

**AUD_2014_0074A John Fiorito 1991-08-08. Interview by Marguerite Holloway August 8, 1991.
Transcribed by Carla Lesh, Hudson River Maritime Museum, 2023**

John Fiorito: And fishing on the ice, cutting ice, setting net through the ice.

Marguerite Holloway: Was there one group of fishermen that you fished with in particular?

John Fiorito: No it was just the one family, the Tutttles.

Marguerite Holloway: And everyone in that family fished?

John Fiorito: Well, the grandfather was a fisherman, he had men that worked for him that pulled the seine and then when he passed away, the son carried on.

Marguerite Holloway: What was the son's name?

John Fiorito: Fred.

Marguerite Holloway: Are the Tuttle's still around?

John Fiorito: No, they're all passed away.

Marguerite Holloway: What did your family think of you fishing?

John Fiorito: Oh, they didn't interfere at all, let me do whatever I wanted to do. So I hung around there plenty. Then in 1930, my brother-in-law, he started fishing for shad. And at that time I was in the trucking business and he needed some poles carted in for the fishing and of course I had a truck and I hauled his poles in. Then he needed some other little financial help on the fishing and that's when I joined and went in partners with him.

Marguerite Holloway: What did he do the rest of the year when he wasn't fishing?

John Fiorito: He worked for Con Edison.

Marguerite Holloway: And he just fished for shad?

John Fiorito: Just the shad fishing, yes.

Marguerite Holloway: When you had been fishing with the Tutttles and you had been the seining and you had been fishing through the ice, what were you fishing for?

John Fiorito: We were fishing for mostly bass, then the seine of course whatever swam in the water, mostly bass, carp, them days used to be flounders but it wasn't commercially flounders, maybe in a haul might have 15-20 flounders. Them days they used to be quite a few flounders in the river, but not enough to do commercially.

Marguerite Holloway: Did they fish all year round?

John Fiorito: No, well, yes, they were most, but he worked down the Point too, he drove a team of horses, the son Tuttle and he fished quite a bit the year around, spare time fishing. But the father, his father had the seine and that was just in the spring and fall.

Marguerite Holloway: Were there a lot of other haul seiners right along there?

John Fiorito: No, it was just that one. And he had a very large, long seine. He let out maybe 1000 foot of rope before the staff of the net would start and the staff and maybe the seine was maybe about 1500

foot of seine and then when this was hauled into shore you had to, while the tide is still coming up, otherwise you'd never pull all that weight to shore. And the rope at shore on each end it was wrapped around a crab and at the crab, that's why they call it a crab where the rope wrapped around and you pulled this rope in to pull the staff in. And they had a horse, used to work this around on each of the staff. They had a horse. And at that time the men done it too, but it was quite a lot of pull.

Marguerite Holloway: How many men did they have working?

John Fiorito: Well, it took about four men to do this, because then when the staff come to shore, then there had to be two men on each staff pulling it in on both ends. Until you get the new all the way in and in the center of the net there was a cod, all these fish were crowded into the cod.

Marguerite Holloway: And that was a thicker mesh?

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John Fiorito: Well it was all about the same mesh that I can remember, yeah.

Marguerite Holloway: Where did they sell the fish?

John Fiorito: Well, a lot of the dealers used to go there and pick it up and then they went to New York Fish Market.

Marguerite Holloway: And so they didn't have any direct competition, right there?

John Fiorito: No, no competition, they were the only fishermen on the Point them days.

Marguerite Holloway: Did they do well?

John Fiorito: Well, at times, at times, yes. Some times would make good hauls, a lot of times there's no fish at all, all that work and nothing in the seine.

Marguerite Holloway: What was the water of the river like then?

John Fiorito: Well, it was way before the pollution, you didn't have the oil and grease. Well, of course today they got rid of the oil and grease, the river is beautifully clean in that respect today. But with other chemicals like PCBs that it contains today.

Marguerite Holloway: There was none of that.

John Fiorito: No.

Marguerite Holloway: How deep was the seine?

John Fiorito: Well, see I was pretty young then on the seine, I was only a kid working with them on that see. But other fishermen, when I went out to my own business and that was all gill netting. The seine might have been, oh, maybe 10 foot wide, I don't remember size mesh, because I never fished, I was only a kid at that time.

Marguerite Holloway: Did you ever go down with them to the Fulton Fish Market?

John Fiorito: No, no, no I was too young then. See I lived there until I was 11 years old at the Point and this all happened before I was 11 years old.

Marguerite Holloway: And then you moved

John Fiorito: We moved to Croton and I lived in Croton until I was married in 1931. Then of course I started fishing for myself in 1930. And it started off that I fished just on the Flats, what they call the Flats, at low water it's about 10, 11 foot of water. That runs that depth all the way to the channel. I started off fishing on the Flats and then of course, I was fishing alone then.

Marguerite Holloway: What gear were you using?

John Fiorito: Well, at them days we used, that before nylon nets, we used started off with cotton, way back was Sea Island Cotton and that rotted kind of fast. Then the linen came out and that was a whole lot better. And then after the linen the nylon come out and the nylon was just great. That didn't rot like the linen and the cotton.

Marguerite Holloway: How many seasons would a cotton net last?

John Fiorito: Well, it depends on how you treated. If you fished just the tide and you bring that it, the cotton net and then you had to strip it on pipe to dry it out. You couldn't leave it in the water. But with nylon come out you could leave it any length of time. We would set our net at the beginning. There's a lift period to allow the fish to go by to spawn and after the lift period, with the nylon net you could set them at the beginning of the week and leave them all week and just lift over the bow and the net goes back into fish. Well there was a lot of different system of fishing. I had crews one time and the crews, I fished two rows with the crews. There would be four men to a boat, say and then I had built scows to handle heavy long poles

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John Fiorito: The longest pole I had was 65 foot in one piece and then I spliced pieces on the ends of them that went to 72 feet. And we edged into the channel them days maybe a couple of hundred feet into the channel and them poles would sink 15 feet, 18 feet into the mud and we set them off of scows that I had built. These scows they were built out of 2" x 14" beams and 24 foot long. Two inches by 14 inches. And 24 foot long. So I built two of those and they were 6 foot wide and then we'd tie two of those together with a space in between where we set the poles. And that's what we set them big, heavy poles off of.

Marguerite Holloway: How'd you get the poles down?

John Fiorito: Well, with the two scows are tied together with a 4 x 6 timber, see. Then this heavy, long, heavy pole we would slide in the center between the scows and we would slide it out to where it's at a balance point. Then we wrapped a chain around it at that point and then with five men, of course we fished, we were setting these poles against the tide, the tide is coming against us. And with five men we'd slowly lift up the pole then the tide is also helping to pull that pole down until you get it straight. Then when you get it straight, we would let go of it and then the five would grab it and push it down, grab and push it and push it down. When we got it down as far as we can we wrapped a chain with a U a hook on it and we would set another pole on top. Another pole that's on the scow and a couple of men would jump on that but you really had to push them down to hold them in there. Because that time, at high tide was 44 foot of water in the channel so it really took some doing.

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Marguerite Holloway: So you set a pole across, when you pushed it down as far as you could and then jumped on

John Fiorito: Yeah, put the other pole onto the hook, we'd put it with a half hitch chain and with this hook and we'd put this pole on top of that hook, then two men would jump on top of that while three others are pushing on the pole down.

Marguerite Holloway: Anyone ever go falling right down.

John Fiorito: Beg your pardon?

Marguerite Holloway: Did anyone ever fall?

John Fiorito: No, no, no one ever got hurt or fell overboard on this. Of course, holding these scows we'd have anchors out maybe with 300 foot of rope, 200, 300 foot of rope to hold the scow in position.

Marguerite Holloway: How did you learn to make scows and how to set the poles.

John Fiorito: That was on my own judgement. I built four row boats. The first row boat, Henry Goudine worked with me building the first rowboat. His father was a boat builder, he learned from his father. So I worked with him on the first boat and then I built three other boats after that. And the scows was all on my own judgement.

Marguerite Holloway: Henry didn't teach you how to build scows?

John Fiorito: No, no, he had scows too, but I didn't have no problem building scows.

Marguerite Holloway: And how did you get the poles back out?

John Fiorito: The poles, to take out, we used them scows and I had a very good wench, We wrapped the chain around the pole, we'd drop it down about 6 feet, down the pole and get it hooked. You feel that catch and then with a cable to the wench. And then we'd wind the wench by hand. And that scows would go down almost to take water. And then of course the back of scows would be up high and we'd walk back to the end of the scows and just wait for it. And all of a sudden it would break loose and come up. Break loose and come up, not completely out, part way so the men could get a hold of it then and pull the rest of the way and pull it on to the scows.

Marguerite Holloway: Wow, how many poles did you set? How many to each row?

John Fiorito: Well, into the channel, out edge into the channel with about 7 poles.

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John Fiorito: And they were set about 40 foot apart, about 280 feet into the channel. And then of course we came into the flats there maybe, we fished about 900 foot of net all together.

Marguerite Holloway: Total?

John Fiorito: About 900 foot all together of net, yeah. The nets at that style were about 400 and 450 foot long in one piece. And we had top ties on the poles, tied about 5 inches below the low water mark. And we set the net at low water and every 40 feet you have these top ties that you would tie onto your net. You're setting your net on the last of the ebb tide. When the strength of the tide is fairly weak, on the

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very last of the ebb tide. Then, when we get done setting the net we had a few minutes and already it's changing and starts up and the net would go up against the poles.

Marguerite Holloway: And then when do you pick the fish? Did you take the net out or did you just?

John Fiorito: Yes, on that style of fishing with these long, and this was with the crews. Then to life that net would be two men rowing. The row boat was 24 foot length. The row boat that we're lifting out of there'd be two men rowing and two men would be lifting, one would have the top sim of the net and the other would have the bottom sim of the net. And as we pulled the net into the boat. At one time we had a large tray that we used to pull it onto a tray. The two men would be into the tray, one on each sim and as you're pulling the net in and the fish coming along, you pick out the fish and pull the net in. And you'd have to take the net in at the finish. You start lifting the net when the flood water is beginning to weaken some because when it's running full strength you'd never be able to pull it up. When the flood water starts weakening and we start lifting the net. Then it was if we start a little too early, we find it's too hard, too heavy to row the boat against the tide. Well we just hook up then to a pole and we'd wait for the tide to slack. You had to wait to get it just about right.

