



NEW BEDFORD FISHING HERITAGE CENTER

Date of Interview: March 13, 2017

Magalhaes, Jose ~ Oral History Interview

Fred Calabretta

Magalhaes, Jose. Interview by Fred Calabretta. *Workers on the New Bedford Waterfront*. New Bedford Fishing Heritage Center. Date of interview: March 13, 2017.

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

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Background

Name of person interviewed: Jose “Joe” Magalhaes [JM]

Facts about this person:

Age 57
Sex Male
Occupation Paint Shop Foreman
Residence (Town where lives)
Ethnic background Portuguese

Interviewer: Fred Calabretta [FC]

Transcriber: Michelle Murray [MM]

Interview location: Fairhaven Shipyard, Fairhaven, Massachusetts

Date of interview: March 13, 2017

Key Words

shipyard, boats, boatbuilding, fishing boats, spray painting, roller brushes, scraping, sanding, scrubbing, priming, boat hulls, skilled workers, paint shop, marine paint, wooden boats, aluminum boats, Fairhaven Shipyard, Kelly’s Shipyard, Portuguese workers

Abstract

Jose “Joe” Magalhaes describes his work as a paint shop foreman for the Fairhaven Shipyard located in Fairhaven, Massachusetts. He is a Portuguese immigrant who is fifty-seven and has been working at Fairhaven Shipyard since he left high school at sixteen years old. He talks about how he got started “back in the day” and learned his craft from his highly skilled co-workers. He began working in the paint shop and would help prep wooden fishing boats before they could be painted. Over the years, he acquired more skills and learned all the tricks-of-the trade. He has been a foreman for twenty-seven years, supervising between 16 – 25 workers where work is split between two shipyards. He describes how things have changed over the years and also how there is a great need for young people to learn his trade so that this important craft can continue. He speaks about how his job brings him so much pride, satisfaction and a great sense of accomplishment. It gives him so much satisfaction to see a completed project - considering the condition a boat came in and how it is transformed. He gives his employer his best, is constantly learning and improving and strives at all times to “make it happen” and get the work done.

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[00:00] Intro. Jose “Joe” Magalhaes was born on May 23, 1959, in northern Portugal. He moved with his family to the United States when he was fifteen years old and attended a year of high school before beginning work at Fairhaven Shipyard in Fairhaven, Massachusetts. None of his relatives were involved in the fishing industry but his father-in-law worked at the shipyard as well. At first, he wanted to be a diesel mechanic and work on boat engines in the engine shop but they needed people in the paint shop. He’s been working in the paint shop for 42 years. He had some experience painting because his father had owned an auto body shop in Portugal. He started out preparing boats to be painted by his more experienced co-workers. He had to wash boats, scrub the bottoms, scrape them and sand them as well as build staging for the carpenters. When he first started, all the work was done by hand. Joe has been a foreman in the paint shop for the past twenty-seven years. In the beginning, all the boats he worked on were wooden boats.

[05:00] Joe talks about how he learned his trade from his skilled co-workers. They taught him the tricks of the trade and he became very skilled himself. He had great respect for these men. So much of the work was done by hand and he even assisted the carpenters with repairing boat hulls. The boat yard provided tools for the workers. They worked from 7:15am to 4:30pm or later and would put in overtime hours. They also worked half of the day on Saturdays. When he first started, a typical day would start with building staging for the carpenters and then scraping the boat.

[10:00] Joe did a lot of different tasks assisting the more skilled workers. The paint shop guys like himself were expected to help out in many areas. Most of the work done on the boats was outside in the boat yard. People of different backgrounds – Portuguese, Cape Verdeans, native-born Americans – all worked together in the shipyard. Often there would be up to twenty people working on one boat at a time. They would be welding, scraping, repairing, etc. Everyone got along and respected each other. A lot of Portuguese was spoken around the shipyard because many of the workers were immigrants from Portugal. Currently, there aren’t as many immigrants from Portugal. Joe also talks about how much colder the weather used to be when he first started working there and how he walked on ice a lot.

[15:00] Joe talks about how tools are provided by the shipyard, but people also would purchase their own tools to use on the job. Most workers have their own basic tools such as hammers, screwdrivers, scrapers, etc. Employees had lockers and they had set break times and lunch times. After a while, Joe started working on sailboats, yachts and powerboats in addition to fishing boats. The work shifted from wooden boats to boats made of aluminum, fiberglass and steel. He introduced spray painting to the boatyard because of his background in auto bodywork. Prior to this, everything was painted with paintbrushes. His co-workers were highly skilled and taught him their painting tricks and techniques. They were of different ethnic backgrounds but everyone respected each other.

[20:00] Joe talks about how paint mixing was a guarded secret among his co-workers. The workers were very particular about how they cleaned and maintained their most prized tool – the brushes. In his early days, the work ethic was much different. Workers, especially the very

experienced ones, had so much pride in their work and strived for perfection. Most of his time was spent working on painting fishing boats. They painted the boats inside and out, from the top to the bottom. Paint chipped easily off of wooden boats and they needed to be painted frequently. This required lots of prepping, scraping and priming prior to painting. The workers got to know many of the fishermen. The boat owners liked to be at the boat yard to watch the work being done on their boats. This was OK with Joe – he knew he had to do a good job because they were keeping an eye on everything.

[25:00] Joe currently has between sixteen and twenty-five people working for him between two shipyards. The biggest changes he's seen in the industry involve EPA regulations. He has to keep track of the temperature, the dew point and how it affects the paint. There's a lot of paperwork involved. Joe talks about reducing the paint. Not much has changed over time as far as his work schedule. He's noticed changes in the weather – it's not as cold in the winter as it used to be. Another change he's noticed is that they have equipment that makes their jobs easier such as forklifts and power washers.

[30:00] Joe speaks about the paint used in the industry, the suppliers, his system of keeping track of colors used, and how he is sometimes called upon to test out new paint from the suppliers. Because of his expertise, he has even made suggestions to the manufacturer and they have used his ideas. He also speaks about paint color and how years ago there were about eight color options to choose from. Now there are many more options and the customers enjoy having more choice. Joe explains that about 15 years ago the shipyard made the decision to stop spraying boats and use rollers instead. This is better for the environment, there's less waste and it's less time consuming since you need to set up tarp covers prior to spraying a boat.

