NEW BEDFORD FISHING HERITAGE CENTER

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DiCienzo, Patricia ~ Oral History Interview

Madeleine Hall-Arber

Patricia M. DiCienzo. Interview by Madeleine-Hall Arber. *Workers on the New Bedford Waterfront.* New Bedford Fishing Heritage Center. January 4, 2017.

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Background

Name of person interviewed: Patricia (Trish) M. DiCienzo (TD)

Facts about this person:

Age: 54
Sex: Female
Occupation: Manager at Maritime Terminal
Residence: Lakeville
Ethnic background: Italian

Interviewer: Madeleine Hall-Arber [MHA]

Transcriber: Amanda Peabody [AP]

Interview location: New Bedford

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Key Words
Ground fish, swordfish, scallops, lobsters, processing, pallets, fish blocks, truck loading, international transporting, clementines, first woman manager of the warehouse

Abstract

Trish DiCienzo was born in Brockton, Massachusetts in the year 1963, the oldest of four kids. She married at age 18 and moved out to Boston for 22 years then moved to West Roxbury, Massachusetts where she worked in the police department. Later, she moved to Lakeville so she could work at a processing plant in New Bedford. Shortly afterward she was asked to transfer to Maritime Terminal where she works today. In this interview she describes the responsibilities she has as a manager and elaborates on certain policies regarding transporting goods and storing them as well as the many challenges that come with managing a unionized company.

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[00:00] Tape intro; warehouse manager at Maritime Terminal; got into fishing industry through agency in Fairhaven; switching over to import/export; switching over from scallop processing plant to Maritime; run down of job description; transporting goods and rails; shipment to and from Canada and Morocco; goods such as clementines and ground fish.

[5:33] Learning by doing; holding and transporting goods; freezers; checkers; inventory; working closely with customers; Main Terminal; bulk product; fish blocks.

[9:20] West Terminal; loading trucks and sending them out; unloading trucks; hierarchy of the way transporting is handled; do's and don'ts; 200 customers.

[14:53] Using cranes or forklifts to unload; US customs; Canadian and US bonds; pallets; Seattle.

[19:53] CSX and Union Pacific; lobster and scallops; Boston airlines; losing cargo; monitoring transports; working with numbers and quantitative reasoning; being a female in the industry and opinions on women in the field.

[25:39] Continued discussion on being a female in the industry; contract negotiations; background on when and where she was born; from Brockton; background on family and marriage; early memories of New Bedford.

[30:20] Work ethic; drivers; temporary employees and temp agency; training.

[34:31] Ethnicity of employees and bilingualism; changes regarding technology; working closely with USDC and the FDA; transporting overseas; stamps and certificates.

[40:02] Policies and regulations; hardest part about the job; grievance procedure; cons about temp workers; state pier; managing schedules for employees; best part about the job; unpredictability of employee availability.

[46:04] Weekend rotations; work hours; best part about the job is being busy often; Mr. Wechsler.

[50:06] Custom brokers; AES; Terminal facility, Bridge facility, Delaware, and Hartford Connecticut; mentoring replacement; maintaining good presentation with delivery trucks.

[55:55] More on "housekeeping"; taking temperatures; Ocean Spray; clementines.

[1:00:00] Quality control and inspections; TWIC cards; TSA; preconceived notions about union shop.

[1:05:03] Storing versus producing; blast freezers; final comments.

[1:08:39] End of recording

[0:00]

Madeline Hall-Arber: I have a sort of 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 at the Library of Congress. I'm Madeleine Hall-Arber and today I'm speaking with Trisha DiCienzo? Is that?

Trish DiCienzo:

MHA: DiCienzo. And it is now about 1:35. So, thank you for agree to do this. So please introduce yourself.

TD: My name is Trisha DiCienzo and I am currently employed as the warehouse manager at Maritime Terminal, main terminal. And I've been at this for about 4 or 5 years here as the manager.

MHA: How did you end up here?

TD: Okay, well I'll be as brief as possible but I ended up here-- I worked in the Police Department in Boston, Massachusetts for many, many years and due to the illness of my daughter I wanted to have a little bit of a change in career. I ended up moving out to Lakeville, buying a house and thought I'd give my hand at a different career, so I came out to New Bedford and I was like "hmmm, how do I break into this industry here?" I don't really know much about it and I don't really know where to go to get work, so I ended up going to an agency, just a regular agency that was in Fall River and they placed me at a seafood business that's now out of business, but it was here for many years in New Bedford and Fairhaven-- MacLean's Seafood. So I worked there in the office-- the shipping office and they took in a lot of ground fish and they were very big on swordfish. So I got a little bit knowledgeable about shipping and receiving and then I did a little bit of the accounts receivable there and then they ended up going bankrupt. So it was back into the workforce and I ended up interviewing for a job... at a scallop processing facility located in New Bedford and I started there working actually for the president. I was his assistant. As I got more involved in the business, they asked me if I wanted to go work in the import and export aspect of it so we changed over to the plant side, moved my desk upstairs and got very knowledgeable in importing and exporting. So what I had to do was file all the paperwork with customs, interpret the banking letters of credit, work with USDC and FDA, get the certificates to move product, did the bookings with the ocean freight and was very successful with that for many years and then after about seven years I got a call from my friend over here at Maritime and he said, "would you be interested in changing over? We'd really like to have you over here." So I came here and now I not only run the warehouse, we also have the cold storage

facility here. I also do the ships at the State Pier. So we take in the clementines from Morocco, they come in on the ship, they come off on a crane through the Longshoreman's Association and then our guys bring them in on fork lifts and we ship them out either to Canada or across the US. If they go to Canada, they're bonded and we also take in ships sometimes here at Maritime. If not, we truck them here and we store them and we ship them out. We also do-- we have a rail siding that runs across the side of our building. So we take in rail cars and each rail car either inbound or outbound holds about 160,000 pounds of fish at about 56 pallets per rail car. So we offload rails cars probably 70-100 a year. And then we also have our loading docks which we take in… we do bulk here, so we take in cranberries from various, mainly from Ocean Spray. That's seasonal and we store them, we freeze them and then we ship them out after they're frozen. We also take in a lot of ground fish that's usually frozen and blocked. We store that here and we also do a lot, we do some bait. We also store-- we changed two of our-- we have about 4 rooms here and we change two of them into coolers and we usually store clementines seasonally which is from October until probably March or April. So that's pretty much what we do. There's a lot more involved but--

[5:33] MHA: So how did you learn all of this?

