



NEW BEDFORD FISHING HERITAGE CENTER

Date of Interview 06/28/2017

Lemieux, Paul ~ Oral History Interview

Laura Orleans

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Background

Name of person interviewed: Paul Lemieux [PL]

Facts about this person:

Age 60

Sex Male

Occupation Owner, Blue Fleet Welding Services

Residence (Town where lives)

Ethnic background (if known) French Canadian-American

Interviewer: Laura Orleans [LO]

Transcriber: Laura Silverman [LS]

Interview location: Blue Fleet Welding Services, 102 Wamsutta St, New Bedford, MA

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Key Words

Blue Fleet Welding Supply, Aerovox, union strikes on the waterfront in the 1980s, closing of Hathaway Machinery in New Bedford, family-owned businesses, welding chemicals, arc welding, mig welding, welding tools, Leo Tuttle, consolidation of fishing companies, New Bedford-style dredge, Digby dredge

Abstract

Paul Lemieux is 60 years old, a third-generation French-Canadian who grew up in the New Bedford area and attended the Greater New Bedford Regional Vocational High School [Voc] where he learned welding. He started his own business, Blue Fleet Welding Services, in 1984 and has been working on the New Bedford waterfront in this capacity for 33 years. In this interview he explains how he got into welding and started his own company, the effects that strikes in the fishing industry in the 1980s had on him personally and in terms of his business, and the effects that regulations and consolidation have had on the fishing industry of New Bedford/Fairhaven. Paul explains different aspects of welding, tools and chemicals used, and some of his personal experiences with customers and employees. He also describes what it's like to run a family business.

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[0:00] Introduction to Paul Lemieux, he explains his family history, how he got started in welding, and how he started his company Blue Fleet Welding Services. Paul describes the strike at Hathaway's and how it helped lead to him starting his own business.

[5:10] Paul describes the work he did during the fishermen's strike in the late 1980s, his positive memories of working for Hathaway Machinery right out of high school and learning from the older workers there. He explains the positive and negative aspects of working with family.

[9:59] Paul summarizes the different kinds of jobs that Blue Fleet Welding Services does, how many people he employs and their roles, and the time commitment that having his own business requires. He also describes what the busy summer season is like, and the importance of keeping up with paperwork.

[15:03] Paul explains the work he does for scallop boats in Maine during the summer, and the intricate regulations for scallopers in the state of Maine. He shares his newfound love for skiing in the slower winter months and explains how chemicals (oxygen, acetylene, argon, and propane) are used in various types of welding, including arc, mig, and tig welding.

[20:04] Paul describes the work that is done in his shop versus what is done directly on the boats, fishermen doing their own welding repair work, and his favorite aspect of his job: crane work. Paul describes how he uses the crane truck and repairing dredges. Paul explains the various tools he uses in welding, and the influence of Leo Tuttle on welding in New Bedford.

[25:10] Paul explains how all of the companies associated with the fishing industry in New Bedford have been consolidated over the years and are being bought up by Wall Street companies for hundreds of millions of dollars, how commercial fishing license allocation has changed, and the effect of the consolidation of fishing boats on shore side businesses like his.

[30:07] Paul describes how he's been able to stay in business, other welders that are going out of business, and the ability to make money on the waterfront if someone is driven enough and works hard enough. He describes the change in the waterfront from a place with a sense of community, to an industry that feels more corporate, and how he tries to keep his workers employed even when work is unsteady.

[35:14] Paul explains how he likes to run his company to create a positive work environment for his employees, jargon used in the company, hiring his right-hand-man Sal and Sal's background and skills.

[40:00] Paul describes accidents that have happened while welding fuel tanks, the different places they've sold dredges to, how dredge styles have changed.

[45:38] Paul explains how other shore side and fishing companies try to expand into welding unsuccessfully.

[47:15] End of audio

[0:00]

Laura Orleans: Today is June 28th in the year 2017. 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 are interviewing shore side workers in the New Bedford/Fairhaven fishing industry to record their stories, document their skills and knowledge, and better understand their important role in the fishing industry. The recording and transcript will become part of the permanent collection at the Library of Congress. I am Laura Orleans, and today I am speaking with Paul Lemieux at Blue Fleet Welding?

Paul Lemieux: Service, yup.

LO: Service. Um, and it's about 1:30 in the afternoon.

PL: Correct.

LO: Okay. So even though we just, oh, and even though you just signed that paper, do you give us permission to record your story for this project?

PL: Yes, I do.

LO: And if you would just please introduce yourself.

PL: My name is Paul Lemieux.

LO: And what is your job in the fishing industry?

PL: I am, let me introduce myself a little bit more so you know. I am third generation Canadian-American. My grandfather came here, not by the boat but by the train. And he started his own business which my father and his brothers went into their own business. And he had seven children and they were French Catholic, they all had large families. So the next generation had eleven, eleven, seven, six; so that business couldn't support all the next generation, so the third generation started splintering out, and I wasn't the oldest of the, of my family, so I figured my best shot was to go out on my own and find another business. And what brought me to the fishing industry was, is I went to Vocational to learn to be a welder, because my grandfather was in the plumbing business and heating business... Is it working?

LO: It's working fine, I just want to make sure that when you move your arm like...

PL: Okay.

LO: ...the cord...

PL: So don't move the arm.

LO: Sorry.

PL: Okay.

