

Participant: Mr. Gene Law
Researcher: Ms. Deanna Caracciolo
Location: Toledo, OR
Date: 6/13/16

DC: So I'm going to go through some of the info things to make sure I have it on recording. So if you could quickly state your name for the recording

GL: Eugene Law

DC: Fantastic. Thanks for meeting with me today. I know our super busy. If not, I want you to be able to relax today. I look forward to learning from you. Your one of my first participants in this so forgive me if it's a little rocky

GL: Okay [chuckles]

DC: We already went through the first 2 goals, and we can get started. So to open up I want to make sure we have a pretty open way of doing this. Do you have anything to say, or how you got into the fishing industry? And good stories about being in the fishing industry...anything like that?

GL: Well the way I got started was, I was still in high school and a good friend of mine, his father used to fly for Pan-American Airlines and he had a little 26 foot Monterey double ender that he used to go fishing on between his flights over seas and what have you. But it got really windy, and it broke its mooring and went on the rocks and sunk. And so he told his son, he says, you know what he was a nice cool dude. He says you want a boat? There it is. And you know, it was sunk so I helped him when we got it. And we got a float and again and got the engine fixed up and we putted around with that until we got out of high school, and there you go. And after I graduated high school I bought a smaller boat. A 30 footer. A big 30 footer [chuckles]. It was so rotten but at least it was mine.

DC: How did you get it up?

GL: Well at low tide you go down and you patch the holes and pump out what's inside, then once it floats again you drag it off the beach.

DC: Sounds exhausting

Both: [chuckle]

GL: I was young then. Had a lot of energy then. I think now wed just let it go.

DC: So what fisheries have you been involved in?

GL: Oh boy...Dungeness crabs is my primary fishery now, but I also fished tuna, shrimp, box crabs, sardines, herring

DC: So what fishery would you say is your favorite? and your least favorite?

GL: Oh I love to fish sardines, that's my favorite. It's a lot of fun. The one I don't like...let me think...oh I fished a lot of salmon. That's actually how I got stated was salmon fishing. But least favorite...I don't think I have a least favorite. They are all different and interesting.

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DC: Good! That's a good thing. [chuckles] Have you seen any changes in fishing since you got started?

GL: Are you kidding me? [chuckles]

DC: I would love to hear them all

GL: Yeah...fishing when I first got started there was no limited entry. There was no restrictions. If you wanted to go fish for salmon, you bought a salmon permit. You wanted to crab, you went and bought a ground license. It was just that simple. You just went fishing. And now in days, you can't go fishing unless you have the proper permit, the proper documentations, a VMS, which is an ankle bracelet like what the prisoners uses that tells the government where you are, how fast you're going, what you're doing, and it's...it's just not America anymore [chuckles] So if you asked me if it was going to be like this when I first started fishing I would laugh and say it couldn't be. You would have to be someone/thing special or something but it is just way different. We used to travel from the Mexican border to the Canadian border fishing and it was not problem cause if you wanted to do something different, you just went and did it. Well now you can't do that so we are pretty much stuck. Well we still fish from the California boarder to the c\Canadian border. You know I don't go tuna fishing anymore. During the early 80's we went tuna fishing and it was right after Mt. Saint Helens erupted, and so I had my wife record a whole bunch of radio stuff so that I would have something to listen to cause your so off shore you don't get any station. And I heard Mount Saint Helens erupt of 45 days straight, everyday [chuckles]. I got so sick of hearing that, but that was back then.

DC: Why would you say that you stopped tuna fishing?

GL: When shrimp fishing and made more money shripping than tuna fishing. And you know fishermen are opportunistic. You make more money doing something, thats what you do. So we have a tendancy to do that. I can remember when I firststarted fishing, it was salmon fishing. Thats where I got my first real start from. And then after a while there wasnt...I was making more money fishing crabs and shrimp, so thats what we did for quite a few years. Crabbing and shrimping, and I didn't even go fishing salmon. I still have a salmon permit but I dont...I havnt use it in years. But I just hang onto it for momento. It's still worth something that I just...I dont have time to use it. I'm busy doing other stuff.

