



# NEW BEDFORD FISHING HERITAGE CENTER

Date of Interview: March 23, 2017

## **Rivera, Jaime** ~ Oral History Interview

Madeleine Hall-Arber

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New Bedford Fishing Heritage Center  
38 Bethel Street  
P.O. Box 2052  
New Bedford, MA 02741-2052

## **Background**

**Name of person interviewed:** Jaime Rivera [JR]

**Facts about this person:**

Age: 28 years old

Sex: Male

Occupation: Nightshift supervisor

Residence: New Bedford

Ethnic background: Puerto Rican

**Interviewer:** Madeleine Hall-Arber [MH]

**Transcriber:** Sara Salem [SS]

**Interview location:** Norpel Plant, New Bedford

**Date of interview:** March 23, 2017

## **Key Words**

Norpel, pallet, packing, AFAK machine, temporary people, nightshift, grinder, women workers

## **Abstract**

Jaime Rivera was born in Puerto Rico in 1989. He came to New Bedford in 2006 and found a job at Norpel in 2007. He describes working his way up from packer to nightshift supervisor. He speaks about learning to work on new equipment, temporary and permanent workers, and that his work is not easy but he likes all of it.

## **Index**

[00:00] Intro; Jaime Rivera was born in Puerto Rico 1989. He came to New Bedford in 2006 because he had family there. He started working at Norpel in 2007 where he began by packing pallets. He learned to work on the AFAK machine, learned to speak English, and became a nightshift supervisor. He married a woman from New Bedford.

[05:00] He answers questions about his normal work day, who he works with, his hours, and when he is paid.

[10:07] He describes learning to use grinder. He has two daughters. Only one woman from Maine works temporarily at the plant. His wife works, but not in the fishing industry. He would advise someone else to work in the industry. He wants to go the Fishing Heritage Museum this summer.

[15:00] His job is not easy, but he likes all parts of it. He's not sure what he will be doing 15 years from now, but he would like to drive trucks. He drives forks lifts and has a permit to drive a truck.

[18:35] End of Audio

[00:00]

Madeline Hall-Arber: So today is March 23, 2017 and 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 the transcript will become part of the permanent collection at the Library of Congress. I'm Madeleine Hall-Arber and today I am speaking with Jaime Riviera.

Jaime Rivera: Rivera.

MH: Yes, okay. Good. And the time is almost 1:00. So, can you introduce yourself and tell me what your job is?

JR: Supervisor employees on nightshift.

MH: And what's the company's name?

JR: Norpel.

MH: And when and where were you born?

JR: Puerto Rico.

MH: Oh, okay.

JR: Then I was [undecipherable] in Puerto Rico.

MH: And when was that? What year?

JR: January 19, 1989.

MH: And did you grow up mostly in Puerto Rico?

JR: Yes. I come here in 2006.

MH: Okay. And what made you decide to come here to New Bedford?

JR: In December 2006.

MH: No, but why did you come here?

JR: Oh, I have family here, that's why.

MH: All right, is anybody in your family in the fishing industry?

JR: No.

MH: So how did you end up at Norpel?

JR: I applied and start working at Norpel in 2007.

MH: And what was your first job?

JR: Packing down there on the pallet. Bringing the pallet.

MH: And so how did you, what other jobs did you do while you were here, since 2006?

JR: On the AFAK machine packing, now I do everything. I know about everything.

MH: So, you started with packing but then what was the second thing?

JR: On the AFAK machine. This packing the product in boxes.

MH: Okay, and then after that?

JR: After that...

MH: Because you do everything now.

JR: Yeah.

MH: How did you learn everything?

JR: A little bit here, over there so. This way I learn everything.

MH: Watching mostly?

JR: Yeah, watching mostly.

MH: So you learned on the job?

JR: Yeah.

MH: Did anybody teach you?

JR: On the AFAK machine, yeah. One guy teach me. So...

MH: And you liked it?

JR: Yeah.

MH: So that's why you're still here?

JR: That's right. I'm still here.

MH: Let's see. What brought your family to New Bedford?

JR: That's a good question. I don't know. So, my cousin living here, so he told me about coming here and he give a hand. So this why I come here in New Bedford. So I come here, my father come here, my mother. The family come here so...

MH: So was your first job in New Bedford, here?

JR: Here, at Norpel.

MH: Good. And how did you learn to speak English so well?

JR: Over here. I try to speak with the people.

MH: That's great.

JR: Yeah. Well the first time here I not speaking English. Nothing.

MH: Really?

JR: Nothing, nothing, nothing.

MH: You do very well.

JR: Yeah. That my wife told me.

MH: Good. So you're - you met your wife here?

JR: Yeah.

MH: Okay. And is she from New Bedford?

JR: Yeah. From New Bedford.

[5:00]

MH: So what is your typical workday? What do you do when you first come in?

JR: Drink coffee.

MH: Okay!

JR: Every time. Tell to the guys whatever need to do.

MH: So I understand that a lot of the workers are people who have been working here for a while, right? But sometimes you get temporary people come in, is that difficult? Do you have to teach the people that come in from the agencies?

JR: Yeah, teach the people. Tell whatever need to do and that's it. It's normal for all the places here. Mostly I have people already know. I tell the guy, explain to the guy. Sometimes [indistinguishable] down there. Sometimes the guy give me hand.

MH: So what's the hardest part of your job?

JR: When some people not come. Like the [indistinguishable] guy or the drive forklift, need to do it. Little hard for me.



