

Transcribed by Carla Lesh, Hudson River Maritime Museum June 2021

Fred Bilyou: I'm going back 20 – 25 years ago, there were so many fishermen out here that you couldn't get in the water.

Marguerite Holloway: Really?

Fred Bilyou: Oh sure, everything's gone.

Marguerite Holloway: So there were so many out here you couldn't even get in the water?

Fred Bilyou: Oh, yeah, Highland used to be 4 or 5 right in this area. That's when I'd fish in Highland up there, used to have a place up there. Most of the time I'd fish in Poughkeepsie until they drove us out of there. The City took the piece of property over where the sewer plant is. See we used to have buyers to come and take the fish.

Marguerite Holloway: Where were the buyers from?

Fred Bilyou: Ellenville, New York, Rappaport. I still think Rappaport's got a store in Ellenville now.

Marguerite Holloway: So were you one of many suppliers?

Fred Bilyou: Yeah. Then I'd sell, when they got so they got out of the business I'd sell them to the people across the river that they got in it. Take them to New York and they'd clean them and cut the eggs out like I do.

Marguerite Holloway: You did that yourself?

Fred Bilyou: We'd do it all ourselves. We'd make all the deliveries. See my youngest kid here that just went out, he makes the deliveries. Then I have my daughter-in-law down the street, she cuts them all out. If somebody's around there she'll make the deliveries see. Because you've got to do this on account of insurance.

Marguerite Holloway: Did you fish last year?

Fred Bilyou: Oh, yeah, sure, I fish every year, every year. Where I used to work right up here, this big factory, I was there for 27 years. That was my vacation.

Marguerite Holloway: You'd go fish?

Fred Bilyou: Yeah, they gave me the time off, because they slowed up a little bit and they'd just lay one truck up, that's all. If they had a load they always had somebody else to come and take a load down in my truck. They had tractor trailers. I used to drive tractor trailers, I used to drive truck, 100 to 110 hours a week.

Marguerite Holloway: So how old were you when you started shad fishing?

Fred Bilyou: I was about 13, 14.

Marguerite Holloway: And how did you learn? Who taught you?

Fred Bilyou: My father, I used to work with my father.

Marguerite Holloway: And had he been fishing, forever.

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Fred Bilyou: Yes. And my grandfather did it.

Marguerite Holloway: Wow.

Fred Bilyou: His father.

Marguerite Holloway: Does the same

Fred Bilyou: Went back.

Marguerite Holloway: Did you have special places on the river that you fished?

Fred Bilyou: Nah, they all fished, well see, they call it Blue Point up here, fish from there down to Marlboro, about 5, 5 and a half miles. Sometimes couldn't get in the water.

Marguerite Holloway: Why?

Fred Bilyou: Too many fishermen. Every house you went to in Highland had a couple of boats by it. That was their living, see. There was no work then.

Marguerite Holloway: When was this?

Fred Bilyou: Well, it was when I was a kid, I was 14, 15 years old (editor's note: 1937-1938) there was no work. And that's what they used to do for a living. [3:50 unclear] He'd wait for me, grabbed me and take me to school sometimes because I'd go out in the middle of the night with my father and would come in in the morning and he'd be waiting for me.

Marguerite Holloway: Did you ever miss school?

Fred Bilyou: Oh, yeah, oh sure. (laughter)

Marguerite Holloway: Did you get in trouble?

Fred Bilyou: Nah. What're they gonna do to you? Used to give my father heck.

Marguerite Holloway: They used to what?

Fred Bilyou: They used to give him heck for keeping me out.

Marguerite Holloway: Did you want to fish though?

Fred Bilyou: Oh, yeah, I wanted to learn how to do it. I'd go and sneak out and go with him. Throw the buoys overboard, pull the net and stuff like that. Learned to row the boat.

Marguerite Holloway: What did he let you do first?

Fred Bilyou: Watch him.

Marguerite Holloway: How long did you have to watch him.

Fred Bilyou: Not too long.

Marguerite Holloway: So, was it hard to learn?

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[TIME STAMP 5:00]

Fred Bilyou: No it wasn't too hard to learn, no.

Marguerite Holloway: Is there anything that your family did differently than other families?

Fred Bilyou: No, same thing.

Marguerite Holloway: Describe to me what the process was like.

Fred Bilyou: Well the process is hanging the net. Then you have to pull it back down, wind all the buoys up, put the rings on one side, and they'd put them in little trays that they'd stack the net in. Then you have to wait for a tide, certain time to go out. Then the right time to throw, say you want 2.5 hours, 3 hours tide you'd throw the net and stay with it. Let the net drift until it takes slack water. When the tide starts back, you go on an ebb tide and you have to wait. And when it starts back you start picking the net up. Taking, pick all the shad out of it and bring them to shore, put them in tubs. Then take them out and put them on ice and bring them up and clean them. This goes on about 6, 7 weeks every spring.

Marguerite Holloway: And then Rappaport would come pick them up.

Fred Bilyou: Well that's going back years ago. Rappaport used to pick them up right there. He'd take them and put them on ice right away. That's going back 1947 even before then.

Marguerite Holloway: So did you make enough money in shad season to sort of carry you over for a while.

Fred Bilyou: No, no, no, not back then, no.

Marguerite Holloway: Was there a lot of competition because there were a lot of other fishermen on the river for markets?

Fred Bilyou: Years ago, a lot of competition.

Marguerite Holloway: So how did you get a market?

Fred Bilyou: Well, 25, 27 years ago we had nobody to buy fish. So I put up a little fish house, here by my home. And I started going to the restaurants and I built the trade up. Now I've got to supply them. I have about 30 restaurants we go to.

Marguerite Holloway: That's great, that's a lot.

Fred Bilyou: I've got them in Kingston. I go up and deliver them guys up in Kingston don't fish like I do.

Marguerite Holloway: They don't?

Fred Bilyou: No, no.

Marguerite Holloway: There's no one left who does?

Fred Bilyou: Course I think the three was in Kingston, they're gone. I think [8:12 unclear] got out too.

Marguerite Holloway: Yeah. So how many people fish for you now?

