NEW BEDFORD FISHING HERITAGE CENTER

Date of Interview 6/30/2017

Mello, Phillip ~ Oral History Interview

Fred Calabretta

Mello, Phillip. Interview by Fred Calabretta. *Workers on the New Bedford Waterfront.* New Bedford Fishing Heritage Center. Date of interview: 6/30/2017.

This oral history was produced in 2016 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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Interview with Phillip Mello, June 30, 2017

Background

Name of person interviewed: Phillip Mello [PM]

Facts about this person:

Age 64
Sex Male
Occupation General Manager, Bergie's Seafood Inc.
Residence (Town where lives) Fairhaven
Ethnic background (if known) Portuguese

Interviewer: Fred Calabretta [FC]

Transcriber: Aneshia Savino [AS]

Interview location: Bergie's Seafood Inc.

Date of interview: June 30, 2017

Key Words
Photography, wholesale, auction, fish cutting, sales, packing and shipping, community networks, bilingual employees, fishing regulations, Working Waterfront Festival, weather, changing demands and work ethics.

Abstract
Phillip Mello describes his duties as a general manager at Bergies Seafood in New Bedford, MA, including auctions, transportation, fish cutting, sales, deliveries and networking. He joined Tichon Seafood in 1980 and continues to be active throughout the Fairhaven/New Bedford Harbor. Mello enjoys photography and documenting the fishing community. Changes in weather and fishing regulations have altered prices, catches and the economy of the fishing industry.

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[00:00] Intro; Phillip Mello is a third generation Portuguese-American. Describes his career in maritime industries beginning as a marine electronic technician, then fish buyer and foreman, now a general manager. He started working at Tichons and eventually moved to Bergie's Seafood. He works with fishermen, fish processors, sales reps for wholesalers and some large chain restaurants.

[04:50] Mello describes fish off-loading from ship at processing plant as well as packing orders and truck delivery to clients. Also discusses fishing tactics, prices from auctions and boats, low sales for 4th of July, logistics, influences of restrictions on fishing and weather.

[10:03] Describes busy times, domestic and foreign markets, shipping and how each day is different but usually a hectic environment. Mello lists his duties and describes how to factor fish yields.

[15:00] Mello describes changes in scheduling, workloads and work force. Discussion of weather changes, including the freezing of New Bedford Harbor. Mello lists El Salvador, Guatemala and Puerto Rico as points of origin for many employees and many in the waterfront network.

[20:10] Continued discussion of Central American workers, bilingual employees and all employees being willing to pitch in on multiple aspects of the work. Descriptions of supervisory duties, sales and inventory procedures, technology, machinery used in fish processing.

[25:11] Mello explains the importance of social interactions with coworkers and clients and the spreadsheet he uses to factor inventory, sales, fish yields and shipping orders.

[29:26] Mello discusses his lifelong hobby of photography, including his documentation of workers throughout the harbor with the Working Waterfront Festival. Continues to photograph and always has a camera.

[35:22] Mello is generally welcome to photograph in many places along the waterfront and notes the close ties the workers and employees have even outside of work. The biggest challenge is making a profit with a perishable product.

[37:11] End of Audio

[00:00]

Fred Calabretta: Okay, so today is June 30, 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're interviewing shoreside 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 and today I'm speaking with Phil Mello at Bergies Seafood in New Bedford. And you give us your permission to record this?

Phil Mello: Yes I do.

FC: Okay, just to start, your full name and..

PM: My name is Phillip Mello, with two l's in both names.

FC: Okay, and date and place of birth...

PM: February 1st, 1953, here in New Bedford.

FC: And grew up in New Bedford?

PM: Ah, Fairhaven.

FC: Fairhaven?

PM: Yeah

FC: Okay. And your family, does your family have any ties to the fishing industry?

PM: None whatsoever.

FC: Okay. And had your family been in this area for a long time?

PM: Yes. My great-grandfather immigrated from St Michael, the Azores, in 1902 on my mother's side of the family. And then probably in the mid, mid- 50's or so, my father's mother and father came over, so but, you know, I was born here.

FC: And let's see...Now how did you first get involved in the fishing industry?

