

Name of person interviewed: Paul Swain [PS], Jim Dwyer [JD] [Part I of a two part interview]

Facts about this person:

Age

Sex Male's

Occupation [PS] Retired auctioneer, Lumper, government worker, general work on waterfront.

[JD] Lumper, head of Lumper's Union

If a fisherman,

Home port,
and Hail Port

Residence (Town where lives) New Bedford, MA

Ethnic background (if known) Unknown

Interviewer: Janice Fleuriel [JF]

Transcriber: Azure Dee Westwood [ADW]

Place interview took place: Working Waterfront Festival [WWF]

Date and time of interview: Sept. 25, 2004

INDEX/KEYWORDS

KEYWORDS

Lumpers; Auction; Union; Newfoundland; characters at auction; icing boats; 24/ 7 work lumping; less people lumping; changed auction structure; nicknames.

INDEX

- [00:00] Introductions, background of each interviewee.
- [03:13] JD involvement in lumping; family history there; how it's changed over the years.
- [06:05] JD less people coming into lumping; his current family; regulations changing lumping for the worse.
- [08:55] PS involvement in all things on the waterfront; his father's involvement in the Union; process for icing boats; hard work of scalloping.
- [12:35] PS government work description; collecting interviews from fishermen; current auction is different and all computerized/automated.
- [14:54] More auction details; who the "top dogs" were in the past; how unloading and auction schedule worked.
- [18:06] Race to get berth space after auction to unload fish; lumpers hand signals; description of Mr. Bower, one of the highliners back in the day and difficulty unloading his boat.
- [21:27] What lumpers wear; evolution out of hard hats to engineer caps; difficult, 24/7 nature of lumping work and toll on family and free time. Been able to manage lumping contracts with all boats despite very reduced manpower.
- [24:24] JD allowed some flexibility in his schedule due to leadership role and "paid his dues"; loss of a culture; boat buy-back affected lumpers; no longer Sunday's off.
- [27:33] Round-the clock nature of the working waterfront now a days; advanced technology on boats; marine radio discussion and story; nicknames introduction [to be continued in part II]
- [30:35] [End of Audio]

TRANSCRIPT

[Start of Audio]

[00:00]

[JF]: OK, we are starting a new series of interviews. Why don't I have each of you introduce yourselves and say what you do and then we'll start asking questions.

[PS]: Alright. My name is Paul Swain and I've been with the National Marine Fisheries Service for 40 years, and recently retired 10 years ago. If you name a job on the waterfront, I did it. Whether it was right or wrong; I did it. Painting, lumping, icing, and also working for the Federal government. And I've been associated with the fishing industry since I was born. My father was a fisherman and he came from Newfoundland.

[JF]: Ah, well you know I used to live in Newfoundland.

[PS]: Did you; where about?

[JF]: St. John's.

[PS]: St. John's. Well my mother came from a little town just north of there, Torbay and my father came from Calbot, which was about 15 miles south. It used to be called... it had a nickname; I'm trying to think of it... the smelts came in there... I can't think of it, isn't that terrible. But anyhow...

[JF]: I have a book about Calbot.

[PS]: Well, there's a lot of Swain's in Calbot. Because that's where my father was born. In fact I went there about 15 years ago and sat down and ate in the same house my father lived in.

[JF]: We have to talk afterwards because I actually am doing another project on Newfoundlanders. Well, that's where I went to graduate school to become a folklorist. Quiddy Viddy [?] and all that stuff. Alright, I'll let you go on to Jimmy.

[JD]: My name is Jim Dwyer. I started in 1960 as a fish lumper. I've been lumping boats from the year of 1960, going 44 years of services as a fish lumper. Also served as the Agent for the last 18 years, Secretary, Treasurer and Business Agent of the Fish Lumpers Union, Local 1749 ILA.

[JF]: Now, tell the tape please, what is a lumper?

[JD]: A lumper is actually... he's a laborer. He is the person that when the boat comes in, they have a catch with a product, we man the boats; we offload the fish and the job's hydraulic winches; they guide the baskets, they dump the baskets. We have, depending on the poundage, a number of men down in the fish hold and usually this stage of the game, it usually takes between 6-8 hrs to offload an individual vessel.