LO: You're fine.

PL: Yup.

LO: Okay. Go ahead. So the plumbing and heating business.

PL: So he was in the plumbing and heating business and they used to have a welder come in and do some of their welding. And it looked interesting, so I went to Vocational for welding and in a strange twist of fate, the uh, when I graduated they got me a job over at Aerovox and the fore-, the superintendent came back and said, "Listen, Paul. This is a better job over here at Hathaway Machinery." And I chose that job and I worked ten years there, and wanting to start my own business I finally got the gumption and the determination and went for it. I figured it's all or nothing. I had four kids at the time and a mortgage, but I had experience and gumption.

LO: So tell me, so when was that that you started this business?

PL: Uh, 1984, '85. It's the winter, I started in '84 but didn't really get into business until the February of '85, so technically I started the business in 1985.

LO: So right before the big strike that I've heard so much about.

PL: Exactly. Which it was one of the benefits for me, and a problem.

LO: So talk to me about that; it's sort of off-topic.

PL: Okay well let me go to the first story first...

LO: Okay.

PL: ...before I get to the second one. So I worked at Hathaway's, and I worked my way up to the top; I had a wife, I had four kids and come from a family of workers, lot of overtime, things were going good and a twist of fate happened over here. They got into a big strike. But a week before we went on strike, they gave me the boss's position, but I had to get out of the union. The strike lasted for 50 weeks. It left a lot of business, uh, bitterness between employees that were friends and... I left before they voted to strike, but I left, to weeks become boss, but a lot of people didn't see it that way. They see me jumping ship. Of course, I was the enemy along with, and then Hathaway's and Brayley's had to bring back the Hathaway's for the voting struggle. Long story short, they brought in some of the owners back, they made me the boss. I mean, they made one of them the boss of me. Which, that was a time to leave, because they made me boss, I lost all of my friends who were fellow employees, and then the minute the strike was done they hired one of the former owners who made- So, that's enough. That was the first fate. Within a year that place went out of business. And they told me it would never go out of business, they were so high and mighty...

LO: There was a fire, correct?

PL: There was a fire, but there was a few lawsuits. The fire was one of the last punches. There was a lawsuit where they lost, a guy lost his arm when he was picking up rope on the winch, never mind that they notified the guy had to be updated, never mind that it went to another company that they worked on the winch, never mind, never mind, never mind. Long story short, they lost. Lost their insurance, had to fire, lost another lawsuit, went out of business. They went out of business was when scalloping was on an uptick. At the same time I left. If I had left six months later, all that work that they lost would have went to someone else who was already established.

[5:09]

LO: I understand, yeah.

PL: Right? Fate. So then when the strike came, that got a little ugly, but I had a couple of big projects and I was a little guy...

LO: And we're talking now about the fishermen's strike.

PL: The fishermen's strike, right. So now move on, so I'm in business I think maybe about a half a dozen years, I'm just, I'm a small, small guy but I'm, so now it kind of shut down the industry but it was a couple of small guys that were using me to rebuild their boat. So while the strike went on I had this big project. Now first crossing the picket line it was tough, because they wanted to shut everybody down, but as the strike went on the guys realized hey, listen, when the strike ends, there again these fishermen are friends, I say listen, when the strike ends you're going to want that boat to go fishing. You got another year to go to fix it. You got to let me fix it. Then it was no problem. So now if the strike wasn't there, maybe the bigger companies would've come in and took that job. But they didn't.

LO: So it was an opportunity.

PL: Right.

LO: Interesting.

PL: For every- Right, there's always opportunity. I mean, you know, like my grandfather used to tell me during the Great Depression, unemployment was what, 28 percent, right? That means what, 82 percent of people were working. Take [unintelligible] out, take away the people that don't do their jobs and there's plenty of work out there.

LO: Yup. All right, so let's back it up a little bit.

PL: Okay.

LO: So you're at New Bedford Voc. Is that what you said?

PL: Right. Graduated from Voc.

LO: Graduated from Voc, learned welding a little bit in the shop or maybe...

PL: Four years vocational program, yeah.

LO: And then you went to Hathaway from that.

PL: Hathaway Machinery, worked ten years.

LO: I'm assuming you learned more at Hathaway.

PL: I learned the trade that I'm doing now at Hathaway's. Learned how to do the dredges and repair the boats.

LO: Tell me about that process of learning. Do you remember how you, you know, your first day on the job or kind of...

PL: It was pretty interesting, it was pretty good because there again, fishing is in cycles. And I caught the cycle right. They started getting busy so they need to hire guys, but all the other people in the shop were like in their late 50s and early 60s. One guy was 45, and then I was the young buck at, I think I was 18 or 19 at the time. So now all the old guys took favor to me, you know, because I was the new. And you know you can go into a place, you know, good or bad. And you go in polite and people want to help you. You go in there try to know it all, snotty-ass kid... I went in there polite, I was raised right, and like I said, in six years, 90 percent of the employees that was there, they all retired, retired. They were all 30, 40, 50 year men. It was that kind of company, you know?

LO: Do you remember anybody in particular that kind of took you under their wing to teach you the...

PL: All of them did.

LO: All of them? Yeah.

PL: One of the, Mr. Costa, his, he lived in Fairhaven in this, he rented to my aunt and uncle which he didn't, you know, then he found out, you know. Just, all of them. They just, it was a family. I still have dreams about that place, you know. We had a baseball team together. You know, we had our own team, you know? It was a good place to work.