TD: I just picked it up. Learn by doing. I started out on the importing and exporting I was like, God I don't really know if I can do this and then it was really just paying attention to what you read and understanding manufacturing. And it doesn't matter whether you're manufacturing working with nuts and bolts, fish, whatever the commodity is, you just have to understand that everything kind of runs the same. You have a shipping area, you have your inventory that you have to be responsible for. When you're in the transportation I booked-- I did the transportation at the other company I worked for and I deal with transportation here that everything that comes in or leaves your facility has to be accounted for and everything has to go on a bill of lading which has to be signed by the driver or by me, so that we can account for everything. So it's really-- as long as you account for what comes in and what goes out and you organize it in such as way that-- by your inventory that you know where it is and you can make it accessible to you when you need to ship it or whatever it's really fine.

MHA: So you're kind of like an intermediary? You don't have to find where you sell the clementines or the fish?

TD: Right.

MHA: You're servicing the transportation. And the holding of them.

TD: Yes, the holding and the transportation.

MHA: Fascinating.

TD: There's a lot of moving parts here.

MHA: Yeah.

TD: We have-- my crew here-- this is a union shop.

MHA: Okay.

TD: So what that means is we have 10 or 11, I think it's 11 list guys that go by seniority and then we also hire temporary employees that work alongside with the union and we need them usually during the ship season. That's generally the time during the cranberry season. That's when we'll really hire the temporary help. But then what they do every single day, their job is to, we have two checkers that work the front doors and then the rest of the guys work the freezers. They're called operators. So the checkers are like the second set of eyes. They offload trucks. They verify the counts. The operator puts the stuff away. When we get an order for the product to go back out, the operators will pull it out of the freezer and the checkers will double check the accounts before it gets on the truck and then if there's any issues, that's when they call me in. I make sure that the inventory matches, I work very closely with the customers to make sure that their-- all they need to service to any problems that they have-- they call me. A lot of times they call me early or daily at a time and say "I have a truck coming in, I'm on a time crunch, can you see if you can have my product ready or could you help me out? I know it's late in the day but I really need to get an order out here." So, we work very closely with our customers.

MHA: Now are the truckers working for you or are they working for the other companies?

TD: They're working for the other companies. For example, I think we have-- don't hold me to this but say we have 200 customers; main facility is the facility where we're talking about right now, Main Terminal, we generally do bulk product which is the cranberry bins, block fish, the clementines, so we do-- we take in the product that is not ready to go directly to a consumer.

MHA: I see.

[9:20] TD: Across the street we have West Terminal. West Terminal has finished goods those are goods already ready to be shipped directly to a customer. And Bridge Terminal is the facility where they free-- they actually freeze-- they're the first line where it comes off say a ship and, for example, Norpel. They'll go in and they'll block freeze their product and then they'll take it from there and then they'll produce it and do whatever they're going to do before it ends up there. Or it ends up here for storage. A lot of customers will freeze at Bridge Terminal and Bridge Terminal generally does the freezing but they don't--

[Side conversation with delivery person]

MHA: So you have to give the truckers directions.

TD: All the time, that's why we have the sign over there across the street-- directions to across the street. Yeah so it's very-- and right now it's a good time for an interview because this just happens to be our really quiet week. It's the calm before the storm because we have 3 ships that are on their way. One of them will be here on Friday, so I'm not quite sure, depending on when the owners of the produce want to offload.

MHA: Are these the clementines?

TD: Yes. We could conceivably work all weekend if contractually everybody gets together. If they're really anxious to get the fruit out then we'll work the weekend. If not then we'll start on Monday. And it'll be a mecca of noise and people and 50-60 trucks in my parking lot here, that we'll check here. We do all the checking in of all the trucks at Main Terminal. So then we send them off either to the pier or they'll stay here and depending on where the fruit is.

MHA: Now I'm just curious, since you're a Union shop is there any issue with trucks coming in that aren't union?

TD: Well it's not a problem-- it has nothing to do with the truck. When it's a union shop it has to do with what the individual does and what civilians-- I call them-- can and cannot do on the dock. For example, if a truck backs in and they have generally paper supplies. For example, say if I order something; I can't let the person that's bringing the supplies in take the boxes off the truck. I would have to get a checker to check it, to take it off and check it. If a driver comes in, he's not allowed to use any of the equipment. A lot of places like a preferred freezer, they want you to unload your product, count it, take it off your truck, and put it on your truck. We have the union-- they have like a hierarchy of the way they do things. And they also-- we can't have anybody-- we have special rules by a contract of who can handle fruit and where they can do that, like they're not supposed to go in and take apart pallets and count like the owners of the fruit. They have certain criteria they have to follow to do that. Also as far as breaks and lunches, say if we take a break at 10 o'clock and a lunch at 12 o'clock and then and afternoon at 2 o'clock, by the contract, if any temporary workers work during a union person's break then the union guy will get paid for it. So we have to be very, very careful-- it also applies to overtime. So, for example, if there's-- we have to go by a list. Across the street, if they're having overtime then we have to go by the seniority list that involves these two buildings. So if West Terminal has overtime he'll call me and say I have overtime this evening can you call in the list? I'll go to the top of the list and we have to exhaust the list. So if they need two guys, the first two guys I'll go to, if they accept then I fill the position over there. Same with me, if I need overtime I'll tell him I need four guys, he'll start at the top of the list-- I have the-- pretty much I have the top guy for seniority he's always at the top so if he accepts the overtime which normally he would, then I would just grab two or three more guys right in order and then we skip whoever doesn't want to work. And then we also have a weekend rotation. Same thing.