[35:00] The discussion continues about how spraying is a quick process but the set-up is very time consuming. It's actually quicker to use rollers. Joe also speaks about mil's of paint and paint coverage. Roller brushes are also discussed. There is a discussion about pressures on the job for fast turnaround time. As foreman, Joe has to make sure he's got enough workers and makes job assignments between the two shipyards. Years ago, there used to be busy and slow seasons of the year, but now the work is steady. They work on all different kinds of vessels and on boats made of different materials such as fiberglass and aluminum composite.

[40:00] Joe does some travel for his job. He attends boat shows in different parts of the country. He also travels to bid on jobs that help to bring new business to the shipyard. Because of his experience, he's able to accurately estimate the time needed to complete a job. Joe talks about the need to train young people to enter trades such as this one. His experience has been that you can earn a very good living in his line of work. He wishes vocational schools would train more students to enter his trade and trades in general. He is concerned about what will happen when he retires someday if not enough workers learn the skills he knows to help the shipyard continue. Shops such as the paint shop or the engine shop run very smoothly when someone with a high level of skill is in charge. He and many of his coworkers have been at the company for many years and they are all starting to get closer to retirement age.

[45:00] Joe feels a person can make a great living by working in a trade. He feels a college education doesn't always guarantee a well-paying job. Joe talks about the toughest part of his

job – being a foreman and supervising others, the responsibility and the pressure – and the best part of his job – the sense of accomplishment he feels at the end of the day, especially when a boat is complete. Like every job, this one has its ups and downs.

[50:00] Joe has a passion for his work and the sense of accomplishment he feels is what keeps him at the job. He has turned down other opportunities to make more money and chose to remain at the shipyard. He always looks for ways to improve his work. There's always something new to learn on every job that comes in. It keeps things interesting. It's also important for him and his crew to clean up every day because the job creates a lot of dust. He feels it's important to keep a tidy area because the shipyard is like a second home and the crew is all in this together.

[53:31] End of audio

Interview

[00:00]

Fred Calabretta: So again, I'm going to read this. 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'm Fred Calabretta. Today is March 13, and I'm speaking with Joe Magalhaes.

Jose Magalhaes: That's correct.

FC: And we are at the Fairhaven Shipyard in Fairhaven, Massachusetts. Do you give us your permission to record this story for the project?

JM: Yeah, not a problem.

FC: Okay. And again, I'll ask you again, you mentioned it before, but if you could just give your full name.

JM: My full name is Joe Xavier Magalhaes.

FC: And your date of birth.

JM: 5/23/1959

FC: And where were you born?

JM: In Portugal. North of Portugal.

FC: OK. And did you grow up there or...

JM: I went from the mainland to the Azores when I was four years old. When I was fifteen and a half, we come to United States. I went to high school for a year. Then right after that, I started work at the shipyard. Not much longer.

FC: And did you, when your family came here, did you have other relatives here?

JM: Yeah, we did have...we had a lot of family here.

Jose Magalhaes interview, March 13, 2017

FC: So you knew people here?

JM: Yes, we had a big family on my mother's side. They'd been living here for many years.

FC: That made it a little easier to get settled if you already...

JM: That's correct. Yes.

FC: Yes. Was your family, your relatives involved in the fishing industry?

JM: They were not. No.

FC: No.

JM: Not at all.

FC: How about boats or boat building?

JM: Well. I always liked boats but I was never involved in boats. Actually when I applied for job here, I wanted to be a diesel mechanic and they put me in the paint shop. At the time they says, "Look - you do body work, you do different things. You a painter." And I says, "Yes, but I want to be a diesel mechanic." He says, "Can you be in the paint shop for temporary? We need people there. Then we'll transfer you to the engine shop." Never left the paint shop.

FC: It's been temporary for a long time.

JM: Forty-two years.

FC: And so before that, you had some experience?

JM: My father owned a body shop. I was brought up in the body shop. So I had experience painting and prepping and doing different stuff like that.

FC: So that's how you got into it.

JM: Basically yes.

FC: And then when you started in the paint shop, how many guys were you working with?

JM: In the beginning it was, things were much different. It was probably seventeen people, eighteen people at the time. And everything was done with a paintbrush, and scrapers and we didn't have technology like we have today. So it was a lot of, we scrubbed the bottoms with a scrubber, washed the bottom with a scrubbing brush. We didn't have power washers at the time. Then, you know, after years, with better power washers started doing things differently. But in

the beginning, my job was just prepping. Was...we had a...I was like a laborer. We had the people were the professional painters. So, I used to sand the boats, prep the boats, I used to come in and paint. I used to build the stage. I used to do all the prepping. And I started learning. And actually my father-in-law used to work here. That's the reason I actually go the job here. Because I went to the Army National Guard for...I went away for training to Oklahoma. When I come from the National Guards, I applied for a job here. And I was a weekend warrior, I guess...is what they call it. And I've been here since then. I've been a foreman for twenty...twenty-seven years I believe.

FC: What was your father-in-law's name?

JM: Botelho. His last name is Botelho. His first name is Guillermo. He work here for many years too. He was a painter, a skilled painter.

FC: So you started out doing a lot of prep work.

JM: Basically.

FC: That's hard work.

JM: Yes, it is. My job was scraping bottoms, scrub the bottoms, sand the hulls, sand the topsides, scraping. So...building staging. The carpenters, also used to build staging for the carpenters. We had a lot of carpenters at the time. It was all wooden boats.

FC: So that's what I was going to ask. At that time, you were working mostly on wooden boats?

JM: Wooden boats. We used to paint the whole boat - top to bottom. And the boat would just sit there for about a month, month and a half and we used to paint the mast, the pilot house, the boat works, the decks. Everything - interior, exterior. We used to paint the whole boat, back in the day. Because I guess labor was cheap. Three to five bucks an hour, I think. I'm not sure somewhere like that.

[05:00]

FC: And so when you started, well you started doing prep work. But were there certain guys that you learned from?