LO: All right, so now you've got this, 30-something years.

PL: 32, 33 years, correct.

LO: And talk to me about sort of, I mean, it's a family business.

PL: Well, it's...

LO: We were talking off the tape a little bit about that.

PL: Okay so get back, so before when I decided I had to go out, I had a wife and four kids and a mortgage. I needed a paycheck. So I went into business with my brother Moe, who was living at home and didn't need a paycheck. He carried a lot of paychecks. And then we eventually built up. I've had a sister, when she got out of school, work part-time. I had a brother who started his own electrical business that would work when he needed work. I have a brother who works for me today, I had another brother work part-time for me, well work full-time for me for several years.

LO: And then your sons?

PL: And then I've had three sons in and out at any given time.

LO: What are the positives of that? Are there positives?

PL: You can trust family. You know, I could call any one of my brothers at any time, and any one of my sons, you know. So you know they're not going to, because they know it's family. And we're all raised right, so.

LO: And what are the challenges of that situation?

PL: You're family! Like I say, the problem I have with my sons is number one, I'm their father. Number two, I'm their boss. Number three, I'm their friend. You know, so we see each other all the time and sometimes the hats get clouded. Like I said, I worked with my father and I loved the guy, but I wouldn't work for him. He was too protective.

[9:59]

LO: So talk to me about this place and what you do. Tell me all the...

PL: We build, uh...

LO: ...range of services.

PL: We started out boat repairing and building scallop dredges, and then we continued in trying to get more products. We build the dredges, we build the chain bags, we build the club sticks, we put them all together. We do the boat repair work, we have a couple of cranes where we move all the marine equipment around. Basically that's what we do.

LO: And how many people are employed?

PL: Counting all the employees with the secretaries, 12.

LO: That's a pretty big group.

PL: Dozen. Yup.

LO: And how do you divide the jobs up? I get the sense that certain people, like you were saying, you know, Matt does this and I don't do that...

PL: Yeah we have, like I said, we have, let's call them different departments. Obviously, Shirley's in charge of the secretary department. One of my son's works here and we have a part-time secretary. And then I have Sal who's the shop foreman, who takes care of all of the welding details. Matthew, when he's not fishing, usually takes care, and sometimes when he's fishing because we have to call him up and, "Oh you're home, I know, but we need to get this order..." So he usually manages the gear work and when he's here he's working the gear. So and then me and this other guy do the crane work. So basically got one, three, four departments.

LO: What's your favorite part of the job?

PL: Going home.

LO: Is that really true?

PL: Some days, yes. Like today I'm going to have my granddaughter, I'm going to go the house and I'm going to spoil her. So yeah, I can't wait to go home. Well, you know, make a business, excuse me a second. Make a business like this survive, you have to marry it. And you marry it because you love it. In the early days I had a desk at home so I'd do whatever work here, and when I could get out I'd go home because I could watch TV, I could do my bills and I could be with my kids. I had a pool in the backyard in the summertime, it worked out great. As the kids got older and I got separated and eventually divorced from my wife, I moved the office into here and there again, I got my computer here so I can look at my kids' pictures and talk to, you know, Facebook with my grandchildren, you end up spending a lot of time. You love it and it turns into a love/hate relationship. I'm fortunate now, I'm able to start separating it. I took three days off this weekend, I went to the Saco River, little R and R, so now tomorrow night I'm going to have to work late to catch up on the paperwork. But I don't mind. I do it when I want.

LO: But that marriage. Tell me about why you married this job. You could've been anything. What do you like about it?

PL: You know, my grandfather had his business, my father had a business. I'm going to have a business, period. Try to work for someone.

LO: Is there something specific about the welding that...

PL: No, it was just, it could've been electrical, I see the guy welding at my father's shop, I thought it was cool, one of my brothers went into it. And I liked it. So I stayed with it.

LO: Tell me about a typical day.

PL: Summertime or winter time?

LO: Well, let's do summertime first since it's summer.

PL: The season for the scallopers starts in March. So the phone starts ringing in February and 7:00-8:00, I start at 8, but they'll call at 7 or 8. I had a multi-boat owner call Sunday afternoon at 2:00 because he needed a guy at 8 in the morning. So the phone rings in the summertime, it just flies off the hook until the middle of the season when they pretty much got half their, their season in and they're just kind of spacing it out. And then it goes 8-4, 8-5, and then there's paperwork. I'm fortunate now because I have the two cranes and I have Sal that's really good and the part-time secretary, we'll manipulate her so I can squeeze in her around 1:30, 2:00 and get a couple hours in. Because 2, 3 days I week I watch my granddaughter. Saturdays is when it's not too nice out, or whenever it's a bad day, Saturdays I come in here and I lock the doors, you know, so I can take care of the paperwork. And that's the worst part of this business is the paperwork. Because unfortunately, if you forget, for instance, the scallop dredge, and it happens, come summertime or come October, the state of Maine starts their business in December, so come October we start getting a lot of tire kickers, a lot of orders. I can get 16, 20 dredges and they all come, because they're lobstermen and they want to get their order in but they want to wait till the last minute, scoop in and get the dredge. If the season opens December 1, they're here November 30th, 29th, 28th and there's 20 dredges going out with gear and some with bags and some not with bags. And it's easy to forget one dredge. We number them; I'd have them numbered three times because it happens. You just get so busy and if you don't mark it down, you've got to sit here, and that's what I don't like about the job, is that...