DC: So would you say the money was your main motivation for starting fishing?...

GL: Not when I first started. I was just out of high school [chuckles] and it was just a lot of fun and it was exciting cause you used to travel everywhere. And I got to know people up and down the coast. Stop at every port and you know, after a few years you know a lot of people. It was just a lot of fun. Every summer we would go up the coast and end up in Newport. Thats how I ended up here, cause I grew up in Half Moon Bay, California, which is down south of San Fansisco. And thats where we would start there and then work up this way. And the crabbing is really good here, and so the late 70's I mooved here in 1980, into Newport, Oregon. So it's...Ive been here ever since.

DC: How would you say that your family has played a role in fishing?

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GL: Well my wife is very involved. When I first met her I had a boat in Half Moon Bay and I was putting a new cabin on it, and she would bring me doughnuts everyday and I think that's how she won me over. So she bought me off with doughnuts. I'm easy I guess [chuckles] And we built another boat, we built the Miss Law in '78, and she helped me build that. I dropped a chunk of steel on her toe and broke her toe. So she was involved [chuckles] And we had a couple small kids then too, so she was always into that and you know, did her part in raising the family.

DC: So what about your kids?

GL: Well let's see...Matthew my oldest son...he's got a PhD in chemical engineering...he don't like boats [smiles]. And my youngest boy, he runs the Lady Law which is an 83 footer. And he has done very well for himself. He's a good fisherman. He spent a lot of time in Alaska fishing king crab up there. My daughters are...I have one that's...she wanted to be an English teacher and she's still working on that and she has a little girl, 15. And then we have my other daughter, Brandy, she just turned 16 and she's just in school, she's still learning [chuckles]. And she earns her school money. She paints the crap pot buoys every summer so that she will have money to buy cloths for the start of cloths.

DC: Does she have any interest in fishing?

GL: Ehh...she likes to eat halibut [chuckles] and crabs, she likes crabs [chuckles]

DC: So on a broader aspect, where do you currently see the industry going?

GL: Well...you know; the fishermen are...they're not out to rob and pillage the ocean. They want to see a fish so they can catch one tomorrow, and their kids can catch one tomorrow. Unlike some of the...I call them greenies, everybody calls them greenies, think that they are going to rob and rape the ocean, and it's not that way at all, really. 99.9% of the fishermen want to see a sustainable fishery. They all work in that direction, but with this...the way that NMFS says it is it's the "best science". Well it's not really best science in my opinion. That's my opinion. Some of the stuff that they do...allocations that they put out are not due to best science. They're...I think they are serving a different purpose, but that's my opinion. I see it just becoming more and more difficult. As I got older, I spent more of my time dealing with governmental issues, permits, and restrictions, and closed areas, and all that kind of stuff. You know, you've got the wave energy, the wind energy, you've got all this stuff trying to take up a portion of the ocean, and all the closed areas, the marine reserves, none of that was ever there while I was growing up. So everybody wants a piece of the action, you know? And so were scrambling for that, and the fishermen are not united and you can't ever get two fishermen to agree on any one thing. I don't care what it is. The sky is blue...well no it aint [chuckles] So that's been our problem and when it comes to dealing with the government, we don't have any true...we have associations but mostly you do pricer while there's a crisis going on...demoic acid or who knows what. When there's a crisis going on than they kinda get together. But other than that, every bodies out fishing, so they aren't representing themselves. Where...as the government, they work on it. And the greenies, they work on it. And they just chip away a little bit. Every day they chip away one more thing, and thing, and one more thing, and one more thing. Until pretty soon you've got no more fishing rights, per-se. There's just so many issues. The tribal issues is on the agenda too as well, and so it's very difficult in this day and age. It's a lot harder to make a living for smaller boats, because of the...the smaller boats like the small drag boats, everybody has to have mandatory observers. Well you gotta pay for those observers. Now a smaller