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Fred Bilyou: Just me and my son. That's all. Just the two of us.

Marguerite Holloway: Have you taught all your sons how to fish?

Fred Bilyou: Only one of them can do it.

Marguerite Holloway: What's his name?

Fred Bilyou: Randy. Randy Bilyou. He's the only one that ever took interest in it. The other one got killed.
{voice choked with tears}

Marguerite Holloway: I'm sorry, Fred, I'm sorry. I'm very sorry.

Fred Bilyou: Fine stuff. Fine like thread.

Marguerite Holloway: Not that fine.

Fred Bilyou: See they fish different when you go up, around Hyde Park.

Marguerite Holloway: How do they fish?

Fred Bilyou: Well, they have a spool on the back of the boat, see I don't fish like that.

[TIME STAMP: 10:00]

Marguerite Holloway: They have a spool?

Fred Bilyou: Yeah, they have a thing on it to hold it all in, sometimes it's pulled over the side of boats. Mine is 25 feet deep, my net.

Marguerite Holloway: How many feet long?

Fred Bilyou: Around 1500 to 1800 feet long.

Marguerite Holloway: And you don't spool it over?

Fred Bilyou: No. Throw it out by hand. We have a ring, and 8 inch ring on the bottom of it and a buoy on the top. The buoy has points to put buoy lines on to them. You throw the ring to cover the buoy. That's the way to pick it up to get it back in the boat.

Marguerite Holloway: And it's a finer

Fred Bilyou: Yeah, just like thread. It's nylon.

Marguerite Holloway: And what are they using in Hyde Park?

Fred Bilyou: They use a heavier twine and it's shorter net, see, because the water up there is not 55 foot deep like it is out here. See, it's deep out here.

Marguerite Holloway: So you can throw it?

Fred Bilyou: Yeah, it stays straight up and down.

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Marguerite Holloway: So did all the fishermen in this area always use the kind of net that you're describing?

Fred Bilyou: Yeah, yeah.

Marguerite Holloway: Did you catch more fish here than they did up in Hyde Park?

Fred Bilyou: Oh, sure, plenty more. I wanted to show you some pictures but I couldn't find them. The boat that far out of the water.

Marguerite Holloway: About 3 inches out of the water? Because it's so filled with fish

Fred Bilyou: Yep, yep.

Marguerite Holloway: Wow.

Fred Bilyou: Taken right off of my dock down here. Coming in lots of times, just the roes, that's all I mess with is the roes. I don't take no bucks.

Marguerite Holloway: You don't take bucks?

Fred Bilyou: No, throw them back in.

Marguerite Holloway: Did you used to?

Fred Bilyou: Yeah, used to. I seen a time we got a penny a piece for buck shad, a nickel a piece for roes.

Marguerite Holloway: When was that?

Fred Bilyou: Going back when I was working with my father. Yep.

Marguerite Holloway: So now you don't get the bucks.

Fred Bilyou: Nah, I don't even mess with them any more.

Marguerite Holloway: And how much do you get for the roes now?

Fred Bilyou: Well, about two and a half dollars a piece we get for the roes. I sell a lot of shad that are clean, you know. We sell all the time with the roes go for \$2.50, \$2.75. I've had 500 roes out here a lot of times. All in the tub, had to make two trips down to the river to bring them up.

Marguerite Holloway: That's a lot.

Fred Bilyou: Yep. I don't think my boy will stop doing the rest, you know.

Marguerite Holloway: Randy?

Fred Bilyou: Yeah, Randy. Randy will still do it.

Marguerite Holloway: So he was the only one who was like you who wanted to learn?

Fred Bilyou: Yeah, when he was young he was the only one who ever took interest in doing it.

Marguerite Holloway: Was he a good learner?

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Fred Bilyou: Oh yeah, he was doing it, no matter what. How much more, I'm 70 years old pretty soon, how much longer am I going to do it. (laughter)

Marguerite Holloway: But you like being out on the river.

Fred Bilyou: I love the river.

Marguerite Holloway: Has the river changed in the years that you've been fishing?

Fred Bilyou: No it hasn't.

Marguerite Holloway: No.

Fred Bilyou: [unclear 14:00] build, put new houses and stuff. Got a few more boats, pleasure boats going up and down the river. It's a lot of work.

Marguerite Holloway: Shad fishing.

Fred Bilyou: Oh, yeah. It's not easy.

Marguerite Holloway: Did you ever have to hire other people?

Fred Bilyou: No, never hired a boy that couldn't learn his way. Guys we work with, we work on percentage. But going back years ago you made \$100 a week shad fishing, you made a lot of money.

Marguerite Holloway: Did you do that? Did you make \$100 a week?

Fred Bilyou: Oh, yeah.

Marguerite Holloway: Did you ever bone the shad and sell it?

Fred Bilyou: No Randy bones the shad.

Marguerite Holloway: Who'd he learn boning from?

Fred Bilyou: He learned from Ray Minard in Poughkeepsie.

[TIMESTAMP 15:00]

Fred Bilyou: You heard of him?

Marguerite Holloway: Yeah, I interviewed him.

Fred Bilyou: Yeah, well he says he's fished a long time too. But don't believe half the people what they tell you about fishing. They own the outfits. They bought the license and they've never fished. They tell you, yeah, they've been in the fishing business but they never fished. Like me I'm out in the water all the time with the boats. Like Gus Zahn.

Marguerite Holloway: Yes.

Fred Bilyou: Says he's been on the river a long time. Sure he's been on the river, but ask him how many years did he fish.

Marguerite Holloway: How many?

Fred Bilyou: Not as much as they say they have. (laughter) A lot of people knows that they used to work in the [unclear 15:53] separator and they never fished.

Marguerite Holloway: They didn't take time off during shad season?

Fred Bilyou: No they didn't take time off. Not like me. I used to take it off the job, Right here, and they'd give it to me. Told me "Fred, you want to take your time off fishing, go ahead." That's what I did for vacation.

Marguerite Holloway: Did you fish for other things aside from shad?

Fred Bilyou: No, just shad.

