Library of Congress. I'm Madeleine Hall-Arber, today I'll be speaking with Natalie-- I don't know your last name.

NA: Ameral.

MHA: Ameral. You just said it. [Laughter]

NA: That's okay.

MHA: In New Bedford at the Fishing Heritage Center and it is now around 3:10. Okay, so, you already introduced yourself and can you tell me a little bit about your job?

NA: So it's my job to meet commercial fishing vessels when they land and go through whatever catch they have and collect lengths and other biological samples such as otoliths which are the inner ear bones or scales depending on what species it is. So I'm given a very specific list by NOAA Fisheries about what species they want data collected on.

MHA: Okay. So you're employed by AIS but you are actually-- the data is going to NOAA-- AIS I guess is hired by NOAA.

NA: Yes, I'm a contractor, a government contractor.

MHA: I see. Okay. And where and when were you born?

NA: I was born in Fitchburg, Massachusetts in 1994.

MHA: And what made you interested in fishing business or fishing, fish.

NA: I mean I guess-- this is never really where I expected to end up. I've always been interested in marine biology and it took me going to college to really discover what path I wanted to follow with it because there are so many things you can do with marine biology; it's such an open field. But then taking Fisheries in college I realized you know, this is really important and I can really give back to the environment and the sustainability projects that the world really needs right now. And it helped me find a meaningful career in something I'm really passionate about.

MHA: How did you get interested to begin with?

NA: I mean I guess very, very initially, I always vacationed on Martha's Vineyard and so I loved being on the water. I loved being on the ferry and going over. So the ocean and New England has always been such a big part of my life and always, I'm always happiest on the water. So I knew that that's what I wanted my life to be about.

MHA: Good. And, so do you have any family that ever was involved in the fishing industry or anything to do with the sea, even?

NA: Not that I know of. I mean, I have family in the Navy that I very much look up to, it's just that that's not part of the water world I can go into but I mean-- that's always been great but beyond that, not, not especially. No one in my family is specific fisheries but casually and for relaxation my family does like fishing and deep sea fishing on charters and things like that. So, for fun. There's always been the fishing industry in my life.

MHA: Well that counts.

NA: Yeah.

MHA: And is this your first job in your professional field?

NA: Yes. I graduated almost a year ago now and got hired out of college to start being the port sampler for New Bedford.

MHA: How did you get the job?

NA: Oh, well, it's always crazy interviewing for jobs in the biological field especially right out of school. It's very competitive. But I found this opening in AIS. I had first looked at the observer positions for at sea observers and I didn't think that was for me, so I found something almost equivalent on land and was lucky to apply in December when not that many people graduate, so that kind of gave me the upper hand. Yeah, and they gave me a chance to start doing this job so I took it and gave it everything I had.

MHA: Good. I'm curious about why you say didn't think you'd be interested in being the at sea observer.

[5:01] NA: I, honestly, I'm just, I would be so terrified of being sea sick all the time that I wouldn't be able to do my job well enough and that's just, I don't know, it's scary. It's so dangerous out there. I give so much props to the guys that do it and just fishermen in general for being out there but, I'd be scared. My mom would be scared for me, so I decided to stay on land just for everyone's sake.

MHA: Sounds rational.

NA: Yeah.

BOTH: [chuckling]

MHA: Okay. Well maybe you can sort of talk me through a little bit about your job and what you do on a day-to-day basis and that kind of thing.

NA: Sure. So every day is so different. I feel like I'm almost on call sometimes so, on a general day I'll wake up in the morning, look at my email to see what boats have come in, try and look on our tracker to see what's coming in and then I call every fish house that I see on a daily basis. So the auction, Bergies, Sea Watch for clams and quahogs and ask if they have anything coming in and if they do, hopefully it's something I need and I'll go down, measure how many I have to measure. If it's coming in later in the day then I have to plan it out and say okay, Sea Watch is landing at ten so I'll go there then and then try and stagger everything out so I get it at the right time. So yeah, that's a typical day. I'll go back to my office after that and enter in all my data to keep it very organized because it's hundreds every month, pieces of paper, multiple pieces of paper that go with each sample and the actual bones and things like that that you have to keep track of. So that's a typical day. Trying to find samples, where they are, if you need them and then getting them and hoping people are willing to give you the time to get them because it can be a process and fish houses are crazy busy and you never want to get in the way.