[Side conversation with someone with a broken foot.]

MHA: So you're saying, Canada is...

[14:37] TD: In Canada, in order to ship fruit, like for example, when we take the ships and how-- what we do is, we offload, the longshoreman use a crane and they offload from the top of the ship and they drop the pallets down, our forklift drivers will take it into the state pier and we'll organize it by the grower, by who owns it, the size and then what happens is we have-- if it's US fruit and Canadian fruit that own the product, the US trucks -- it's primarily the same check-in however, the Canadian fruit has to go in bond. So it can't touch US soil so it has to go-- it gets loaded onto the truck. Canadian drivers have to have custom paperwork through US Customs and Border. They have to seal the truck with the seal and then they give them the paper work so it goes in bond from here directly to the border. Then they'll cancel their bond on the US side and do an entry into Canada.

MHA: Wow. Complicated.

TD: Complicated.

[Interview Interrupted –comment about down at the wharf, they put US and Canadian fruit in the same building—but Trish responded, "I don't do that." They have to have so many feet in between, they can't house US and Canada… 25 feet, whatever it is, it's because of a fungus that can destroy a citrus crop. Then directions.]

MHA: Okay, so I kind of lost track of where we were. One question that I did have, you mentioned sometimes that you have the railroad and sometimes fish-- I'm assuming it's the frozen blocks.

TD: It is, frozen blocks yes. So we have-- they fit like I said, they fit about 160,000 pounds so what happens is we-- they're all on pallets, the blocks, so normally we put… 56 pallets fit in there with 52 blocks. It's like 2,112 blocks, I think fit in there. And then we seal the doors and the train master comes and it goes to Seattle, Washington.

MHA: Wow really?

TD: So it goes to--

MHA: I thought they had enough fish out there?

TD: No, we send out to Seattle and Seattle sends into us.

MHA: But that's so funny because it's like the traffic.

[19:53] TD: I know I know. And that's-- actually, the... rail... CSX and Union Pacific, they offer wonderful service for frozen product, going out to Seattle or-- different places but, the industry

really hasn't bought into that yet because the schedule isn't 100% where they need it to be and they're trying to use that as an alternative to make it cheaper for seafood processes to ship seafood. So they're very leery about it.

MHA: That's interesting because I know a lot of product is flown now out of Logan.

TD: Well, yeah, that's primarily lobster and scallops. The only problem with that is that, yeah normally they, every day they have the trucks, they have-- all the companies here that have lobster or scallops they all send trucks into Boston to the airlines. You know you're put them on gels and then you know you always take a risk of the stuff getting lost. We've had so many instances where either the lobsters arrived-- they were spoiled or because they sit out the tarmac for a while before they load them-- but primarily it's pretty good. It's a pretty good process. The only difficulties I've experienced, is everybody that ever wanted to ship anything, other than the local stuff is the international stuff. There's always been a problem doing that. Going through Customs say if you wanted to send a sample to the EU or you want to send something out to China or even to Canada. Because of Customs, there's always confusion with the-- somebody on the other side that brings it in like a broker so sometimes there's not really any clear rules. Like if I call up FedEx and say I'd like to send this to Canada, oh yeah, no problem. Then you find out that you thought you did everything that you could do and there was an issue because certain times-- they would let it go through customs and then it would be delivered to the destination. Other times they need a broker to actually broker it through. So it was up to me to monitor that from beginning to end. So it got frustrating because if it was something important to one of my bosses, they'd be like, well when you try to send out the sample out can you make sure you get it there? Can you do-- well a lot of the times they'll say can you do it Trish? Can you do it? Yes, I can do it. But you know it presents you with a lot of pressure because you have to stay up.

MHA: You seem really good with numbers. Is that one of your skills that you've learned or picked up over time, or always been good--

TD: Yeah well-- I mean I've always kind of been good with numbers but I mean as it applies to this industry you really really have to know the counts of things like what fits on a pallet. Or you really have to know a tier and you really have to know how many-- you know you get very good at numbers because you rely on that to fill a truck. How many pallets go on this size truck? How many pallets go on box truck? How many pallets can you fit on a 53 foot tractor trailer because everything revolves around fitting whatever-- the maximum capacity you can for the freight that you're paying and you want to sell products, so everybody wants to ship the most that they can like the rail cars. They want to ship as many-- the tier-- they want to fill that rail car. All the available space that they can, because every pound is money. It gets very important. And I also think, I'm a big customer service person. I love computers, I love what they do. However, I'm old school in the sense that I like to shake somebody's hand, I like to meet them personally, I like to call them and ask them how they're doing. I can sense in their voice if something is wrong. I cannot really pick that up unless there's a bunch of exclamation points in an email. You know what I mean? You really get a sense. Sometimes if you-- you really have to keep in touch with

your customers because sometimes business will drop off and there might be a reason. It might be because you're not doing a good job, or it might be because they're not having a good year and a lot of times it's just a-- you're miscommunicating. You're thinking one thing and really it's something completely different. Some years our customers do very well, other years they have a bad year and they rebound the next year but. It's very important that you keep up with them personally, I think.

MHA: Have you found any problems with being a female in this role?

TD: Um, actually you know what I have a great-- tremendous amount of respect for the females in this industry. I have to say, you have to be tough to be a female and work here, but if you'll notice-- if you actually polled these companies-- women are extremely strong and in very hard positions. Especially for operations positions here. I know really tough plant managers, I actually worked for one. Extremely tough. But she was very good. I know three or four businesses that women are at the helm so I mean-- me personally, I'm the first female manager here at Maritime, warehouse manager that's actually been in charge of running... in this facility, as far as the union being a supervisor-- female supervisor in the Union shop.