JM: The old timers. Those people had a lot of skill. So, you know I was just a helper. So you start by picking up, learning a lot of the stuff, a lot of the skills the skills they used to do. So I actually picked up very quickly. A few years later I was...I was one of the key players here. At the time, you know? Because...the problem people don't do...the skill's disappearing slowly. Back in the day, they had all these old-timers had all the skill. And they retired. They went away. Basically, not too many people that do that kind of work. So I was very fortunate that there people with a lot of talent. I become, not number one but I was really skilled.

FC: Those older guys, they were willing to take the time to teach you?

JM: Back in the day, yes. You had to respect those people. You had to really respect them because they had that skill and they were professional people. So as long as you listened to them and you follow what they tell you to do, they will teach you. So... it was different. It was very different, you know?

FC: What are some of the things you remember most that they told you?

JM: Well, the tricks of the trade. You know, how to clean a seam without damage the seam. How to feather something without damage the area. How to prep things the proper way. A lot of skills like that. Things that these people been doing for years and years. Most of that stuff doesn't apply anymore today because a lot of the boats is fiberglass and steel and everything else.

FC: The technology's changed a lot.

JM: Of course. And we had people that the only thing they used to do was caulk boats. You know all the caulking. We had two old-timers there...that's all they did every day - day after day, six days a week. Seven days a week. Those are the skill guys. That's all they did is...we had carpenters that had a lot of skill here too. They used to do just about anything - bend the planks. I used to help the carpenters quite a bit too. Because I was a young guy then. These planks like thirty feet long. Twenty-five, thirty feet...you know you got to put them in the steamer, bend them. You know, hold to the boat. There was very tough work.

FC: You did some of that too.

JM: Oh yes. I helped the carpenters many, many times - yes. Building boats, yeah.

FC: For the carpenters and the caulkers and the painters - were they using their own tools, or did the yard provide the tools?

JM: The yard provided tools. We used to have a stockroom. We had ten tags from one to ten. I had number nine, or number ten. I'm not sure what number I had at the time. You would come to a stockroom and you provide the tag. You request the tool you are looking for. At the end of the day, you return the tool. You get your tag back.

FC: They kept track of them.

JM: Yes, they did. Back in the day, yes everything was in the stockroom. They actually, this used to be the stockroom, right here.

FC: Oh.

JM: The first floor.

FC: When you started, what days and hours were you working? What kind of schedule?

JM: I was working, I believe, from seven o'clock to four-thirty, five o'clock. At the time, I was looking for overtime because I was young. I was starting a family. At the time, I didn't make a lot of money. I think I started here with, I believe, two dollars and fifty cents an hour. My check was a hundred and something dollars. So in the beginning, you know, I struggled like anybody else. Then every year you get a little raise and the next thing you know, you put the time and you make the money.

FC: Were you working weekends at all?

JM: Yes, I used to work Saturdays. Usually we worked Saturdays 'til noon or one-o'clock. And back in the day, yes everybody used to work quite a bit of overtime.

FC: At that time, you talked a little bit about it, but what would have been like a normal day - when you came to work? From start to finish, what would you do?

JM: A normal day would be my foreman would come to us. At 7:15 we'd be ready to go. He'd says, "Well, need to build staging for these carpenters to do planking this boat. It has to be ten feet high, fifteen feet high." So I would be the leader at the time. I would bring four guys with me and set up horses and planks and safety rails and build a stage for the carpenters. After we build a stage for the carpenters, we go scrape a boat. Perhaps sand or stay with the carpenter. The carpenter needs a hand. He has a lot of heavy wood to move around. So I would go...we used to put this piece of wood in the cart. We didn't have forklifts at the time. Everything was done by hand. Sometimes it'd take eight, ten people to move something. But we did it, you know? So it was differently and we had these huge horses that we used to build them to build the staging. And it require like six people to move these horses around. So it was a lot of bull work at the time. Very heavy work, yes.

[10:05]

FC: And so on a day like that you might be going back and forth or you're working with the carpenters but then...

JM: Then we go back to paint, correct. The carpenters, because it was such a high skill, they didn't have to do the bull work. I mean they don't have to do the staging. So, the painters was the guys that do the cleaning, do the maintenance. The painters kind of do it all. Myself - not the skill painters. Skill painters paint and the skill carpenters do carpentry work. Other people just make it happen, you know. We put it together for them.

FC: How much of the work was inside and how much was outside?

JM: Most of the work was done outside. If it was a rainy day, I knew I had to build a top for the carpenters so they don't get wet. We did that too. You know like, "Tomorrow's going to rain.

The carpenters, they don't want to get wet. They got that boat to get done." So alright, I have to

be there in the morning first thing build a, put a canvas. You know, plastic and staple it so the carpenter can do his job the proper way basically.

FC: What about the other people, all the people working here at that time - were there different nationalities?

JM: Back in the day was...here was a lot of Portuguese people and some Cape Verdeans and most of local people, you know people born in this country. Used to be welders. We used to work together with the welders too, because a lot of these boats require those stainless steel bars for the dredge to go up and down. Everybody used to work together. Sometimes in the boat, now we don't do that, there used to be fifteen people in one boat. Twenty people in one. The boat's not that big. It was five or six guys putting bars on the side, one side, and another five or six guys on the other side. Two or three guys scraping and painting. Two or three carpenters building something. So you look at the boat and you see twenty people on that boat. Today they cannot afford to do that because it's \$80 an hour versus, you know - it's just different that's all.

FC: Did people get along pretty well?

JM: Overall, yes because people, back in the day, everybody used to respect each other. You know what I'm saying? The people with the skill...and if I was a laborer I always respect those people because they the ones that had the knowledge. They would tell me what to do. And many years ago - when you don't follow the rules here, they let you go right away. Today we more flexible. We have more tolerance. We kind of...have a conversation with that person. "Don't do it again." Or "Don't do this." We try to. Back in the day, if you don't follow those rules, they would say, "You're done." Just like that.

FC: And you knew that right away.

JM: Oh, I knew that right away. And most people knew it. That's why everybody respect each other here. Because they knew as soon as that carpenter went to see the manager or the foreman, says, "This guy is supposed to be working with me and he's not there for forty-five minutes." Or, "He didn't show up to work." Or, "He's talking too much." He would come to them and says, "If you do it again, don't bother coming tomorrow." So people knew where they stand. It was different.