Marguerite Holloway: How long would it take you to do one of the rows?

John Fiorito: Well, that depended how many fish, how heavy the fish were running see. If there was a lot of fish, we'd have to work hard against the very strong tide because it would take quite a while to pick all them fish out, see. It used to take about, oh, an hour and a half to pull the fish and approximately an hour and a half average time. And we would have to get the net in before the change of tide. Because at change of tide of course then of course the net would turn inside out with the ebb tide and then a lot of the roes would fall out.

Marguerite Holloway: So you would bring the net up over the front of the boat?

John Fiorito: No, it's off with the flood tide, your bow was facing south and your stern is facing north. And that's the way we'd lift the net. Two men into the tray and pulling in because your tide is going up.

Marguerite Holloway: And then when do you reset it?

John Fiorito: At the next ebb tide.

Marguerite Holloway: You would take time off from your job?

John Fiorito: Yes, I worked in General Motors, I started at General Motors in 1934 and I worked there until 1942, the last model before World War II.

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John Fiorito: And I always got a leave of absence with General Motors for my commercial fishing, which I had done for about 6 weeks of the season.

Marguerite Holloway: That's great.

John Fiorito: Now, when the war ended and all of these boys, service boys coming back, good men that worked at General Motors that went to service. And when they come back there were some many of them that were business minded and they wanted to try out for a business and if it didn't work out they

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wanted to go back to their job in General Motors. So General Motors, there were so many of them they come out with a strict rule, no leave of absence for anybody. So at the end of the war, when I went back with General Motors and it came to my fishing time, because of that strict rule they had I couldn't get a leave of absence.

Marguerite Holloway: So what did you do?

John Fiorito: They said you could quit and fish at the end of the season we'll hire you each year as a new man, I couldn't build up no seniority that way and I said, that wouldn't be very good. I couldn't build up no seniority, so I had to quit and then I started painting. And from then on I painted and I joined the Painter's Union. I was 33 years in the Painter's Union until I retired.

Marguerite Holloway: How did you find people to crew with you each season?

John Fiorito: Well the different ones, in the neighborhood. Them days there was quite a few out of work. It was kind of Depression time. And there was always quite a few. And I had a tough time. I had a tough time with a crew because I had to have seven men to fish two rows and myself, 8 took four to each boat.

Marguerite Holloway: Did you usually get the same guys each season?

John Fiorito: Yes, yes, they were available.

Marguerite Holloway: Do you remember any of them?

John Fiorito: Not exactly the same ones sometimes a couple of different ones. Well there was Bingals, Robert and Alfred Bingal. There was Perch, don't even know his real name, knicknamed Perch Purdy.

Marguerite Holloway: What was he like?

John Fiorito: I don't know how I could describe him. Ken Satch was another one. I can't remember the others.

Marguerite Holloway: So all of the, except for building the row boats which Henry helped you with, everything else, if you had been doing the seining with the people on the Point, how did you learn how to do stake netting and set the poles?

John Fiorito: Well that I just seen from other fishermen what they would do and just, mostly all to my own judgement. All to my own judgement. You learn from experience, failures at times.

Marguerite Holloway: Do you remember any mistakes or anything that you had to learn each season.

John Fiorito: Well, there's plenty of mistakes that we learned from. That's where experience come from the mistakes. I remember one time, the river at times has an awful lot of dirt rug that would get into your nets. And this rug, you had to dry the nets thoroughly. You had to dry the nets thoroughly and then you put it on to a plank with a rug underneath and you had to beat the rug to a dust to get it cleaned out of the net. And so there was times when the tide was running, if you go out and set the net early and if the river is clean, no floating stuff

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John Fiorito: the net would be laying on top of the water. That running water would clean out your net. So one time I went out there and it was running fairly strong like that, it was a fairly strong northwest wind that ripple, that rough water is what beating the net, cleans that rug out. So the one time I went out kind of early, set two rows and it was an – at night time this was. We fished two tides around the clock. There's two tides a day, Two ebbs and two floods. So I went out, it was dark and I couldn't see all this floating stuff and I went out a fairly strong ripple on the water, rough water. I figured it was going to clean my net clean as a whistle. And what happened, there was a terrific lot of floating limbs of trees and planks and there's an awful lot of floating stuff. And it really made an awful mess of the boat. We had an awful job of cleaning all of this wood and tree limbs out of the net and so I learned a good lesson at that. Never again getting the net clean is better with all this beating on shore. Then of course, with this beating I used to pick up maybe 8 or 9 kids to beat them and they're always looking for money to go to shows. So that's how I used to get the nets clean, mostly with the kids. Then of course I've done it with our own men too. Because it took an awful lot of beating, two rows, a lot of net. It took a lot of beating of the net to get it all clean.

Marguerite Holloway: How long would you have to beat it for?

John Fiorito: Well it might take, 4 or 5 men, it might take about 4 hours.

Marguerite Holloway: Oh, my god.

John Fiorito: Yeah, it took a lot of beating and shaking it out and then we'd take it out on the pipes, open it up on the pipe and let the dust fall out of it.

Marguerite Holloway: You would do this between each set.

John Fiorito: Yeah, in between and mostly on the weekend when we could fish. There was the lift period.

Marguerite Holloway: And then you'd also mend the nets on the weekend.

John Fiorito: On the weekend and then in between while waiting for the tide during the day. I done all the mending myself. None of the men I had were menders.

Marguerite Holloway: How did you learn to do that?

John Fiorito: Well, I learned that mostly on my own because it was quite a lot to that. Tuttle tried to show me an awful lot. But I was young then and I couldn't pick it up. But then from making loads of mistakes and making big knots and mending at all I finally got that down pat. It was quite a trick in mending holes. The hole is not perfectly round and it went off at different angles and all that. It was quite a lot to mending net.

Marguerite Holloway: Were there other fishermen in the area that you would go talk with?

John Fiorito: Oh, yes, there was loads of fishermen around then. Right here in Ossining there might have been 8 or 9 of them.

Marguerite Holloway: Was there any competition for the places where you set the nets?

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John Fiorito: Well, that was a little before my time, it wasn't regulated and the fishermen then used to fight one another. One would set out a row of poles and the guy behind him was too close to him and he'd pull his poles up and he'd go and set maybe just a little ways ahead of him. And a lot of that went on, before my time. During my time, the War Department stepped in onto that and it was controlled, your location, you had to get a permit from the War Department. And they come up and inspected your row and see that you have proper lidded right and all that and flags, you had to meet their regulations. And then they set a distance of 1500 feet. But the 1500 feet was fairly close in the channel. The fisherman ahead of you, 1500 feet in front of you, he did hurt you.

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Marguerite Holloway: How did they choose 1500 feet?

John Fiorito: They set the 1500, the regulation 1500 feet and then you would file with them where you want to fish.

Marguerite Holloway: Why was it the War Department?

John Fiorito: Well, they're the ones that set in. I don't know how they got control of it. Somebody had a rule that they gave it to the War Department. The War Department regulated about the location and they controlled that. And then we got our license from the Conservation Department in Albany. Conservation, you know, they used to just give you the license and that was it and there was nobody to control the fishermen with the lights on the pole, you had to have a red light on the inside, a white light on the outside. A flag on the outside pole, a flag on the inside pole. The War Department regulated that.

Marguerite Holloway: Did they come out and check on you often?

John Fiorito: Not too often, not too often. I'd see their boat go by every now and then and even at night time they'd check to see if the lights were lit.

Marguerite Holloway: So where were your rows?

John Fiorito: I had a row, I don't even remember this buoy off Scarborough Station I had a row, on the flats and then I had a row down off of Rockwood Hall dock. That's just down a little north of Philipse Manor, Rockwood Hall dock.

Marguerite Holloway: And that one went into the channel.

John Fiorito: That's the one I fished into part of the channel. Then I ahead of this light here, I had a row there too. There's a buoy, I don't remember the number of the buoy. They went by numbers. It might be Number 8 buoy. Yeah, and I fished just ahead of that. And that row edged into the channel too. With the crews I fished just the channel rows and part of the flat. Then as fishing dropped off and shad was dropping and not as many coming up, I cut down from two rows to one row.

Marguerite Holloway: When did the shad drop off? Or you mean in the season?

John Fiorito: Yeah, well, the seasons that not too many shad come up. It dropped off that the shad got very few. I don't recall the years. But I cut it down to the one row and then even the one row, to meet expenses with three men the one row fish was very cheap. We got peanuts down the Market for them. We were at their mercy down there. One row wasn't even starting to pay off so then I discontinued the

crew fishing and I fished just with one man. And then cut up these long nets into 50 foot lengths. And that was another style of fishing, 50 foot lengths. We'd fish them between poles. We'd have rings on the poles, a small ring, a rope would be tied on the pole and allow that small ring to go down just below your low water mark. And the top of your net would be tied onto the small ring. Then there's a larger ring onto the pole that your bottom sim of the net would tied onto. That would take the bottom of your net down, see. And then when it comes to lifting, we'd lift up and the rings would slide up. You'd lift over the bow then. That's when I start when the net goes back into the water. Lifting over the bow and cleaning out the fish, the net goes right back into fishing.

Marguerite Holloway: When would you use that technique as opposed to the other? When there wasn't as much fish?

John Fiorito: That's right, when it didn't the expenses of a crew, they you're only by yourself and then I had one other fellow that I fished,

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John Fiorito: he fished out of one boat too. He lifted the row on the flats and I would life the row where it's part flat and part channel.

Marguerite Holloway: So it would be much easier because of these rings, so you could go faster.

John Fiorito: That's right. Yes, and what was nice about that you didn't have to go out there at low water to set net, see. The other one, around the clock you had to get up in the middle of the night at low water to go out and set nets. And of course there was not a lot of net that you could leave it all week that you could do that, so you could never fish that with the cotton net or even the linen, it would rot in the water all week. We'd leave it all week.

Marguerite Holloway: So when you used the cotton net and the linen net, you've have to bring it in, dry it out.

John Fiorito: Dry it out, that's right.

Marguerite Holloway: Bring it back. So what happened if the weather was terrible? Where did you dry the net?

John Fiorito: Well, you have other nets to put in if you couldn't get the nets dried see.

Marguerite Holloway: When did you first use the rings?