MHA: Yeah. So how did you learn how to do what you're actually doing?

NA: I just was really lucky to have a lot of co-workers that were really patient to work with me. There's seven of us in the port sampling program so I have New Bedford and the Cape, technically and then my next two closest people are Dave, he works out of Gloucester, and Mark works in Rhode Island and both of them either came here to teach me or I would go and see them and see what was going on in their ports. But it can be a crazy job to learn. When I was first being trained in the office I was like, there's no way I'm ever going to be able to do this or be good at this because it's so many components to keep track of. But you know, once, once you get in there or once you learn how to take otoliths out of every fish species that comes into the port it becomes second nature and you get your species that you see all the time that you just get good at. So it's a lot of practice, it's a lot of being very patient and just overly nice to people that don't necessarily like seeing the government come into their buildings, which is always very hard. But

yeah, just, I had people that were patient with me and that was the best blessing ever because I can't imagine teaching me how to do this now having taught other people.

MHA: [laughter] So do you have a chance to talk to some of the workers in the plants? Or the fishermen themselves? Or are you just strictly going in and doing your...

NA: It depends. Whenever I get there, I mean, I always talk to whoever is managing that plant or whoever is at the processing. Sometimes I'll go and sample after the boat's already gone so I won't get to see those fishermen. But a lot of the times, on the Cape like in Chatham or Hyannis, I go right to the boat and just talk to the people on the boat, and as they're off loading it into a truck or something I'll step in and measure everything I can. So, it depends on the place but you're always talking to somebody, people always want to know why you're there. So yeah I get to talk to everybody on the spectrum.

MHA: And do you ever get any push back from people?

NA: Yeah. All the time.

MHA: [laughter]

NA: It's hard, being a 22 year old girl showing up in a government vehicle, seeing these men that have been doing this for 50 years and then you step in and want to interfere and it's hard but I think as long as they know I'm not coming from a point of law enforcement or anything like that, as long as they know I'm not trying to get them in trouble or whatever they might think I'm doing. I can be really well received and it's funny, now that I've been doing this for a year everyone knows me now and they're a lot more welcoming. They know I'm as efficient as I can be getting everything done. I don't get in the way so it's been, it's been a long journey to get where I am to people respecting me and taking me seriously and realizing that I have a government mandate to be there and they have to let me be there.

[10:09] MHA: What about the, the information that is being obtained from the otoliths and the scales. I know its aging... is at least part of it right?

NA: Mhm.

MHA: Do you get involved at all in the analysis or are you strictly sending things off?

NA: That's one part that's really hard about my job is that there's such a disconnect between my data and what actually happens to it. There's actually three steps in the process. There's all of us that are just data fiends collecting everything we can and then we send it to another lab that ages all of it and then we just don't know what happens. I mail off all my samples and that's it. I don't think about it again because I have hundreds more coming in that I have to use my time for and then once it goes to the aging people in that lab it goes to the statistical people that actually do the numbers to work on the stock assessments and see how all the populations are doing. So I never talk to those scientists. I never talk to the aging scientists and-- we had a great meeting this past June where we all got to get together and I think that's when all the port samplers really

realized how influential our data is and how hard it is for us that we don't get to see how it's being used. And I'm sure there are journals that this data is published in that I'd love to read or just articles and I have no idea where they would be.

MHA: You were trained in marine biology so you have a sense of maybe the stage of life of the fish that you're sampling, um, but you don't have any direct feedback from the otolith?

NA: Right.

MHA: That would be frustrating I would think.