[15:03]

LO: so are those bay scallop dredges?

PL: No, them are state of Maine dredges, okay?

LO: Tell me about that. I was unaware.

PL: Okay, they have their own season, okay? Massachusetts has their own season, and the federals, okay? But in the state of Maine, they're a crusty old crew, the lobstermen rule there. And they're, if there's not a hundred little bays with their own little rules and regulations, there's my granddaughter. She's conked out, good, because I need a nap after all that, uh, so, what was I saying now?

LO: Oh, about the crusty old crowd and...

PL: Oh yeah, so every year the lobstermen decide what's going to happen. So then the scallopers are left to feed off the crumbs, you know what I'm saying? So sometimes the season's longer, sometimes it's shorter. Sometimes they can use ten-footers, sometimes they can only use five and a half-footers. And so whatever, and then every bay has their own sub-regulations. And a lot of

these guys are calling up here expecting me to know, you know, Costco, Shirley lives for Maine. She loves this time of year. She talks to everybody up and down the coast and she knows, everybody knows her father, they're all lobstering. So right, Shirley, every different, every, uh, so we get all those orders. So it's easy when they all come in at once and you, it does get hectic.

LO: And I didn't realize, that's interesting that you're serving boats up in Maine.

PL: Yup. But usually what, what used to be the season is, they used to start November 1st to December 1st, and they could only use five and a half-foot dredges. Then from December 1st until, I think January or February, they can go up to ten and a half, but as the scallop and the cod and the lobster adjusts, like I say, the lobstermen come in and, you know, they're all lobstermen. So the majority rules. And a lot of the lobstermen are also scallopers, so they're playing off either way. But the guys that come down here to buy scallop dredges tell me, you know, the lobstermen rule there, and whatever the lobstermen say they got to do. And then in the wintertime, when it slows down, then I get to take my real time off.

LO: I see the ski posters on every wall.

PL: The skiing. It's a funny thing, I never, I work outside all the time. I hate outdoor and I couldn't wait to go home and take a hot tub, right? It's like, what am I going to go out there skiing, but you have the time, you're going to make the best of it, right? And have you ever been skiing?

LO: I have.

PL: So you got all that, you know, new-fangled, you got hand warmers, you got toe warmers. Hey, and the best thing of all, you got that bar over there, so you can come in and warm up anytime and eat and drink. So make use of the time.

LO: So, let's see. I recently learned about the compression tank, the gas tanks that are used in welding?

PL: Yup.

LO: Had no idea. So tell me, tell me what I don't know. You're talking to, you know, somebody who knows nothing about welding.

PL: You want me to impress you or scare you?

LO: Both.

PL: Okay. That liquid oxygen, okay, that's compressed oxygen. We have acetylene here, we have propane here, we have bottled oxygen. That's enough to make a bomb. I could take out half a city with the right chemicals and the right... Not that I would. Please don't call anyone; don't put that particular in... but that's how dangerous it can be. But there again, like that compressed oxygen is

used to save people's lives. You know, if you were dying and you needed oxygen, I could just take that oxygen there and make a jerry rig and feed you oxygen.

LO: And how is it connected to the welding apparatus?

PL: Okay so that's the, in the welding, and we can take a walk out there after and I'll show you, you have oxygen acetylene is used to heat and bend the material, and also to cut it. Then you have the arc welding, which is electric stick welding, which we use to fuse the metal together. We also use mig welding here, which is a machine gun to a regular gun, which is rapid fire, heavy welding. Then you have the tig welding, which is, we call the dentist welding. You need the fancy gloves, you can't, nice and clean oil. You use an argon gas and it can't have no contamination. We don't do that stuff here. We just rust and, fill and slug kind of guys. Because as you well know, fishing, they throw it overboard it's going to get beat.

LO: Yeah. So mostly you're making dredges.

PL: Building dredges and putting the gear together and...

LO: And does much of the work take place off-site, or is it all here in the shop?

PL: There again, go back to the four different departments. The fabrication of the dredges and the gear, all done here. Grappling hooks and all new equipment here. Repair dredges, sometimes we bring them here, only then when they're switching dredges because it's going to cost a crane to bring them here and back. So they'll go to the boat and repair them. And then sometimes they have boat repair work, so obviously they've got to go to the boat.

[20:04]

LO: And how much of that will the crew do themselves? Any of it? Do they do that repair work?

PL: Some guys do, but I like to try to tell them, are you a fisherman or are you a welder? Do you want to spend your life fishing or do you want to go out there and weld? You come home, do you want to be with your wife, or do you want to weld? And sometimes they have equipment on the boat which is very good and sometimes they don't. And it, and that's really what happens. The people that are capable of welding, they make a little bit of money and they say, "you know what? I want to go home and spend time with my wife and kids, you know? Just do it yourself." Come wintertime and there's nothing to go around, they'll do it themselves. But no problem. We have enough guys.

LO: So what, well we talked about what your favorite thing is, which is going home, and your least favorite thing which is...

PL: Yeah, no the favorite thing, I'll tell you...

LO: Yeah tell me the favorite thing...