John Fiorito: Hard to tell the year. The rings might of come in around early in the 1960s and as far as the fish, the fish that come in there, we really worked for peanuts. Buck shad, we were only getting a penny a pound. A penny a pound, we packed 125 pounds in a box and the early part it would cost 50 cents for the truck to take that to the market. Then we might have about 10 cents worth of ice in it. And down at the Market, they operated on a 12 and a half percent commission and so we actually gave them three pounds for a penny. And still at the same time, them buck shad were selling the stores from 13 cents, so I don't know who was making all the money. The fisherman, the producer that he got the peanuts.

Marguerite Holloway: Was there a lot of competition to sell at the Market?

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John Fiorito: Oh, there were plenty of dealers down there, they all wanted fish. There was plenty of times where I didn't even get the penny. Where they didn't have no sale down there. Now the truckman that takes the fish down. The dealer says, hey, tell that Fiorito don't send no more buck shad down, we can't sell them here. But the truckman would 't tell me because he's making 50 cents a box taking them down. And I've lost money many a time down there, 10, 12, 15 boxes of buck shad. It cost me 50 cents a box to ship it down with the ice on it and all the work of boxing it. And the roe shad. We were only getting 4, 5 and 6 cents a pound when they were in the stores there for 28 cents, 30 cents a pound.

Marguerite Holloway: So the truck driver wasn't someone that you knew very well.

John Fiorito: Oh, I knew them well, he knew me well, but he's not going to tell me. He's not going to tell me and lose that 50 cents to cart that fish down. Oh for the last, oh, golly, the only time we get anything for buck shad or row shad when we got any prices on the beginning of the season before the run really started. You only come in with like a bushel or a couple of bushels. Then maybe you get 13 cents a pound for buck shad. And roe shad might be 25 cents, 30 cents.

Marguerite Holloway: How long did that last?

John Fiorito: The early part maybe for about a week and a half. Until the heavy part, but as soon as the heavy part of the fish start running, they went down to nothing. I often joke prices in stores, the meat might be like 99 cents. I say, well I can see the 9 cents was for the producer of that meat. The 90 cents was between the market and the store.

Marguerite Holloway: The same with the fish.

John Fiorito: Yes, the same with the fish. The producer is at the mercy of the market.

Marguerite Holloway: Did the fishermen ever try to organize to get more money?

John Fiorito: No.

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John Fiorito: No, we were at their mercy down there.

Marguerite Holloway: Were there some dealers that were better than other ones?

John Fiorito: Well, they, that's hard to tell, that's hard to tell because when you send, every day is a different market price. If you send it to this dealer today and you send it to the other dealer tomorrow. The other dealer might give you, he might give you a couple of pennies more, so you would send fish down to him, see. To draw you, one of their customers. I remember now when Harry Gourdine when he started in there was a fellow by the name of Than Tuttle. He was related to the Tuttles over at Croton Point. And this Than Tuttle he had men to all the work. He didn't do any of the river work. And he shipped the fish down to the Market and he knew that he was at their mercy. So he marked his boxes. And he went down to market. The dealer down there didn't know who he was didn't know who he was, see. So he's walking around there watching for his fish when his fish is going to be sold. And he seen his fish being sold, he took a good look at the buyer and then when he got his return, it was a lot less than what they sold it for. So then he called up the dealer and said look, I was down there and I seen my fish being sold. He described the guy that bought it. He told him the price the guy paid for it. He said here's

what you're sending me was below the price he sold minus his 12 and a half percent commission. Nothing you could do about it. Nothing you could do about it, you change dealers, the other guy would do the same.

Marguerite Holloway: So the guy didn't say, didn't try to give him the money?

John Fiorito: No, no, well I don't know what become of it. I could have done the same thing, anybody, you can catch them, but what good is it, you're at their mercy. What're you going to do, you come up with these fish, you can't sell them around here. A few dealers come around, pick up maybe a bushel to peddle them, stuff like that. But you come in with a lot, a lot of fish you're at their mercy to send them down there. Well the fishing never amounted to me, it was never a profitable thing. It was something I loved to do. Something I loved to do and I just figured that I only got paid for my time. And then of course, during the year I spent a lot of time mending nets, building boats, going out looking for poles and preparing for the season. What it amounted to I just about got paid for my time. It was an interesting business, something I liked to do.

Marguerite Holloway: Did you break even in terms of being able to pay your crew?

John Fiorito: Well, the crew I paid according to the fish coming in. Of course them days it was a lot cheaper but the least I remember paying was 50 dollars for the weak and with the crew time maybe the highest pay was around \$100, \$110, \$120 . Of course this was going way back when \$120 was a whole lot more than today.

Marguerite Holloway: When was this?

John Fiorito: It had to be in the 1960s, the latter part of the 1960s. Or maybe it could have been in the 1950s too. Hard to tell, I can't remember exactly. I haven't fished in so many years now I've been retired from the painting 17 years.

Marguerite Holloway: When did you last fish a shad season?

[TIME STAMP 45:00]

John Fiorito: I last fished that must be around, I've been retired since 1973, about 1978 I think must have been the last fishing. I last fished when the regulation come over the PCBs in the water, you couldn't take bass. Then it was completely, it wasn't worth fishing at all then.

Marguerite Holloway: So that was like 1976, I think.

John Fiorito: is that when the PCBs? 1976?

Marguerite Holloway: If you were fishing mostly for shad, did you catch bass as sort of a side catch before?

John Fiorito: With the crews it was mostly all shad, and of course we got some bass. We fished 5 and a quarter inch mesh net for shad. And a lot of your bass would go through that. So we'd catch the later like 7, 8 pound, 6, 7, 8 pound bass. But all the 4. 4 and a half pounder, they'd go through that, see. So when the shad, the season when the shad start dropping off quite a bit, then we got smaller mesh net, 4 and a half, 4 and three-quarters. We started to fish for bass. And then the latter years, when I was fishing alone, that system over the bow it was mostly all bass. It was mostly bass then.

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Marguerite Holloway: How much would you get for a bass per pound?

John Fiorito: Well, bass, of course, when you just start off in the beginning of the season, you only come in with a bushel, a bushel and a half, you might get 18, 20, 22 cents a pound for it. But then in the middle of the season, when you're catching them real heavy, they went down to 6, 8, 9 cents a pound.

Marguerite Holloway: Around 1976 when they banned them, did all the fishermen know that were about to be banned?

John Fiorito: Oh, well, yeah, the law came out, we couldn't bring them in. Up in Verplanck I understand they were smuggling them in and they were going to the market and however they must have sold them down there as Chesapeake Bay bass. Yeah, there was a lot of dirty work that I heard of.

Marguerite Holloway: Did you know any fishermen that did that?

John Fiorito: No, no.

Marguerite Holloway: Were you ever interested in doing that?

John Fiorito: Oh, not a bit, not a bit. I would never think about, If the fish were polluted, I wouldn't eat them myself and I would never want somebody else to eat them. I'd never want to make a dollar that way. No way. I just quit fishing.

Marguerite Holloway: A lot of fishermen say that they don't think the PCBs are bad for your health.

John Fiorito: Well I don't know, the regulation, they say Food and Drug Administration, whoever controls that. They say not to eat maybe more than a meal a week that they were saying.

Marguerite Holloway: So did you stop eating bass then?

John Fiorito: Yeah, I haven't had bass myself since then, no. Even when they say a meal a week, I wouldn't eat bass. I would never think about sneaking them into sell them to somebody else to eat, no way. Anything that I wouldn't eat myself, I wouldn't expect somebody else to eat. I don't need a dollar that bad.

Marguerite Holloway: So at that point it wasn't worth even fishing for the shad?

John Fiorito: No, no, not at all. Because at that time it was mostly bass they were catching.

[TIME STAMP 50:00]

John Fiorito: And the shad, the heavy run was in the channel, very few shad on the flats. So I mean when the fishing, you couldn't take bass it didn't pay with this heavy equipment to go into the channel. You would need scows and everything else to do that see. It didn't pay to fish for shad alone.

Marguerite Holloway: So why did the shad start swimming more in the channel and less on the flats?

John Fiorito: Well, it was always the heavy run was always, the shad, they know how much time they have before it's time to spawn. They know how much time they have. I don't know exactly how far up the river where they go to spawn. Some of them spawn right here in the Croton River, in here. And they know just how much, and the ones in the channel must be the ones, they must be near ready to spawn that they're in a hurry to get to the spawning grounds. The heavy runs was always in the channel in the deep

water. A 50 foot space in the channel would catch as many shad as you would get in 300 feet of net on the flats. Just a 50 foot space.

Marguerite Holloway: Do you have a camp down by the river?

John Fiorito: Yes, when I was crew fishing, it used to be a railroad crossing here. When I was crew fishing I had a two car metal garage on the dock that I used to keep my nets in and store my boats in. That's where I packed my fish when I had the crews. Then when I finished crew fishing, I done away with the garage, then I had a shanty on this side of the track and I operated out of the shanty on this side of the track.

Marguerite Holloway: Where did you find the poles?

John Fiorito: That wasn't easy. I done a lot of tromping through the woods and then try to find the owners of these poles. It wasn't easy for the channel poles. The poles on the flats, they're only about 35 foot long. You could find them in quite a few places. The channel poles were very hard to find and had to be the right kind of wood. Hickory was one of the very good. Ash was another one. You had to find them so they're not too thick at the butt and they've got to be very straight. And for a 65 foot pole like that, they're not easy to find.

Marguerite Holloway: So how thick were they at the base?

John Fiorito: At the base they'd be about 8 inches, 8 inch diameter.

Marguerite Holloway: Wow, so you'd go traipsing through the woods.

John Fiorito: Oh yeah, yeah. Then these poles of course, we had to scrape all of the bark off and where the limbs come out on them we had to cut the limbs off and rasp it so it would be very smooth so the net wouldn't catch on anything. Because the net slides up these these poles when we're lifting, see. That's on the crew fishing part. We had a lot of different systems of fishing. Now even on the flats one time instead of in between rings before we started the ring business, we'd have two rows of poles. A row when the flood tide would go up against your northern rope poles. And at the ebb tide the net would go down and go against the ebb poles. You tied the net just on the end poles. The west end pole and the east end pole. Then your net would be in between that, see and it would go against this row of poles on the floor tide and when the tide changed on the other side.

Marguerite Holloway: I've never heard of that.

John Fiorito: On the flats we done that, not in the channel.

Marguerite Holloway: So how far apart would the rows be?