[JF]: And did you grow up in New Bedford?

[JD]: All my life. Always lived in New Bedford.

[JF]: And your family; do you come from a lumping family?

[JD]: Actually, I had an uncle, he was a shore captain back in the late 40's. His name was Walter Dwyer and he was a shore captain. He was a single man, he was a bachelor and he lived in a household and he did a lot of the engine work; he used to go up to Maine, bring the boats down; John G. Marley [?], he worked for the Marley's [?]

[03:13]

[JD]: And then he had an injury and during that time, it got into his bones. Come to find out he had cancer; he died at the age of 47 years of age. But just before the time my uncle had

passed away, my father was working at this Eason [?] Electric Factory, making cigarette machines, and he got my father involved. My father, prior to the industrial plant job, he worked for the Nantucket Steamship Authority. And he got involved with the lumping business and that's how I started. He actually wanted to know if I wanted to come down and make a day's pay, working, offloading a boat and I've been here ever since.

[JF]: Tell me, let's stick with lumping for a bit – there are some questions here that I'm supposed to ask you. What was your first job as a lumper?

[JD]: My first job I worked for the Acushnet Process. I used to work there; I had swing shifts. I used to work there nights, do my lumping on a Saturday or if I was there like 10-6 then I would make it to the auction down here; the auction didn't start until 8. So it worked out quite well. I did that for about 2 ½ - 3 years. And then I decided it was going to be a full-time job; I was going to really try and get into it full time. And this is where I'm at.

[JF]: How would you say the work has changed over the years?

[JD]: I can recall in the 60's, we had no regulations there in those days and there was plenty of fish in the 60's and 70's. 100,000 pounds was nothing; 120,000. But then we had the regulations come over the years, and everything being regulated and the buy-back program, the poundage started to shrink and of course man power started to shrink; no one wanted to stay in. It's hard to get new blood into the business; same as fishing. Right now, we are 24/7, round the clock, on the waterfront offloading boats. People say you're like a fireman. No, I'm not like a fireman. A fireman has a shift; I don't have a shift. I'm out with the family in the evening, having supper and they get advanced notice where they call 6-7 hrs. Some cases, I have 10 percent. They will call and say they are right here, ready to go. Everyone has a cell phone, pagers; we're all hooked up. I have to call the individual; I have to wait for the phone calls. It's no life right now; it's a hard life; we're on call 24/7. People will compare it to the fire department; like I say, we don't have a shift, 2 days on, 2 days off – we are around the clock. And there is no new blood coming into this business.

[06:05]

[JF]: So what's going to happen?

[JD]: Well, eventually you will get people into it. They have to try it, whether or not they are going to be cut out for it is another ball park. But we have to; all the time, I'm taking new guys in. We don't have a training program. I am part of the trainer. I train these guys top-side I can teach them within 15 minutes, but down below deck, there's a little more knowledge there so you don't tear the fish and rip the product and all that. That's where the work is at; it's hard physical work, it's like going to a gym but you get paid well.

[JF]: How do you feel about the regulations?

[JD]: I think back in 1994 I think we're all at a panic during that time, including myself. But I have seen that in most cases that we were overfishing; we are all going to capitalize during that time, there's no question. When you're in business, you have to capitalize, that someone had to step in and it did come to a point where it seems to be working for all of us. As long as they don't continue cutting our days.... Because cutting our days, it's shore side people, it's the ice people, it's lumpers, it's fish cutters; everything is being regulated and as soon as you cut the days, you will not get people to stay in this business. If they leave the days alone, we'll all continue to make a decent living.

[JD]: Do you have children?

[JD]: Yes I do.

[JF]: And do you think they are going to come into it?

[JD]: Actually it's in the blood, it's a tradition. My son works for Marley's Seafood; he's been over at John Lee's Marley's Seafood for the last eight years and he is into the business, yes. My daughter is not into it, but she knows what it's all about.

[JF]: Let's talk about - Paul, let's talk about some of the things you've done. Give us a little bit....