FC: Was Portuguese spoken around here much?

JM: A lot.

FC: A lot?

JM: A lot. My father-in-law was Portuguese. His...someone from his family used to work here before him. He was also Portuguese. Actually, from one time to another, it was a lot of

Portuguese people here - in this waterfront. In this shipyard and the other shipyard, there was a lot of Portuguese people involved.

FC: So if you were walking across the yard, it wouldn't be unusual to hear Portuguese being spoken then?

JM: That's correct. Yes.

FC: What about now?

JM: Now? Not as much. Not as much, no. No more immigration, I guess. Portuguese people don't come like they used to anymore. So you don't see as many Portuguese people like you used to anymore, no.

FC: What did you wear for clothes? Any special clothes?

JM: Well, back in the day, they require us the old toe boots...steel boots, and heavy-duty gloves. It was very cold then because I used to cross the ice here. Forty years ago, I used to walk all over this shipyard on the ice. I was young. I was not afraid. And we had to break the ice for weeks and days sometimes here. We spend so many days. Before we can launch a boat, we spent hours and days with an ice chipper - before we can even launch the boat. Now, it's fantastic. People don't know what it is now compared to what it was. It's different.

[15:03]

FC: And if you're on waterfront site like this, there's nothing to stop the wind either. The wind....

JM: It can be tough, yes. Actually, some days when the wind comes out of the - certain parts of the...it is still tough, yeah.

FC: You did say that the yard provided all the tools so the workers didn't have to bring tools to work.

JM: No, but like, a lot of the skill people have their own tools. And that's why I learned. I used to buy my own tools. I have my own tools. Most of the skill people here now today, they have their own tools. And now require that you must have a hammer, a scraper, a screwdriver, adjustable wrench. Something simple, you know.

FC: Just the basic stuff.

JM: Basic stuff. And even that - some people don't have that. But then I tell people, "You know, if you have pride in what you do, start buy a few tools here and there so you can, you know. You'll be able to.... because if you have tools, you can learn more, you get do different things." It just - everybody's different, you know.

FC: When you were in your early years here, did you have a locker or something where you kept your stuff?

JM: I did. Yes, I had a locker. It used to be...we used to have a different shop. It doesn't exist anymore. It was a big shop. We had one shop for the welding shop, one shop for the engine shop, one shop for the carpenters and the painters. We had a huge shop with a lot of cats there and a lot of lockers and a lot of people. It used to had a wood stove. We didn't have the heat there except the wood stove. And we had to make sure we had plenty of wood for the winter. So we also used to cut wood and stack up wood for the wintertime. That was part of our job too.

FC: Did you have set times for breaks? What about breaks?

JM: We had breaks. So, we started at seven-thirty and we had a break from nine (to) nine-fifteen. We had an early stop of five of twelve to twelve-thirty. We stop of ten of four to four o'clock.

FC: Were those times pretty set? Right to the minute?

JM: Well, you know, people should stay until you hear the buzzer. You know, that's the rules of the company. You don't leave the boat until you hear the buzzer. That's when you move...you know, leave the boat.

FC: So everybody took their breaks at the same time?

JM: Ninety-nine point nine, yes.

FC: So especially when you first started and you were doing prep work, you must have been doing a lot of work on hulls, right?

JM: Most of it, yes. We did and then we start to do a few yachts, sailboats. At the time it was sailboats, then we start powerboats. Because I was brought up in the body shop, I start spraying boats here for the first time. You know, things start picking up and then I was responsible for a lot of the stuff here. For all these yachts, I used to be the person. I used to have three people, four people working for me. So I used to do all the yachts. Because I learned from the old-timers and I picked up skills very well. Then, you know, years later, aluminum boats, fiberglass boats, steel boats. But the wooden boats - that's what I started. Wooden boats. Yes, we had quite a few of them.

FC: You sort of brought the idea of spray-painting here?

JM: Yes, correct. Because I had - that was my trade original in the body shop. I used to spray and do that kind of stuff. I was brought up in a body shop. My father owned a body shop since I was a kid - five years old. So I was bought up. So I kind of introduce that a little bit to the company at the time, yes.

FC: So before that it was brushes?

JM: Yes. And it used to do beautiful jobs. I had - we had people with so much skill here with a brush. They can do - you couldn't tell the difference between if it was brush or spray. That's how good they were. Very skilled people. Back in the day, some of the old-timers they had a lot of skill.

FC: Do you remember certain guys that stand out?

JM: Of course. They had certain talents then. And I picked up a little bit from everybody. And it made me very good at it too. They had styles, yes. Some people had a certain style, certain ways of doing things. We had Frenchmens, we had Pollacks, we had...you know they all different. Everybody was - everybody had a little secret about the brush. How to maintain the brush clean. Everybody had a little way of doing certain things. Yeah, it was inter....it was very, ah...you know and I come in when the time was. I kind of picked up a little bit from everybody. Not just me. With everyone at the time. And it was very interesting, yes.

FC: Did the guys have fun with each other, and give the Frenchmen a hard time?

JM: Oh yeah. Everyone kind of respect each other, but it was kind of – “You know - he's a tough guy. Be careful. He's a tough...you know, don't say anything to him. Just...Whatever he tells you to do, just do it.” So we used to wipe the hulls down with water, soap - clean them. Tack rag the whole thing and just kind of stand there.

[20:00]

JM: He's the boss. You know, he's like my boss basically. He used to mix the paint. It was a big secret. You know - they don't want nobody to watch who makes the paint. Because he used to mix a little bit of...eh what is it...penatrol? They used to put a little bit of this, a little bit of that. So everybody has his own ways. It was very interesting, you know.

FC: Working in the paint shop, the cleanup must have been a big part of it. You had to leave some time at the end of the day?

JM: Yes. Usually that's, that was my job. Those people won't let nobody touch those brushes because those brushes - they used to put them in oil and used to preserve them. They had it in sol, but I used to clean the rest of the tools. Put everything away and that was my job. So I was basically a helper for whatever they needed. Myself, not just me and other peoples. But sometimes I used to stop a little bit early to re-organize and straighten things out there. That kind of stuff, yeah.