John Fiorito: The poles, they'd be maybe about 35 foot apart. It would go around this way, like egg shaped.

[TIME STAMP 55:00]

Marguerite Holloway: So you'd have sort of an oval of one row and then another semi-circle facing and the sides curved away from each other and the net would be in the middle.

John Fiorito: That's right. The net would be to this pole there say, east end and the west end.

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Marguerite Holloway: And then it would hit when the tide

John Fiorito: That's right.

Marguerite Holloway: Where did you learn that?

John Fiorito: Well, that I seen other fishermen do. I lot of them done it way back. They mostly do that kind on the flats see.

Marguerite Holloway: So you could fish both tides.

John Fiorito: You could fish both tides that way.

Marguerite Holloway: And that was only with nylon net?

John Fiorito: Now, with the ring system, you fished both tides too. Because that's, you've got the two rings on the poles see. But we never went out to lift the ebb, unless it was strong winds when it was time to flood tide that we couldn't make it, then we'd go out on the ebb. But otherwise, and the fish would be in, fish that are caught from the flood tide. We never fished the ebb this way much. It wasn't worth setting the net to fish the ebb.

Marguerite Holloway: What would be the advantage of using this system where you have the two rows pretty close together, versus using the rings?

John Fiorito: Well, you don't have to go out to set the net at the ebb tide, see? You didn't have to go out to set the net.

Marguerite Holloway: But with the rings you can leave the net in too.

John Fiorito: Oh, yeah, with the rings you leave the net in. You see the small ring tied to the small, you adjust it to the tide, there's a rope tied on the pole would let that ring go down only below your low water mark. You've got to make sure it's below the low water because if it don't go down below the low water mark, then you're net would be above water on the ebb tide and it would catch all the floating stuff, see. So the ring is adjusted with the rope allow it to go down just below the low water mark and your heavier ring, it's a bigger ring, it goes to the bottom of your net is tied to. It'll take the bottom of your net down, see. Just like this is your net, your bottom ring, this is the top of your net, this is the bottom. Your net has a sim all the way around 50, has a sim. And when you tie the bottom of your net to the bottom, that ring goes down.

Marguerite Holloway: To the bottom of the pole.

John Fiorito: Yeah it goes to the bottom, right to the bottom.

Marguerite Holloway: I guess what I don't understand is if you can leave the net in if you have the rings. And you can leave the net in if you have these two rows of poles, why would you do one or the other?

John Fiorito: Well the idea, you don't have to go out to set mostly. It isn't that you want to fish the ebb tide. I'll go out, the fish seem to be caught more in the night tide. Now I've gone out there just to see what's in the ebb tide. I might only come in with half a bushel of fish caught from the ebb tide. And the flood tide, the previous flood tide I might have come in with 20 boxes. Twenty 125 pound boxes.

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Marguerite Holloway: How long was this net that you set between the two rows of poles?

John Fiorito: You can make that as long as you want. 400 foot, any length you want to make it.

Marguerite Holloway: Where did you store all the poles?

John Fiorito: At low tide, in the river and we buried them under loads of rock to hold them down. And we used the same poles year after year. That's the only way you could hold them, in the water. At low tide you set with the butt, the heavy part up on the shore because sometimes the water will go down below and the air won't hurt that too much. It's important that the end of your poles be underwater all the time. Because they're the ones that would weaken fast. When you set your pole, the part that will go is the part that's above water.

[TIME STAMP 1:00:00]

John Fiorito: where the air hits it. A pole could last maybe forever underwater where the air doesn't hit it.

Marguerite Holloway: How many seasons would the poles last?

John Fiorito: Well, a lot of the poles, well, some of the poles went 20 years, yeah. And the tops, during the fishing season, the tops are above water and that's the part that will decay. Then you can cut that off, you can splice another piece to the bottom part. If the bottom part is good that can go on for many, many, many years. They hardly ever rot.

Marguerite Holloway: So where would you leave them? Along here?

John Fiorito: Down here there's a beach and a lot of rock of on the side there. We'd bury and put a lot of rock on top of them to hold them down.

Marguerite Holloway: And the other fishermen did the same?

John Fiorito: The other fishermen did the same, yeah.

Marguerite Holloway: What time, when would you bury them?

John Fiorito: Well, we fished, when I had the crews, started about mid-April to about the end of May. Six weeks.

Marguerite Holloway: And then you buried them then?

John Fiorito: Yeah, pulled them out, when you're done fishing, pull them out and bury them.

Marguerite Holloway: That's neat.

John Fiorito: When I fished alone I fished a couple of anchor nets in the channel, when I couldn't afford to be using scows to set these heavy poles. I'd use heavy weights and anchor them. Now, on the anchor nets, the anchor we'd find iron, any kind of iron for weight, about 300 pounds see. So that was quite, and the hold the weights from year to year we'd tie a nylon rope when we got done and let that nylon rope drop down to the bottom. Then we'd grapple that rope for the following year, you don't have to replace the anchors. And the nylon is good all year long. I've fished the same nylon rope out there

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maybe four or five years, the same rope, never rots, nylon. The only thing that deteriorates nylon is the air and sun. But the water, you can start in water.

Marguerite Holloway: How many foot of anchor net?

John Fiorito: It would be two 50 foot pieces tied together. Then of course you had to have about another 75 feet on each end to the anchors see. So there would be 100 foot between anchors of net.

Marguerite Holloway: What other techniques did you have?

John Fiorito: Well, way back of course talking about ice fishing, we used to fish on ice many years ago.

Marguerite Holloway: When?

John Fiorito: That's before, well, let me see, up until about 1940, I think. Then the river didn't make much ice. But there used to be heavy ice on the river. And we used to cut holes through the ice and set net.

Marguerite Holloway: How'd you do that?

John Fiorito: Well, we had what you call a haul hole. Maybe that's about 3 foot wide and 5 foot long. Cut that long. And that's where we would set our net in. A 50 foot net on each side of this haul hole. And you'd go out here about 15 feet and you'd make a small hole. Another 15 feet a small hole. And then 15 week would be the end of your net. So what we'd do, we'd take a long furring strip and we'd tie a rope and get it from the haul hole to this small hole.

[TIME STAMP 1:05:00]

John Fiorito: And then we'd pass that along. The idea is to get a rope underneath the ice to the last hole where you tied it. Then at the haul hole you'd have a long stick to go across your haul hole. And your net would tie to that and go underneath the ice. Then the idea of the small hole was to dip down and catch that top sim and bring the top of that net and you'd tie it on to a string and a stake across that haul hole. So the top of your net would be maybe a foot under your ice. Then to the next hole the same way. And then the end of your net would tie, a rope tied to the pole on the end of the net. So that when it's time to lift, you tie a rope onto the end of the net here and you loosen up where you've got it tied here and the holes in between hold your top sim up. You let that loose and then you pull your net to this haul hole and you clean your fish out. And then with that rope that you on that, with that rope you bring it right back out and set it again.

Marguerite Holloway: Put it back in.

John Fiorito: Yeah, then you reach down with a pole with a hook on, get the top sim and you would tie a string on it and adjust it so that it would be a foot or so under the ice.

Marguerite Holloway: So you would sort of string the net through from hole to hole, using a pole, and then you would loosen it in the holes between the end of the first one at the end and then you could pull it back through the haul hole.

John Fiorito: Pull it to the haul hole, you tie a rope on that then. Of course, where that comes out of the ice there's a rope tied on it to where the end of your net is in the water, see. And the rope ties to the

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stake you've got in the ice. Now, of course, during the night, during the night it might make an inch and a half, and so you'd break that ice in the haul hole and you'd break it in these other holes there.

Marguerite Holloway: What did you catch?

John Fiorito: That was fishing mostly for bass in the winter time, yeah.

Marguerite Holloway: What size mesh were you using?

John Fiorito: These were only 50 foot nets and then you had different size mesh four and a half, four and three-quarter inch mesh.

Marguerite Holloway: Did you catch other things?

John Fiorito: No, just bass. And it was very seldom that you would catch bass. I mean, you might, bass brought a good price, if you caught any. But there were winters that we wouldn't catch any bass at all. We tried in several different places, not catch any at all.

Marguerite Holloway: Did a lot of fishermen do that? Do ice fishing?

John Fiorito: Well, up in Peekskill. Yeah, a few of them did that. Then up in Peekskill, when we fished up in Peekskill there just with the 8 and 10 foot nets. We'd cut a hole, let's see now, it's so long ago, I can't remember exactly how we done it. It was under the ice too. You'd make a hole the same way, you have a haul hole there. But it's only maybe like a foot wide and maybe two foot long. And 10 foot over farther there you have another hole like that. We'd pass a rope under that and we'd tie, we'd get a 10 foot net tied underneath that. A 10 foot square net and we used to let that net go down on one end, for a weight we used to use a rock, we put into a bag. We'd knit a bag and put a rock in. A rock on each end of this 10 foot net that would take the net down. And then the top of the net you'd have maybe it was deep water up there, 100 foot of water so we let it go down maybe 40, 50 feet, let 40, 50 foot of rope down. And you tied onto the poles, sticks, one on each end. Then when it come time to lift this net, you would just take it from this one rope and you pull it all out of that one place. And up there we very seldom got any bass, mostly perch

[TIME STAMP 1:10:00]

John Fiorito: So, penny a pound, I mean and yet, you couldn't make no money. We really didn't fish much for perch but was looking for bass, see. Some of the fishermen up there, they fished for that penny a pound and put it and they get maybe 200 pounds in a ten foot square net. But I never bothered with that. I used to go up with Harry Goudine and another fellow by the name of Charlie Rohr. We used to travel together up there. But we only wanted to fish for bass. We never did hit any bass up there. The other guys up there, they were fishing for perch and come in with maybe 15, 20 bags of perch. It didn't pay.

Marguerite Holloway: Is Charlie Rohr still around?

John Fiorito: No, he passed away. Did you hear his name before?

Marguerite Holloway: No.

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John Fiorito: He retired to Florida, then he passed away in Florida quite a few years ago I guess. Harry Goudine, he's about 89. He still puddles around with a little bit of fishing just for sport and give away to family and friends. He still puddles around with a little fishing.

Marguerite Holloway: Do you ever do it just for fun?

John Fiorito: No, well I developed angina too and at the time when I quit too. When I developed angina so I never done it at all. I had a triple bypass surgery two years ago. I went for 14 years with this angina, with plenty of problems before I had the surgery done. It did do wonders for me.