[PS]: My father was a fisherman so I was down on the waterfront in the early '50's. Then my father suffered a heart attack and he went to work for the fishermen's union and that's how I got involved that time, when my father got sick, I would fill in for him during the auction. And nobody knows what that auction is like until you've been up there on that board and take these prices and never have a chance to look at the person, you just listen and know by voice. And if you screw up, they let you know about it. So I did that in between, while working for the government. Of course that was a conflict of interest, but I still did it and I ended up putting in 40 years with the Federal government, right here in New Bedford and the area.

[08:55]

[JF]: And were you born in New Bedford?

[PS]: Yes, I was born and raised. I tried fishing. In fact my brother and I got out of the Service the same day, we went in together, and he went that way and I went that way. He put in his 40 years and luckily he's got all his body parts with him still to this day - he's retired too. I've been through it all - you name it: icing. I ice the boats when they had 300 pound blocks and you had an old coal shoot that you had to put aboard the boat. And a lot of people don't remember that; now they have blowers that will go blow the ice three boats out. But back in the old days, you had a coal shoot. One time I went down to shoot myself because they crushed the ice over at the House and they bring it over in the truck and you pour it out. And the other time.... They advanced after that, they have the grinders.

[JF]: Well Louis was talking about some of the icing, he said about 15 tons in 15 minutes? That's phenomenal to me.

[PS]: You take a scalloper, he'll take 35-40 ton of ice per trip at \$45 per ton and that's quite a bit of ice - that's Jimmy's job to put that ice aboard. And then luckily they have dockside facilities now and its pre-crushed. Back in the old days, there used to be deliveries; you'd take a truck and go somewhere. You'd have about 8 ton aboard a truck and then trim it down, [couldn't decipher] 300 pound blocks to lift with those old tongs there, it was really something.

[JF]: Now you're Union work. What kinds of things were you doing with the Union?

[PS]: Well, my father was a Union, the Fishermen's Union, which I think, up until my father broke away from the Union because it was out of Boston called the Atlantic Fishermen's Union, and then they decided they weren't getting the good benefits so my father and Mr. Patent went to New York and met the SIU and the SIU came here I think in '56 or sometime around that time because I know I was scalloping then and my father told me if I didn't join the Union, he'd turn me ashore. So I had to join the Union. So I know way back then, it was '56 or so.

[JF]: And SIU is...?

[PS]: Seafarers International Union. And that's the sad part; they don't have a Union now, the fishermen.

[JF]: There's no Union now?

[PS]: The lays are altogether different, you're at the mercy of the owner, and so on down. There's no benefits, there's no pension whereas the other guys, as much as they disliked it, they you'd get \$30 a month per year that you put in. So if you put in 30 years you'd end up with not a bad pension. Plus your social security. They don't have that any more. Like Jimmy says, there's nobody breaking in. That's one thing wrong with the government regulations is that – I work for the government, I know about regulations – but if it wasn't for the regulations, they would have killed off the industry themselves. But now it's kind of gone overboard, the other way. Nobody is breaking in new and like a scalloper, he's allowed seven men. So he doesn't want to go out unless he's got seven experiences men because he can't afford to take another guys because they'd working such a short shift. They work some awful hours on those scallopers; some like 9 and 3 or something like that. Imagine that. I went 8 and 4 myself one time so I don't know what 9 and 3 is like.

[12:35]

[JF]: And what was the kind of work you did for the government?

[PS]: We were a statistical agent. We used to take and compile the pound and values by port so that at the end of the month – there used to be a monthly thing that would come out that said the port of New Bedford landed so many millions of pounds of fish and so many thousands of pounds of scallops – and we kept track of all that, and that's how they did it back in the old days. Plus doing biological samples; checking on the age and growth of fish; that was all part of the job. We compiled all the statistics about what actually went on in New Bedford. New Bedford, Sandwich, Boston – name the port, we were there, one way or the other.

[JF]: Did you rely on a lot of fishermen for information?