NA: It is. It's just more like, this data is so important to me because it's such a big part of my life and I really care about it. And I want to know what happens to it even if I can't be involved just to be able to read about it would be great and people come up to me and say how old is this fish, and I'm like I have no idea.

BOTH: [laughter]

NA: So that's not my part of the job, to have any idea. So it would be nice to be able to answer more questions even beyond that because I have no idea sometimes.

MHA: Yeah. That's a really interesting thought too because I wonder if you were able to answer more questions whether people would be more receptive to your being there apart from mandate.

NA: Right.

MHA: [laughter]

NA: I mean most things that fishermen ask me I am able to at least have a conversation about it's, often it's not as much questions as complaints. So I'm almost happy to be in a position where I have minimal power. I don't have any connections to anyone high up to have these questions answered. So a part of it is good that I'm in the dark because I don't have access to that information so I'm not responsible for it and they can't blame me for anything.

MHA: [laughter] That's a good point. And let's see. What is your academic background?

NA: So I have my bachelor's degree in marine biology.

MHA: In marine biology, you said that. Yep. And what do you consider the hardest part of your job?

NA: I think the hardest part can be, every day is so different and I'm personally someone that likes a schedule, I like regularity, but you know a boat could say hey, I'm going to be here at 3:00 and they're not there until 7:00. So it's, it's hard to schedule things and then once you get to the boats, hoping that they have something, so it can be a lot of disappointment with not finding the samples you need or boats saying they have something and they don't, or they do and they don't

tell you. So, yeah, just how hectic it can be. I do this job seven days a week, it gets very, very tiring but this is the busiest port in the country. So you have to expect it but it's been a good learning curve for me to learn how to deal with the craziness and, you know, not being on a schedule all the time.

MHA: Right. So when they give you assignments, it's assignments on certain species that you need to find? The otoliths or the scales from?

[14:45] NA: Yeah. So we work in quarters so every quarter a new huge sheet of requests come out and I have to start looking at it, figuring out what I need from it. For me, I have around 30,000 lengths that I have to do in a quarter, which is a lot. The next highest person is around 10,000.

MHA: Wow.

NA: So yeah it's, it's a lot.

MHA: And is that because you're at this port?

NA: Yes. And that can also be something really disheartening too because I feel like I'm never getting a lot done because there's always so much more to do.

MHA: Huh. So, a lot of my questions are more historical, so, when you talk to people, how long have people been doing this sampling, even before you?

NA: We, at AIS, have had the contract for I believe this is our third year, but it existed with another company before. I'm not sure for how many years. I know our guy Mark in Port Judith has been port sampling for I think maybe 10 years. So at least that long, but it could have been on a different program, so I'm not sure about New Bedford specifically how long they've been port sampling here.

MHA: So, if I may ask, I think, if I'm not mistaken, they were interested in the video monitoring too that's not really, it's kind of thinking about the future. Have you heard anything about that and do you anticipate your job changing at all?

NA: I haven't necessarily heard about that. I mean, I'm very isolated in my port sampling job. I, just the biggest thing I know about AIS is how involved they are with all the different observer programs both here and in the northwest. But I haven't heard about video monitoring. I think that would be great. Any new technology that we can use is always helpful. It can always give us a different perspective.

MHA: It wouldn't give you the same information that you get from the otoliths though, that's for sure. [laughter]

NA: Right, yes, it does not have the microscopic capabilities.

MHA: But I was asking because I took a trip years ago to British Columbia when EDF was trying to get the switch over to, what they ultimately did, which was catch shares. I mean they were arguing for ITQs. But, anyway, British Columbia had that system and they have a video monitoring system and Archipelago is the company that does the video monitoring but I know that there were some connections somehow with the AIS but just don't remember the details, so.

NA: They, yeah, they have a bunch of contracts that are just little things here and there that I'd probably never know about.

MHA: Yeah. So what do you see as your future?