[25:39] MHA: So did you have to-- I know they recruited you, so maybe it was a little different but--

TD: Well, they didn't really recruit me. It was like-- somebody upstairs that I've known for a really long time, said, hey, do you want to switch over? So yeah that is technically recruiting but-- one thing, I was just about to-- I just lost my train of thought when I was going to add when you said that about recruiting um... oh God.

MHA: I was basically just wondering whether you had to prove yourself or-- and whether the women-- since you're the first.

TD: Right now I have to prove myself. Everyday.

MHA: Uh-huh. Everyday.

TD: Every single day. Not to the customers. It's more internally kind of, than it is externally, to be honest with you, because I feel like people get threatened when there's a woman that is actually in a traditional man's role that this-- I think men are always on board. It doesn't affect men, but other women that see women in positions, I think it's really, really hard for them to imagine that a woman can gain the respect of a man and manage men, and they're wonderful. I mean I've worked with men my whole life. In the Police Department I worked with all men. So I'm used to it. So it's easy for me.

MHA: So do you have to get involved at-- for example, with the contract negotiations, labor negotiations that kind of thing?

TD: Actually, I haven't been involved yet but I have a sense I'll be involved this time around, only because in between, there's five years in between the contract and I've had this position less than-- they ratified the contract first, so the contract's up in 2018, so I have a sense and I'll have some input into that. I think all the warehouse managers will. I think that's important because... it's hard to describe but it's kind of like an age-old tradition when you're in the union-- it's kind of like a lot of the rules need to be updated and more modernized for the times. I think that they should be flexible on both sides, you know it's 2017 now and some changes have to be made. So we'll see, I really want the opportunity to sit in on that and have some input.

MHA: Good, so... now we've been talking awhile and I totally forgot; did you say when and where you were born?

TD: Oh, when and wh-- actually I was born in 1963 and I was born in Brockton, Massachusetts and--

MHA: You're family were not-- was not in the fishing business?

TD: Nope. Not at all my dad was actually-- he was a civil engineer, my mom was pretty much a stay at home mom, I'm the oldest of four kids and then when I was 18 years old, I ended up meeting somebody that I would eventually-- I married. Then I moved down to Boston, so I lived from 18 until 40 in West Roxbury in Massachusetts, worked in the police department, Boston Police and then moved out here to beautiful New Bedford, well, I moved to Lakeville but decided to work in New Bedford. But it was funny because when I was a kid-- young-- old enough to know like probably-- let's say 9 or10 I could say. And used to come here to New Bedford with my aunt Mary and my uncle Al and they were part of the Sons of Italy and I used to remember when I got-- I didn't know where it was at first, I just-- until I was actually coming here, I said this is the spot that I looked at. When you come off of 195 East and you get off on Exit 15, you can see the water and I remember as a kid looking out and remembering the exact same picture in my mind, so I had asked my aunt, where did you bring us? She said, "oh we went to a church." It was in the basement of an old church that they used to have the meetings, so I used to come a couple times a year. And then I remember my aunt, Mary Genest was her name. She always sent a Christmas card to my mother and our family and it always said Mary Genest, whatever the address was, New Bedford. I used to say to my mother where is New Bedford? And she used to tell me. Then I think I did one field trip; I went to the Whaling Museum, so.

[30:20] MHA: Good, nice memory. It's interesting how it comes around full circle, huh?

TD: It is, it is. I've taken a lot-- I have to admit that it took a while for my family-- they were like, "oh you're working in New Bedford, it's tough." I had other people say, "oh, you work down in the docks" and, you know, "it's tough down there" and I would have to say... people are tough here in the sense that they have a very, very good work ethic. I mean they're very hard workers, very concentrated. You'll see a guy-- you could talk to a guy; they put in 68 hours a

week and they're just always at it. They get up in the morning-- I don't know how they do it some of them-- they're up 4 or 5 in the morning they stay out 8, 10 o'clock, they're doing the Boston runs. They're working 6 days a week. Some guys work 7 days a week and they're just... and I say, "how do you have the stamina to keep up with that kind of schedule?" I mean even us, we work-- sometimes-- I mean I've worked 3 months straight. I mean we've had the ships and sometimes I'd say, "how am I going to keep up?" You know you just do it, you just get in the zone and you do what you have to do but... very, very hard workers here. In this whole area.

MHA: So the temporary workers that you get, it's seasonally, do you have to go through an agency or?

TD: We never really did, this is really the first year we would going through an agency only because we really wanted-- because with the ships and... it's hard to get guys-- let me start this way. Normally we had a bunch of guys that were kind of-- every year-- come back around and say, "oh when are the ships coming in?" And we had a good run of that. And then as the economy has been tough and things have been tough and these guys get-- you know, they have children and families and they're older, they're not young anymore. You know, they had different obligations, so they can't really wait around until ship season to work say six months when they really need to work 12 months. Some of them we get back, because they kind work part-time but generally we work during the day now. We try to anyways, rather than before we'd work-- it wouldn't make a difference. We'd work until midnight. So we're trying to be a little more aware of a regular day. So we lost a lot of people. So we said, "well, let's go to an agency because they'll already be trained as far as a fork lift, they'll have experience, we don't have to go through the application process." So the jury's kind of out still with that because even though they're saying that they're trained, I find that they're really not as trained as somebody-- I get a better sense if I talk to a guy, I can tell, give a practical test on a forklift and I can tell if he can do the job-- more so then if I get the guy in there that's from a temp agency and-- [phone ringing] then I'm like this guy's really not trained like I would like him to be so. Excuse me.

[Brief pause]

TD: Where were we?

MHA: So um... well we were talking about the using of temp agencies.

TD: In philosophy, it's a good idea because they say that they're already screened. Meaning that they're drug screened, they have all their information, they give them-- like if they say that they have to have-- they usually have training for fork lifts, general manufacturing practices, that processing plants would normally go through. So they're supposed to have-- rather than us doing it.