PM: Well, back in 1975, I was a marine electronic technician. I installed radios, radars, ...on commercial fishing vessels. And at one point the company I worked for went out of business, I took up a job on a tugboat, working for a couple years, working for a local tug and in 1980, Tichon Seafood called me looking for an assistant foreman to help out with the different job in the plant. So, I took that job in 1980, I was there until '92. I worked my way up from an assistant foreman to a foreman to a salesman in the office, and a fish buyer, eventually. And I used to go to the fish auctions and buy the fish and come back to the plant and supervise all the workings. And in 1992, I moved here to Bergies.

FC: Now at that first position, was that, was that business located somewhere near here?

PM: Yes, It's two houses, down, its two doors down.

FC: And how did you learn? Were there certain guys that really kind of...?

PM: Uh, basically you just watch and learn. I mean, I knew nothing about seafood at the time. I knew there was cod and then there was flounders but I didn't know all the different species of them, of the flounder anyway, so I, you Know worked closely with people there and just learned that way.

FC: And then, and then you started here, you said…?

PM: 1992

FC: 1992. And what were you doing when you first started here? What were your responsibilities?

PM: I'm basically general manger, I would, I order the fish, get the orders from the customers, coordinate packaging. We start at, you know, cutting the fish. We're very small plant, when we first started. We were down in the north, north terminal in a small little rental building and I had

maybe three, cutters and not much machinery. We did a lot of, lot of things by hand. We had a skinning machine, thank goodness, for the fillets. So we had a small operation there and eventually moved into this building here, which I have 12 cutters, fish cutting machines are much bigger than when we first started.

FC: Now, and when you first started, and continuing today, so the business is basically the fish wholesale business?

PM: Yes. We sell wholesales, that in turn sell to restaurants. We do have some national chains, store chains that buy from us. And some larger restaurant chains will buy direct. But primarily we ship to wholesalers.

FC: And so it sounds like, from early on in your career, you're dealing with buyers, but you're also dealing with the fishermen. Is that right?

PM: Yes. And so when we would buy at the auction, it would be competitive situation and once the fish was bought, the captain and the whole crew would come over and, that was back when they had the city auction, so um, but when you're buying from the boats directly like we do, the fishermen do come in here. We do interact with them.

FC: So some of, so some of it, some of the fish is coming here directly and being offloaded right here in your facility. And some of it is purchased through the auction?

PM: That is correct.

FC: And what's the balance roughly...

PM: It’s tough to say all that depends what time of year, like yesterday we had three boats and today we had two scallopers the other three boats were draggers, and we might go like three or four days without anything, four days without anything. So, every day we buy from the auction, even if we have a boat, we don't. So it's just really, tough to say a ratio, because it's always changing and the weather has a lot to do with that.

[4:50]

FC: Now the boats that do offload here is that, what kind of an arrangement is that is it? Is it like a contract arrangement? Or is it more informal?

PM: Ok, well basically, the fishermen like to keep things a secret, so if one particular fisherman fishing, the northern part of George's, let's say, you can go out there on a boat for quite some time and never see anybody, you can talk to them on the radio. So basically, they know where you are kind of. So when he comes to me and he offloads, nobody really knows what he has. If he goes to the auction, they're going to see, "Woah look, Joe caught all this stuff. he was up to the northern." Let's, they get on their satellites phones and call their other boats and get them out there and they'll try to move to the area where the man was fishing. So a lot of them come here for that reason. A lot, another reason is that with the auction system, everything's dropped by pallets. So in other words, there's different lots. There's a 1500 pound lot. There's a 500 pound lot. So those go for different prices. And sometimes the fishermen will get upset because they will have one pallet that gets a dollar and a quarter, let's say per pound and then the next pallet, right next to it, gets a dollar 10 per pound. So they so they feel they should get the dollar 25 so we pay the boat the average board price. So, not the high, not the low, and if there's like day boats in there that mess up the costing, the captains of the boat understand that's not the same fish he has. So, but they're, seem to be very happy with the arrangement. We have, I don't know how many boats exactly, but a good sum of boats that come here and offload.

FC: And the prices change every day?

PM: Yes.

FC: And then to determine like, today's prices, that's based on the auction this morning?

PM: That's correct.

FC: And then how does that information get to you?

PM: Well we are a buyer in the auction, so as we buy fish, we print up what we purchased. We print up the board average, which everybody has the privilege to do that. So you see what the boat average is right there.

FC: And does it jump around a lot, based on supply and demand?