[PS]: Yes, part of our job was interviewing. And they used to give us their bearings and sometimes maybe they lied a little bit; that's the fishermen's trait. But our block was 6x10 so within a few miles, you weren't exactly wrong but you weren't exactly right. We had to rely on them and they had to be honest. Now that's been replaced by a log book; they don't do that anymore. But that interview was a personal touch; you had a personal touch with the skipper, and you're in that auction room every morning. Which to me was something a lot of people didn't like it but I thought it was the greatest thing in the world, to think that a million pounds land there during the week and it's gone by the following week, it's gone everywhere: Chicago, New York, Philadelphia... everywhere its gone. Just neat to think that such a thing goes on. I'll be quite now and let Jimmy take over.

[JF]: What's the difference now between the auction and the buy boats?

[PS]: The what?

[JF]: The buy boats.

[PS]: What they have now is an auction but it's all computerized; you don't even have to be there. You have to join the fish auction and they charge you a certain amount of money to do it, to take the fish. Everything is done by computers; you can bid on a lot for 100 pounds if it happens to be there or 5,000 pounds or whatever, all by lot numbers and that's the way it works. You can be in Gloucester and buy fish in New Bedford or be in New York and buy fish in New Bedford.

[14:54]

- [PS]: Before you had to be in that auction, like Louis was saying, Mr. Eldredge, well I remember one of the first times I ever experiences the auction. Mr. Eldredge came in and he was kind of hung over from the night before and he would say, "Give them all \$0.50 across the board!" And there's be 15 scallopers and we'd have to change them all and erase and put "E" down at the bottom and some guy would say... back them we were working on 05, but I think they finally went up to 010 so it would be 5010, a tenth of a dollar and that's how we used to work. And we'd be there with an eraser in one had and chalk in the other. Erase all those, and he was a big man, he was the one who brought out the first breaded scallop; he had his own cooking place right down on the pier and you'd drive by and you could smell the product. He was quite a character. Eventually every I guess you might say 20 years, you get a new top dog. The whole time Jimmy and I were probably there, Smittie, Smittie was the top dog. And I mean he was top dog; when he spoke, you erased it and did your thing. Colorful, it was really colorful I thought.
- [JF]: Are there still characters today? Are you guys characters?
- [JD]: I guess you'd say we're characters.
- [PS]: You mean us as character or people as character?
- [JF]: Well, Louis was talking about various people and their traits and there's the big guy, a story teller.
- [JD]: Ed Smith, he was the king of the scallops, he was king of the fish. Actually I can say I remember Linus Eldredge, and after he passed on, I say it was Ed Smith. He bought quite a bit of fish through the auction, the public auction in those days and at Tyshons [?] and you had Vinnie. Vinnie came from New York; that was Pilgrim Fish in those days. But even prior to that, for the fish we had Ely Beck, B & G Fish Company.
- [PS]: This, getting back to Smittie. He room enough down at his dock to unload four boats at one time so it would be nothing to see eight boats unloading in the course of the day and ½ a million pounds go down the shoot there.
- [JD]: And like I had said earlier, if you went to the auction, we would have as much as a million pounds in that auction and it was done in 22 minutes, the selling. It started at 8 o'clock in the morning and the end of the auction was 8:22. And as much as a million pounds, not for a week but per day.
- [PS]: We had a grace period there, for minutes. From 8:15 to 8:17 you could change your mind and wipe off and that's when you'd see the calamity then. Well, this guys lost a boat here and lost a boat there, so they start bidding on the other guys boats and Ed got to be really screaming and shouting.
- [18:06]
- [JF]: And what kind of fish were you...?
- [PS]: That was every species. When you bought a boat, you bought whatever that boat had and it would have flounders and groundfish together so it didn't matter what; you bought the whole boat. See now the auction, the way they have it now, you can just buy what you want. As far as quantity and species you want. Before you had to buy the whole boat and make sure you got it sold.
- [JD]: In those days you wouldn't actually get a door, you had 4-5 vessel going like Paul said, Ed Smith down at LVD during that time; he would have like 4 doors going. Well if he bought something like 8-9 trips, it wasn't going to work; someone had to wait. So we would have lumpers out in the Harbor here. They'd be up in the rigging and as soon as that last bell went off at 8:22, get out of the way, they were coming out to run down at the

end of the dock to give hand signals so direct them, they'd get a head start, it was all hand signals.

[PS]: Like a drag race.