FC: But that's interesting. So they took special care of their brushes. Those were their babies then.

JM: Yes, that's correct. It was like you own a very expensive tool. For them, that was the only tool they had. "Oh this brush does a nice job." "This brush - oh I got this one from this one. I got that..." So everybody has his different ways.

FC: It's so different now. So much stuff is...you use it once and throw it away.

JM: Yeah, people don't even have an idea what things - the way they used to do things back in the day. Most people don't have a clue how it was done. How fussy, how particular those people were. How much they loved the work they did. How much they cared for what they did. Today is different - the mentality. People don't think, they seem...I mean there are still people that really like to do nice work. But back then, those people they strived for that. Every day they come here they wanted to do the best job they could ever do. It was different, yes.

FC: And they were proud of what they did.

JM: Very proud. That's the word. They were so proud. They were always looking to do a beautiful job. Because everybody'd be looking at it. And everybody was proud of what they did, you know? Because that was a skill at the time. Good old days, you know?

FC: Yes, yes. How much of the work you were doing was on fishing boats?

JM: We did a lot of work on fishing boats. We, like I say, the boat used to come in and we used to wash and scrape it. Clean it. We used to paint fish holds. We painted the whole boat - top to bottom. We'd spend weeks and sometimes months because wooden boats - the paint used to chip a lot. And back in the day, the paints were not like today. You know - I guess. I'm not sure. They had a lot of lead, but they're not as probably as good as paint is today. So we did a lot of scraping, a lot of prepping and a lot of priming. A lot of painting and a lot of stuff. So you spend a lot of time on the fishing boats, yes.

FC: Are the bottoms the hardest?

JM: Bottoms - I used to do. After they did all the caulking, we had to put the seam compound. That was a lot of work. We used to put primer - we'd used to put primer in the seam...you know, after and before the seam compound, we had to put the seam compound, put a coat of paint, the second coat of paint. So it was a lot of requirements for the fishing boats. Back in the back of the boat, we used to put the copper, so the vibration wouldn't...the stuff wouldn't fall apart. So it was a lot of involvement in those fishing boats. They used to spend a lot of time doing different things there.

FC: Did you get to know the fishermen?

JM: Of course I did, yes. Some of them nice people, very nice people. Some of them used to bring us fish. Yeah, some nice people. You get to meet nice people.

FC: If you were working on a fishing boat, would sometimes...would they, kind of, get in the way? Would they come lean over your shoulder while you're working on a boat?

JM: The boat owners - they used to watch everybody. We always respect the boat owners very well because they were paying so much an hour at the time. We just kept going and they watching. They didn't give us a lot of....

FC: But they were around.

JM: Always around, yes. Watching. Back in the day, everybody used to watch everything very close, you know. Today they leave the boat here. They go home. They don't come back a week later, two weeks later. Back then, it used to be at seven o'clock in the morning and sometimes used to give them a chair, "There's a chair for you to sit down." They used to sit in the front of the boat watching us work. Yes, we had customers used to sit there and just stand there all day long.

FC: Did that make you nervous?

JM: Ah, no. We just like...you know, as long as you doing your job, it was okay. But, a little bit annoying.

FC: Yes. But you knew what you were doing.

JM: Of course, yes. It was fine. But they used to stay there from morning to night. They used to go on the boat, pick up all the bolts, nuts, screws. If we, you know, when we nail on the bars, those screws used to cost about...three cents, two cents?

[25:00]

But sometimes when we get the screws, those screws would fall on the ground so the boat owner would be there picking up all the screws.

FC: He figured he'd paid for them.

JM: Yeah (laughs). That's how important it was then, you know?

FC: Were you or are you now a member of any industry association or union or anything like that?

JM: No, none. No.

FC: No? I was going to ask you if you worked alone or other people, but it sounded like pretty much you are working with a group of guys.

JM: Right now I have working with me, I believe, sixteen people. Sometimes I have twenty, twenty-three, twenty-five. We have two shipyards. I help them. They help us. So, if we have a lot of work here, I call the foreman there and they bring people to help me and I go help them because, and also, I have been here for such a long time. And I help them too a lot. You know,

because steel boats - I know a lot about coatings and stuff like that. I'm involved in a lot of different things here.

FC: What are the, you talked a little bit about it, but what are the biggest changes you've seen over the years?

JM: The biggest changes? The hardest change I seen is EPA. The regulations are getting too complicated. Making things complicated for everybody I think. Every time we get something out of the stockroom, we got to write the day, the time, the temperature, the dew point. Too much work. Too much involvement. Teams shouldn't be doing that - all this. Just makes things a little difficult for everybody. I have the responsibility before we paint a boat. I have to make sure the dew point is right, the temperature is right. A lot of these paints are very forgiving, these epoxies, because they can go as five degrees. Long as the dew point's fine and the hull is dry, we can paint. It's different, you know. There's a lot of different change in the regulations, in the rules. You just kind of have to follow - just go along with it, basically.

FC: You had to keep more records, more paperwork?

JM: That's correct. Not as much myself, but I have a responsibility and make sure when my guys get something, they tell the stockroom what they getting so they can write it down, mark it down. Every time we have paint left over, I have to get rid of those paints. I have to have a special container then they come in. So it's just different. Everything is different. The reducers...you have to be...You have to watch - you cannot reduce a paint like we used to anymore. We have to be very careful. If we need to reduce a paint, we have to tell the stockroom how much we doing - ten percent, five percent. They have to write it down. So it's a lot of things that makes it sometimes complicated a little bit. But it's all part of life, I guess. Just slows down the process a little bit. Slows down the progress, slows down because that guy needs to reduce that paint he has to come ask me. I can tell him he can reduce this five percent - no more than five percent or three percent. He got to go to stockroom. He got to explain to them why he's doing. Because it's cold - the paint too thick. So it's just a lot of, you know, it's more time. More time. The customer pays, gets less than he should that's all.

FC: Now what about things like the schedule? You were saying about the hours you worked when you started. What's the schedule like now? What's your regular hours now?