Marguerite Holloway: That's great.

John Fiorito: Yeah,, helped me tremendously.

Marguerite Holloway: One thing I'm confused about what you describe with the two holes and catching the rock as an anchor. How did you pull the net out , how did you disengage it from the anchor?

John Fiorito: You mean with the 10 foot nets?

Marguerite Holloway: Yeah.

John Fiorito: Up at Peekskill?

Marguerite Holloway: Yeah.

John Fiorito: Well your net, you tied this here back that we knitted and put a rock in it. It would tie to the corner of the net here. The net is simmed and then it has corners there. You just tied it to this here and tied to that. And your net, you would let it go into the one hole here. The stone would go out and this stone, this rope here you had it pass underneath the ice here.

Marguerite Holloway: I see.

John Fiorito: And then the rope's tied here to this side of the haul hole and this would tie on this end see?

Marguerite Holloway: I see, you dropped both rocks had been thrown in the one hole.

John Fiorito: In the one hole, that's right.

Marguerite Holloway: Then pull the net through the other hole.

John Fiorito: That's right. The rope would come over here. You'd pull and rope and you'd tie that rope that comes under the ice would tie to this end of the net, see. And that there goes up there, and then you've got a rope from this other end.

Marguerite Holloway: So when you pulled the net out to get the fish, you're pulling it back.

John Fiorito: You're pulling it all there and the net is folding up as it's coming out the hole there with the fish and everything in it.

Marguerite Holloway: And the anchors and underneath.

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John Fiorito: That's right, you pull them out of that, it was a hole about 2 foot, two and a half foot long and about a foot, foot and a half wide. It would all pull out. We'd pull the net out stones and everything else.

Marguerite Holloway: How long would you leave it hanging down there?

John Fiorito: We lifted every day. If there's no fish, we'd skip a day. Well, there was never no fish up there. I didn't do too much of that, but the fishermen up there. When they hit a good year and they hit a few fish, they made good money. The fish was about 40 cents a pound then. But we only tried that two or three years. We never did hit any fish up there.

Marguerite Holloway: Aside from ice fishing, did you ever fish with Henry out on the river?

John Fiorito: No, no, only the ice fishing was with Henry. We used to go up to another fisherman up there. A fellow by the name of Billy Wind. He's passed away since. But he fished for all them perch. But I guess he sold a lot of the perch to the stores and customers up there. He sold a lot to where you can get a whole lot more than you can down in the Market.

[TIME STAMP 1:15:00]

Marguerite Holloway: Did you ever fish for sturgeon?

John Fiorito: Well, when I had the crews we'd catch sturgeon in the net. And of course there was a limit on the sturgeon, they had to be 30 inches to be of legal size. But the sturgeon never brought much money down in the Market. Ten, twelve cents a pound eight cents a pound. That's in the late years.

Marguerite Holloway: And the roe?

John Fiorito: The roe shad?

Marguerite Holloway: No, the roe sturgeon. Sturgeon roe.

John Fiorito: Oh, well, we shipped very little. We got the same price for the roe as we did for the point and nose. They're fishing for sturgeon up in Verplanck now. There was a large one caught here not long ago. And I guess they have a way of cutting the roe out and maybe shipping to dealers that make caviar out of it maybe. I don't know just how they do it up there. They fish up there, these late years. I don't know if they're still fishing. They're probably fishing yet. Because your large sturgeon are out there now, July and August. Yeah, this was only a couple of weeks ago there was a story in the paper and it showed a picture of the fish. I think it was something like 200, in the 200s, 225, 275, in that weight. During World War II, the Conservation Department I guess they wrote to all the commercial fishermen, trying to encourage them to fish for sturgeon. And they gave us the history of the sturgeon. They said that July and August when the large sturgeon and said that they weighed up to 400 pounds. And they were trying to, because of the shortage of food during World War II, they were trying to encourage us to fish for them. And they gave us a size mesh, a size twine to use. But I never tried. Because even when I had the crews, the truckmen had a big sturgeon on the truck then, the Verplanck's fishermen sent to the market. I don't remember exactly what it weighed and he only got 10 dollars for it. So I wasn't going to go through all that, at the mercy of the market down there.

Marguerite Holloway: Did a lot of fishermen try to get sturgeon?

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John Fiorito: No, no, I don't know of anybody. Except just these guys that are fishing now. They must have the large mesh nets to catch these.

Marguerite Holloway: During the war, since there was a shortage of food, did a lot of people become fishermen?

John Fiorito: Maybe a lot of them went into fishing to duck the draft. Now with me, I had just bought another fisherman out, a fellow by the name of Fred Rohr. I had bought another fishermen out and I had a lot of work to do, repairing, remodeling his motor boat, it had an old Palmer engine in it. And I bought a new Universal four cylinder engine to put into that. And I rebuilt the whole motor boat and I invested \$3300 that year which was a lot, a lot of money, this might have been in 1942 or 1943. I invested \$3300 then and my number was coming up to be drafted. And I wrote a letter to the War Department, they kept us under control for location up there. And I wrote an identical letter to the Conservation Department explaining this investment that I made for this year. If they could do anything to have me deferred for that season. That's all I asked for. If I could be deferred for that season, because it was getting close to the fishing season in a couple of months. And the War Department I never heard from. But what a letter I got from Conservation Department. They said, I'd fished about 10 or 11 years before World War II, that I was one of the regular licensed fishermen.

[TIME STAMP 1:20:00]

John Fiorito: And they cited the tonnage of fish, but at the end of each year we had to report to the Conservation Department the tonnage of fish that we caught, see. Each species of fish. And so they cited the tonnage of fish that I produced all them years before World War II when I was a regular licensed fisherman and they recommended I be deferred, not temporary but permanently. I wish I had a copy of that letter.

Marguerite Holloway: You don't?

John Fiorito: No, them days we didn't have copy machines around like today. Today I would sure have it. I would sure love to have it. And when I took that up to the Draft Board up here on State Street and they seen it, "My God, who do you know in Conservation Department." I said Who do I know here? War Department I never heard from, never even acknowledged receiving the letter, nothing they could do for me, nothing like that, but that's the letter I got from Conservation Department. See, so they had to have been planning, trying to go into commercial fishing. They said it was rated I think higher than agriculture at that time, commercial fishing. So I didn't see no service. Two of my brothers were drafted, were in service.

Marguerite Holloway: Other commercial fishermen who went in, probably didn't get out of the draft.

John Fiorito: I don't know, I mean that's just the story with me. I don't know whatever happened with anybody else, but I had a lot of money and the \$3300 then was better than \$33,000 today. It's more than ten times. In 1942 what is it, 57, 59 years ago.

Marguerite Holloway: Did you make back that money that season?

John Fiorito: Well, like I say, the fishing never amounted to any more than just getting paid for my time. I produced for the Market. All of my business was with the Market and I was at their mercy.

Marguerite Holloway: Did you ever sell smoked shad? Or boned shad?

John Fiorito: No. There was a fellow in Tarrytown that smoked fish, but he done it for a hobby, not for commercially. And he'd come up with another friend of mine that worked down at General Motors. This fellow also worked at General Motors. And he come up with this friend of mine and said that he smoked fish. So I give him all the fish he wanted to smoke. Like buck shad and at that time we could bring in under size bass, we couldn't sell them because they drowned, a lot of them drowned in the nets, the shorts. So we could bring them in but we can't commercialize them. So I used to give them to him and he used to smoke them. And he'd give them plenty of smoked fish, he done a beautiful job smoking them. Hickory smoke, he done a beautiful job smoking them.

Marguerite Holloway: What about boning them?

John Fiorito: No, I never tried to learn boning. I had plenty of work to go. During World War II, Conservation Department, because of the shortage of food, they requested that we fished seven days. And they eliminated the lift period. Well I fished 7 days, I lost 35 pounds in them six weeks that I fished, 35 pounds.

Marguerite Holloway: Oh my god, you must have been exhausted.

John Fiorito: Oh, golly, that was murder.

Marguerite Holloway: Did you have the crew then?

John Fiorito: Yes, I had the crews then and the crews, they got a break, because when it come to setting the net, I'd only take one man with me, see. To set both rows. Then the crew, they were off from one lift period to the other lift period, which is 12 hours.

[TIME STAMP 1:25:00]

John Fiorito: Well it takes a couple of hours, an hour and a half to lift and maybe another hour and a half to pack the fish. So they worked about 3 hours at a lift period. So they were off from one lift period to the other. But with me, my own business, you know, I'd take a different guy each time to set the two rows I'd only take one man to set the row, the two rows, but I had to be there. And then there was a lot of time watching the tide, you had to judge that tide. I'd sit there, I'd put a stick in the water and watch the progress of the tide going on to catch the point where it turns around and starts up. From the shanty head on this side, I'd go across that track every 15 minutes and move the stick. Then your winds had a lot to do with it too. You had to judge by the wind, it was quite a lot to that, to get the tide right.

Marguerite Holloway: So you would head out right before the tide turned though?

John Fiorito: Yeah, you see now, say the tide's going down to the shore and I'd catch it at the point where it just changed, in about 10 minutes. Now when that just changed, I let it come up for about an hour before I'd go out with the guys. Because, at that point, out in the channel, now water started up on shore here. Out in the channel it would be running up for another two and a half hours. Two, two and a half hours, running up. Now it's the same thing when the tide changes and shore here starts down. When it starts down, let's see now.

Marguerite Holloway: When it's in ebb?

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John Fiorito: Yeah, when it starts ebb, it's flood water out there for another two and a half hours. There's a big, big difference in shore and out in the channel.

Marguerite Holloway: So you'd have to wait and allow

John Fiorito: That's right, so I'd have to catch that tide when it started to come up. If I'd look at, kept my boats later in a pond down in here. I'd wait for it to come up about this much on the wall. About 4 or 5 inches. Then we'd go out there and we usually hit the tide pretty good. Just about ready to slack, ready to lift. There was a lot of judgement to be used in that, an awful lot.

Marguerite Holloway: You'd have to direct all that

John Fiorito: Oh, yeah, they'd be sleeping. I'd go watch the tide, maybe an hour and a half before I'd wake them up time to go out.

Marguerite Holloway: So that whole season was there no lift period? Did you work seven days?

John Fiorito: Seven days.