PL: ...really the favorite thing is operating my crane. Okay, so my typical day is, is I go out a couple days a week and I eat breakfast with my mom or my son, and we start the day at 8:00. And I get here two minutes of 8, 3 minutes of 8, but Sal already knows his job, he's the foreman, and Bob [unintelligible] knows what he's doing and the gear guys know what they're doing. They don't need me here, just in case there's a one quick, you know, you got to change the play at the last minute deal. And I get them going, whatever they need, "oh we need..." okay, phone calls, Shirley comes in, we straighten out the paperwork, then I jump on my crane truck and I get to go move the dredges around. And I use hooks to lift them. And when you don't have employees working with you, you can cut corners. So it's like, uh, you ever to go Lincoln Park, one of the amusement parks and try to pick up a stuffed animal? It's basically what I do all day, but with dredges and doors and nets. And if I lose, then I got to climb down and hook it up myself. If I win, I hook it up and people see me and I look like a hero, like... But that's the best part. I used to plow with the truck, I used to unload the clam boats with the truck, so I worked all crazy hours.

LO: So the challenge of it is kind of appealing.

PL: Yes. And it, it's what made, I wouldn't be in business now if I didn't have the crane trucks. Because you need to move the scallop dredges and if I had to hire out the crane all the time, pretty soon someone would figure that you don't need a crane to build dredges, which they do now, or the guys building dredges say, I don't need him to build dredges and move dredges, because I'm doing it. Yeah. Why, you know, cut him right out of it.

LO: Can you think of anytime that you had a really challenging job, unexpected order, or some problem that you solved that was kind of... sticks out in your mind?

PL: You know, people like it when they come in with a repair job that they have no clue, and it's peanut butter for me. So they think you're a hero. There's a lot of jobs like that, busted booms or busting out and the guys come in here and it's laying on his deck in three pieces and, "I want to get out, like, tomorrow!" right? And two days later you get him out. And they look and they say, "wow." But.

LO: That's pretty satisfying too.

PL: Yes, that is satisfying.

LO: What's the most common repair job?

PL: Dredges. Repairing the, they've got to put shoes on just about every trip and then they beat them up so there are cracks and cut and bars, and...

LO: Tell me what the shoes are again?

PL: That's the part that sits down on the bottom that scrapes the, that, on the bottom. We can show you out there.

LO: Yeah.

PL: So that's the part that takes the most wear, like tires on a car. If you wear out our tires and kept on driving you'd be spinning on your rims. If you ran out of your rims, you'd be dragging on your, uh, bumper. Then I'd have to rebuild the whole car. So best to get your tires changed before you get into your rims.

LO: What about tools? You've got to have specialized tools. I mean, there are links, tweezers...

PL: Yeah, most of them are common hand tools. Nothing too fancy. I'm not a multi-million operation where we get presses and breaks. We have a few simple drill presses and an ironworker, which cuts and punches holes in metal. But other than that it's all hand. Hand and crane.

LO: Somebody told me that Leo Tuttle, does that name mean anything...

PL: Yes. Leo Tuttle.

LO: Is it true that he basically invented the squeezer? Before that people were hammering the...

PL: He probably did. Leo, I didn't work for his boss, [unintelligible], okay, he had this guy run [unintelligible], who was a hero. He really was, he was a Korean War hero. Brings a tear to my eyes. He was one of twelve people left standing doing that, uh, that march, that death march, the TV one? So one of twelve guys left. But so he did all his work. But yeah, Leo was, Leo was an innovator. He was, people watched what Leo did and they followed Leo. Because he'd catch the most scallops, and he knew what he was doing.

[25:10]

LO: How have things evolved in all these years? So you've been at this forty years or so.

PL: 33, 33 years I've been here.

LO: Here, and then before that even, right?

PL: 10 years in Hathaway's, you're right, 43 years. I started when I'm 18, I'm 60. Give or take.

LO: How have things changed? Tools or materials, or anything.

PL: What's happening now is that the industry is shrinking, like anything else. What's happening is when I started the business, I could name you a dozen welding companies. A dozen. Now you're lucky if I can name three or four. And after me, John Luzo's got one guy, one and a half guys working for him, Manny the welder's three quarters, thirty hours a week guy. I mean before, I could name Morris [??] and Z & W's, and Ronnie's Welding, and Ceasar's Welding and Joe, Joe [??] and Victor, and John Luzo, and Ryan.

LO: So not enough volume of work?

PL: Well what's happening is, is ever since the government stepped in, okay, the government is shrinking this industry and only for name sake, you've got the [??], the [??], the Roy [??], and that's just this generation. Next generation when, and I'm just going to pick, for example, the people you know, like sooner or later Roy is going to pass on to his two kids, and so now those two kids are sooner or later going to say, "you know, Wall Street's coming down like this already, because, you know, give you 300 million for this. 300 million, or whatever, what am I, crazy? I'm going to work till I'm 90? I can buy a house in three different countries and just bounce around for 300 million." It happened with the [??] fishing, [unintelligible]. I don't know how familiar you are with [??] but they had like some 30-some odd boats. That company got bought out. He had at, uh, a fish house down south, with eight boats, and this company, I know Mr. Davis, he's the CEO, and it's a Wall Street company. Now eight boats, the licenses are averaging five, six million. So just for simple math, eight times five is 40 million, plus the property down there must be worth five million, 10 million, pick a figure, right, it's 45 million right there. Then they bought the Harbor Blue up here, they bought all his six or seven boats and they were all six to seven million-dollar boats, because they had tuna quota with it, and scalloping. So eight times seven is another 50-some-odd million, we're up to what, a hundred million now. Now they bought that building over here, uh, it used to be Quality where Ray [??] ties up, that whole big plant, what's that, 30, 40 million dollar plant? And they're not stopping. So when Roy, you know...