[JD]: And you'd see them in the Harbor racing to get berth. And some of the signals used to get mixed up. When they were going down to Ed Smith, they should have been going across the river perhaps over to Joe Boadliger [?] and now this boat had to come back and he wouldn't get started until afternoon. And they thought it was bad waiting in those days. But every vessel during those days, we had them all offloaded, the latest I would say is 6 o'clock, nothing compared to today, nothing. And the volume was there, the poundage.

[PS]: Did you interview Mr. Bower's?

[JF]: You have to...

[PS]: You have to get Woody Bowers, Captain Wood Bowers.

[JF]: There are several of us doing interviews, he's not on the list. I think he's on another one.

[PS]: Well he had the boat called the *Ella Marie*. And he was the only skipper of that boat for something like 15 years, 20 years.

[JD]: At least 20 without a trip off.

[PS]: Without a trip off.

[JD]: Never took a vacation.

[PS]: He was the only skipper of the vessel and he always brought in big trips. A lot of guys didn't like to lump his boat because when you started – they have the two hatch covers they call them – well when the hatch covers are there, it's what they call a slaughter house in here. The pens are filled on both sides, the slaughter house is filled right up to the hatch. You start breaking down; that's the worst thing to do, Jimmy can tell you that...

[JD]: As soon as you take off the hatch cover, you wouldn't have the slaughter house open, you'd be stepping on the fish which meant in order to get the "boardies" down there, the man power, you had to open up this small area so we would have to dig it down. A few years went by and what happened was the Coast Guard came out with a ruling: you had to have at least one slaughter house open in case she was taking on water and they could at least pump her out. But we used to start right on, many boats, take the covers off and go right down the slaughter house, stepping on the fish and over the years I even found that a lot of times we used to take 2-3 thousand pounds of fish from the deck and then start with the hatch.

[21:27]

{JF}: What do lumpers wear?

[JD]: Actually we have the same outfit: the oilers, the boots, same as the fishermen. Everything is the same; the oilers, the boots, the gloves, rubber gloves, the hat. At one time, we had in the contract that we used to have to have the hard hats. During that time we always negotiated with the boat owners group, at that time it was Seafood Producers and we also had another one, Boat Owners United. And finally they felt as though you had to look for the safety and the hard hats came out. Most of the time, the average guy, it was too heavy, too light, it didn't fit right. If you drove by their homes, you see them as flower pots, they were on their porches, they would never wear them. So we continued wearing the old engineer cap. In those days everyone had an engineer cap. You go to ship supply and I think during that time it was \$0.25. Everyone wore the engineer caps.

[JF]: You were saying a little bit earlier about your working 24/7 now. What affect does this have on people's families?

[JD]: Well, maybe you're interviewing the wrong person, perhaps you should speak to my wife on that. But it has. It's taken a toll on my wife; get-togethers, weddings, you can't plan nothing. There are times myself because I've been established, I do have that option because I've paid my dues, but if I cannot get the man power, I do have a contract with that vessel, it's my obligation to get it offloaded. So a lot of times I just can't do what I want to do on a weekend because of that. Because it is 24/7. And I try to get a lot of the young guys to do it, but again, no one really likes it. Matter of fact, as far as the numbers of members I have in the Union – I've taken it over back in 1985 I had 133 members. We have 25 now because of the system. 25. And it's hard to believe that even now, with the amount of boats that's coming in with fish, that I have not yet told one boat owner or skipper that I can't handle your operation. The day may come, but we've handled every single boat with the 25 guys. What we do, we go short-handed. Paul is familiar with that system. If it calls for six men, we double up. We do with three men and the workers we have, you wouldn't even know the difference if there was six or three there. We call it actually "perks". It's extra compensation for the men. That hook is not waiting, the production line is going all the time.

[24:24]

[JF]: What's going to happen? It's a team work between the fishermen and the lumpers so what's going to happen if you don't have any fish, they are not bringing in fish for whatever reason or they are bringing it in and there's nobody there to unload it?