Marguerite Holloway: The whole season?

John Fiorito: The whole season. I missed one night that I didn't go out. I figured I picked out four out of the seven fellows working with me. I picked out four to go out to set this upper row here.

Marguerite Holloway: The one that's in the flats.

John Fiorito: No, it's in the channel too but it was only about a 10 minute row out there see. Told them to go out there and set that and I'm going to sleep tonight. Well, I slept that night, but they never made the row. That's how dependable they were. You really had to be there and lead them along.

Marguerite Holloway: Why couldn't they do it?

John Fiorito: The four of them didn't go. They didn't go out and set.

Marguerite Holloway: And they were going to lose money because they were paid by the catch.

John Fiorito: That's right, they got paid by what we'd catch at the end. Well, a lot of these fellows working for me, a lot of these fellows, they only looked for part time work. They didn't want steady work around the year. And a lot of them were drinkers too. So one or two might have been drinking and couldn't make it see.

Marguerite Holloway: Did you ever have trouble with people out on the boat being drunk?

John Fiorito: No, no, only one time when one of my men didn't show up so this other fellow was around. And I could see he'd been drinking a little bit. So I figured he would have been all right just to hold the top sim. I carried the bottom sim and cleaned all the fish out. So I took a chance taking him out. Because he looked fairly well, I figured I'd watch him close. Well might have had a bottle in his back pocket. Whatever happened, going out there, we got out there he was loaded. He was stiff, he could hardly stand up. So we had the tray, I had him in the tray and I could see he was very wound, couldn't even hold the rope. His name was Fred, Freddie. I said never mind, you can't don't nothing for them. Then I'm holding in my teeth, sit down. He's trying to get up, he's trying. Freddie, sit down you're causing enough

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trouble already, sit there. And he kept getting up and here I'm fighting to hold the rope in my mouth and trying to pull the fish and all that. And he's, Freddie if you get up once more I'm either going to knock you down, or tie you to the seat.

[TIME STAMP 1:30:00]

John Fiorito: And by golly I gave him a good push and the other guys, sit down Freddie, tried to hold him down. Finally got him quieted down and I had a terrible time trying to lift the net. That's the only time.

Marguerite Holloway: Oh my god.

John Fiorito: One other time, when I was fishing alone. There was another fellow used to hang around the dock there and he was one of these drinkers and all that and he was sober at times. So I'm going out 2:00 in the morning and he's Can I ride out with you John? He looked pretty good, Yeah, come on, for company, you know. So he gets in the boat, and we're going out there and it was just a little choppy and I'm pulling up to the pole. And I said, George, get a hold of the pole. He gets up to the bow, he says, which pole? Oh, George, sit down, sit down, there's only one pole. (laughter) Sit down George. He sat down, he minded. I'd just brought him out there for company, not that I needed him. I figured it was just a convenience to let him catch the pole, but I could have gone, usually I'd turn the motor off and run up there myself and catch the pole. But as long as he's in the boat, let him get (laughter) which pole. A lot of strange things has happened.

Marguerite Holloway: That's great. The one on the left.

John Fiorito: Yeah, which pole, wow.

Marguerite Holloway: What other strange things happened on the river?

John Fiorito: One time when I only fished the one row with one other fellow and there was another guy fishing ahead of me. And he used to go by my row, drop me off at my row and go down to his row. That's before I got a motor boat. And he would pick me up on the way back. I'd wait for him and when he got done he'd pick me up on the way back

[END OF RECORDING]

John Fiorito: So this day was very foggy and he didn't go straight out then. At that time, before we start using compass, neither one of us had a compass. And we went down to Long Shore and he was going to go to Long Shore and go out. No, before going to Long Shore he went out to find my row. So he never found the row. Usually it only takes about 5 minutes, he had what you call a one lung motor, chug-chug-chug-chug. So we're chug-chugging, it only takes five minutes to go out there about 40 minutes. All of a sudden there's this big bright light. One guy says, gee we must be out in the channel, that must be a boat anchored. Another guy says, well we must be across the river, that's somebody across the river. Then all of a sudden we were up here my row was down there, we were up here at the prison. You know where the prison is here?

Marguerite Holloway: Yes.

John Fiorito: We're only about 50, 60 feet from shore, it was the guard on the tower, had the spot light on us. So then we come along the shore, we're going to try it again. So we got, this is Mount Murray this

high hill here. My row is right out from Mount Murray, so we're going down along shore. And when we got to Mount Murray, I says to the guy that was towing me, Let me loose. What are you going to do? I said, I'm going to try to row out. You're crazy, you'll never find. Let me loose. So he let me loose and I had one guy with me then. And he's rowing and I'm watching the shore. His name was Perch, this guy. Hey Perch, pull more to your left oar, a little more to your left oar. He was trying to go around, a little more to you left oar, he's going along, along, pretty soon, I seen this little red light. Unbelievably, I never thought I'd ever find my row. Inside my pole, I see this little red light. So he's trying to circle, more to the left, do what I tell you, will you Perch. So pretty soon we got to the pole. And I lifted in a hurry and I had quite a few fish too, just about made the tide. And we got done lifting and I hear the other chug-chug coming up the river. I said Gee, them fellows done pretty good, found their row and lifted already and they're coming up. They sounded like it was way out in the channel. So pretty soon, they turn off the motor and Hey Johnny, sounds way off, Hey I hear you Buel, you're way out west, you're way out in the channel. And you gotta come in, bear right. So he come in pretty soon. He come in a ways and the next time he yelled Hey Johnny like he's close sounds close. Yeah, you're coming in the right direction now. Come straight the way you're coming, come a little more. So the next time, he went the wrong way, Hey Johnny (faintly). This went on for a couple of hours. Hey Johnny 300 feet away, the next time Hey Johnny (faintly). So did you find the row? No we haven't found the row yet. Well, forget about it, the tide has changed. After a couple of hours they finally got his row. Then by that time, this was night time by that time it was daylight, the sun was shining and we know the sun rises in the east here and we come to shore by the sun. (laughter)

Marguerite Holloway: That's great!

John Fiorito: Oh, after that tho I got a compass, never no problem anymore with a compass. I don't know why I didn't have it a lot sooner.

Marguerite Holloway: Did the guards ever get upset when boats would come in towards the prison? Did they think that they were going to try and meet people who were going to try and break out?

John Fiorito: Oh, no. Another time

[TIME STAMP 5:00]

John Fiorito: Another time when I was, this when I was fishing just with one other guy. I dropped him off at the row and Scarborough Station, the flats to lift. And I went out down to Rockwood Hall dock, off of Rockwood Hall dock and I was in a channel maybe about 300 feet. Then, we weren't supposed to go in the channel. But we edged out that far. I've had poles knocked down that I had to replace, see. And it's not an easy thing to find these poles and have them knocked down and replace them. So once in a while I'd get hit. So I'm out there in this night and I'm busy, a lot of fish, and I'm lifting. I've got, we used gas double mantled gas lanterns. I had one tied onto a stake on each side of the bow, lifting over the bow. This is when the net is lifting over the bow back into fish see. So I'm going along, I'm busy with a lot of fish. These double mantled lanterns, it's like daylight out there with double mantled, two of these, one on each side of the boat. And I'm working along, working along, and I got to the last space, I'm out in the channel about 400 feet. I got to the last space, just getting in. I happened to look up and there's this great giant of a boat, looks like he's coming right for me. When he went by me, you couldn't hear him coming. He went by me just like a (soft sound) like that. And he was only about 50 feet from me. He wanted to give me a thrill because he knows I'm out in the channel, I don't belong out that far and he's

going to scare the daylights out of me being out that far. There was no boats coming down, he was going north, see, no boats travelling south. He could have been out another 500 feet. But there he wanted to give me a thrill and boy he did. I look up and I see him, oh my golly. Then the wave pushed me up and down there. That was really something. I never forgot that.

Marguerite Holloway: I got scared just as you were describing it.

John Fiorito: After that I looked down the river and watched. See you learn from experience. That's the best teacher.

Marguerite Holloway: How far would you edge out into the channel?

John Fiorito: Oh, about 300 feet, a good 6, 7 poles.

Marguerite Holloway: Did you ever have any accidents out there?

John Fiorito: No, I never had no accidents. And even with these poles I had with a splice, the longest pole I had was 65 foot and the splice that would bring them up to about 72 feet. And even these here, the way I explained it, we set them, and they'd go about 15, 18 feet in the mud. Even then they would down. I used to have to tie two together, a bridle, and then with a rope and an anchor up about 300 feet up against the ebb tide. The ebb tide is the strong tide where I got into trouble, to hold them poles. I'd have to do that with maybe the outside four poles. That ebb tide is terrific strength.

Marguerite Holloway: So let me just understand this. You would take two poles, you'd tie a rope to each one of them and then you'd bring sort of in a V the ropes together.

John Fiorito: That's right, A Y see, big Y like this. Then from this Y here about 200 foot of rope, 250 foot to an anchor. I'd throw an anchor, see. Throw the anchor and then tied it to hold that net. That would hold them poles. They need that extra help because they would never stay there just by. Some tides are much stronger than other tides. They vary.

Marguerite Holloway: The ebb is usually stronger?

John Fiorito: The ebb is much stronger, yes.

Marguerite Holloway: Did the weather ever knock the poles over?

John Fiorito: No, the weather didn't, no. Just the outside poles and the edge. In the 44 foot of water that's a lot of water with a strong tide going by them poles. I lived up the street here and the house that I lived in is built on a bank, against the hill, a bank.

[TIME STAMP 10:00]

John Fiorito: And there's a two car garage the first level. Then the next level is a big porch over the two car garage, and then was a big living room. Then the flight up farther I had four rooms in back up there. And that's all I needed at that time, was the four rooms and bath. So that big room, that spare room downstairs for a living room, I never used that living room, I had the living room upstairs. And it was a real nice, big room and Harry Goudine and I built a 20 foot row boat in the room. 20 foot, I said, boy I hope we can get it out of here when we get done. We had it figured out turning it sideways. There was a railing around the porch I had to remove just a part of a railing. And we built that 20 foot boat in there in

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the winter time, being we're nice and warm. So I built that boat with Harry Goudine, then I built three others by myself. And that's where I built my scows too. I built just the sides. See, they're 24 foot long and 2 x 14 so the scows only come up 42 inches. I built the sides and then I put them together on the outside.