PM: Yeah, yeah, yep. Today unfortunately one boat got paid 15 cents for his snapper haddock. Just a lot of fish around, going into the 4th of July week, holiday, it's not a big fish week.

FC: And there's um, a pretty interesting jump between what the fishermen are getting and then the retail prices you see at markets.

PM: Well, if it goes through a couple of people, everybody tacks on a little something and I believe what the fish markets do is they have x amount and say they bought 10 pounds and they put it out for 2, 3 days, and then it either has to be frozen, sold at less value, or discarded, so they kind of figure that into the price, a little bit. So, if there's any discard it's taken care of.

FC: Yeah, and it seems like thinking about the nature of the business, you're dealing with something that's perishable, so does that sort of affect the pace...I mean if you offload hardware in warehouse, you can let it sit for a month, but you can't do that with fish.

PM: Fish isn't wine It doesn't get better with age It's very, uh...stressful at times to try to get the product out of here. Try to make a buck on it. We can buy fish and not realize what's coming in the next day and so if I have 20,000 pounds of haddock here and I paid, let's say a dollar and a quarter for it and there's double that amount in New Bedford tomorrow, or coming down from Canada, the price is going to drop, you want to really work hard to get the product out.

FC: So it seems like that sort of unpredictability of it must make things tough or complicated.

PM: It is. Years ago, when there was plenty of fish around you could talk to different companies and work out sales and special and today with the government restrictions, where they can fish, where they can't fish, the weather, it just, it fluctuates very, very up and down. Like it's very, very flexible.

FC: And is it, are the ups and downs a lot more seasonal now with the restrictions... or certain times of year busier or slower?

PM: If the weather's nice, the boats are fishing, they bring in a lot of weight, so it's, you know, the prices sometimes stay a little more stable here, but in the winter time, it all depends on the weather and the supply coming in.

[10:03]

FC: I mean what tends to be your busiest period or...

PM: Our busiest time is probably, start of spring right through fall. All the different restaurants open up and down the east coast, up and down from like the Jersey Shore all the way to Cape Cod up to Maine, so there's this big demand for seafood. And we like sell those people that sell to restaurants.

FC: Now when you first started here at Bergies, where were most of your buyers located?

PM: On the same areas that we have, Fulton Fish market, now it's called the Hunts Point market in New York. The Philadelphia Market, used to be on South Street but it just moved. We have the Boston Market different distributers up there, and then globally we sell to Japan in the fall, monkfish livers, skate wings and monks into France and Spain.

FC: And then what's your involvement with the shipping side of it? Or working with shippers...

PM: Well, we're kind of a small shop here, so everybody takes a, we work as a team, so when the orders come up they're printed and a master sheet goes down to the floor so they know how to start preparing the product so when the plant's running, you might be starting off with some flounders and all of a sudden you get a big cod order so all of a sudden you got to shut the flounder production down and start on the cod, because that truck's got to leave first, or vice versa. So after the paperwork comes upstairs we set it into which truck's going to pick it up, we do the shipping to make sure we do the case count, give it to the driver, they check the case count, truck gets loaded it gets out of town. So everybody shares the same responsibilities.

FC: So is there any such thing as a typical day? I mean, could you describe one, say describe what you did yesterday.

PM: Nothing's typical; every day is different. Yesterday, we had a few boats and just around the clock the guys are working. When I came in this morning my workers had been here for 24 hours, offloading boats, so it's like they're all walking around like zombies. So yesterday was just unloading the boats, getting the fish from the auction, we bought fish from the Gloucester auction, we needed that to be delivered to New Bedford in a timely fashion, so we could start processing it to get it out of town. Then all of a sudden half that fish did not show up on that truck for some reason, and now you got to call the customers back and tell them you don't have anything and so it's, that was kind of crazy.

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FC: Do you need to check on that...

PM: No, I was going to tell her she could come into the room, but...

FC: So, it just seems like, they can get pretty hectic. I mean, boats are coming and going, buyers are coming and going, the trucks are coming and going, and all of it is tough to schedule because it just changes constantly and does it ever drive you crazy?

PM: Oh, a lot! But you just, it is what it is, you just get through it. It's a living thing, you just do it. Sometimes are slower than others but most of the time it's pretty hectic.