NA: Honestly, my, I guess my dream job would be working for Woods Hole, being one of the scientists that is involved with the statistical analysis of the catch but also being somebody that has worked in the port, there is such an obvious lack of information within the higher-up scientific community, I think, and what's it's like being on the docks, so I guess I've learned a lot about the social component of fisheries more than I would have expected. So I think that's something I'd really like to contribute to is the information and collaboration between the guys that are out on the boats and the people responsible for doing the scientific part of regulations. Because we do have a lot to learn from each other and as a scientist it can be really hard to interact with the fishermen but really they just know so much more than I do and often times they ask me questions or they're like, you would know better I'm like probably not, you've been a lobster fishermen for like 35 years, you know. You know them way better than I do. So, I think that's something I'd like to see myself doing, is, we're going to get these two groups together.

MHA: They could use that.

BOTH: [chuckling]

NA: It's hard and I understand the disconnect and there's already a lot of great things that go on between, you know, meetings and things like that to try and get everyone together.

MHA: There are some cooperative projects too.

NA: Right.

MHA: They have been very beneficial I think. So, you mentioned a couple of different species, can you give me just a break down what some of the species that you typically get samples for?

[19:28] NA: I mean, every day I probably see, even if I don't collect samples from it but just, you know, haddock, cod, pollock, moreso in the winter, winter flounder, summer flounder when it's open, halibut if I'm lucky, red fish, cusk a few at a time, mackerel, silver hake, red hake, surf clams, quahogs, lobsters, red crab, hag fish, skate wings, whole skates, I think that's almost the whole list of things I do. Scup, yeah. It's a lot.

MHA: Yeah, it is. Do you anticipate any change with climate change, or are you seeing anything yet? Or have they talked about anything yet?

NA: I think being the age I am and the length of my experience isn't long enough for me to know or have enough information just because, I went to a college that's really great on sustainability and one thing they really drove home with us is looking at climate change on a 30-year scale. You know, you can't look it like, oh it snowed here this year, no climate change, so. I think, I hope to be able see maybe in 10 years in my 30s if there's any, any difference, but I think, in regards to environmental change I think just the biggest thing we have to look at is just overfishing in general of all species, is the biggest concern. Not environmental related, but possibly, I don't know.

MHA: Have you felt any discomfort from being a female on the waterfront?

NA: It's very hard. I'll be honest. And I knew what I was getting myself into, it's historically a male dominated society but I've been really surprised in a few ways. A lot of the older generation look at me as a daughter and they treat me how they would treat their daughter on the waterfront but that's not to say that's every time. I mean, people have made comments to me that I wouldn't want to repeat to anyone, that, you know, make it hard for me to get through my work day, but I just hope that my presence can pave the way for future generations being more comfortable there because at that point we have been there and we are not backing down. And I think that's my biggest thing, is not letting anyone scare me or intimidate me or treat me like I'm a weak woman on the waterfront because that's not how I feel so, yeah. I think establishing myself in that type of presence has been the easiest way to get through it.

MHA: And have you talked to your, I guess I would call them mentors in a way, the people that, they're longer, or have done this job longer the guys, have they talked at all about their reception from, you know in general?

NA: Compared to me?

MHA: Yeah.

NA: I mean, yeah for a while I was the only girl on our team so it was me in the busiest port and what I would consider the most difficult port in Maine to Virginia. So, I don't know, I think I got props for it and I, it's something I'm really proud of; I took on this huge challenge but it's definitely, definitely different when I'm with the guys in their ports or they're with me. You know, when we're in my port, all, all of the men are very generous and very helpful and will move anything that I need moved even if I don't really need it moved.

MHA: [laughter]

NA: So the guys are just like, this would never, ever, happen to me. So it has its pluses and its minuses but, you know, overall I wish I was just a more neutral presence but yeah the guys, they look out for me too. They're, I feel like the baby sister almost, of the group. They want to make sure I'm safe and they're so helpful, with it being really busy here. And it's harder for me to move hundred pound box of fish than it is for them as, however that may sound but yeah, they realize it is harder for me in different ways.