Marguerite Holloway: So you had a boat shop.

John Fiorito: Yeah. I had plenty of help around then to get it out, turning it sideways and on that porch maneuvering on the porch and had the stairs to go down with it.

Marguerite Holloway: That's great. Was it right on the water? Or was it on the side?

John Fiorito: No, no, it's on this street here, right up the street here.

Marguerite Holloway: So you had to cross the street and then get down.

John Fiorito: Oh, no, the boat It'd bring them down across the railroad tracks down there on the trailer.

Marguerite Holloway: Did you and Henry use a blueprint? Or did you just do it?

John Fiorito: Well, no, he got it from his father. His father was a very good boat builder, so was Harry, he learned from his father. He and I built the first boat and then I built three others after that. And I repaired, put the new motor into, it was a 26 foot motor boat. I had to rebuild that whole motorboat. It was a very old boat. I had a lot of rebuilding to do.

Marguerite Holloway: How long does it take to build a boat?

John Fiorito: Well, it depends on how much time you want to put out. We worked in our spare time. It was quite a lot of work. Cutting out the ribs, shaping them and everything else, quite a lot of work. And running around to get the materials for it. Cedar, used mostly cedar. When I could get cedar. When I couldn't get cedar I used California redwood. Then for the hardwood I used Philippine mahogany. The transom was Philippine mahogany, the seats and the ribs and the bow stem, where the bow come together, that was real hard African mahogany. That was very hard wood. And you had to run around to these places that handle this lumber for boat building. There was a place on Route 22 in White Plains where I went for my materials. And of course a lot of the nails, copper nails, I went all the way to New York. You couldn't get that around here. Well, galvanized screws we had here but all the copper stuff for rivets and different things I had to go down to, oh, I forgot where it was, on the west side there, I forgot the name of that street Burrhall? No. I forget the name of that street where I used to go down to get that. And of course, my equipment for the crews, like the rain gear and boots and anchors and ropes and all that.

[TIME STAMP 15:00]

John Fiorito: I used to go down to Fulton Street, across from Fulton Fish Market where all them dealers are down there for that stuff.

Marguerite Holloway: Did you like it down there on the Market?

John Fiorito: Well, I only went down there to do my business and come right back home. Just to pick up all my gear and all that.

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Marguerite Holloway: So you had to supply your crew with everything?

John Fiorito: Yeah, I supplied them with the boots and the raingear and everything.

Marguerite Holloway: Did you have to feed them?

John Fiorito: Yes, yes, my wife used to feed them. And she done all the cooking and I'd bring them all up here.

Marguerite Holloway: Where'd they sleep?

John Fiorito: It was a very nice shanty I had down there. It had a porch on it. It had windows. It was like a little cottage. It was real nice. It had good size windows and I had beds built in there.

Marguerite Holloway: Did your wife like you fishing?

John Fiorito: No, she wasn't keen on it. She was glad when fishing season was over and feeding all of them. Now this isn't my wife. My wife passed away about 7 years ago. This is my sweetie, Doris.
[laughter]

Doris: Are you still talking?

John Fiorito: Yeah, yeah.

Doris: I finished.

John Fiorito: You finished?

Marguerite Holloway: She didn't like your fishing?

John Fiorito: No, she wasn't keen on it. The only thing she liked about it, I gave her a little extra money, of course to feed the crew, it took a lot of cooking. And on the shad, they're so bony, you know. And they're a very rich meal, we don't have maybe two shad a year, a season. And the first shad that she cooked, she stuffed it and she basted it with tomato sauce. And of course she had all of the vegetables to go with it. And we all sat around the table and then one guy says, Where's the bones? It dissolved all the bones, it was a slow process and it took about five, five and a half hours to cook. And even the heavy center bone it was just like when you open a can of salmon, you know that is brittle that you could eat it. That's the way even the center bone you can eat. And there's a lot of flavor when you can dissolve them bones like that.

Marguerite Holloway: That's great! Five hours?

John Fiorito: Five, five and a half hours.

Marguerite Holloway: At what temperature?

John Fiorito: That I don't remember, what temperature, yeah. None of us realized. The guy was where's the bones? And there was no bones. And from then on she cooked it the same way and it always came out the same way.

Marguerite Holloway: That's great.

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John Fiorito: I don't know whether it's the acid in the tomatoes or the long process of heating five, five and a half hours. It worked every time.

Marguerite Holloway: Did anyone come to you to learn how to fish? To be taught how to do everything?

John Fiorito: Yes, there was one down here. Lee Salazo, he was one of the fishermen that worked with me. And when he learned, when he figured he'd learned it enough, he went on his own. He was the only one that went on his own that worked with me. And unfortunately, he fished after I retired, he was still fishing. Well, I had the angina pretty bad too. And he was still fishing and here only about seven years ago, he went out to set net and he drowned out there.

Marguerite Holloway: How?

John Fiorito: Well, it was a day, it was a rainy day. He had his son used to go out, on a Sunday to set net. His son would come down to set net with him, or his grandson. So it came this Sunday, the son thought that the grandson was going to go out with him. The grandson thought the son was going to go out with him. Then he's even taken his daughter out with him.

[TIME STAMP 20:00]

John Fiorito: Because there's a system that you could tie the rope from pole to pole, see and you could bring anybody, just to pull the rope. He would set the tie up on the pole and then pull to the next pole. Anybody could pull the rope and pull you across, he'd set his net. So it was a rainy day and he didn't have the rain gear for his daughter to go out with him. So he figured he'd go out alone. So he went out alone, to set the nets alone and this style of fishing like when I was fishing alone, he learnt that from me too, this style. Your tray is half on the seat, 2/3s on the seat and 1/3 out of the boat. So you're reaching over your tray tying your net to them rings. So he must have pushed that tray some got it out far enough so it bounced and fell into the water and he must have made a, tried to retrieve it, he must have lost his balance and fell in. The boat went one way and him the other and he drowned out there. His boat just drifted down. They didn't find his body for three weeks off of, down in Tarrytown the boat club in Tarrytown.

Marguerite Holloway: Because he had all the gear on

John Fiorito: That's right, well, I don't know if he could swim but with boots, you'd never be able to swim with boots and rain coat and everything else. Boots alone I guess. And maybe when he fell in the boat must have went out and then with the ebb tide taking it away, even if he could swim he probably wouldn't catch it with the ebb tide taking his boat down.

Marguerite Holloway: That's terrible.

John Fiorito: He lost his life out there.

Marguerite Holloway: What was his name?

John Fiorito: Lee Salazo.

Marguerite Holloway: Are there a lot of fishermen that you know have accidents like that on the river or was that pretty uncommon?

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John Fiorito: Well, when I was a kid over at Croton Point, the Tuttlés that I said one of the brothers, they used to pull a seine. They used to go around the Point and over to another beach to pull a seine. And they drank an awful lot. And when they started out they get to pulling the seine and they discovered one of the brothers wasn't there, he fell overboard, going out and he drowned. That was from drinking. Lee was no drinker. That was an accident. It had to be that that tray was, he leaned on that tray and that tray was falling overboard. To retrieve the tray he lost his balance and went with it.

Marguerite Holloway: Everybody must feel so terrible for not going out with him.

John Fiorito: Yes. I gave up the angina, I gave up the same time, he fished a while after me. I must have quit from the angina before the pollution.

Marguerite Holloway: So the river was clean when you first started fishing and then it got very greasy and very dirty.

John Fiorito: At one time there, when I was fishing along off Rockwood Hall. At that time, I went out there one night to lift, well, it must have been about 11:00, we lifted at the last of the flood tide and I was out there about 11:00. And I had my lanterns lit and the oil, the grease, you could see it coming up, it was terrible. Big gobs of grease, it had to be one of these factories, like General Motors or Anaconda. They let it off in the middle of the night when it's not noticed, see. Them days they used to wash to shore, you'd see a ridge of it along shore along the river. And also them big boats used wash out their motors and their bilges and their motors and all that and they dumped a lot of grease into the river, them big boats. And so I went out there this night and all this grease and oil coming terrible. So I waited and I waited and I waited and it kept coming and coming and coming. So then when the tide started to slack a little bit, I thought maybe I'd start lifting the net and if I see a fish I could splash the grease away and pull it out fast. So I lifted about five foot of net and I could see the oil and grease making a mess of the boat and I had to throw it over.

[TIME STAMP 25:00]

John Fiorito: I come in about 1:00, 1:30 a.m., I was out there two and a half hours, never able to lift that night.

Marguerite Holloway: So was the net ruined?

John Fiorito: No, the net is, see this is all on the surface, see, but I would have ruined it in lifting it all that oil and grease into the net. I lifted about five feet and I thought maybe I'd splash when I seen that first fish and going to pull it through, and I seen the mess I was making. I have to give it up. I've seen plenty of that out there, that grease and oil. But they've done a beautiful job when they come out with the restrictions about dumping oil. They really cleaned the oil and grease, you don't see that anymore. You used to see the color on calm days, yellowish color and all over in streaks of blue in it, acres of it all over the water like that. But they've done a beautiful job cleaning up as far as the oil and the grease is concerned.

Marguerite Holloway: When did that stop?

John Fiorito: Oh, a good many years it's been stopped on the oil and grease. Fishing through the ice, I fished with this fellow Fred Rohr, another, that's another Rohr, Charlie Rohr up by Peekskill. But there

was another Rohr, the guy that I bought the equipment from. So we were fishing through the ice. We tried here and different places but no fish, nowhere in the river. So we had some net out here in front of this buoy. And so we're going out and we're going to set some more net and the sleigh I had all of our equipment on, the net, the stones and all the gear we needed out there. Usually, he was an older man, I used to ride him on the sleigh. I was only a young fellow then and I would ride him on the sleigh. So this day, being the sleigh is loaded, he's walking behind. So I'm going along and all of a sudden he says, Hey Johnny, stop where you are. We had ice, good clear ice like this and golly that would hold the Chrysler Building that much ice.

Marguerite Holloway: About 2 feet of ice?