LO: So that's outside, outside money coming in?

PL: That's right.

LO: Yeah.

PL: That's money that's Wall Street. This guy has got some Wall Street firm and he's coming and buying it all up. Warren Alexander, Carlos is going to jail because of the same thing. The Russian guys, Warren has guys, anyone, Lars, they come all the time offering him hundreds of millions of dollars because they want, they're... When I started the business anyone could buy a license and fish. Before I turn 65, there won't be one species in the ocean that nobody doesn't own. Everything's going to be owned by somebody. I own quota right now. In fact, that's one of the questions I'm going to hit you up later, boats like the Trident. We bought the Trident, we stripped the boat, we sold the parts, we kept the license, we're leasing it out. We had the Matthew and Lisa. We had 20,000 pounds of cod fish when we first bought that license, excuse me. Now we're lucky if we have 900 pounds from 20,000 pounds. So now these licenses, there again, sooner or later I'm going to die. One of my sons are going to get it, or my daughter. My daughter lives in Florida. She's going to say, what do I want that for? Can I get a hundred, can I get fifty, can I get 500, whatever? And it's going to stock, it's going to the stock market.

LO: So tell me, you mentioned that back in the day, I don't remember exactly what the year was, but that there were five, six, seven...

PL: When I started welding there was all kind of welding business. There were all kinds of carpenter businesses.

LO: What happened to them? And why did you...

PL: Well there again...

LO: You know.

PL: Roy Enoksen went from owning maybe six boats to owning and managing 25-30 boats. He's got his own welding crew. Lars Vinjerud, I remember coming to him and he came to me when he started and bought a used dredge for \$300, and asked if he could pay when he could come back. He had no money. And there again, now he has 18 boats and he has a crew working for him. So now everyone's got six, seven boats, they get their own little crew, and so there's less and less independents.

[30:07]

LO: And what do you think kept you...

PL: The scallop dredges. Because I was building scallop dredges and I got into the crane work, which is what I do. And I'll work at Sunday, two minutes, you know, before midnight, if that's what to do to make that customer come back, you know, there's no turning around. It's, there's no other job for me. So I want to make the customer happy. And when you make the customers happy they come back, most of the time. So, and the scallop dredges, when you don't spend more than you make and you're, you know, so wintertime when it gets slow I made the guys build dredges, did what we have to do to get by until the big, until the good times came. Guys that weren't building, John Luzo's been able to maintain, only because he went into the, um, salted cod business. But that's left him now. He used to buy these cod skeletons, salt them heavily, and then ship them over to Portugal as a delicacy. And he was from Portugal. So he had this big shop so he could weld, he took a corner of the shop and that was his welding shop, he was able to weld with no overhead. But now he's lost the cod business and he's selling the building and he's got another two or three years to go and there'll be another welder out of business.

LO: Sounds like a bleak future that you see.

PL: Not if you're a multi-boat owner. There's plenty of welding work, but not for independents, small independents like me. I mean, you know, I'm talking I do a million and a half a year business is a good year for me. You talk to Roy Enoksen, if he doesn't do 300 million he had a bad year, you know? And I could quit tomorrow and go work for a Warren Alexander or Roy Enoksen like that, but you'd be working for somebody else. I'd rather be poor and work for myself than be rich and taking orders from somebody. It's the way I am.

LO: That independence is a strong thing in the industry.

PL: It is. My father, my grandfather, going back to family, so, yeah.

LO: The waterfront's kind of an unusual place, I think.

PL: It is.

LO: What would you say about that?

PL: Well, the one thing, the one thing about the waterfront that a lot of people don't realize, is that somebody could get out of school, 8th grade, 10th grade, 12th grade, with a lot of gumption and hard work and get here, and make two, three, four hundred thousand dollars in a matter of five years if he really wanted to do it. And you can't do that by getting a college education, which I'm not saying you could do even better with a college education, but you have guys coming from all over the country. They come down from Maine, they up from down south, and they want to get on a scalloper because they hear you can make 20, 30 thousand dollars a trip. And that's the lure of easy money, is strong appeal as they say, but it's not easy money. It's not always there. But it brings out people with cajones.

LO: So what would you say you value in the workers that you have?

PL: Say that again?

LO: What makes a really good worker?

PL: Me? Show up on time, give me an honest day's work and don't steal from me. And I'll find work till the day I die. And work's pretty good. I have the best crew, the best crew. They're diversified, I can name them all and you know, there's, I can take days off, I don't have a problem.

LO: That's good.

PL: I can't take weeks off at a time.

LO: Do you feel like, a lot of people that I talk to...

PL: Actually I could take weeks off at a time, but then I would miss it. But go ahead.

LO: A lot of people that I talk to sort of talk about kind of, back in the old days there was much more community, now it feels, to them, like that sense of community has kind of gone away.