Marguerite Holloway: Stripers.

Fred Bilyou: Stripers you can't take anyway, now. That's what killed shad fishing. Too many of them. Get 100 to 150 bass in the net, just weighs it down.

Marguerite Holloway: So there are more stripers than there were.

Fred Bilyou: Oh, years ago there was hardly any. If you caught one or two stripers all season long you was lucky. Randy's got a picture of a big sturgeon.

Marguerite Holloway: You catch sturgeon?

Fred Bilyou: Yeah, I get sturgeon once in a while. We have a big picture of it. [unclear 16:57] it was 100 pounds. But that's a little one. That year one of the fishermen, up in Kingston got one weighed 350. Cause he's got a heavier net, see.

Marguerite Holloway: What were you fishing with for the sturgeon?

Fred Bilyou: A shad net.

Marguerite Holloway: Oh, it was just a by catch.

Fred Bilyou: Years ago used to fish for sturgeon around here with sturgeon net with a high line.

Marguerite Holloway: Did you ever try that?

Fred Bilyou: No, I never tried it.

Marguerite Holloway: Why?

Fred Bilyou: I've never cared about sturgeon, catching sturgeon.

Marguerite Holloway: Why?

Fred Bilyou: I just never interested me about getting into sturgeon business.

Marguerite Holloway: Just the shad.

Fred Bilyou: Just shad, that's all.

Marguerite Holloway: What do you think about when you're out on the water, when you're letting the net just drift?

Fred Bilyou: Just another day's work, that's all. I've got a [unclear 18:14] over 100 years old. You can't buy them no more.

Marguerite Holloway: What are they?

Fred Bilyou: [unclear 18:18] you have to row the net out and you have the motor off the back, because you need the whole back of the boat. I have in fact about five sets of them.

Marguerite Holloway: Did you ever have a boat with the motor well in the middle?

Fred Bilyou: In the middle, no.

Marguerite Holloway: No

Fred Bilyou: We tried that here and it didn't work.

Marguerite Holloway: It didn't work? Why not?

Fred Bilyou: You have to row it anyway, see because the motor would go all over. So they found out it's better to row the net. We tried.

Marguerite Holloway: Didn't work.

Fred Bilyou: No, never worked right. Like someone had inboard motor. I fished with my father when he had a too soon inboard motor. We took it out. You're rowing all that weight around for nothing.

Marguerite Holloway: So you just rowed.

Fred Bilyou: Row and put the motor on after the net's in and just follow the net on down the river with the motor. I bought, a few years ago I bought a brand new Honda for \$1000. And don't have to use no oil [unclear 19:37] mix the oil and stuff.

Marguerite Holloway: Did you ever make your own boats?

Fred Bilyou: Yep.

Marguerite Holloway: Yeah.

Fred Bilyou: Yep. I've made my own boats.

[TIME STAMP 20:00]

Fred Bilyou: A couple of days ago (unclear 20:12) you've got a friend.

Marguerite Holloway: So how did you learn how to make boats?

Fred Bilyou: Oh, I just picked it up on my own. Decided I was going to make a boat and I built a boat in 1979 and I still have it. Found some (unclear 20:35) and I built it. It's 19 foot 6 inches, four and a half feet

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through the center. But you've got to repair them all the time and I have it down at my son's house. I have a boat that's over 100 years old, round bottom. Too much work to it.

Marguerite Holloway: Who built that?

Fred Bilyou: That was built by the Fisher Brothers in Kingston, years ago. It's too much work to keep it up.

Marguerite Holloway: Do people ever come to you and want to buy boats from you?

Fred Bilyou: No more. Because there used to be a lot of old boats. That's all they ever fished out of were round bottom boats. There is only one person around I know that's got a round bottom boat now, besides me.

Marguerite Holloway: Who's that? Who built it himself?

Fred Bilyou: Well, he could build. I think he rebuilt this one, Alfred Storm, he still fishes out of Highland. But they don't fish like I do. He just fishes during the day.

Marguerite Holloway: You go 24 hours a day?

Fred Bilyou: Keep going all the time. Because sometimes you've got a lot of orders.

Marguerite Holloway: Got a lot of

Fred Bilyou: Shad roe orders.

Marguerite Holloway: Do you fill them all?

Fred Bilyou: Yep. Sell every one of them. Sometimes when you haven't gathered enough to supply the customers. Last year was bad.

Marguerite Holloway: Because there wasn't a lot of fish?

Fred Bilyou: Too many bass.

Marguerite Holloway: So did you get out of the water early because of all the bass?

Fred Bilyou: You have to take the net out. I've hit bass over the head with a hammer and let them float up the river dead, get so mad at them. [speaking to dog] Get out, go on, you're a pain in the neck. Git. 11 years old

Marguerite Holloway: That's a nice dog. So do you teach any other young people aside from Randy?

Fred Bilyou: No I never teach anybody else, only just my kid. (unclear 23:12) drives a truck.

Marguerite Holloway: He also takes time off during

Fred Bilyou: Yep, yep.

Marguerite Holloway: Did Ray Minard teach you how to make knives.

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Fred Bilyou: Not yet, no. We have his knives. Ray Minard's losing his (unclear 23:29) His wife's gone, senile, you know. He's the same way. He's 74 or 75 now. He come over here last spring and he said to Randy, give me a couple of shad and I'll give you a couple of knives. They made a deal with the knives. Because he don't use them no more. And he got mad at Randy and wanted the knives back. Kept the shad. (laughter)

Marguerite Holloway: Did Randy give him the knives back?

Fred Bilyou: Randy give him a couple of shad for them. That's what they wanted. I stood there and listened to the deal.

Marguerite Holloway: So when there are all these fishermen out here and it was so crowded, what did fishermen do to make sure that they could get a place in the water?

Fred Bilyou: Some of them usually, they'd get the boats ready and put all the stuff in the boats and go wait at Blue Point on the corner there. Some would be there 4 or 5 hours. I used to have a big boat and a 22 horse motor and I'd wait until the first guy put a skipper over at night time, it was light and I'd throw in front of him. That was me and my step-brother used to do it.