MHA: Sanitation and all that--

TD: Yeah, it's easier for us because we have to do some... every company really should do some kind of training before they go on the floor. So in philosophy, it's a very good idea and like I said...

MHA: The reality is a little...

TD: The reality is a little different.

MHA: And how about the workers? Both the workers that are permanent employees and the people that come in. Are there different ethnicities represented?

[34:31] TD: Oh, absolutely, we have... you name it, meaning we have all kinds of... we have a good mix of... you know, we have white guys, black guys, Spanish guys, we have people that speak English, people that don't speak English. Even from a temp agency, we've had people that are completely not fluent in English, they're fluent in Spanish and then we just... communicate with them. We either get another guy to speak Spanish to translate-- I mean I don't turn anybody away that doesn't speak the language. We give them an opportunity, if they can keep up. Now if it really hinders their job, which I've never seen happen, I suppose if I was going to have somebody that didn't speak a language answering the phone, that would be a problem, but if they're out on the floor and they're doing work with their hands or doing work with whatever and their eyes, they can communicate.

MHA: So is-- are the majority of the people English speakers or is it just--

TD: Yeah the majority of are. But we have-- definitely bilingual workers here, absolutely.

MHA: And how about any Portuguese?

TD: Oh well, uh... yes.

MHA: Because it used to be--

TD: See it used to be-- I-- my... view of it that New Bedford used to be primarily Italian mix and Portuguese, but now I think it's mostly Portuguese that are here. That's my understanding, I mean that's what I see.

MHA: And how about technology? What have you seen changed since you've been here, if anything?

TD: Since I've been here at Maritime or just been in the industry?

MHA: In the industry.

TD: Let's see. Well I used to work really closely with like the USDC and the FDA so when I first started to work with them it seemed like it was tough and then it got a little easy; it got a little easier to deal with them. At first it was like USDC, oh my God, it's this government agency and then when you really find that your local office, even though they are tough, and they are strict and they have very strict guidelines, they're very accessible. You can call them up, you can ask them a question. It's not like that taboo agency where it's like the Federal Government, oh my goodness. Even them, they've had contacts that you can call and ask questions about certificates, questions on commodity, if you had a question, oh can I send this or how do I do this, they've been very helpful. Used to be that-- they used to pull samples a lot and I found out with the blocks at least-- that they can actually do some drilling in here of the blocks and take their-- do whatever they have to do and then issue their certificates without having to take the samples with them in boxes... load blocks into cars like, they'd take so many blocks per so much weight and we'd have the guy out there in the truck trying to load blocks and you know, it's tough. So they have better ways of doing things now. As far as--

MHA: What's that stand for? USDC?

TD: United States Department of Commerce. They're the ones that-- they have to-- see I'll explain to you the difference. If you're sending seafood to the EU-- European Union countries for example; Belgium, France... the FDA will allow you to issue-- they'll issue a certificate by sight, meaning you type it up, tell them what you're going to send, the case count, where it's going and you submit it to them and they'll issue you a certificate. A signed certificate in triplicate, I think, or whatever that allows you to ship with the certificates. The USDC is for, it's called-- like with your mass packer number, you have to have a CFN number with the FDA which is their number that they issue. You have to be on a list. And everybody that processes and sends to the EU has a certain CFN number. The USDC has a mass packer number but the mass packer number which is issued for anybody that wants to ship using the USDC to other countries, not in the EU, like for example China, Vietnam... but that means that they have to come in physically and stamp with their seal and date every single box that you send, and if it gets there without you stamping it, it stays there and it comes back. So that's the difference.

MHA: Is that our regulation or the other countries' that it's going to regulations?

TD: It's our regulation, Department of Commerce. Well, we actually have a-- we actually probably have an agreement because the same goes-- there's an agreement between their country and our country, all of them that work under this so if they send product here, the same has to happen-- their boxes have to be stamped and our boxes have to be stamped. But going to the EU, it's sight unseen. And what happens is that they don't post,- like on USDC because they've already stamped the boxes and viewed it, sampled it, tested it. They did all that. They don't get help up that much going where it's going. But in the FDA, stuff gets held up a little more only because every so often they'll-- they hold it just to check to make sure because they're not stamped so. They hold it up a little bit.

[40:02] MHA: So if-- do you ever forget to check for the stamps either going or coming.

TD: Actually only one time that did happen to me and I panicked. And I said, oh my goodness. And it actually-- I think-- I'm-- to be honest with you I can't-- don't hold me to this because this was several years ago but I remember getting USDC in there and saying to them-- and it was actually somebody that was there forever and ever-- he's retired now, but he was like the main guy you know and I was like oh he's going to be like whatever. So I think I know what happened now. I think I told him and he said there's nothing you can do. And I think I told my boss and somehow we directed them somewhere and they got-- I think they went to Vietnam or something and Vietnam was very lax, so they snuck through. But it won't happen now. Vietnam's tightened up. So I wouldn't try that now. Ever again.

MHA: Have you been affected at all by fisheries regulations?

TD: I-- I'll tell you. I haven't been in this industry right here, but I-- if I was working doing importing and exporting I definitely would-- that would affect me in some way.

MHA: And you probably see it on the waterfront.

TD: Absolutely. And I read about it a lot. I'm interested in it. We've been affected by quotas, days at sea, the fishing, when the boats go out, you get a pulse of that because it goes-- and sales-- they know how many trips that they can go out and they know what the catch is going to be and then in the seafood industry as a whole, especially with scallops. They-- when it's time to fish they fish and then they process. So in the summer it's extremely busy, that makes their winter inventory to freeze. They have to be very careful about that.

MHA: What were the-- what is the hardest part of your job?