PL: There again, it's coming to be a one-horse town. So as there's less and less boat owners, it's more and more of a corporate world. And corporates are all about numbers, okay? I got two sons working for me, I got a brother right now, I've got a second or third cousin/nephew or however you want to say it, then I have a half a dozen other employees. I, I'll find work to break even to keep them busy. The big companies will say, "Jeez, you know, we don't need the welding shop this year, lay them all off and then, and I'll buy six months." And to be honest with you, I've had to do that. I've had to lay my brother off and say, "Listen, Rodger, here's your unemployment, go find a part-time job, come here one day a week I'll pay you a little bit of cash, things get better, we'll hire you back." You do what you got to do to survive, but when it gets slow, that's, I bought

a boat and I'm refabbing it. And hopefully I got enough money to fix it and sell it, but, so I can keep my guys going. Because it's never steady in this business. Never.

[35:14]

LO: So there's more of a, I don't know, sense of, welfare like...

PL: Well right now it's more of a sense of survival...

LO: But, as a manager, as the owner of the company, you have...

PL: It's family.

LO: Yeah.

PL: I treat it, the way, you know, and there again, when I started this business, I used, I didn't go to college for business, I learned the hard way, and believe me, I learned a lot of hard lessons. But I copied Hathaway Machinery, which I thought, there again, I felt, it was a big business but it was still family-owned, it was a third-generation business. The third generation ran it aground. So I copied my, like, eleven holidays. I pay my guys eleven paid holidays. One of them is a birthday. And they say, "Why do you do that?" I say, "Well, that's the company I worked for before, that that's what they did. And I liked it, so you know, this is the standard I'm using myself. I'm not going to, you know, going to be that or better." And that's what I do, I mean. The end of the year, we have a lot of money, we have a party and a bonus. We have a bad year, well...

LO: Little party.

PL: Well a little party, yeah. We have sandwiches and beer out there in the break room.

LO: That's good. Funny little question, but I know that there are interesting terms on the waterfront and, you know, different workplaces. Like you've got the cookies that you put on the dredge, right?

PL: Right.

LO: Can you think of other ones that you guys...

PL: Well the shoes on the dredge...

LO: The shoes...

PL: Right, then we put the tires on the dredge, which really, are hard, solid rubber rollers. Uh, describing the dredge you have your bale and your gooseneck, which if you don't know what I'm talking about, it's like, what are you talking about? You know, and your pressure plate, I mean, there are different terminology. Other than that...

LO: And do most of the guys, I mean other than your sons, but the other workers, did they come in here knowing the fishing industry?

PL: Most of the kids I take I get them out of Voc, believe it or not. Sal, Sal was a godsend. Sal's my number one guy.

LO: Where did Sal come from? I met Sal last summer.

PL: Did you?

LO: Yeah.

PL: He came here with his brother. Couldn't speak a lick of English. Couldn't speak a lick of English and he wanted a job. And I was just getting busy, said, Jesus. There's something about him. I said, hang onto him. But he couldn't speak English and that was a good thing, because when people can't speak English, and at the time I didn't know he was married and had three little kids, that I didn't know. But so he comes in, he wants a job, he's got a job, he can't talk to nobody, he speaks no English, right? So he's just going to keep welding and hold his job, so, to keep his job. So after about six months, there again, the cycle started getting up and work was getting good and the brother comes back again and says, you know, he needs more money. I'm saying to myself, we all need more money, you know? The hell do you want me to do, you know? Says, he's got three kids. I said, oh, you had to tell me that. So we started raising him. And his three kids, because he spoke fluent Portuguese, so it was Spanish and English and Creole because of his family and his kids...

LO: He's from where?

PL: He's originally from Portugal. But of course, you met Sal, so you know he's got to be from Africa somewhere somehow, but he...

LO: I figured Cape Verde, no? Maybe?

PL: Probably both.

LO: Yeah. Azores.

PL: Azores. Yeah. But he, I'm not going to argue, I'm not a gynecologist, he's awful black to be just from the Azores, right? But he, that's what, so he's Azorean, part Cape Verdean, you know, generations, he could have a lot of, I don't know, but he writes down Cape Verdean, Portuguese, that's what I consider him, and, uh, he's one hell of a guy. He's come to the top. I can't do, I can tell him what to do, I say, "Hey Sal, build this up over here." And I get away and I come back it's like, wow. Better than I was even thinking.

LO: What kind of experience did he come with?

PL: He was a certified pipe welder in Portugal, but he has a natural talent for what he's doing. He just - There again, just shit luck timing.

LO: That's great.

PL: Yeah. For both of us.

LO: Yeah.

PL: Yeah.

LO: Just want to see if I missed anything on my list. Is there anything you wanted to talk about that we haven't talked about?

PL: No. I could show you how it works out there and everything, you might have a few more questions.

LO: Oh, I know, one other question, you talked about the gasses...

PL: Yup.

LO: ...which are flammable and explosive...

PL: Yup, yup.

LO: You ever have a close call?

PL: Um...

LO: With that or with...