JM: I get here at 7:15. I work 'til 9:00. I have a fifteen-minute break. Five of twelve to twelve-thirty. And ten of four, four o'clock I go home. A lot of guys work overtime. They stay 'til five, six o'clock. We work Saturdays. Just about every Saturday from 7:00 to 12:00, 12:30. Sometimes Sundays if we have to.

FC: So, it sounds like the hours are pretty much what like they were when you first started.

JM: Yes, correct. Yes, that's correct. The only difference back then and now is, it was so much cold back then. Now it is a little bit warmer. The winter is much better than it used to be back

forty years ago. Forty years ago it used to be very cold in this waterfront. For some reason, I'm not sure why. Maybe it was different, you know.

FC: But you really noticed a difference?

JM: Oh yes, yes. And now is - the people don't have to - they don't work as hard as they used to work before. Before everything was bull work. Everything was very heavy. Now we have forklifts. We have equipment. We have stage. We can build stage. Today it's so much simple. You know, things are much, much simple. We have power washers.

[30:00]

We don't have to scrub the bottoms with the scrubbing brush. It's so much simple.

FC: In terms of paints, now do you do any mixing here or do you get, if you need a certain color or a certain paint, do you get it already prepared and ready to go?

JM: That's correct, yes. We got color cards. Sometimes I do play with colors. Most of the time I don't like to do that because if the following years, if I don't remember... Some customers require a little darker colors. So I make a system and I put it in the computer so we know next time. But most of the colors, they come from the factory already mixed.

FC: Where do you get most of your paint from?

JM: We use...most of the paint is PPG we use, and we use Devoe and we use International. There's a company called Surface Works. They supply most of the paint we use.

FC: How's the paint different? I know it's changed.

JM: The paint's different. A lot of different ways, I guess. Well, every time the company gets bought or sold, the paint change. And when I see a change, I call someone. I tell them what I think about it and I try to make changes. You know, make them make changes. And I work the paint companies sometimes to help change stuff. Like the bottom paint. The color of the bottom paint. I pick the color twenty years ago because the company was sold, they changed the color bottom paint. People don't like it. I give them a sample here. And I say, "This is the color everybody likes." And they sent it to the lab and few months later, we had that color. And whenever the paint companies have certain paints they want to try - they want people to see if they like it, how they stand in the weather - sometimes we try stuff here. New products. We probably the first people to try some new products because we been here so long. I been doing this such a long time. A lot of these people who sell these products, the company asks, "Who should use this? Who should try this?" They say, "Oh, such and such you know will tell us if it's good or not." So they bring it to me and I do experiments. I try it. I do pieces. I paint it. It rolls

nice, brushes nice, covers well, does it have good base to it, it doesn't have body, it doesn't dry well...so they wait for my respond.

FC: What about the colors? Do people really know what they want? Do they come in and say, "I want this certain light...?"

JM: A few years ago - many years ago, they had seven colors. They used to have white, green, blue, black and orange. It was very simple. All the boats - because they used to buy that paint from local...ah, what's the name of that local guy here? What was the local guy...? Someone local that we used to buy most of the paint from. So it was like six or seven colors. Now it's so many different colors. I know most of the colors of the boat. I work on the boat, I know what color boat has because I been, you know, such a long time. But now is a little harder than before. Before it was very simple. So, now they'll have different blues, different greens, different yellows, different - they have...you know everybody likes to be a little different than the next guy. To say, "I'm the only guy that has *this* color." "I'm the only guy that has *that* color." It's not really true, but that's how they feel. It's a little different. But twenty years - back in the day, it was seven colors, eight colors. That's what they used to use. So you'd look at the boat - it would be blue, would be green in New Bedford. If you look at the old pictures....

FC: They're all just a few colors.

JM: Yeah. Seven or eight colors. That's it. Now everybody has different choices.

FC: Is pretty much all the paint applied with sprayers now?

JM: No.

FC: No.

JM: No, everything is still applied...we, I made a decision about fifteen years ago, maybe longer, when the laws started to change about you know about HVLP guns and all that we can't put in the air. I talked to my boss, he used to be Dave Kelly, it used to be Kelly's Shipyard. And I told him, I says, "I like to change from spray to roll." I says, "The future, because of VOC's..." I told Dave Kelly at the time, I said, "The future, if you can roll everything, we going to be so much better than anybody else. Because we going to be putting less VOC's. We going to be so much efficient than anybody else." He gave permission to do that. Because we used to cover these boats to spray. It used to take six to eight guys to cover the boat. We used to put these huge tarps over the boat. So I started looking at the hours to cover these boats. Sometimes it was a lot of wind.

[35:00]

It was very complicated, very difficult. Actually we used to struggle a lot to cover these boats. It was holes here and holes there, so we used to spray these boats. Spray goes fast, but then I realized how long it was taking to cover the boat. It was like eight guys all day - like sixty, forty, sixty hours. And one day I roll a bottom of the boat, and it we did it in twenty-eight hours. And I said, "Wait a minute, okay. I did this in twenty-eight hours. To spray the boat took four hours but took sixty hours to cover the boat." So I told my boss, I says, "I think I can do better rolling and be more efficient." So, basically - I don't know - in New England, I was one of the first shipyards to change mentality about the spray gun. So I went out. I picked the best rollers. I did a lot of experiment. I found the right stuff. Took me a year to find all these right products. Then everything we done after that was roll, roll, roll. We roll everything. We brush and roll everything. The only time we spray - it's like we do a water tank because it has a lot of frames. We spray water things. We spray [unintelligible]. That kind of stuff because it's faster. And it's inside of a boat so there's always below anyway, basically. But outside - the hulls - everything is done with a roller.

FC: You must have less paint waste that way, is that right?

JM: Less paint waste, less...you know, it helps...it's good for everybody. So I changed. Now a lot of people doing what I started almost twenty years ago, a lot of people doing that now. I think. It took a while to get the right rollers, the right stuff and a lot of skill to put the right mils. Because every coat of paint requires so many mils. So if you don't have the right roller, you cannot apply the right mils. So it takes a lot of skill to do all this, to find all these products for the job. And we found it and we doing it.

FC: So you use different roller pads for different finishes?