FC: I think a lot people have trouble with dealing with sort of an uncertain situation like that, that's constantly changing. A lot people like to know what they're going to be doing that day you know, but it seems like in this business...

PM: I come in my feet don't hit the ground. Just run, run, run, all day. You know between once you, once you participate in the auction, I would have you come upstairs to my office, figure out what my inventory was from yesterday, figure out my new costing for the fish, figure out what the yield was yesterday, because yield can vary where the boats fish. An offshore yellowtail right now is yielding anywhere from 36 to 38 percent. That's good meat. So if I cut 100 pounds, I would get 36 pounds of fillets, let's say. The inshore yellowtails which are very fresh product, I'm only getting 29 percent yield on those. Because it's just different area, where they eat and what have you. So, when I come upstairs, I have to keep that in mind. I have to check to see what I got yesterday, because if I got a better yield, then I got a lot of fish I want to price competitively. I don't want to price off the wrong yield and all of a sudden, I found out I got a terrible yield yesterday. So that's part of it. Then I have two other salesmen, actually three other salesmen that work with us, one downstairs and two upstairs, and we go over all the pricing, we send out an email to all the customers about the pricing, and then we start getting on the phones.

FC: So there's a lot of detail...and what's a normal schedule for you a week? I mean, how, what days and hours?

[15:00]

PM: Well, when I first started working here, I was told I only had to work a half a day, so I took the job. But I didn't know they meant 12 hours. So, my typical day is usually a 10 to 12 hour day. Up until maybe five or six years ago, as I'm getting a little older, not doing that, so I work an eight hour shift. So I come in at 5, 5:30 and work until like 1:30, 2:00. But our plant is open 24 hours a day. So, there's always something to do, always a phone call you're getting, always a little problem.

FC: So you're, when you're not here, it's not unusual for you to have to be on the phone or...?

PM: Yes, that's correct, Well see, the processing end will shut down, but the offloading side is always open, so the offloaders might be calling to say they need something, or the owner of the company will say give so and so a call in New York and tell him I have this coming, how many does he want, this sort of thing. Even if it's Saturday or Sunday, we still communicate. We have phone numbers that connect to the buyers at anytime.

FC: And how has the business changed? What are the biggest changes since you first started here?

PM: Well, when I first started at Tychons, they were a very large company and they would have four boats a day. They would normally buy four boats at the auction. And we would have about 75,000 or 100,000 pounds per boat. There was just a tremendous amount of fish back then. And you worked and all of a sudden 4:00 and everybody was done and you left. Now, the average boats have 20, 20,000 pounds and it's just, strings you up all day. Because there's not that many people anymore who work the industry. So, it's, you know it's always been, you know, always changing. The regulations have been a big change. When I first started really not too many regulations. And then, they believed the fishermen where overfishing, so they started all these different regulations, there's days at sea and sizes and scallop size made counts change so it's, it's changed. Now we have a new system where its fished in sectors and everybody gets a little piece of the pie and that seems to be, I know the fishermen aren't happy with it. And, but it seems to be a little more stable work you know. As the, as we work now.

FC: But in general, is it safe to say, compared to 15 years ago or something, it's less fish and fewer people involved with the industry?

PM: Yes, yes. Definitely is less fish available. The workforce has changed, up and down at times. You know we had a winter maybe three or four winters ago, that the harbor froze. The

outer harbor froze. The boats were getting stuck in Wood's Hole. I mean the boats couldn't get out and if they went out they couldn't get back into New Bedford. We were really shut down for like two weeks. Just nothing. We tried to buy fish elsewhere and there really wasn't much fish around, and it was you know, it was slow. And everyone in the city suffered from it. You know, the packaging guys, everybody that deals with this end of the business. And you didn't see a lot of that years ago, you know.

FC: So is there, you mentioned all the, I know there's a lot of associated industries and types of work going on and there's pretty much sort of a network on the waterfront, where most people know each other? And.. get what you need and you know who to call?

PM: Yeah, we...you know, we've been dealing with one welder for so many years, because you know he does such great work, and if we need some hydraulic work, we have you know a guy who does that so everybody knows everybody, down here, and you know it's funny that the work is now, now we have Central American workers and I was asked to photograph at one of the worker's wedding. They didn't have any money to pay for the photographer, and I said okay, sure, no problem. And I couldn't believe it. All the people I saw there were people I saw coming in and out of my plant from other companies doing work, so they have their own little community and they say hey there's a job opening here, and they make sure that somebody gets it. And they're all related. All kind of cousins or whatever like that. So even they have their little networks.