[TIME STAMP 25:00]

Marguerite Holloway: So you'd slip in in front of them?

Fred Bilyou: Yes.

Marguerite Holloway: Is that called plugging?

Fred Bilyou: Yeah, that's what they call it plugging.

Marguerite Holloway: Did anyone get angry at you?

Fred Bilyou: Oh, they'd get angry.

Marguerite Holloway: So what'd you do?

Fred Bilyou: Nothing. Just tend their own business. I used to put 7 shot net at Blue Point, right across the river. That's when I was young and didn't care about nothing, sleep in the boat. (laughter)

Marguerite Holloway: Did you do that a lot? Sleep in the boat?

Fred Bilyou: Oh, yeah. Sleep on the rocks.

Marguerite Holloway: So did anyone ever plug you?

Fred Bilyou: Oh yeah, sure.

Marguerite Holloway: Did people ever cut up other people's boats? Or nets?

Fred Bilyou: Not as I know of, no. (unclear 26:16)

Marguerite Holloway: What?

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Fred Bilyou: People used to argue, throw the nets in between them.

Marguerite Holloway: Yelling.

Fred Bilyou: Yep.

Marguerite Holloway: What would you do when you saw a lot of the traffic coming up the river, the big ships?

Fred Bilyou: Well, you'd take your chances. Sometimes it cut the net, sometimes a big ship would go around. The worst problem we have in the Hudson River right now is the big cement boats. They will not move. Saying that right up, you've got to get the net out of the way.

Marguerite Holloway: Do you have much time when you see a boat, to get it out?

Fred Bilyou: We split the nets, put a flag on them. I lost a brand new net out there, \$500 - \$600 worth of net with them big cement barge. They will not go around.

Marguerite Holloway: When they rip up your nets you're able to mend them.

Fred Bilyou: When a cement barge goes over you get forget about the net, the net's gone. It's all rolled up in a roll like that.

Marguerite Holloway: So you can't (unclear 27:57)

Fred Bilyou: No. That's why I have extra net. I bought 50 pounds of net last year. I still got some I've got to work on to put it together to get it ready for this year. I didn't do it all.

Marguerite Holloway: What are you going to do to get it ready?

Fred Bilyou: Sim it, put the bottom and the top line onto it. Takes a couple of months to get it ready. A lot of work.

Marguerite Holloway: Do you do a little bit each day?

Fred Bilyou: Do a little bit each day. Each day I do a little bit, night time. I do it in the cellar, because you have to have a guide line to go by so it's even all the time, both the top and the bottom.

Marguerite Holloway: You have enough space down there.

Fred Bilyou: Yes.

Marguerite Holloway: Then where do you fish off? Right off down below?

Fred Bilyou: I fish off you'd call it old Milton dock I guess, that's the old name for it.

Marguerite Holloway: Is it a public dock?

Fred Bilyou: No. Belongs to Agway right now.

Marguerite Holloway: But they let you fish off there.

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Fred Bilyou: Yeah. It's down by the old winery, it's where I have my dock and I have permission from them. And I have a key to the gate when I get big loads of shad I can use the truck right down next to the dock.

Marguerite Holloway: Are there any of the fishermen that you used to fish with that are still around? Parslow?

Fred Bilyou: No. None of them.

[TIME STAMP 30:00]

Fred Bilyou: The old time fishermen's all gone.

Marguerite Holloway: And there are not that many young ones.

Fred Bilyou: No, nobody wants to do it. It's work, it's hard work.

Marguerite Holloway: But it's satisfying.

Fred Bilyou: I mean, it doesn't bother me. I still do it. My son, he don't mind.

Marguerite Holloway: Does he have any children?

Fred Bilyou: He has a boy and a girl.

Marguerite Holloway: Is the little one the boy. Is the girl doing it?

Fred Bilyou: No, they're too small. One of them's 10 and baby's not a year old yet. But the mother of them, she takes care of all the shad that's in the fish house. It's hard for us because we fish and he bones them too.

Marguerite Holloway: That's a lot of work.

Fred Bilyou: Oh, sure, it's a lot of work. You got diners calling, give me boned shad, you can't supply all the time, one person. You can't hire nobody, suppose somebody gets cut bad or something, it could happen. So we keep it in the family.

Marguerite Holloway: How much do you get for the boned shad?

Fred Bilyou: \$4.50 a pound.

Marguerite Holloway: That's good.

Fred Bilyou: I've got an ice box there, we store the shad in. When you put the shad away, you put the bellies up and put a layer down there of ice in a layer. And I've got a box in there, must be 125 years old. One of the old milk, they used for the milk cans to go in. I still have that. That's been all over with me.

Marguerite Holloway: When was the last season that you had so much fish that your boat was only 3 inches out of the water?

Fred Bilyou: Year before last.

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Marguerite Holloway: Oh really!

Fred Bilyou: Yep. I have a friend of mine buys them off of Alfred Storm. He does down to the city all the time. He tells me when they're coming in.

Marguerite Holloway: He sells down to Fulton?

Fred Bilyou: Yeah, he takes them from here. He takes them down there and gets them boned. He's got all the big restaurants that he sells to on the way down. Then if he needs more, he'll pick them up there are sell them some other place. He makes money that way.

Marguerite Holloway: And he buys from you and from Alfred Storms?

Fred Bilyou: No. I haven't sold him any shad in 15 years.

Marguerite Holloway: Were there lots of fishermen who were competing to sell to Rappaport?

Fred Bilyou: Oh yes, lots, plenty of them.

Marguerite Holloway: So how did you keep Rappaport with all the competition?

Fred Bilyou: Rappaport was just a, he'd buy off anybody. He used to buy off all through Kingston, above Kingston and all over when there was plenty of fish. Cone, they was one of the buyers too.

Marguerite Holloway: Did you ever sell to Fulton Fish Market?

Fred Bilyou: No, I never went down that way to sell any fish. Always in this area they took.

Marguerite Holloway: Did you ever have trouble selling?

Fred Bilyou: No. Every shad that comes on the fish market here, during the fish season, we sell. Sometimes more, you can't get enough.