TD: You know what, to be honest, the hardest part of my job I would have to say is the contract, as far as making sure that you follow the contract and you don't get into any squabbles because then they have a grievance procedure that they use so just when you-- it's just kind of a tricky thing because if you need something specific done on the dock you have to make sure you ask the correct person. Everybody has a job so you have to follow what the contract says about assigning somebody to do that job; if it's inside work, if it's outside work, if it's a freezer guy, if it's senior freezer guy and you have outside work, you have to go out and ask the senior guys before you say take a temporary worker and assign them to do it because then all of a sudden once they're at it, they say we're going to grieve you and they call the steward. And you have to be careful about their time. You have to be careful about the breaks because if you're allowing temporary guys to work it can be very costly and you have to be very careful during the ship season when you have labor here, to make sure that we watch that. Watch the hours.

MHA: So, I can see that that would be very challenging.

TD: Right and then the other thing that's challenging too is that-- managing the staff that you have, your daily staff. For example, right now I have, I'm using two checkers and I have two operators so I have four union workers here that are assigned here right now. When the ship comes in I can lose up to two, I can lose more, they can all actually opt to go except for the checker. He'll stay here. But they can all actually opt to go to the state pier if they'd like. Generally I lose two guys that go to the state pier.

MHA: And why is that?

TD: Because contractually, under my guys are the state pier and in this building. It falls under my management so the state pier is an extension of Maritime. They can work on the pier contractually before a temp can. So they can go get assigned there, which one of my guys goes there and works. Another one--

MHA: Is there a reason they would prefer to go there?

TD: Change of scenery. There's a lot of-- sometimes they work, they'll totally work the ships and then they could be there for overtime. I mean they're the senior guys there because it's their dock. And now usually I have another one of my checkers here that's been a checker, he's usually an operator but now that I need him, he checks. He sometimes goes there as well. He's staying here this year but usually he goes there when I have him. They like to go. I think it's more change of scenery. But it gets tricky though as far as the assignments and knowing-- you have to adjust your staff based on what you're doing so, say for example... it's quiet like right now and it's 2:30. Then all of sudden I'll get a phone call from upstairs and they'll say we're going to do shuttles; they're processing over at the bridge so we're going to send you 20 shuttles. So now it's 2:30 in the afternoon, you see the crew I have, and then if everybody decides that they want to stay and work to make the hours, it's a good day because then I can say okay great. Or I could be sitting here and it's a Friday night and nobody wants to work and then I'm panicking because I know that I only have so many guys on the list and I know I need so many guys that I need to do the job. It's very difficult to get a temp to come in on a Friday night. So it's a nail-biter, when you're busy. And it's something that's really not the norm.

[46:04] MHA: Yeah

TD: And then on the weekends you have to make sure you have the weekend rotation list, by the book. If you skip over because it's a clerical error or you missed, then you end up having to pay a whole row of guys. If you forget to call a guy or if he doesn't answer you or you don't reach out to him then he gets paid. So--

MHA: So if you call and he doesn't hear the phone or doesn't pick up or whatever-- what then?

TD: Well no, if he doesn't-- well if I were to call on my work phone from my business or my cell phone for the company and I make an attempt and I leave a message then that'll satisfy it. Now if

I try to get away with it and somebody says to me well can you prove that? Yeah I could whip out my phone, here it is right here, you can see I called the guy. You're really held to that. You really have to have an answer, you have to have documentation.

MHA: It's actually probably helpful with the cell phones now.

TD: It is. It is. And sometimes we text back and forth. You get a good sense of who's the texters that you-- I generally don't like to text but for some reason everybody else does, so. I mean text is a record too so if I had to do that as a last resort I will. I'd rather talk personally to somebody.

MHA: So you personally, are you at managerial level so you don't have to keep quite as close track of your own time and?

TD: Right, I'm part of management and a salaried employee. I generally have my hours from 7:30-4:30 and then whatever is extra is required to work, meaning it's salary positions. If I'm required to work 100 hours, I work 100 hours. If I have to work 60 hours, I work 60 hours. Or on the same token, if I can get out of here in 45-50 hours, I do. Very unpredictable, it's really by... whatever way the whatever blows, whatever happens. So generally we have-- between October and April is ship season. October, berry season. Now I have a whole room full of berries that are frozen and they're going to be ready to ship out. But when you do that you're only talking about by the time, it's two or three weeks before-- to get them out.

MHA: So... oh what do you like best about your job?

TD: I like to be busy. I like to be just engaged. I like when the ships are here, I don't like to be idle. I like when there's a lot of things going on. I like to learn things. I like to-- I really would like to take on a much bigger role than I do only because I think personally that I'm very knowledgeable in a lot of different areas so I think that I could be... definitely utilized more.

MHA: Who owns this business?

TD: Mr. Wechsler

MHA: And is that like a-- did he start it?

TD: You know I don't really know as much history as I.. I know that you ask-- I guess that there was a family here, that was here for many, many years and then Mr. Wechsler took over the business and I don't think he was 100% hands-on as far as-- now he's here all the time, but I think-- we used to have another general manager that was here, so you know, Mr. Wechsler wasn't required to be here, but he's no longer here, so I think he took on a bigger role, so he's more involved.

[50:06] MHA: Does he have any family that's also involved?

TD: I do not believe so. No, not at this time.

MHA: So there's no impediment to perhaps moving up?

TD: No, yeah, no, I just think that-- as far as my roles since I've done-- I've done so many different things I mean to a full extent of-- they usually send out, like for example the banking letters of credit, importing and exporting. We have other people that do that here now. So we have somebody that does that here now and they don't really have the business to support me going there in and playing a role up in there... maybe in the future when they retire. So that's always to be determined. So I didn't come in here doing that. But I like to do that-- but there's no job that can really encompass everything that you-- you either do the importing and the exporting or you do the-- you know, that, I've done transportation. So I really picked up and become very knowledgeable in this business.