FC: That's interesting. And speaking of that, I mean in terms, do you know roughly how many employees here?

PM: I'd say probably 45.

FC: 45?

PM: Yeah

FC: And you know mentioned some people, Central America, are there a lot of different, a mix of backgrounds, and cultures?

PM: We have some people from El Salvador, some people from Guatemala, some people from Puerto Rico, you know, but basically it's mostly Guatemalan.

[20:10]

FC: And what about older Portuguese families that have been here longer?

Pm: Yeah, I don't have too many employees from that. Maybe a few for the off-loading side, but mostly it's the newer people.

FC: And are there any language issues? Is that a problem at times...

PM: Most of them understand English, my foremen speak very good English, that I have down in the processing area, and so there's no really communication barrier. You know there might be few workers that don't understand English at all, but they're embarrassed to speak it back. I think they understand it. Because you would say something, they, I think they get it...

FC: They get it but they don't have confidence maybe... try to speak. And everyone gets along pretty well?

PM: Yeah. I have a great workforce. Yeah! They come in you don't have to tell them what to do. Years ago when I first started we were everybody you had to, do this, do that, be on their tail all the time and if you're working late, they were all, Oh, I got to go do all this and all that and all of a sudden you're down to two people. And these people, they come in, they punch in, they know exactly what they're supposed to do. You never hear them say, I got to leave early, unless it's something serious. And they'll do any job. I have a young lady that's been with me for 5 years. She's started when she was like 18. And she can run a skinning machine, she can pack the fish, she can scale the fish, she can actually cut the fish. She can do every job in my plant, and there are many workers when we get very busy and they'll get up on the bench and cut fish and do a good job at it. And years ago, you know, you'd say, Hey I want you to do a different type of job, its not my job! You know, so that has changed.

FC: The people are maybe more willing to pitch in where they're needed. So how involved are you in that part of it? In the cutting and everything? Do you supervise that?

PM: I supervise that. So after the fish is purchased I tell production what to start with and sometimes it's a crapshoot, because we don't know what's really going to sell, but I need to get some product up. So we'll say start cutting the yellowtails, and we'll get going and all the

salesmen on the phone starts selling all our items, and we keep a tally going, you know we know exactly how many pounds roughly we're going to have of fillets, let's say, for one item, so if someone sells a fairly large order like three or four cases, okay, so four cases gone of that! We just keep track of it and all of a sudden you go okay, hold up, don't do anything else. Make sure all the orders are in. Because nothing's worse than overselling then you don't realize it till later in the day. Then you realize the customer that you have to call up to say you can't have it can't find it someplace else. So it's very important to stay on top of that. So after I do that I will call the floor in to call me, and I'll direct them into what product to cut next. I go down check you know, make sure the scales properly set. Put a 10-pound weight on it, make sure it's not cheating the customer or giving to much fish. Spot check the product, spot check, when the fillet comes off, the skinning machine is very important because you can look at the fillet and see how it, how the skin was taken off and if its cut too deep, I'm going to get less of yield there. I'm going to lose money...

FC: You're losing product.

PM: So you want to make sure that's done. So whether we change over that machine each type of flatfish, or cod, whatever we do, different species, has to be readjusted again. So I kind of go down there. It's so easy because there's no, the noise of the skin machine is so distinctive and it's like when it stops, you know they're going to change over. So I know I'll stop what I'm doing and go down to the floor. It's like being on a boat, you're in your bunk, the engines got a steady pitch and if it goes down or revs up real fast, you wake up right away, so it's the same thing with the skin machine. You hear it stop and you go down there and supervise that. And then we get the shipping ready to go. And like had discussed before and oversee getting the trucks loaded.

FC: So has the machinery gotten more sophisticated, gotten more efficient in recent years?

PM: Not since I've been down here. Back in 1980 Tichon had fish cutting machines and a cutting bench. Those machines are still in use today. They're not new, but they still do. There's some that have computerized measuring systems on it. That's what we have here. But it hasn't really changed a lot.

FC: Is it, and I haven't watched that part of the process closely, is it, are there safety concerns, or stuff that people have to...