MH: Yeah. How about - what do you like best about your job?

JR: The best, when the boat come with fish, everything.

MH: Because it's busy?

JR: Busy, yeah.

MH: What's - normally you work what hours? When do you start work and when do you end usually, most days?

JR: The most days 7:00 or 6:00. No have time to leave. Whatever time done the job.

MH: Say that again?

JR: Whatever time done the job.

MH: Okay. And then when it's the busiest - when the boats come in and you're very busy, do the hours change?

JR: Yeah. Nightshift 6:00 to 6:00. 6:00 PM to 6:00 AM.

MH: And is that when the temporary people have to come in?

JR: Yeah.

MH: Yeah, that's what I figured. So, what would you say is the best job at the factory, at Norpel?

JR: I don't know. I like everything, so I don't complain about nothing.

MH: How about other people, do other people complain very much?

JR: Sometimes.

MH: But the people that work here regularly, they seem like - it seems like there's a group of people.

JR: Yeah, like working every day, they're permanent people.

MH: So how often do you get paid, is it every week? Every month?

JR: Every week.

MH: And do you, are there, is there anything special that you have to do like certain tools or certain clothes, or whatever. Is there anything that somebody off the street would not know about? That you have to do or you...

JR: No.

MH: Have you noticed any changes since you started working here? Either in the plant or in the industry as a whole? Has anything changed that you've seen?

[10:07]

JR: The change...

MH: I know that they started grinding. Because that's new, right?

JR: That's new. That is changed. Something new. They grind.

MH: So how did you learn what to do with that? Did - I know that they bought grinders.

JR: Yeah.

MH: But I wouldn't know what to do a grinder. So did they have somebody come in?

JR: Eoin teach me on the grinder.

MH: So when people are in the plant, are they mostly speaking Spanish?

JR: Yeah.

MH: When you have children, do you want them to work here?

JR: I have two girls. Maybe.

MH: I know that there's at least one woman here, Jacki. Jacqueline.

JR: Yeah. Jacqueline.

MH: Are there many other women who work in the plant?

JR: She work on the plant - for now, no. The boat come, the temporary people yes, sometime. Pick the fish. Picking. From [indistinguishable] woman.

MH: And does that ever create a problem?

JR: No.

MH: Okay. Does your wife work?

JR: Yeah.

MH: Does she work in the fishing industry?

JR: No.

MH: So, if somebody was arriving in New Bedford what would your advice be to them? Should they look for a job in the fishing industry or would you advise them to do something else?

JR: Yeah, I advise to the fishing. A lot of people not like it, but.

MH: And why do people not like it?

JR: The smell of fish. Like my cousin. Tried.

MH: Didn't like it?

JR: Other friends, yeah, like it.

MH: So do you live in New Bedford?

JR: Yeah.

MH: And that's comfortable?

JR: Yeah, I like it.

MH: So have you ever been to the Heritage Museum, the Fishing Heritage Museum? It's a new museum. It's very near the Whaling Museum. It's small, but it talks all about the fishing industry including shore side positions, including processing and so on. You and your wife should come by sometime and visit it. Because it's free right now. So it would be a good time.

JR: Yeah, my wife told me, we'll go there with my daughter for some time I have a chance. I'll try to go this summer.

MH: It's only open Thursday, Friday, Saturday, and Sunday.

JR: Yeah

MH: The reason I was - part of the reason I was asking that is - one of the reasons we're doing this project is to develop an exhibit so that we can show what it's like to work in the fishing industry here in New Bedford. So is there anything that I haven't asked you that you think I should have or anything you think would be important to tell people who are coming to the museum about your kind of work?

[15:00]

It's not a test. I'm just asking. I'm just curious about whether... what would you like people to know about the kind of work you do or how hard you work or how easy it is, whatever.

JR: Nothing is easy.

MH: What do you like best about working?

JR: The best we...

MH: Just everything? You mentioned before you liked doing everything.

JR: Yeah, everything.

MH: And you like staying busy?

JR: Yeah.

MH: So maybe somebody who is like you that likes to stay busy, should think about the fishing industry.

JR: Yes.

MH: Because it changes a lot, right?

JR: Yeah, does different things all the time.

MH: What would you, in say 15 years from now, you're not getting old yet but you're older, what would you like to see yourself doing?

JR: I don't know yet.

MH: Well, you're young.

JR: I am young.

MH: It's hard to know the future, but it's fun to think about sometimes, to see.

JR: Yeah, I know.

MH: I mean is there anything here in the plant that you would like eventually to do that you don't do yet?

JR: Like drive trucks. Something I like. We'll see in the future.

MH: What was that?

JR: We'll see in the future.

MH: Yes, yes.

JR: I don't know yet.

MH: Do you know how to drive a fork lift? Right?

JR: Yeah. I drive fork lift and drive the truck to 23,000 pounds.

MH: Oh.

JR: Yeah. I drive the regular truck.

MH: Did you have to get a special license for that?

JR: No, only the permit.

MH: Okay.

JR: The legal permit.

MH: I know that sometimes there are special programs for people to get more permits, you know, to get additional permits.

JR: Yeah. I don't know yet about that.

MH: Whatever they need, maybe they'll train you.

JR: I'm good.

MH: Good. Well, I can't think of anything else. If you think of anything that I should know, you can tell me. Well, thank you very much.

JR: You're welcome.

MH: Good luck. It's not so difficult, huh?

[18:35] End of audio