Marguerite Holloway: And way back when you first started, the same way?

Fred Bilyou: No, way, way back we used to get 25 or 30 shad a drift. You got a lot of fish.

Marguerite Holloway: So there are more now.

Fred Bilyou: There's plenty of them. You've got to get a bad year. What I think the problem is that there's too many bass. There's too many bass eating the small shad when the spawn up there. That's one of the problems. And it'll get worse as it goes on unless they get rid of, let us take the bass out of the river.

Marguerite Holloway: Do you think they will?

Fred Bilyou: I don't know. I hope they do. There'll be a lot of dead ones.

[TIME STAMP 35:00]

Marguerite Holloway: Did you ever hear of any fishermen selling the bass? Did you ever hear of any fishermen catching the bass when they weren't supposed to and selling them?

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Fred Bilyou: Well, you hear a lot of things but I never saw anybody.

Marguerite Holloway: Well, what'd you hear?

Fred Bilyou: I heard they used to take them to New York City to get rid of them, but that's only hearsay.

Marguerite Holloway: Right.

Fred Bilyou: Hearsay you can't go by. You've got to catch them when they do it.

Marguerite Holloway: Did they ever get caught?

Fred Bilyou: Not that I know of.

Marguerite Holloway: If they opened striper fishing up would you fish for stripers?

Fred Bilyou: Sure. I would fish for stripers because I could sell them.

Marguerite Holloway: Right.

Fred Bilyou: Nothing wrong with the fish.

Marguerite Holloway: No PCBs?

Fred Bilyou: Nah, that's, I've heard PCBs for the last 40 years and nobody's never died from them yet. That's only a gimmick they've got going.

Marguerite Holloway: Who's got going?

Fred Bilyou: The Conservation Department. They've been catching fish in the river since I don't know, ain't nobody died from eating fish yet.

Marguerite Holloway: So why does the Conservation Department have this gimmick?

Fred Bilyou: I don't know. It looks to me like they want to put the, bring the sportsmen thing out this catch the bass out of the Hudson River. They let people go out there with poles and catch them and eat them but don't want the shad fishermen to take them. You can go up by the Troy Dam up there at the end of May and get all the bass you want they're so thick up in there. They can't go no farther, that's why. You must see 40 – 50 people out there fishing for them. I've been up there. Wade out in the water there. I've seen people bring 7 or 8 bass at a time outta there. On a string, catch them.

Marguerite Holloway: There's big money in sports fishing?

Fred Bilyou: Well yeah. Bass don't stay here. It's like that pollution business. That's a lot of nonsense too. That PC, that stuff went to the dam and that's as far as it went. How's it going to get over the dam? They're making a big case out of that.

Marguerite Holloway: So it's not down here?

Fred Bilyou: Well, I don't see how it could come, what 75 miles. You can take and go to Lake George up there and that water's clear as crystal, take fish out of there and it's got PCBs in it. I had them checked already.

Marguerite Holloway: You did?

Fred Bilyou: Oh yeah. All fish have got PCBs in them. They take them out of the ocean don't they? Eat them, sell them. That's a lot of nonsense I think.

Marguerite Holloway: So when do you think the Conservation Department will open up the bass fishing again?

Fred Bilyou: I hope soon. Or there won't be no fishermen. Because you can't have nets, nets don't last a long time anymore.

Marguerite Holloway: Why?

Fred Bilyou: Bass break them all up on you.

Marguerite Holloway: So is there any pollution in the river that's hurting any of the fish?

Fred Bilyou: No, I don't think there's any pollution in the Hudson River that would hurt any fish. They still come up. Where they come through down there. They come through bad water then they come up here in the Hudson River where all them boats. Just through the garbage in down there in the water and every other thing. Down by New York City, and that's where they come through up. I'll say one thing. They cleaned the Hudson River up, a lot better than it was years ago.

Marguerite Holloway: What was it like years ago?

Fred Bilyou: Years ago they used to have sewage running in and everything. Took all of them big factories and let them get straightened out. Anybody had a creek running down, that's where they had the sewage went. You can't do that no more. They've done a good job of doing that. The fishermen's association.

[TIME STAMP 40:00]

Fred Bilyou: Then they had this guy running a sloop he's from Poughkeepsie, I don't know if you knew him, Mylod.

Marguerite Holloway: John Mylod the *Clearwater*

Fred Bilyou: Yep. He's another guy if he makes two drifts all season long he makes a lot. Them guys they lie. I get a kick out of it. He had a big piece in the paper a couple of years ago "I caught the first shad." I had the first shad two weeks before he got it. Last year I got the first shad, I never put it in the paper.

Marguerite Holloway: You should call the papers.

Fred Bilyou: Nah. They won't put it in the Poughkeepsie paper no more, first shad. Because when Mylod put his in I called them back I said "Why'd you guys put that kind of piece in the paper?" I said "Over a week ago I caught the first shad. It was a small buck." I had a new net so I wanted to tighten it up, you know. Get all the knots and stuff tight me and my kid went out and threw it in. I got one little buck shad. I got a little bitty one. And I never said nothing. Then I see a piece in the paper where he went out. Then I called them up. [unclear 41:29] I said good then don't put it in the paper no more then. So they won't put it in. But see like the ones I showed you. They tell me to bring shad up because it was a fresh shad

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and they'd take a picture of me. It was on the first day. Well I've caught the first shad in March. If the weather's good, see.

Marguerite Holloway: Yeah, how do you know that the shad are in the river?

Fred Bilyou: Down the line. Tappan Zee Bridge.

Marguerite Holloway: You listen to Gabrielson?

Fred Bilyou: No. When I used to run a truck. Drive truck see and go across the Tappan Zee Bridge I used to see them down there with the stake nets. That stake net runs right along there. I used to see them there with a speed boat, lifting it up. Then you tell the shad's coming through.

Marguerite Holloway: So there's no, you don't look at the forsythia or the weather, you just look at

Fred Bilyou: Well, weather don't mean nothing. When the shad gets ready to come, they're going to come up the river. If the water's clean. What holds them back is you get a heavy rain and all the mud and stuff gets takes the river and muddies it all up.