PM: No, I've, very seldom do I ever have a fish cutter that cut himself. You know you might have someone who maybe got, ran his toes over with a pallet jack but other than that I mean it's just very minor, we're very cautious here and everybody knows their job.

FC: And, I mean, it's interesting because you know your different responsibilities seem to go in pretty different areas and you know if you have sort of favorite way you like to spend your time, or is there one aspect of it that you'd rather be doing than another?

PM: You mean a different job here?

FC: Yeah.

PM: Yeah well, sales is always fun, cause you're always talking to the same people every day and now you have Facebook so you get to see that their family did something and you say hey, you know, that sort of stuff. Selling is probably the easiest part, the most enjoyable. Sometimes you have customers who don't pay on time so you have to call them up and that's kind of pain, in the neck you know. They want their fish right away, nice and fresh, but you know they're not paying me. So that's kind of the down side, but other than that just get through the day. Before you know it, it's already time to leave; it goes fast.

FC: So, it seems like a lot of the interactions with people is a big part of it, whether it's, you know it's, whether it's people who work here, or people on the outside. So you have to be a partly an amateur psychiatrist, too.

PM: Ah, yeah, a little bit I guess. But you know what I used to always do. I used to always find out what that person was interested in, and you know we all have another life, other than being here, so he's a golfer, if I talk to him, or if he likes riding cycles, professionally, you know. So I will always say up a little something. Every once in a while, send a box of golf balls to somebody. I always try, I've always done this for them, for all the years I've been down here. If anyone I talk to has a baby, I make sure I get a baby gift to them. Just those things like that help me bond with a customer. When I first met my wife, a customer of mine in Connecticut asked me to come to a wedding, it was a Greek, I mean not Greek, and Italian wedding. And it was kind of fun to do, I couldn't turn it down. I mean I don't really know him that well but he invited me down there. And I said, okay, yeah. So my wife who was at that time my fiancée, and I drove to Connecticut and went to this fancy Italian wedding. And so that has made that customer

always come to me. Because out of all the people he invited, I was the one that showed up, you know, so. Those little things I then help bond with the customer.

FC: Yeah that counts for a lot. I mean I'm thinking any type of work, a little bit of a personal connection and so it's not just all business. Show that you care about the person as a person. In terms of, is there any special, I mean the machinery, there's different stuff. But is there any special equipment that you use? I'm guessing that you probably depend on your phone and your computer a lot, but...

PM: What I did, I don't know what you want to call it, design… I made up a spreadsheet. So I take this, this spreadsheet has columns where I can put the type of fish I'm cutting and the price, click in over here where the yield is, if I have inventory fill it so I can enter them in and what my price was, so I can get an exact, exact price, you know, very close of where we should be. Instead of just trying to shoot from the hip and do it. And I also have a, oops, I have a looking for a (undetermined),I still have a boat average one, so if I'm buying from Gloucester, I'm buying this, I can average all the prices together to take that plug it into my other little spreadsheet.

FC: So this is on the computer, Excel or something?

PM: Yeah, yeah, I prefer to have the customers call me at the plant. I don't like to give them my cell phone, because then they call me all weekend long and at nighttime. But we use an Excel… I use a spreadsheet that I did and primarily our telephones here, the plant to call, you know, the landlines.

FC: So that spreadsheet is an important way for you to keep track of a lot of details?

PM: Yeah. Keep my costing right there.

[29:26]

FC: The, well another thing I wanted to ask you about, I know you're interested in photography and that, you know that has a connection to this industry too, so maybe if you could just talk a little bit about how you got interested in that part of it and sort of documenting this industry and the work and...