[40:00]

PL: Funny story. Okay, you're going to love this one. There again, being into welding, we have experience. And when we're in Vocational, they showed us the difference between gasoline, propane, diesel fuel, gasoline. Now, the guy takes a rag, he lights it up, he goes to diesel fuel and he sticks it in the bucket of diesel fuel, he puts it out, right? Same thing, he goes to the gasoline, he gets about five feet away, the thing goes woosh. So I always know that gasoline, and every so often people come in and ask for favors. Well, somebody came in and they needed their gasoline tank welded. So I said, listen Sal, this is what we got to do. We flush it out, you soap it out, the proper procedures. We did it three times. We filled it up with water, it was only a small tank, it's a motorcycle tank, about, let's say three, four gallons tops. Soap it out, wash it out, leave it, water sitting in it all night long, drain it the next day. Say, "Sal, how's it, you know, how's it look and everything?" You know, yup, say, "Well, make sure you got all your clothes on, you know, the face shield," and you're actually, because sometimes in summer we'll just weld like this. But, said, "Okay." So we come back in the office and I start talking to Bob Lobel, and all of a sudden

we hear Boom! We run out of there, Sal's white as a ghost. "Sal, what happened?" As soon as he put the torch and the heat to it and he heated it up, the fumes. After we soaked it for two nights and washed it out, the fumes still stayed there. And it blew up. I've been in a fuel tank myself with inches of diesel fuel in the tank and welding a little hole because they didn't want to haul out because times are so tough and they'd be out of business if the boat got hauled out and... But that was...

LO: You weld on the tanks that hold the fuel?

PL: Been inside a tank, with fuel in it, welding it, yes.

LO: Wow. That never...

PL: I would never do that again today and I've never sent any of my guys out there. But back then, I, one of the things I like to do today, and most times in my life, I love to go to the mail. I love to see, oh, check from this guy, oh, check from this guy. Back in the early '90s when times were tough, I was afraid to go to the mailbox. Bankruptcies left and right, getting stuck. And people don't realize, if you do a 10 thousand dollar job you're probably making about 3 or 4 or 5 hundred dollars, you know. That was the brutal part. But what else are you going to do? I thought, when I got divorced and I was at my lowest and business was bad and I was dating this girl and she, her best friend's husband worked at the gas company, and that was always a cherished job, you know, security. You work forty hours, you get your, you know, you get your insurance 401k, nobody's, you know, nobody's beating you like a dog and... And I said, many a days, wanting to fill it out. But I didn't. And things got better.

LO: I get the sense you're pretty happy with how it all turned out, so far.

PL: Yup. I wouldn't do something different. I wouldn't.

LO: So besides the crane truck, what else do you like about it?

PL: About the job? Just coming around, they know me as Mr. Blue Fleet. I get calls where, Shirley, where do we sell dredges, what, Russia? England, Alaska...

Shirley: Ireland.

LO: Wow.

PL: Ireland, Canada...

Shirley: Oregon.

PL: Yeah, Alaska or Oregon.

LO: And how do they get shipped? Truck?

PL: Truck and then by boat.

LO: Boat.

PL: But that's why we never get repeat business, because it's cheaper to copy it than it is to make a new one. But, you know, because New Bedford is considered the scallop capital of the world. So if you find scallops in your neck of the world, and you Google it up, you'll find New Bedford. So if you want to know something about scallops, well let's, you know, gear. Well let's look for, like, Ship Supply, or Reidar's, or dredges, you know. My name comes up.

LO: I think it's even called a New Bedford-style dredge.

PL: That's right, New Bedford-style dredge. It was in the book, I don't know if you read the Marine Service, they're coming back with a, uh, what the hell do they call them, it's five small dredges, a Digby dredge, with a bar ten foot or fifteen foot, and then you have like two-foot dredges in the back. And oh, they're the best thing since sliced bread. They're doing great over there in, uh, Norway. Well, you know, we did that 30 years ago. So we've already been there, you know what I mean? And I know that because I was there when they were doing it. Nobody in New Bedford uses them anymore, what does that tell you? When I started the business I had a boat or two that ordered them, and everyone else was clipping them. So they don't use them. So and that's what people, when people go into scalloping, we build the dredges, we build the gear, we hang it. I deliver it, I pick them up, I store them. With me, you don't need anybody else. With anybody else, you need me, you know what I'm saying? Except for Roy because he's got his own dock so he can have boats come up to him and dock. You know, or if somebody else, like Charlie is starting to build dredges, but he doesn't have the crane, he doesn't have the dock, so he's at a disadvantage.

[45:38]

LO: Charlie [??]?

PL: Yeah. Nice guy, successful but, you know, Charlie wants to do everything and he's going to find out that what he was doing best he should stick with. But, you get people that come in, when it looks easy everyone wants to do it. And in theory, I survive because I build dredges. But because I'm not too high-priced, I got a sharp pencil, it's hard to get in under the mark and to beat somebody who's been in for 30 years with a better product that's twice the price. You know, it's like how, I've been doing it for 30 years so you've got to steal, he has his own boats, but that's not enough to keep the business going. And I'm not singling out Charlie in particular, but guys like Charlie, I have that with the vultures, you know. It's just, you know, I've been doing it for 30 years so I've been doing it. You've got to come and get it from me, so you better either be a lot better, a lot cheaper, or, you know, have some dancing girls come with them, you know what I mean? Why would you change, whether it was dredges or, you know, you go buy a new car, you're happy with the guy, he got the best price in town you think, you're going to come to me, I'm going to have to get you a better car, lower price, right?

LO: Parting words?

PL: See you in twenty years, because I plan to be here until the day I die, but not working 60 hours a week. By then I'll be down to 20 hours a week with three-month vacations. Sal will be the guy you're talking with. But yeah, I love this. I love it.

LO: Great.

PL: Okay?

LO: Thank you.

[47:15] End of audio