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boat that goes out and catches a few fish...you can't pay for those observers because it's a daily fee, and it's really expensive. And so sometimes you don't even make enough to pay the observer. So what they end up doing, is those small boats end up selling out to bigger boats, or actually corporations, big corporations. That's how cooperation's are building big stocks of quota. And that's the only way they survive. They get bigger boats, you put the quota on the bigger boats so it can catch a lot of fish and afford to pay the observer. And the government has done all that. They are driving the small independence...they are out. And they've got the rationalization, which is...that's so that you have so much of the quota. Each individual has so much of the quota. And you can lease that out or you can sell it. And for the smaller ones, it just makes more sense to just sell it. You know, they just can't afford to stay in business. They make more money by selling or leasing it out than they would trying to catch it themselves.

DC: Yeah, I'm from NY and my dad was a lobster fisherman, so this is all very new to me. Thank you for teaching me about this. So what did you mean by a greenie? What exactly is a greenie?

GL: That would be Oceana, Green Peace, The Audubon Society

DC: So environmentalists?

GL: Yep, Environmentalists. Cause everybody is worried about the birds and the sea lions and the puffed puffins, and everything. And that's fine, but moderation is good too. A lot of those organizations...they don't tell the truth, or they tell partial truths, to where it deceives the public. And they have a seemingly unlimited amount of money to do this. They pay people on salary to work on this. To where we should do it for nothing. We just have to do it to kinda. All we...We don't really change, we just kind guide things a little bit. It's very difficult in the council process.

DC: So, on the other side, where would you like to see the fisheries go?

GL: Oh boy...I'd like to see a lot less regulations. It just...I'd like to see better science. We need better science and we need to make the scientists accountable for what they are doing and what they are saying. Right now they can just say whatever they want to say, and oh my god the sky is falling. Well, it's not true. Anybody that spends their life on the ocean, they can see that the ocean is absolutely alive and vibrant. And there's just so much bait fish, there's so many birds, we are over run with sea lions, and yet everybody's...they are crying that the sea lions are dying. Well, that's because they are over populated. Could that possibly be? I don't know. But it would be one of my opinions.

DC: So overall, deregulation...?

GL: That. Yes.

DC: That seems to be the consensus of what I have heard from other people. Back to your family. With your children, you said you have 5 kids, correct?

GL: ...[pause]...four

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DC: four kids, and one of them went into fishing on the Lady Law. Did you encourage any of your children or discourage them to go into the industry?

GL: Well...when the boys were young, the youngest boy, he never got sea sick a day in his life. Well the oldest boy, he got sicker than a dog a lot of the time. So that was incentive to where he didn't really wanna go. And that's okay. He was a pretty smart kid

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GL: My oldest boy, he went to college and he went to college for a long time until he was 32. But he did get...he got a PhD in chemical engineering. I'm happy for him. More power to him. He didn't like fishing at all and that was okay. But my youngest son...couldn't keep him out of the...wanted to go fishing all the time. So when he was young I told him that he needed to go to work for somebody else first. To see what the real life is before...you can't be...I'm not just going to give you a job so other will say guys made it so easy for you. You needed to go out there and get your feet wet. So he went dragging and went to Alaska. He spent quite a few years fishing king crab in Alaska and did really got at it. Really liked it. So when he came back he bought a house here in Toledo, but then he wanted to ...he wanted to get into fishing more so I said...my wife and I would take care of him, and he sold his house, and we ended up buying another boat. And now that's pretty much his boat. But the corporation, he's the major shareholder. And that's good. That's way I don't have to worry about it anymore [chuckles]

DC: So what benefits did you see him going into the industry for. As your son, did he have any specific costs or benefits coming from a family that fished?