MHA: Let's see, have you met any other women on the waterfront?

[24:33]NA: Not, not that I, I'm trying to think really hard. Not that I can honestly, really think of. I'll run into an observer every now and then and there are a lot of awesome female observers that I know in this area that are in the same position as I am and sometimes worse because they're at sea but not from an industry standpoint. I was at one place one day and this guy looked at me and he's like, you're the only girl I'll see all day besides my wife.

BOTH: [laughter]

NA: It's the weirdest thing. So I think they know me as the only girl on the waterfront. If I'm somewhere new—oh, are you the girl that port samples? And I'm like, yeah that's me and they're like oh, yeah we know. So they know who I am on the waterfront even if they don't know me because I'm the only girl they see all day, I guess.

MHA: Which can be pluses or minuses I guess.

NA: Right yeah. You know, they respect me but it's also, sometimes I feel "why are you here" kind of thing. But you know, some girl has to do it first, why not me?

MHA: So do you ever have to get into long conversations about why the sampling is taking place?

NA: Not especially. Once I state my reasons that I'm here as a government contractor, all I do is collect data, usually that's the end of the questions because I'm not law enforcement, I'm not going through anything they have. I'm not a threatening presence anymore so they don't really, really care. I think, mostly people just want to share information with me about what they're seeing. They're less interested in what I'm actually doing because visibly it's not all that interesting to outside people so I more just hear about trends that they're seeing and if I'm sampling squid, they'll be like, oh, this is the best squid we've had in three years. And I'll be like that's really awesome information that you guys are sharing, I wonder if that matches up with the data. So it's more-- a lot of, a lot of stories that I get to hear from people or things they're noticing or questions they have, not really related to what I'm doing.

MHA: Yeah. So do you keep track of any of that? Or is it just part of the background conversation, kind of thing?

NA: I mean from a personal standpoint I just find it really interesting because who, what other scientists talk to the guys on a daily basis? Pretty much no one. I don't know if I'm allowed to share this with you, Luke might have to cut this out, but we write, all the samplers, we write biweekly blogs about things going on the waterfront so usually I'll write stuff like that in there that they share because that's what the scientists will never know, but could be meaningful information. So if I have a boat that is switching gears or they're saying, we're in this area and there's none of this species here but there was last year, then that's something I'll write in there, just anecdotes that could be useful.

MHA: That's very interesting, yeah. Because I know there has been more interest in what we call traditional ecological knowledge and, and trying to get the scientists to consider it. But if they don't ever hear it and if it's all just one anecdote, but if you have several people noticing similar things then it becomes closer to data.

NA: Right and I also think that in my position, people there are so much more willing to tell me things because I'm like a normal person there, I don't show up as an interviewer asking questions like, what have you noticed about cod over the last 30 years, because that will shut any fishermen down they do not want to talk to you about it. They don't want to tell you where they're fishing but I overhear things and they trust me and every time I see them they tell me something different. So I think, almost as like, just background information, it's really awesome to be in my position to get this information.

MHA: How long do you think you'll end up staying as a sampler?

NA: I've actually recently accepted a new position.

MHA: Oh really?

NA: Yeah so I'll be starting my new job December 1st. But this, honestly, has been such a great year of experience and I'm so happy I did this before doing anything else because now I know what's it's really like out there and I have such a different perspective and respect and understanding for people in the fishing industry and fishermen, and all the components so I'm really lucky.

MHA: Do you mind my asking what you'll be doing?

NA: Yeah, so I'll be working for the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission, and my job will take place at the Jamestown Rhode Island of Department, the Jamestown, Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management, and I'll be a fisheries specialist for them. So still a large part of my job will be interacting with fishermen, helping them with new technologies for reporting and things like that. I'll get to do a bunch of different things down there but it will be more of an office setting. Which is exciting and sad but, I'll miss the fieldwork.