Marguerite Holloway: They don't like that?

Fred Bilyou: No, they'll back off from that. Last year I went out and got the first shad and I waited another week and I took my brother with me he wasn't doing nothing, Randy was working. And I took my brother out and we got 34 that time. So I kept going out fishing. Randy took off from his job. See my brother, he lives up in Highland. He helps us out. When Randy has to bone a lot of shad he'll go out with me. If we have to make a lot of deliveries to the diner sometimes I'll stay here and Cindy will make the delivery because some of them run out of shad roe. You get a diner, they call you up and they say we need 50, 75 shad roe, you've got to give them to them. Cause you don't want to lose them. It's a rough racket.

Marguerite Holloway: It must be very cold out there.

Fred Bilyou: Oh yeah. It gets cold.

Marguerite Holloway: Does the weather get bad?

Fred Bilyou: Yeah, I've taken shad in the Hudson in the snow.

Marguerite Holloway: Really?

Fred Bilyou: Yep.

Marguerite Holloway: When was that?

Fred Bilyou: In April, I don't know what year it was. It'd get so rough out there sometimes you don't know if you're going to get ashore. You've got the net there that's got to come out. I've seen me and my brother to get to ashore. It was so rough out there we had 100 shad in the boat, bail water. Just row and bail water, couldn't put the motor on the boat. Down to Marlboro Bay that happened.

[TIME STAMP 45:00]

Marguerite Holloway: Have you ever been in an accident out on the water?

Fred Bilyou: Never been in an accident. Never had no problems out there with no boats, ships.

Marguerite Holloway: Can you read the weather very well? Can you tell what's going to happen?

Fred Bilyou: No.

Marguerite Holloway: Have you ever tried different kinds of fishing like the stake netting or the haul seining?

Fred Bilyou: No, never got interested in that, just something, shad fishing I've been doing ever since I've been a kid and I just love it and I just keep doing it. I'll guess I'll do it until I die.

Marguerite Holloway: Are there things that you've tried over the years that have been different, that have made it easier?

Fred Bilyou: Never tried nothing new. I've tried a different kind of net.

Marguerite Holloway: What kind of net?

Fred Bilyou: I've used monofilament net. Can't handle it on account of the wind takes it. It's a good fishing piece of net but you can't throw it.

Marguerite Holloway: You can't throw it in?

Fred Bilyou: Nah, the wind takes it all over. You put it on

Marguerite Holloway: So you got rid of the monofilament?

Fred Bilyou: I still have it, I just keep it in case I need it it's old now. I've had it 5 or 6 years. It costs a lot more money, you don't get to the poundage, it's so heavy to take shad up, you can't use it at night, can't see.

Marguerite Holloway: Why?

Fred Bilyou: You can't see the monofilament on the net around the shad. When you got to pull it over the head and put the shad through you can't see and you bust a lot of them.

Marguerite Holloway: Did you take each shad out hand by hand?

Fred Bilyou: We get the meshes open and slid overhead and scoot them between your hands. That's the way you take them out. A lot of them pick them out. I don't I have a big mesh net, 6 inches hang in the water 6 inches between them. A lot of them use 5 and a half, 5 and a quarter inch mesh. I don't use it.

Marguerite Holloway: Why not, because

Fred Bilyou: No, I get rid of all of them, small buck shad, let them go through.

Marguerite Holloway: So you just get the fat roes?

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Fred Bilyou: Yeah, that's all I need is the roes so let all the buck shad let them go instead of taking them out. Little small one will go right on through it. When you've got a 5 and a quarter, 5 and a half inch mesh you get all of them, you get all the small roe, small bucks, you know, I don't need them.

Marguerite Holloway: So what kind of net now are you using?

Fred Bilyou: Nylon.

Marguerite Holloway: Have you ever made a net yourself?

Fred Bilyou: Nope, never made a net. My father used to make them.

Marguerite Holloway: For shad fishing.

Fred Bilyou: Used to set in the house in the winter time make a whole 500 feet of net.

Marguerite Holloway: How long would it take him?

Fred Bilyou: All winter. One shot. Used to have a block of wood. Used to make a block of wood, said years ago they used to use 5 and a half inch mesh. That block would be five and a half inches and that's what they made the net on. Sure I've watched him do it lots of times. Me and my father used to sim four five fish in a net all winter long, That's how we made a living. They'd all bring their nets up to our house and me and my father worked all day.

[TIME STAMP 50:00]

Fred Bilyou: Making putting people's nets together.

Marguerite Holloway: Did you ever patch people's nets?

Fred Bilyou: No. My father used to. I never got interested in. I could put them together, cut them, put a patch in, no.

Marguerite Holloway: So he would cut out a patch of net and put it in?

Fred Bilyou: Yep. I've seen him sit there and put the net in a corner, put a nail in patch them, do them all over for a guy. Brand new net we used to sim all winter long. That's the way we made a living.

Marguerite Holloway: That's great. So what did your father do the rest of the time, when he wasn't fishing for shad?

Fred Bilyou: He used to pick apples, huckleberries, whatever, strawberries, whatever there was to be done.

Marguerite Holloway: So he taught you everything that he knows about

Fred Bilyou: Yep.

Marguerite Holloway: Making a net is very hard.

Fred Bilyou: He used to do it. He could do anything he wanted with a net. He learned from his father. Because my grandfather was another.

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Marguerite Holloway: Where did your grandfather come from?

Fred Bilyou: I couldn't tell you. That's something I couldn't tell you where he's from. Probably from France.

Marguerite Holloway: Did his father teach him how to fish?

Fred Bilyou: I couldn't say. My grandmother she in the summer time that's all she done was canning fruit. That's what they lived on all winter, put potatoes in a barrel, onions.

Marguerite Holloway: When you were fishing and your son Randy was helping you were other members of the family also helping?

Fred Bilyou: Yes.

Marguerite Holloway: Who would help?

Fred Bilyou: My wife. She would help us.

Marguerite Holloway: What would she do?

Fred Bilyou: She would make deliveries for us. Wrap the fish.