[JD]: Well, it seems like every year that comes around I get to a point where I'm on the phone, I'm more on the phone than anything else. I seem to manage getting the people. I've gone to unemployment; I try to get people that are familiar with the industry. Because one time, if they had been fishing, they know the species, they know the Houses; I can't direct them holding their hand during the night. We try to get... because of the days with the fishermen today, we have a lot of fishermen that are dockside now instead of doing their days, they come – I try to get a lot of the fishermen if I can. They fill in the gap at times. I worry about it when I come to that bridge; I'll keep going and I'll do the best I can to keep the boats offloaded and keep everyone happy as far as I can. I don't know what's going to happen. I don't try to go into the future; I try to take one day at a time and take it from there.

[JF]: It sounds like this wasn't an issue on the past.

[JD]: It's all because of the whole change. Yogi Bear once says, "This is your or our future." It wasn't for the best on my part. They did a buy-back program, that didn't help my future, it didn't help my pension plan. Because those boats that were contracted during that time, with the Union, they were paying their receipts, especially the boats that were bought out here in the city of New Bedford. Those boats that were bought, those contributions were coming into our Fund. They are no longer coming into our Fund. So we felt that even with an unfunded liability [?] with our pension fund. And of course with everything else that's going on with our days.

[JF]: This is an issue – I was living in Newfoundland during the cod moratorium –

[PS]: It's still there, right?

[JF]: Yes. And this is a culture where this is what families have done forever, and what do you do next. And that's were outsiders I think understand. This is not just a job, it's a way of

life, because it is the toll on the family, it's the partnership. Especially guys going out on the boats for long periods of time and women are staying home working, running the family. What happens to the way of life? The bills [?] came and left, are the boats going to come and leave?

[JD]: Sunday was a family day. It was unheard of, when I started down here, we used to go Monday to Saturday was the auction and they decided they were going to cut the auction on the Saturday and perhaps there was an auction one time, I don't know if Paul can speak...

[27:33]

[PS]: I think it went seven days, yeah. One time, way back in the early '40's.

[JD]: I remember they delayed a Saturday and that was great and then Sunday was a family day, it was unheard of... you could have a family day. Today, boats are fishing on a Sunday, they are leaving on a Sunday, everyone is working on a Sunday throughout the fish houses, throughout the waterfront.

[JF]: It's interesting because you talk to somebody like Louis, some of the changes he was talking about, for good and for bad, when on the other hand...

[PS]: Well, one thing about a fisherman now, he's got the advantages of electronics. Back in the old days, they had nothing. I remember when I tried fishing in '56 after I got out of the Service, and somebody says, "You're going on that boat? You have a radar." Well Christ you go down there now, they have two radars, two Loran's, they have everything, they even have a little disk they put in there, a cassette, that will take the boat out for you. Some of the boats don't even have a steering wheel anymore; it's all automated. Years ago, when we grew up in the industry, a guy got to be in his 40's, he got to own a boat. You see some of these kids, 25, they have a million dollar boat. It's unbelievable how the times have changed – hook and sinker was the old days. Stuff like that. The portable toilet. I did an interview, a survey for the government to find out how many portable johns there was aboard the boat; when you went aboard they had a bucket. Some were luxurious, they had the cover on it. That was a real fancy one, but its funny, when they did that, you have to wonder how many guys were lost over seas without the bucket on the stern, that's it.

[JF]: But being connected is really connected. You're talking about cell phones. I know I've talked to guys out on boats; "where are you now?" "Oh I'm out on Georges Bank". They sound like they are just down the street.

[PS]: Years ago, they used to have a VHS. It used to be "How are you doing? Over" "How's the family? Over".

[JD]: Boston Marine opera. I remember one time, I don't know if it was on Brooklyn Bills boat, the *Moonlight* at the time, the mate had grabbed the phone and Coast Guard was calling for some reason and he says, "Ok, Roger." And the mate went down and he told Bill, Bill was getting a mug up [?] and he says "Bill, you have a call up there, it's Roger."

[JD]: That was what I was going to ask you, some of the pranks and the nicknames and the jokes.

[JD]: Did you hear the nicknames?

[JF]: No.

[JD]: Oh, we just did a, Paul and I just did, 360 nick names...

[JF]: Let me just stop...

[End interview – rest continues on another recording]

[30:35]

[End of Audio]