MHA: Well I remember that they-- that the dealing with customs-- I went to a talk once where somebody was talking about how complicated it is. I know they have specialists-- are firms that help people--

TD: Well, custom brokers? But see the things is, I think to be a custom's broker, you need to be logical, so you just have to really know the business, because I've had custom brokers that have called me and asked me for help. I've had people come and take me out for coffee and ask me their opinion. It's really-- you have to delve into it and do it. A lot of customs brokers will go and they'll just have to do the travel lanes and put it into the AES, which they usually have somebody in their office do that. But as far as when you handle something from the inception, from the processing all the way through to the other side, every step that's involved, you become very knowledgeable, especially when you deal with the agencies, when you do the paperwork for the agencies, when you're booking your own freight, when you have to see it through to make sure it doesn't get hung up. You're the guy on the phone at 2 o'clock in the morning making sure that -- tracking it on your computer, making its going to where it's going because you have somebody to answer to and it's very important. I've gone to the seafood show and had to represent my company there and go and see the international people because I like to know who they're dealing with, see who they are. So there's a lot of facets.

MHA: Sounds fascinating, actually. Now how many employees does the company have?

TD: I'd like to say 50-75.

MHA: And that depends on?

TD: It depends on a lot of things like we have this facility, we have West Terminal facility. We have the Bridge facility. We also have Delaware, and they have Hartford, Connecticut.

MHA: Oh really? Wow.

TD: So we have more than one location and then when you add the temps in and the office staff. So I'd say 50-75 at least.

MHA: And let's see... are you mentoring anyone coming up?

TD: I always-- you know, I have Valentine here. He's here, I think they put him here because they weren't sure about what's going to happen with me and my foot and how long I'd be out, because it was a little longer than I anticipated. So he's here. The idea with him is that maybe he can provide some coverage during vacation times because, what happens is, in general, I can help Wayne across the street and Wayne can help me or vice versa. But it tends to be extremely busy when one of us is out, so we can't dedicate to do that. So it makes more sense if somebody-- cross training is always a good idea. And then we have Harry at the Bridge, he's getting older, he's looking to retire maybe next year. So you kind of have to look forward and say, let's bring somebody else in, teach them... so we're hoping that Valentine can cover the-- right now at least, be knowledgeable enough to spend time at each location and then be able to cover like vacations or sick time or an injury.

MHA: How did-- what did he start out as?

TD: He came from the agency.

MHA: Oh okay.

TD: And actually I've only worked with him, this is my first week. Second-- actually, maybe a handful of days. So as far as-- he's a quick read. I mean it's a quick study but he's not from this industry so I think, myself, I think that you really have to put in the time, you really can't-- you really do because you just get an idea of-- you kind of know about all the little weird things that can happen. Like when I go out on a truck the first thing that I look for is "Is the truck clean?" I know that a lot of guys, just because they've been doing it for so long, it doesn't even dawn on them if they see debris in a truck or whatever, but the customers and some freezers, if they see that, they'll reject the load, so I make sure that the truck's clean, that there's no damage inside the trailer. I make sure that the temperature is going to be correct and they have the instructions for the driver. I make sure that-- sometimes the stuff in the freezer is old, it's dusty. You want to send the freight out in the best condition it can be in. Guys don't really say-- I want it to be looking good. If you see dust that's on it because it's been in there for a year. You want to take your time. If you see shrink wrap, you see the pallets not squared up, if you see a pallet that's broken. You have to always point those things out. They don't just do it on their own.

MHA: Yeah.

[55:55] TD: That's why there's a manager, because you constantly have to do housekeeping. I have to-- everything I do has to be by instruction. Nobody's self-starter in this industry anywhere. If they're not told to do something they're not going to do it, and that's just--

MHA: Is that true because of the union or anywhere?

TD: I think anywhere. I think that it's like, tell me what to do and I'll do it, but I'm not going to create work for myself. I don't know why that is. I really don't.

MHA: It is interesting.

TD: It's interesting. Well, I really think it's human nature, meaning me, I overdo it. And I can't-- it's just my nature and it's not really a good thing all the time, because then you just, you're frazzled. I mean you want to do this, you want to do that, you know it's kind of like an OCD thing. I make sure, like when I do my lock up and I do the alarm, I mean, I don't just take it to chance. Like if somebody tells me, "I locked the door," I still go and check. Somebody tells me, "I locked the front door," I drive my car around and I double-check. It's my responsibility. I mean there's a lot at risk here. I've driven back and said, "darn it did I lock-- did I arm the freezer. I'll either call upstairs if I know somebody's there and I say can you do me a favor? Are you still there? Can you just run down and make sure the freezer's armed. Just because it's so important. It's somebody else's livelihood too. It's somebody else's business so it's my responsibility to make sure.

MHA: Now you mention the temperature. I know that there are rules about-- what is it... the hazardous…

TD: It's HACCP.

MHA: HACCP.

TD: Critical Control Points

MHA: Yes. So is that is-- are you effected by that?

TD: Yes, actually. I have to-- this is my process: when I take in product that I'm going to store here. We temp it, we temp it,-- I temp it, I either take it-- a probe like this and I put it right inside the temperature so I can get the core. Or I can take a gun like this and shoot the truck to see what the temperature is.

MHA: Oh, really?

TD: Or-- I got something else to show you, which you'll laugh. This is our infrared, that'll shoot the temperature or... for the last five years, I've had my... here it is. I put it over there. This...

MHA: Woah.

TD: This right here is... this is… to check the berries.

MHA: Wow, because you can stick it right in. Wow! I don't know if I mentioned when we talked that part of this is also going to involve some photography. Do you know Phil Mello? Have you ever run into him? He's the manager at Bergie's?

TD: Yes, that's where I know him from, Bergie's, yes.

MHA: He's a terrific photographer.

TD: Is he?

MHA: Yeah, so he's part of the project and he's taking photographs. So when he does, I'll mention that you have these interesting temperature probes. And maybe that can be a prop.

TD: Yeah, because that's kind of cool. I thought it was cool when I saw it. And then I report the temperature because like Ocean Spray, they have a certain-- they have a program. They have their criteria, whatever it is. Standing operating procedures and we go by this. So we report the temperatures daily to them. They come in and do their own temps.