JM: That's correct, yes. We do bottom paint, we have to use a half-inch roller because the bottom paint requires seven mils wet to get five dry. So the only roller that put that many mils would be a half-inch roller. So, the 302, let's say we use zinc on the boats, require 5 mils to get three and a half dry or one and a half dry. So, everything requires different. The 450, the other things we use - they want 3 to 5 mils so we use a smaller roller because we looking just to put a sheen on. And we use less paint, yes. Yes, a lot less paint. A lot more efficient. We made a big change, not it the world, but in this part of the country. We made a big change.

FC: How much pressure is there in the work when, like if it's a fisherman - a fishing boat - he needs his boat so he can get out there and make some money?

JM: There's pressure, yes. Sometimes a lot of pressure, yes.

FC: Get it done as soon as you can?

JM: Of course. Then if I have, like I say, eighteen to twenty people working for me all the time, so if this one requires more people, then my job is to make sure there has enough people there to get this done in time. Then I'll ask the people working the boat, "Can you stay overtime? Can

you work an extra hour or two?" And a lot guys will like to work overtime. They don't mind coming early. And leave late, you know? So, it gets...we got to get it done sometimes. And some days, the push is on. Yes.

FC: And what about, are there certain busy seasons? Winter busier than...

JM: Winter has been very good to us. Actually, the slow time used to be July and August because everybody is either on vacation. Also, January and February used to be slow. Back then, we had like...in the summertime, a couple months were slow and we used to do maintenance in the yard and painting buildings and do different things. In the wintertime, we had also a couple slow months. Actually, many years ago people used to get laid off for a month or two. The ones who want it. Not everybody wants to get laid off: two, or three, or four people. But now, we work steady. We always busy. We don't close the shipyard. Ever. There's always people here. There's always something going on, and we have work everyday. Keeps everybody busy.

FC: And you're working on all different kinds of boats too, right?

JM: We work in fiberglass, aluminum composites. We do work on everything. We do sailboats. We do mega-yachts. Actually, I go to Florida once a year for the boat show, and also I go to Antigua for the boat show. Try to bring work for the company.

[40:00]

And we go to local boat shows and sometimes I go to Newport, talk to customers, look at the jobs, do the bids, bring them in. And I kind of - not only do the paint job, the paint foreman - also, I'm in charge of these other jobs. Oversee the whole job.

FC: So there's some travel involved then?

JM: I do a little bit of traveling, yes. I go different places. I go look at jobs. Someone calls the company and says, "Oh, I got a big job in Newport," or Connecticut, Boston, New York, whatever. So I take my car. I get there and look at the boat. Come back here. Figure out the prices, numbers. She prints it out and sends it out, and we hear from the customer later.

FC: Do you like that part of it too?

JM: It's okay. When you bidding jobs, it's a big responsibility. Yeah, you want to make sure you're doing a good job. Because I've been doing this for such a long time, I do very well. Overall, I do okay. You know what I'm saying, after you do something for so many years, you just look it once you already figure out: okay, sixty hours, eighty hours, you know.

FC: That's where the experience comes in.

JM: That's correct, yeah. I do that for the boatyards. I go out and look at work for the boat shipyards. Because the paint foreman, there he has less experience than I do. So he don't have the same...so every time they have a job, an important job to be done or looked at it, I make the call. I make the call. Basically, I help him make the call.

FC: Do you think - would you say this is a good business for young guys to get into?

JM: I'd like to see the Voc schools teach these kids this skill. I'd like to see New Bedford, or everywhere, open up shops. We don't have electricians. We don't have plumbers. We don't have air condition people. We don't have painters. We don't have welders. We need skilled people. These kids, they...back twelve years ago, I went to New Bedford - the Voc - myself and one of the managers here. We talked to the teachers and we talked to them. See if they can promote this area. It needs to be promoted. Someone needs to go there and tell these kids, "We need skilled people." And they can do very well. They can make a decent pay, actually. I make a decent pay myself and even I start at the bottom here. But most of these guys start at \$15, \$17 an hour. If they get three percent every year... four percent, in five, six years they making twenty-five bucks an hour which is very good money for this area. Don't you agree?

FC: Yes.

JM: I mean, consider...if you here for twenty years, you make \$80,000 a year...\$70,000. And you ten minutes away from home. A matter of speaking, you know - right? I mean, that person has to want to do this skill. So I wish, if someone promote these schools to have these kids learn these trades, you know. Because I told Kevin, "What's going to happen when I'm leaving two other guys in my shop?" I'm the oldest guy. I'm probably one of the oldest guys in the company right now. But, I do a little bit of everything in this company. I do from...in the whole boat - I'm involved in everything in the boat. Basically, everything except the engine. I told Kevin the other day, I says, "When I leave and two other guys in my shop leave, what's going to happen to my shop?" I told him, I said, "We need to bring people in so I can teach my skill." Joe, another guy that works with me, has a lot of skill - he learned from me. Another guy who has a lot of skill also learned from Joe and me. So I told Kevin, "In a few years, when I...I'm fifty-eight, fifty-seven years old...so, if we don't have someone to do what I do, what's going to happen to the company?" Like he says, "The company has to continue." He says, "Even after you retire, the company has to continue." So, we trying to find these people to take over my job someday. To learn what I know. To learn what my guys learned, so they can continue this. It's very difficult because I work with these different departments, here and we have, like I say, we have two shipyards and one of the key people falls off, it would take five people to take the place of that person. You know what I'm saying, basically.

FC: Yes, yes.

JM: And people don't realize that. You know have Dan in the engine shop - he's been here for...older than I, he's been here longer than me but he left three times, two or three times. So

you have so much skill. My shop - I have so much skill. The shop with a lot of skill - you can see the quality of the work. When you have a foreman or someone who takes that person's place

[45:00]

don't have the same skill, you can see how the shop runs. It runs, you know...But if everybody runs a smooth shop, makes the whole yard look good. So, what I'm saying is: the future doesn't look - for this trade - doesn't look very good right now. My opinion. Unless someone start doing something and tell these kids, "Listen. Learn this skill. Learn this skill. You can make a living with it. You don't need to go to college, then go work at McDonald's." Maybe I shouldn't say that.

FC: My brother-in-law is an electrician and he says the same thing. That there's not enough people who can do what he does.

JM: That's correct.

FC: Makes a good wage and he's his own boss.