GL: Absolutely. If he was just somebody off the street and wanted to go fishing...say and he had the money to go buy the boat, how's he going to buy the permits? The permits are worth as much as the boat is. Sometimes more. Sometimes way more. And so how would a young person be able to start? It would be impossible. It wouldn't be like when I was young and I bought a little boat and went salmon fishing, and then I bought a bigger boat, and on, and on. Well now, the salmon fishing is pretty much in the toilet because they took all the hatcheries out and the scientists say they want natural fish, but I don't think there is a natural fish left. They had all those... The hatcheries were the greatest thing. They had the ocean just alive and they had lots of fish and lots of kings and silvers, and the salmon fishing did well. Well when they took the hatcheries away everything just...it just killed the industry. It killed...there was no fish to catch. How would a young guy start now? He would have to win the lottery so he could buy a boat, do something because in order to survive...the expenses are so much to get in. It's not like going out and buying a car. Now we go to the fuel dock and it costs you an SUV every time you go to the dock to get fuel. So it's not...if he was on his own he would have never been able to start. Since we bought the boat together, and I had a bunch of permits so I shared, and got him going. It worked out that the boat now has enough permits, but it wouldn't have been...by himself he couldn't have done. I don't know what else...I don't know how else a person would get started anymore if you didn't have family. And that's what your finding in this neighborhood. There's families that the sons are carrying on the traditions of the fathers. There's several of them right here in the Newport area that are like that. But then you don't see any fresh blood coming in. Any younger guys that will have a chance to own a boat maybe, very few of them if there are any. I can think of 1 or 2, and that's about all I can...and their running boats for other people. They're making really good money doing it. But they have to save enough to buy a boat, buy a permit, and if a young person...if they want to have a family, it costs a to

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run a family too. It's not...it's not an easy thing to do. That's all part of that graying of the fleet there. There's all the guys in my generation now are retiring and they have other people run their boats for them. The Miss Law, I have a guy running that for me right now. Cause I lifted that anchor for 50 years, I know what the anchor looks like. And I'm not going back on the ocean again. I'm done. My coordination isn't going to benefit. It hurts now [chuckles].

DC: So with these barriers, what attracts young people to the business these days?

GL: Well it used to be independence. You do what you wanna do. And the traveling around and that...you could make as much money as you wanted, as hard as you wanted to work. And that was basically the attraction to get in. And then...now it's a little different program. You now it's hard to put into today's dollars, what was then...I think the guess are probably better off, the deck hands are probably better off now than they were back then. I think they are actually making more money, but there's no benefits, no medical benefits. When I first started fishing we used to have the marine hospital which was the same thing as the...the people on the commercial ships that have tankers. They have a marine hospital that takes...and that was all...and then President Reagan took all that away.

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GL: The benefits...yeah they...I guess that they don't have any medical benefits or any kind of savings plan. They don't even have...they don't withhold any taxes, so they have to save...they have to be smart enough to save enough money to pay their taxes because a lot of them get in tax trouble because they spend the money and they don't save enough to pay their taxes at tax time. So then they all...a lot of them become tax delinquent. So that creates a problem there to. So there you go.

DC: What would you say the average age of fishermen is now?

GL: The fishermen or the owner?

DC: Lets go with both.

GL: The owners is probably 65 I would say, an average. And the fishermen, the people that are running the boats are probably in their 50's, and the crew is in their 20's and 30's

DC: Has that changed through time?

GL: Well yeah, most people...it used to be they were owner-operators. We were all younger then too. And there wasn't the old timers that were around, but the...what's really changed is the size of the boats. When I first started fishing salmon trawlers were a 40-foot class boat, then along comes the 60 and 70 foot class boat in the 70's and 80's and now it's going to bigger and better and wider. They are growing wider. So the boats are changing because they're more stable, they have to be. And those boats are getting old, those wooden boats. They don't make wooden boats anymore, or very, very, very few of them. And their all are steel, and steel is easy to make. You can make it 40-foot-long, but you can make it 30 foot wide too. That's what a lot of them are doing cause they got regulations again. They say you can only be so long, so they will make them wider instead of longer and it will increase the capacity of the vessel. And just playing the game; the government forces you to do that. Like when we

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bought this...the Lady Law in Texas it was 105-foot-long, but we only had permits to 83 foot. So we took it to the ship yard and cut 17feet off of it so it would fit the permits. A perfectly good boat, you take it and you cut it up. We did that to make the permits fit. So...

DC: Is there any way to extend your permit? Is there any way you could have gotten 17 extra feet on your permit?