John Fiorito: Yeah, plenty of ice. So he says stop where you are I see out way out, a puddle. Wow. And there's a brook that comes down over here by Mt. Murry and there was a laundry at that time up there. Laundry, and I don't know if the car wash was there or not, no, it was the laundry. And so what it was, the detergents, all the chemicals from the laundry dumped into the brook and emptied into the river. It et all this ice in this big area. He said, look at that puddle over there. Jeez, stay there where you are Fred. I take the ax off of the sleigh and then I pluck this much frazil ice. If I'd have taken another step or two all together I'd have gone through. So I back tracked. We got back on the solid ice and we come way up the river, way up here to go around that area. To go out there. Now see, what that done to the ice just from this one laundry that was here, see. Nowadays with all these washing machines, all these detergents going in the water and all these chemicals. That's what's in the water you don't see today, along with the PCBs out there, see. Them chemicals, they could never eliminate them I don't think. I seen that from experience what chemicals can do to the water. If I'd have gone another five or eight or ten feet I'd have gone right through. He caught me, I never seen, I'm just marching along and never suspected. He spotted that water out in front of me about maybe a couple of hundred feet in front of me,

Marguerite Holloway: Wow. Did the stream do that a lot? Break up the ice like that?

John Fiorito: It must have done that continuously while they were there, because we never paid no attention to it. We didn't fish out there no more anyway, no fish out there. We only tried it a couple of years out there. I never did see a good year through the ice.

[TIME STAMP 30:00]

John Fiorito: Not even to pay for any partial of my time. I mean the other one would probably pay for just my time to fish and nothing at all through the ice.

Marguerite Holloway: Have the populations of the shad did they change a lot over the years that you fished?

John Fiorito: Well, at one time many, many years before I even started they used to run heavy and then they dwindled down to nothing. Then they start coming heavy again. And they were coming very heavy when I had the two crews. Then they start dwindling again.

Marguerite Holloway: When was that when they started dwindling?

John Fiorito: Gee, I haven't fished in so many years, I don't know if it was in the 1950s. I had the two rows I might have fished for about eight years. I don't know, they started dwindling, I cut it down to the

one row and then even the one row didn't pay at all and I cut up and I went into the 50 foot lengths fishing alone or with another guy but I can't remember the years when it started dewindling.

Marguerite Holloway: When did you start using the motor?

John Fiorito: What the motor boat?

Marguerite Holloway: Instead of having to row out there.

John Fiorito: Oh, well that's when I brought Fred Rohr on, I can't remember the year, I can't remember the year. I brought him on and then I put the new motor in that. I have a very poor memory because stuff that I think is of no importance to remember I can't remember. (laughter)

Marguerite Holloway: Did you miss fishing after you had to stop?

John Fiorito: Not a bit. Not a bit, I had my belly full when I was through. Not a bit (laughter) One time when I had a row off of Scarborough Station, the Station just down below here. Do you know where Scarborough Station is? And there's a dock on the outside and I had my row started off from dock. And the poles are 50 foot apart and I'm lifting. And way down the river there's this seaplane. Good thing he was short winged, he had a very short wing. He started coming up and gee, he's coming, coming, coming, coming, not getting up off the water. I guess he didn't have a very strong, not much horsepower motor. So he's out in the water, coming, coming, coming, coming and he got so close to the poles, getting so close and my golly if he didn't leave the water he was never going to clear the poles. So when he figured he wasn't going to get up off the water he come so close, he turned the motor off and he just glided. And he just made it between the two 50 foot poles. It's a good thing he had short, he had very short wings. And when he pulled through that he landed a couple of hundred feet north of my row and he just sat there for a while. (laughter) I thought it was going to be really messed up there coming up there leaving the water. There was another time, there was a fellow, come down here from Pleasantville, they called him Piccolo. And he had a sea plane, he only had a 30 horse motor. And he was going to open up, take up passengers open up a sea plane base there to take up passengers. So he didn't realize the storms we have here, the strong northwest he had an airplane on the outside and it near got wrecked. So another fellow and I we saved the plane for him.

[TIME STAMP 35:00]

John Fiorito: And in appreciation he gave us a book of tickets for rides. So he's going to take me up. And the water had to be perfectly calm and there had to be a little bit of a breeze. And he had to buck the breeze in order to take off. A couple of times he tried, there was no breeze, he couldn't get me up, not enough horsepower, only 30 horsepower. So this one time the breeze was from the east. He was going to try to take me up again. So that meant he had to go out in the middle of the river and come towards the east here. And we're going and going and going and going and golly all of a sudden we're getting so close to shore, only about 300 – 400 feet off from shore. And the motor chupp-putt-putt and stopped. I said What's the matter Piccolo? And out in front of you it had your gas tank. Had the gas tank in front and it was gravity feed to the motor. And there's the gas cap and there was a rod. This is the way the automobiles used to be way, way back too. Your gas tank, this rod had a cork on the end. When you've got gas in there, your rod is way up because your cork is pushing up. And as you go out of gas the cork goes down. And so that little needle was all the way down to the bottom. You see that needle all the

way down? We're out of gas. Ah, you son of a gun, I said, you had another pint we'd be sitting up there on the railroad tracks now wouldn't we? (laughter)

Marguerite Holloway: Did he ever get you off the ground?

John Fiorito: He finally got me off when the breeze was just right, the breeze was just right and we were going around and this Mt. Murry there's like an air pocket, a dead air pocket. So we're going along, without him disturbing his controls, all of a sudden the plane fell down about 50 feet and then started lifting again. Hey, Piccolo, what was that? He said, a dead air pocket. (laughter) He had a 30 horse. Another guy come up from Tarrytown, looking for [unclear] the guy from Tarrytown only had a 45 horse and he could take off against rough water, breeze and everything else. It made that much difference, 45 horse and a 30 horse. He only had a toy there with that 30 horse. And he's going to take up passengers? (laughter)

Marguerite Holloway: Do you see Henry Gourdine any more?

John Fiorito: Very seldom. That Charlie Rohr that used to fish with, that we used to ride to Peekskill with all together. He fished a row out here too. Later years he went partner with Harry Gourdine but he was fishing by himself at that time. There was a prison break here, three of them broke out. And Charlie Rohr had just lifted and he come to shore and he's unloading his fish. He had a lot of fish, he was unloading his fish when these, this break at the prison. They were supposed to meet a car at the railroad station, so the car wasn't there. And they're desperate to get away and they go down to the river and there's Charlie Rohr there with the boat. And they commanded Charlie Rohr, they got into the boat to take them across the river. At that break here there was a local cop that was shot, he was killed and there was a prison guard that was killed, there was two that was killed in this break. I don't recall the year, that would be in the 1930s. They commanded him to row them across the river, he had to row them across the river after of that lifting of the net and everything and rowing to shore, he had no motor on the boat then, rowing. And he took them across the river and they were thinking about bumping Charlie Rohr off, Charlie says look, I'm over here by myself, it's going to take me two hours three hours to get across that river to home. What's your advantage to doing that to me? He says. So the guys talked it over and says all right we'll let you go.

[TIME STAMP 40:00]

John Fiorito: But then they were caught at Nyack, the three guys were caught and he was lucky he got away. They let him go, after two cops being killed there. They caught them three. The three of them got the chair in later years.

Marguerite Holloway: That never happened to you?

John Fiorito: No, no, no.

Marguerite Holloway: I mean, everyone knew who they were, I mean it wasn't as if he was going to tell them you know, what they looked like. Everyone knew who was missing.

John Fiorito: Yeah, yeah.

Marguerite Holloway: Wow. That was scary.

**AUD_2014_0074A John Fiorito 1991-08-08. Interview by Marguerite Holloway August 8, 1991.
Transcribed by Carla Lesh, Hudson River Maritime Museum, 2023**

John Fiorito: There was, this past Sunday there was a drowning on the south end of Croton Point this past Sunday. There was loads of boats out looking, it was in last night's paper they still didn't find them. You see the water current coming down this Croton Bay meets the Hudson Bay and the ebb tide, it forms a current so he got caught into that current somehow.

Marguerite Holloway: A fisherman?

John Fiorito: Well, a hook and line sportsman. He come up from the City. I don't know, the paper said a line got caught, one of the guys lines got caught in the rocks or something and he was trying to free the line and he slipped and fell overboard. So gee, evidently he was that close to shore I didn't know the currents could be that treacherous that close to shore. I know most every year, I lived there until I was 11 years old and most every year there was a drowning. People don't know, that current. And yet at that time, nowadays they do things. At that time you think they would have out in the middle of the river some kind of buoy with a sign, notice, a warning of some kind. Still there's nothing there. They always tell you, every drowning, about the treacherous waters there but they've never done nothing about it.

Marguerite Holloway: Is there a lot more traffic on the river these days?

John Fiorito: Oh yes, yes, oh yes.

Marguerite Holloway: A lot more people going sports fishing in smaller boats?

John Fiorito: Yeah, sport riding. When I was a kid at Croton Point there used to be trucks carting lumber on the river. Used to be ice like this out in the channel. Used to be sail boats on ice and they really could fly on the ice.

Marguerite Holloway: Did you ever do that?

John Fiorito: No, I've never done it. But I've seen local plenty of them when I was a kid on the river. The old, old time fishermen they used to go out into the channel, they'd bring a tent along. And they camped there, fishing through the ice for sturgeon. Instead of running back and forth and that must have had some kind of heater with them. And they fished right on the ice.

Marguerite Holloway: Did they catch a lot of sturgeon?

John Fiorito: Well, they used to clean them on shore. I used to see the skins and the heads, piles of them on shore. So they caught them, them days, yeah. Must of caught plenty of them.

John Fiorito: Up in Croton when he told me he figured out the ages and he said he was 9 years old and I'll be 81 in January, so he's close to 90. He has all his faculties too at his age. His father died in the 90s, 93 or 95.

[TIME STAMP 45:00]

Marguerite Holloway: I know that his, one of his daughters, one of his children or one of his grandchildren is still setting eel pots and crab pots and Henry was going down.

John Fiorito: Either his son or grandson or something. What's he doing? Fishing or what?

Marguerite Holloway: He was down, it was at the shack that's right next to all the buses. And he had pots and he was setting them.

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John Fiorito: Oh, oh, yeah.

Marguerite Holloway: Last summer I think.

John Fiorito: Was he doing it for a business or just a sport, a few pots.

Marguerite Holloway: I think it was sport.

John Fiorito: Oh, just for sport, yeah. I think he fished here this spring for sport. I think he, I don't know whether he anchored a couple of nets or whether he had poles off. He'd row out to close to shore there some where, so they tell me.

Marguerite Holloway: Wow. Well, thank you very much.

John Fiorito: Okay.

[END OF RECORDING]