Marguerite Holloway: Did she ever

Fred Bilyou: No, she wouldn't clean them. Before I had any help I used to have to get up in the morning sometimes and get all the stuff ready for, to clean the fish, cut the shad roe out and then go fishing. She never would clean the fish, no way.

Marguerite Holloway: Do you ever bleed the roe?

Fred Bilyou: Do what?

Marguerite Holloway: Yeah, some people bleed the roe to get the roe shad to get the eggs sort of white.

Fred Bilyou: No. Kirk, you know Kirk in Kingston? He's another guy, had a big shad festival last year. He had got in the paper up there said he was the oldest shad fisherman there was around, but he's not.

Marguerite Holloway: He's not?

Fred Bilyou: Nah. Him and his boy used to do it. I don't know if they do it any more or not. But last year he had a big shad festival thing going on up there.

Marguerite Holloway: So there are all these guys passing themselves off as fishermen and they're not?

Fred Bilyou: That's right. They owned all the rigs. The boats and the motors and net. But to get in the Hudson River and do the work no. Like Gussie Zahn the last 10 years. Hornbecks, fished his boat and stuff for him. That's not fishing. They did the work. That's not getting out in the boat and doing it, night and day.

Marguerite Holloway: Did you ever feel like just giving it up? That it was too hard work?

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Fred Bilyou: No, never, no. I've had bad years and good years, just keep right on going. I've see time when I've worked for Hudson Valley up there, I could make more money working than I did fishing, but I kept fishing.

[TIME STAMP 55:00]

Marguerite Holloway: What is it about fishing?

Fred Bilyou: I don't know, just a thing that I like. I've always did it, when the first of April comes around, I'm ready to go.

Marguerite Holloway: Do you ever call the fishermen down river to see what's up?

Fred Bilyou: Never called one of them.

Marguerite Holloway: No?

Fred Bilyou: No.

Marguerite Holloway: Do the fishermen in this area let each other know what's going on?

Fred Bilyou: Well there's only two of us here.

Marguerite Holloway: Right. But when there were a lot of them.

Fred Bilyou: Never. The only one I'd get any information from was Keith Mulroney. He tells me when they're getting them down in New York. Because he goes down there right away and gets them. He's got two or three fishermen way down below Peekskill that he gets shad off of. And they get them way ahead of us, Haverstraw. I only think there's one fisherman now at Haverstraw.

Marguerite Holloway: Who's that?

Fred Bilyou: I couldn't tell you.

Marguerite Holloway: Is that stake netting?

Fred Bilyou: No.

Marguerite Holloway: No, drifting?

Fred Bilyou: One of them. Dennis Point they call it, that's got a stake net there. That's the only one that I know of that's got a stake net.

Marguerite Holloway: Do you remember boats of shad fishermen coming up river from farther down?

Fred Bilyou: Yep.

Marguerite Holloway: And barges?

Fred Bilyou: No. They used to take their boats, coals and in the last 25 years I haven't seen anybody do it. But when they had the buyers up here that's when they used to do it. When the guys bought fish,

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they used to come up and fish at Port Ewen off the beach they had tents and stuff and that's where they.

Marguerite Holloway: So they would come up from where?

Fred Bilyou: From down the river, down towards Peekskill.

Marguerite Holloway: They'd follow the fish up?

Fred Bilyou: Followed the fish up, yep. There was about 4 of them did that. They used to have cedar poles to hang the net on and they used to take. You'd see them. I was out there fishing. Then they used to go out and weight them, they had to move them over with the round bottom boats with the poles and the tent. Two of them in a boat. The wife used to meet them up by Port Ewen dock up there. That's where they fished on the beach up there some place. Every year I used to see them.

Marguerite Holloway: That's great. So they drift?

Fred Bilyou: Well, they used to fish up that way on the flats up there.

Marguerite Holloway: Using a drift net?

Fred Bilyou: They used the drift net. The same as I did.

Marguerite Holloway: That's great. Did you ever know any of their names?

Fred Bilyou: Never knew one of their names.

Marguerite Holloway: But then 25 years ago that was the last they did it.

Fred Bilyou: Yeah. Nobody did that in at least 25 years go. After a while it cut down, I only saw one.

Marguerite Holloway: Why do you think it cut down?

Fred Bilyou: Well, I guess they quit fishing, you know. The last two I seen come up the river they was 60, 70 years old. They used to have a little tent, a little cook stove. Then I think their wives. I talked to one of them when he was on the dock up in Esopus, up that way. The wife used to come up, bring them stuff to eat, give them meals.

Marguerite Holloway: How would they get the fish that they caught back in the market?

Fred Bilyou: Well Rappaport used to go around with the trucks and pick them up see at that time. Rappaport and Cohen they used to leave boxes. They had trucks run around to where all the shad fishermen were. And Gilmore, did you ever hear his name?

[TIME STAMP 60:00]

Marguerite Holloway: No.

Fred Bilyou: He used to own Hudson Valley Apple Products before it was redid over. He used to buy all the fish in Poughkeepsie too and ship them to New York to Fulton Market. He used to go to all the Grand Unions in fact.

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Marguerite Holloway: So there'd be several really big suppliers picking up everywhere.

Fred Bilyou: Oh, yeah. Used to have a building on the Molene dock over there where everybody fished from, must have been 20 fishermen on that dock. I used to have a little cabin over there. And that's where I stayed all through shad fishing.

Marguerite Holloway: Did everyone have a cabin?

Fred Bilyou: Yep.

Marguerite Holloway: That's great.

Fred Bilyou: I lived in Newburgh and I still fished over there.

Marguerite Holloway: Who did the dock belong to?

Fred Bilyou: The City of Poughkeepsie.

Marguerite Holloway: And they didn't mind?

Fred Bilyou: No, no. They were glad to have somebody down there. Until they put a sewer plant in there.

Marguerite Holloway: Did you ever follow the fish upriver?

Fred Bilyou: No. I fished off of Esopus at the lighthouse up there. Come down and went up. It's too far a run for us.

Marguerite Holloway: But no fishermen came up on big barges did they, big coffee barges?