[30:30] MHA: Yeah. But Port Judith and Rhode Island in general have a pretty active fisheries and science interaction. There are a couple of organizations that you might eventually end up wanting to get to know a little bit better. There's the Commercial Fisheries Institute I think, I forget the acronyms.

NA: That's okay.

BOTH: [laughter]

MHA: And also URI, University of Rhode Island used to have a very active fisheries program. It's much less so now. It's more international than local and their Sea Grant program used to have more fisheries-related activity. But there's probably still enough that could keep you engaged.

NA: Right.

MHA: So it'll be it'll be interesting. So you were saying you work seven days a week? How many hours do you think you put in?

NA: Honestly, I work seven days a work but it's rare that I'll work 40 hours. So it can be a 10-hour day and then a 2-hour day and then another 2-hour day and then a 10-hour day, and then the next day I might have a day off, if weather's bad and nothing came in, so it's really so different per day, per season, per species depending on what I'm trying to get and putting the effort into.

MHA: Okay. Is there anything you can think of that I haven't asked you? Because I don't know a lot about fish sampling. [laughter]

NA: It's not that big of a thing, not that many people know what it is. I think if I could say anything about our program it would just be that I think there should be more. There's so much opportunity for boats landing here especially and other places. I think mostly New Bedford, I would just like another person to help, but even in other parts of the country, port sampling just gives such different information as opposed to observing because you're on one boat all day, you can only do the fish on that boat, but I can see 5 to 10 boats at a day and get that much information. So I think I would love to see more on land sampling opportunities and programs because I think if I'm not mistaken, through, NOAA and Woods Hole the seven of us port samplers are responsible for 75% of the data used in stock assessments, which is a huge number. So for me that's like 10% at least. So yeah, I think if there were more of us we'd get more information and other ports in the country and Alaska, places like that, I think it would be awesome. And I mean there might be, I just have no idea that there's other port samplers beside us, besides us but I think that would be awesome.

MHA: Have you had a chance to meet anybody from other parts of the country that are doing what you do?

NA: As far as port sampling, do you mean? I mean, when we all got together I met everyone from Virginia to Maine within our program but outside our program I don't know any other companies or contracts that do port sampling. So, I know everyone on my team, which is kind of a big deal because we have people all the way in Virginia so it's hard to get all of us together. But yeah, but no, I just know our group.

MHA: So you've had a chance just to look briefly through this exhibit. We're hoping that our interviews, this set of interviews will lead to a little change and/or additions maybe to what would you like to see emphasized if we were to kind of focus on port sampling?

NA: [laughter] It's just so funny because to me it's just such a small part of the industry, I'm like I don't know how much it deserves. I mean I guess just awareness. You know, a map of where all

of us are and how much we're responsible for and, I think, this might just be me because, being selfish about it, but I think we really are a really influential group of scientists that collect a lot of data if you call us scientists, some people don't--

MHA: [laughter]

[40:00] NA: But yeah. I just, I mean, even if anything, just to have some the numbers that are associated with our group would be awesome because they're immense. But yeah, it's so hard because at sea stuff is so much more interesting to everyday people and that's what I love.

MHA: Well this particular project, we're really focusing on the shore side businesses and tasks, I guess, that they go into, that are really essential for the industry. So I mean, you may be, your job may be a small part but is really essential, I think, so I think.

NA: I agree. I mean I totally love this job and thank the world for it.

MHA: Now how about the other, your coworkers? Do you share war stories?

NA: Yeah, it depends. I mean, I think I'm probably closest with our people up here so I see Mark, Dave and Jay most regularly. But if something happens we'll immediately text each other, especially if we find a really uncommon sample from an area that we just never see, it's always really exciting for us and it can be hard because I'm the only port sampler for about 50 miles each way so it can feel really isolated being the only girl in the building, being the only port sampler in this part of the state, so I think to keep our sanity we have to keep in touch with everyone around us that are doing the same thing because there are so few of us.

MHA: Do you have any idea of who's going to replace you?