GL: Most permits - no. Like the...if we wanted to fish squid with that boat, those permits are by capacity. They're water line length versus the depth, all that which is the carrying capacity. And so that bat carries 120 tons, so we would have to buy a permit that was capable of 120 tons. Well there's very, very few of those around. Very few, so I would have to buy either 2 60's or a 50 and a 70 and those permits are like gold. It would cost 4 million bucks, or maybe a little more, to buy those permits to fit that boat. Squid permits are very expensive so it usually gives you a good idea of what...you know a young guy starting out, I don't think so [chuckles]

DC: So it sounds like you are noticing this graying. With this aging, how do you see it impacting Newport as a place, as a community?

GL: Well it ends up with bigger boats, and a lot more corporation's boats. And so instead of being independent, it will be more cooperation oriented. To where...as far as...setting the price, but you have to be really careful there because you have the RECO laws and the Anti-Trust laws. Since fishermen are individual businessmen's you can't...unless you are in an association you can't get together as a group and set prices because that's price fixing; that's a RECO. And they will throw you in jail for that. I know a guy who has had some severe fines here a few years back in the crab industry because of things like that. It's not easy. It's a fine line you gotta walk of who you can talk to and what you can say.

DC: So what about the fishing community specifically? How do you think this graying is going to impact the continuation of fishing in Newport?

GL: Well, they've got the Newport Fishermen's Wives that's really the strongest fishermen's organization around. They do a lot of lobbying; they lobbied for the helicopter. If your here in Newport, we are thankful that we still have the helicopter around here and it because of the efforts they've done. They do a lot for the families of the...they have funds for injured fishermen or fishermen lost at sea that help the families out in a time of need. Just last year there was 5fishermen died in Oregon during the winter. So it's not an easy thing and they do some lobbying...I'm not sure exactly what they can do, but they can lobby legally. Fishermen's organizations can lobby legally; you have to lobby individually. But that goes back to one person lobbying verses a group lobbying is a lot different.

DC: So what would it be like if your business in particular was sold. What would it be like for your family?

GL: Well, I guess...my wife is getting ready to retire. I've been...I haven't been fishing for quite a few years now so I have plenty of stuff to do to keep the boats running and to deal with the governmental issues. Permits and regulations and stuff like that that you have to deal with. I don't know...I wouldn't know what to do cause I've done this all my life. So it...I think...we talked about buying a place in Arizona, some place where it's warm and sunny.

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DC: Last question for you...do you see a potential for a tipping point once this graying gets to a certain level into the community?

GL: Well, I think it depends on what the government does. The pendulum has swung so far one way, it's gotta turn and come back. We need some deregulation to where we don't have all this stuff. I'm just trying to figure a way to put it. It's a hindrance to the industry. It's basically a coke hold where if they keep doing it, they are going to have to import anything they want to eat. And how...does that make any sense? Regulate what you have here and then import it. It just doesn't make any sense, but that's what...if the environmentalists had it their way, that's what they would do. And it just...it's frustrating at times to have to go through this and this 'best science' stuff. This 'best science' drives me nuts [chuckles]. The way they do their allocations or estimate the allocations is a lot of smoke and mirrors and guessing by golly. Where they done...they don't really know so they're...well you know, they air on the side of safety but there is a limit and there should be a limit.

DC: So that was my last question, the only other thing that I wanted to ask was - is there anything else that you think I should know? About fishing, and fishing families, and potential graying? Anything that I missed in the questions?

GL: Well I think...the whole thing started going south back in the days where we had the offshore fleet where the Russians were here. They were fishing whiting off shore. So then everybody was up in arms and they wanted a 200-mile limit to drive them out of our water. Well they had already been here for a lot of years and they had taken a lot of fish out, so okay. That worked, we got out 200-mile limit. And then the Magnusson Act was passed and that's where...that's what brought all this upon us. So I think we end up...you gotta be careful what you ask for. Because we got it and we got way more than we ever wanted. It just made things difficult for everybody after that. But it has done some good things, but I think it's done more damage to the industry than good.

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