Fred Bilyou: No, never saw none of that.

Marguerite Holloway: Did you hear about it?

Fred Bilyou: No. Never seen anybody fishing off of any barges or anything. I fished in the Hudson River with my father before we had motors. Two men on a pair of oars. We'd throw in at Blue Point buoy, drift all the way down Marlboro Bay. When tugs come by we used to row out in back of the tug and let the people on the back. Then we used to row out to the back of the barge and we used to throw the rope up, they'd tow us all the way up the river.

Marguerite Holloway: That's great.

Fred Bilyou: Instead of rowing home.

Marguerite Holloway: Did that happen a lot?

Fred Bilyou: Lots of times.

Marguerite Holloway: So were the tugboat captains nice to the fishermen?

Fred Bilyou: Yeah.

Marguerite Holloway: Yeah.

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Fred Bilyou: Yeah. Tugs were pretty good, but see you don't have a long tow like you had years ago. They didn't have no more wooden barges. So they used to take all that stone from Callahan and everything. It used to go on the old wooden barges. We used to give them fish. Used to be on the back of the old wooden barges they used to have a little cabin like. And it used to be a man and a woman, stay on that barge all the time. That's where they lived.

Marguerite Holloway: That's great.

Fred Bilyou: No more though.

Marguerite Holloway: When did that stop?

Fred Bilyou: That stopped 25 years ago.

Marguerite Holloway: Did your father tell you stories about how things had changed from when he was learning to fish to when he was teaching you or no?

Fred Bilyou: No, no.

Marguerite Holloway: So things pretty much stayed the same?

Fred Bilyou: Shad fishermen always stayed the same. You can't change a method that's been doing for the last at least 75 to 100 years that I know. I've always fished the same way. The net has changed. Because we used to fish with linen.

Marguerite Holloway: What was linen like?

Fred Bilyou: Linen was heavier twine, you couldn't bust it. You used to get a lot of sturgeon in a linen net, because sturgeon couldn't go through it. With nylon, they'd hit and go right through it, sometimes you'd find holes like that where they were.

Marguerite Holloway: Six foot wide?

Fred Bilyou: Sure. Where they hit, stretched out, they've got strain on it, because the ties are going to hold. And the sturgeon would go right straight through it. If you get a sturgeon you're going to get him in the end of the net where the net is

Marguerite Holloway: billowing?

[TIME STAMP 1:05:00]

Fred Bilyou: Yep. My Uncle George and Harve Cashdollar years, we're going back years ago, caught a sturgeon weighed 350 pounds. And they put it in the boat. But see, they didn't catch no shad then, 30, 40 shad was a lot of shad. I've seen fishermen throw a net in at the Poughkeepsie bridge up there, the old iron bridge, all the way to Hyde Park, let it sit back let it come all the way back down the river and pull the net out. That's how long they was out. They'd take enough lunch with them.

Marguerite Holloway: They'd go down out with the tide?

Fred Bilyou: Up with the tide.

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Marguerite Holloway: Up with the tide, and then down?

Fred Bilyou: Then come back down with them, then tow the net all around through that other bow on the back. Not me.

Marguerite Holloway: Did they get a lot of fish?

Fred Bilyou: No, that's why they stayed in the water.

Marguerite Holloway: You never did that?

Fred Bilyou: No. My father used to throw the net in a Blue Point, get on this end, hold the net. Put what they'd call a tow line on it and towed it, keep it right close in to shore. I stopped him of that. I said let the net go.

Marguerite Holloway: Why?

Fred Bilyou: Keep the net across the river. So stretched out. The old time fishermen that's all they did, hold the net on the West Shore over there.

Marguerite Holloway: To keep it stretched out?

Fred Bilyou: To keep it so, this end always goes down the river first. It moves around like this.

Marguerite Holloway: The end that's farther out in the river.

Fred Bilyou: Stays there, it holds. And the West Shore goes down the river, faster than the middle and the net goes faster so they used to put big long 75 to 100 foot tow line to keep it right up against the rocks. Towed the net five miles. So I made my father stop that. I said let the net go. So we find did no more towing. The only time he'd tow was when the net was starting to wind. He'd get a hold of it, straighten it out.

Marguerite Holloway: Why did you say just let it go?

Fred Bilyou: That's work. It'll kill you after a while. (laughter) See the old timers they didn't, see my father, after a while all they used to do was just row the boat. You know you got to an age and he'd just row the boat. And I handled all the net. When I was small, I used to row the boat and he'd take care of the net.

Marguerite Holloway: Did you catch less fish when you weren't holding it?

Fred Bilyou: We caught less fish years ago than you catch now.

Marguerite Holloway: When you'd just let the net go and you didn't tow it, did you catch less fish.

Fred Bilyou: No, caught the same fish, same amount.

Marguerite Holloway: And everyone was doing it that way?

Fred Bilyou: Yes, that's the way we, now my kid, I learned him see. Once I learned him how to do it, he can do it.

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Marguerite Holloway: So does he do anything different?

Fred Bilyou: He tried it two or three times, he can't do it.

Marguerite Holloway: What did he try?

Fred Bilyou: I couldn't tell you what he tried, but he got to stay in the water for at least 2 to 2 and a half hours to catch fish. He just can't throw a net in when there's not many fish, you've got to stay in the water to get fish. We used to go out there and throw it out there and pull it back out and you don't get no fish. When there's a lot of fish, yeah, you want to get it in. Because I'd take, used to have to take gallon the Prestone gallon plastic thing and carry them in the boat to keep the net afloat. Because the buoys wouldn't take all the weight.

[TIME STAMP 1;10:00]

Marguerite Holloway: Were you ever very scared out in the river?

Fred Bilyou: Never been scared out in the river yet.

Marguerite Holloway: Even in a wild storm?

Fred Bilyou: Nope. I took a good many shad fishermen couldn't get out. My stepbrother. He had a big, big round bottom boat, took a lot of nets out, pulled shad and everything right in the center of the boat. To guy losing his net, we had a lot of old fishermen out there. When we was young, we didn't care.

END OF RECORDING