NA: No, I just know there's a lot of people applying, which is really, really great. It's such a good experience for anyone getting out of college or wanting to get into fisheries. I mean I hope I get time to work with them before I leave just because it's such an intricate thing learning this port and how to maneuver it and who to talk to and things like that. So I hope I can help them anyway I can.

MHA: Yeah I think it would be valuable if you could actually go around with them and introduce them.

NA: Yeah, I mean some places are just really hard to find and they don't have an official address but we have boats that offload there so, yeah. It would be great and I think I have a good reputation, so I'd love to introduce someone new to everybody so they know it's the person after me, it's the same company and everything.

MHA: So do you see any differences among the, I know that there are fleet boats and there are individually owned boats, and there are small small and large businesses, do you see any overall differences in how they react to the sampling?

NA: I think the places that I go most often or that have been visited most often like Whaling City Auction, I either talk to someone there on the phone every day or I'm there every day, so they're one of the biggest companies here but I know everyone there. Everyone there knows me. So I think it's hard to see differences just because I've been at all of them for so long now that they just all receive me the same way. But it's really great meeting the small businesses too or the boats that offload directly onto their, onto trucks or something because most of them are with their family and things like that, they're a smaller business; it's a more intimate conversation being able to talk to them and learn about them and their business in particular when I'm at bigger business then it's just millions of dollars of fish everywhere and people are too busy to really talk to me. But both have their values and both are great to experience and see.

MHA: So are you telling people yet that you're leaving?

NA: Yes I am. It's been hard and it takes a while to be good at this job and feel like you've mastered it, I don't even know if I feel that way yet. I'd like to think I would be somewhat hard to replace for some point of time. But yeah, I've told my boss. AIS is honestly, it's such a great company and I'm so happy I work for them. My boss Luke Curci is, he's great, he was an observer so he knows how hectic life can be and he has the seven of us and a lot of other programs so he's just really trusting and gives you a lot of responsibility on yourself which was something great to learn, being right out of college where everything is assigned to you and there's a date on it, whereas here it's like, here's three months of work, figure it out. So yeah, I'll definitely miss AIS but everyone knows and I think, is genuinely excited for me and because it is my next stepping stone to the career that I want to achieve.

MHA: Good. Well I don't have any more questions that I can think of right now...

NA: I can't think of anything else that I really need to share about the job.

MHA: Well I feel like I know just a little bit more about sampling. I mean, I've run into, I know more observers than the shore samplers.

NA: Well there are just so many more observers to know, I mean...

BOTH: [laughter]

NA: If you'd meet anyone it'd be me probably.

MHA: So I really appreciate your coming in and meeting me.

NA: I appreciate being able to talk about it. I mean, I love this job. I want more people to know about it. I can never just tell someone straight up I'm a port sampler because they have no idea what it means. So yeah, the more people that know about it, the better and hopefully the more programs that'll be inspired.

MHA: I just thought of one other thing sort of corollaries to some of the things we've been talking about. I know that NMFS is considering more monitoring, what they're calling

monitoring, port-side. I think for a while Maine had a lot of port-side monitoring, especially for herring. But I think there are people making arguments that it would be financially better and perhaps get more information, for the assessments and so on, if they had port-side monitoring. So, it sounds like you would agree with that, to some extent.

NA: Yeah, I mean it depends on how they define monitoring. I know we have a herring contract where every five minutes they grab a tote of herring and see how much non-direct species are in there, so I guess if I knew more about what they were defining monitoring as, I'd be able to say whether or not I think it would be something important, but even the port sampling program, it needs a lot more-- maybe not a lot-- some more work done to be as efficient as it can be, like any other program. So I, in general would say that it's great that they're thinking of monitoring at all, because it is more information. It's a different type of information. So yeah, if something came out of that that would be awesome to look at.

MHA: Well thank you Natalie.

NA: Anytime.

MHA: If I think of more questions, I'm going to give you a call

NA: Oh yeah, of course.

[43:36] End of Audio