PM: Well I started on the docks in ‘75 and always carried a camera with me. A good friend of mine, that I used to go visit, there was a dentist in town, and was a friend, older gentleman, and he would let me borrow a camera. I really didn't have one at the time. And he passed away, and his wife called me up and said, I want you to come over to the house, so, show me the box she said, pick any one you want. So I saw this Nikon. I said, oh yeah, it was a Nikon F it was brand new and it was, that was my first camera and I used to carry it everywhere I went and then I slowly got some different ones and I really wasn't focusing on documenting anything in particular, the subject, just more or less taking pictures of things that I saw. But back, probably back in 2008, I was in the Whaling Museum and I'm looking at their collection of photographs and there's a photograph of a gentlemen with a tie on, little cap, he’s got overalls and he’s got a trowel in his hand with a brick. He's doing, making a tryworks on the boat. And it was just a great portrait. And I said, you know, I'd see the sailmakers, everybody's in the sail loft and they have this photograph and everybody's all dressed up and this is a great photo. And I say, you know, two things. I wondered if they dressed up because they knew the photographer was coming or that's just the way they dressed those days. And then I also said, you know, here in the fishing industry, we have the same thing going on. So I approached the Working Waterfront Festival and I talked to Laura Orleans at the time. I told her about this little project that I wanted to do and I said it's not going to cost you anything, I said I want to go document it, but I want to have someone behind that I can use as a name. So even though I'm very well-known down here, I just wanted to have that collaboration with the Waterfront Festival. So she said, sure and I went around and I started photographing from lumpers to ice house workers, to fish cutters, to the bookkeepers, the scallop bag makers, I went all to every little part of the industry, I shot it with a medium format, black and white camera, because I didn't want to do it digitally and go try to go change it around. Why do all that when you can just shoot film? So I did that and then the Whaling Museum caught wind of it and in 2009 they took all my images and did a very large presentation and then fast forward to where we are now with Archie Green thing, I just, I enjoy photography, like I said, I always carried a camera with me. I literally when I walk from one office her to another I carry it. But, it's been a fun hobby and hopefully I keep going with it.

FC: Now when you just mentioned your subjects, you mentioned people, doing different kind of work, and is it people that you're mostly drawn to?

PM: Yes. I like the portrait. I like the environmental portrait when you're showing someone doing their job and they're just tools in their hands, you know it just, I took a photo the other day for our project here and it was a gentleman caulking a boat. And I don't think many kids are going to know what a fishing boat is, you know, caulking a fishing boat, because that's unheard

of now, because that's all steel vessels. And actually, it was on the Shenandoah or the Alabama, one of the two boats from Martha's Vineyard, it was at the Fairhaven Shipyard. So this is portrait of a person with his tools in his hands banging that caulking in. It was great.

FC: So it's interesting that you maybe were inspired some by looking at historic photos and seeing these workers from the past. And why do you think it's important, do you think about, I mean you mentioned a couple of things. It seems like it has documentary value but it also artistic value, but why is it important to you?

PM: I like, I don't think of myself as an artist, I mean some photographers do. I'm just documenting someone at his job and we're losing these people. You know, I, we had our foreman here for many years got pancreatic cancer. And he went within a month and his family was so appreciative that they had these professional images of their loved one at his job that he just absolutely loved, and did and so proud of. So, that makes me feel good you now that I help a family with that sort of thing. But a lot, we need to document what's going on down here because it's slowly just disappearing, like the whaling days. And I don't think people really realize all the different facets of the job, which this project will illustrate.

FC: Well it's interesting that, you know, that you have the you had the access, you know, you've worked in this industry and you know people and all the different branches of it and that seems like a real, you know, a real contributing factor. That you do have the access and you are known ...

[35:22]

PM: Yes, and when I go into a fish plant with a camera, they know that I'm not going to show them in a bad light, not that you know whatever, because a lot plants that are very private, plus by knowing everyone here, they're more relaxed. For this project here, my work is just I'm always have the camera going, so they're like, okay, one more picture get it over with.

FC: So they're used to seeing it.

PM: Yes

FC: So I should let you go here, I guess maybe to finish up, what's the hardest part of the work, the challenges?

PM: The biggest challenge is trying to make a profit. It's, you fly by the seat of your pants. You deal with a product that has a short shelf life... Not short, but a shelf life. That's a perishable, so coordinating that getting the product in and out, trying to make a buck at it. That's the main stress.

FC: And we talked about it a little bit, but what do you like most about it, what do you enjoy most?

PM: The people. The people. From the fishermen to the people in the office where; my workers. I'm very close to my workers. I, we treat them like they're family. I told you I shot a wedding for them, one of the person, I also did a baptism, for another one, we had a Mayan festival here in the city and they all came down and stuff like that just like, I treat them as family. You know Michelle in the office, I've known her since she's been a kid and now she's a grandmother. You know, so, just family. Mark and Sonny, the guys I work for are great guys.

FC: Well is there anything you'd like to add here?

PM: No...

FC: All right, I'll let you get back to work.

[37:11] End of Audio