MHA: How about the clementines? Do they have that?

[1:00:00] TD: Clementine, they have-- actually representatives from the people that own the fruit that come out and they do quality control. They do inspections. We have absolute thick book, this thick, of our operating procedures that goes through Homeland Security and Customs that we can't have any fruit laying on the ground. We have to have receptacles. There's a whole process. All the doors have to be locked, especially if there's a ship here. The people have to-- like I have a TWIC card that I use that I hang on my neck down at the pier. People have to be-- some-- everybody has to have a TWIC card. It used to be that you could have like six people under you if you had a TWIC card but you had to accompany them everywhere they had to go. So we're on lockdown when a ship is here.

MHA: TWIC card is that...

TD: Transportation Workers Identification Card [Credential]. You have to go to I think it's Pocasset, they have them now or wherever they tell you. They do a background check, they have to do all kinds of stuff. And once it comes back, it's like $130 or something to buy it. And then every few years-- I think mine runs out this year. I'm not sure when mine runs out... pretty soon. Another $132.

MHA: And do you have to pay for it or does the company?

TD: No, the company pays for mine, but they don't pay for the workers, except the union. The Union they do pay for but the temporary workers, no. It's their responsibility.

MHA: Huh, interesting. So... yeah, my husband is in aviation so I'm familiar with the cards and the IDs that they have to-- they have to do the same things.

TD: They probably have like TSA or something. But you have to be-- now in the processing plants they have-- I was TSA certified and then you have areas that are roped off so that you can certify your own freight for the airport so you can ship it and certify it, rather than get hung up at the airport and have to wait for TSA to come in.

MHA: Very interesting so... is there-- I really appreciate all the time-- it's been fascinating to talk to you, but I wanted to ask if you could think of anything that I haven't asked you that I should have, and especially if there's anything that you think is critical for other people to know about your business. For example, this is all... kind of in aid of doing an exhibit and so, is there something that--

TD: I personally think that by just being a union shop, I think that it scares people away in the sense our regular neighborhood people because they think that they have to wait during a break or a lunch or an afternoon break, if they—product. However that's not really the case, because managers, we have the authority to work somebody through a break or through a lunch or through an afternoon break based on... you know, whatever is going on. If I have a busy day, I don't just blow my whistle and say, “stop, the guys are going to have a corn muffin right now,” if we're busy. So that's what I mean about closely working with customers and seeing what their needs are, so I think that's a misconception about our own-- about our neighborhood, so much. We have... I think we do a wonderful job in this neighborhood. I wish that people would have more confidence, as far as that goes. I think that's kind of the sticking point, is that. But I think that they've come around full circle now, so they're starting to realize that-- you know because we have new management, I’m a new manager, Wayne's a new manager. Harry does a wonderful job. So I think that's kind of, that stigma’s kind of going away now.

MHA: So has this always been a union shop?

TD: Yes.

MHA: Well there may be a time when I’ll ask you if I should talk to you or someone else who's been here. Has anybody been here through the 80s?

TD: Oh yeah, we have several people that have been here.

MHA: Because that was when they had the big strikes with the fishing boats and they were unionized. That's when the unions were broken. So we're-- at another project we're doing--

TD: Right, right, I understand.

MHA: …for the Heritage Center we're going to be looking at labor relationships.

[1:05:03] TD: Yeah, you could probably, if you can get Pierre on a non-busy-- like right now he's so busy with the ships and stuff but, Pierre is really very, very knowledgeable. He's been here for many years. And he's very, very knowledgeable about the union, about the contract, also about the history.

MHA: Okay good, and what's his last name?

TD: Bernier. B-E-R-N-I-E-R.

MHA: Is he French Canadian?

TD: He is. He is.

MHA: All right well this is-- this has been fascinating. I don't know-- I haven't really talked to anybody about this kind of work. I interviewed somebody at the Bridge Street facility once when I was actually doing some work on the herring. I do social impact assessments and so I interviewed somebody, I can't remember now who it was, but they were very interesting but it wasn't a long interview so I don't really know the details of how things work.

TD: See people get confused when they-- especially in the processing plants and stuff because everybody thinks that we're like they are, but we don't process anything. We just handle customer's shipments, but we also kind of we do a lot of things that are similar. Meaning we do shipping, we work with trucks, we do transportation, we do the same thing as like a regular company that produces things to sell like, say, scallop company or whatever or a crab company. So we touch upon the same things, but it's-- we're not producing anything. We're storing things.

MHA: And you have the cold storage but do you also freeze? Is that part of the Bridge facility?

TD: So Bridge has blast freezers.

MHA: So that and--

TD: So they can blast freeze in 24 hours.

MHA: yeah that really breaks the--

TD: Right so what happens is say... it's ... squid season. And one of our customers is a big squid... they catch squid... so say they do a million pounds of squid. Well, they catch a million pounds of squid in a very short amount of time so it requires a ton of overtime on our part. So they'll freeze it over there and then they'll send it on trucks. We have a truck that shuttles it. Just, sometimes we'll shuttle, 10, 15, 20 loads and then-- or they'll shuttle it right from Bridge or the customer will send it from their facility and send it here, or however they're going to do it. And then we have to store it. Plus the other thing here is that we don't have so much of a racking system in this building, so we have to make a racking system like Wester's Racks, so everything goes in a rack. Here we have a small amount of racks so we have to be very creative on where we put things. It requires a lot of planning. What goes in, must come out, so you have to be very careful where you, you kind of have to think about it very logically, how long it's going to be there, what are you going to block? You can't put something behind something that you know you're going to have to get at, just because you want to park something in front of it. It takes thought and I have a wonderful freezer-- two freezer guys that are really good. They know where everything is when I need it.

MHA: Good. The logistics are amazing. Very interesting. Well I should let you go, Trisha, I have been taking up a lot of time.

[1:08:39] End of recording