JM: Make a good living.

FC: He tries to tell the kids that.

JM: These kids go to college four, five years. Sometimes they don't have a decent job for a long time. And they got bills to pay. They come here, they can make a living. You know, create a job. So, I'm always looking for young people. All the shops looking for people. And Kevin, he told me he was willing to train these kids from school. He's willing to start some kind of co-op to work with these kids to have - we need young blood here.

FC: Yes. You need that next generation to come in and...

JM: Help us out.

FC: What are the toughest things about the job? What don't you like about it?

JM: This job. Sometimes the pressure, the responsibility. Everything has good days and bad days. You know you look and think - that guy has a nice job. He's always smile, but I have a lot of, you know, there's a lot of headaches here. Make sure everything falls in place. Make sure people don't make mistakes. Don't forget, I have seventeen guys. I have three or four guys with a lot of skill but I have a lot of people they're just basic labors. They nice people but they, you know - everybody's different. Some people have a broad vision and they can go any direction. Some people only see one way, you know. So they need a lot of support, a lot of attention. You have to watch them constantly. But this is everywhere. I wish if I had all skilled people here,

then I wouldn't have to get out of my office. Maybe, I shouldn't say that. No, but I wouldn't have to be always...you know, I have to be on my toes all the time. Because things have to get done and I got to watch the weather, temperature. If we prime today, we have to put paint on the same day. I got to make sure the weather going to be fine for the next day. So my thing is the weather. I'm always watch the weather. I need to know what the dew point is all the time. I need to know what temperature's going to be. I need to think ahead. Okay - tomorrow's going to be a rainy day. Where I'm going to put these guys.

FC: Try to get this done today.

JM: Yeah. So it's always...but you know something? Pressure is good sometimes because once you get used to it, it's part of your life.

FC: And you surprise yourself how much you can get done when you have to, right? I think we all do that.

JM: Of course we all do that.

FC: When we're under pressure you deliver.

JM: Oh yes. We have to. And like I told my boss, "We make it happen." He says, "We need to get this boat in the water by tomorrow. To get this boat out of the water, we have a skill. I mean we have so many things to do this week, we need to get this accomplished." And I say, "We'll make it happen." And we will.

FC: What's the best thing about the job? What do you like most about it?

JM: It's always different things and the end of the day, we say, "Wow! We accomplished this, we accomplished this." It makes me feel good. I go home, then I know we accomplished so much. I mean, most of the time we accomplish a lot of stuff. You know when the weather isn't permit, things go wrong, the jobs don't go right. Every job has its up and downs. Nothing is perfect. It's not a perfect world. Sometimes people don't produce as much. They don't feel well. They sick. They have issues at home. You know you got to deal with all this stuff. Sometimes I go home, I tell my wife, "I think sometimes I'm like a babysitter or I'm like I'm a, I don't know." Some come to me, "I have this problem." And sometimes I don't have the time to listen, but that's my job. I listen to the person. I try to say something nice to him.

FC: So that's part of it. The best days are when everything comes together?

JM: Yeah. The end of the day - when you do a beautiful job, the boat's here for a week, two weeks, a month - you do a big job and the end of the job, before the job gets here - you say "Wow, that's a big job." But once it's complete, you look at it. You smile. You feel good about yourself. That's how I feel. We do some big jobs here. Big jobs - jobs very complicated, very

difficult. But then the boat leaves. We say, "Wow! It looks beautiful. We did a wonderful job." The company did okay. We didn't lose money. Everybody's happy. The customer is very pleased. My boss is happy.

[50:00]

FC: Everybody wins.

JM: We had overtime. Everybody made extra money. We had a wonderful week. It's all good. You go home, you go in peace. You know you accomplished something well. That's how I feel about stuff. I have a passion for this job. I've been doing this for such a long time. I had the opportunities to leave the shipyard many times, to do other things. And I always refused to do that. I had some good opportunities. Maybe even make more money to do a lot of different things. And I choose to never leave - to stay here. Sometimes I don't know if I did the right thing or not.

FC: You like the situation you're in?

JM: I like what I do.

FC: Yes, yes.

JM: Like I say, the end of the day you see something you accomplished. Or you made it happen. You and other people worked to get that accomplished. It's very unique sometimes. And I have ideas. I'm always thinking of something. Always trying to find ways of doing things smarter, better. You know like anything else, as you get older, you get wise. You look back and you say, "Wow, I can accomplish by doing this and this and make everybody happy." Better for the guys, better for the company. So you always trying to get the next level. Better tools, smarter tools, better sandpaper. Today, things revolving around us so fast. Sometimes, things...always new products. So I'm trying to always be ahead of that. And introduce, "Hey, guys - I got something for you guys to use. This sandpaper lasts a lot longer." This sandpaper, this vacuum cleaner, it lasts lot longer. Also we deal with a lot of that. We try to collect all the dust all the time. So it's another thing we have to do. We don't want to make dust. We don't want to make mess. We try to be smart how we do things. Put a tarp, collect, contain. We very good at it. You know, in the beginning everybody says, "Wow! That's impossible." Nothing is impossible, once you put your mind to it. And we accomplish all this stuff. We getting all this accomplished.

FC: And all those things keep the work interesting too...

JM: Correct. Even people now they learning these things. It's already part of them. Well when we wash the boat, watch the wind. When we sand, watch the wind - collect, dust, pick up. The end of the day, take fifteen minutes clean up your mess. And once they get used to that, works

like a charm. You know I go around the boats before I go home. Check all the guys. Check everything. Walk around. They already know what I'm looking for. So they don't want me to say anything, so they clean. They pick up. They move. Because I'm a nice guy but I can also be...

FC: Sometimes you have to be a not-so-nice guy.

JM: Well, you know, sometimes you have to...it's the rules. It's my job. It's everybody's job. We all part of this. I tell my guys, "I'm not doing this because of me. I'm doing this for all of us. If we do well, if we succeed, we all succeed. If the company makes money, we all make money. We got to treat this - this is our home. We spend more time here than we spend at home sometime." I do. Sometimes I work here seven days a week. Not physical - but I'm here.

JM: Well, I should let you get back to work. But that's a great, great help.

[53:31] End of audio