

## **Interview with Bernice Calnan**

**Narrator:** Bernice Calnan

**Interviewer:** Madeleine Hall-Arber

**Location:** New Bedford, MA

**Date of Interview:** September 25, 2010

**Project Name:** The Working Waterfront Festival Community Documentation Project

**Project Description:** This project documents the history and culture of the commercial fishing industry and other port trades. The project began in 2004 in conjunction with the Working Waterfront Festival, an annual, educational celebration of commercial fishing culture which takes place in New Bedford, MA. Interviewees have included a wide range of individuals connected to the commercial fishing industry and/or other aspects of the port through work or familial ties. While the majority of interviewees are from the port of New Bedford, the project has also documented numerous individuals from other ports around the country. Folklorist and Festival Director Laura Orleans and Community Scholar and Associate Director Kirsten Bendiksen are project leaders. The original recordings reside at the National Council for the Traditional Arts in Maryland with listening copies housed at the Festival's New Bedford office.

**Principal Investigator:** Laura Bendiksen, Laura Orleans

**Transcriber:** Laura Orleans

### **Abstract**

On September 25, 2010, Madeleine Hall-Arber interviewed Bernice Calnan as part of the Working Waterfront Festival Community Documentation Project. Bernice was born into a fishing family, her father immigrating to the US from Newfoundland. She retells stories she grew up hearing about her father's youth and work as a boat cook, providing a good sense of the New Bedford fishing community of the 1960s. She became the wife, mother, and grandmother to fishermen, and was an active member of the New Bedford Fishermen's Wives which was instrumental in protesting to get the 200 mile limit. Her husband is now retired, her sons continue to fish and own boats. She discusses close calls, safety at sea, and changes in technology and parenting.

Madeleine Hall-Arber: Ok, thank you. Could you, before you start, could you just introduce yourself to the listeners?

Bernice Calnan: My name is Bernice Calnan and I'm married to Donald Calnan who is a retired fisherman right now. Daughter, wife, mother, grandmother of fishermen and scallopers. [Reading] My dad was a fisherman for 30 years. He was on a dragger called the *Adventurer*, with the same crew for 13 years. They were all Newfoundlanders and he was a cook. Back then in the 30s and 40s most of the boats were owned and crewed by Newfoundlanders and Norwegians. My dad, Jim Powers, being a cook would only take about three loaves of bread with him from the dock. He would make his own bread called yeast bread. He would make it in a big aluminum dish pan, in fact, boats going out when they were coming in would ask if he had any of his bread left. He and his crew had their picture in the paper for catching one of the largest lobsters ever caught. He brought the lobster home and put it in the bathtub. We had no pot big enough to cook it. It had to be cooked in pieces and the whole neighborhood enjoyed lobster that day. My mother, whose name was Ethel, who my father called "Ettle dear" would say to him, "I didn't get much sleep while you were out to sea it blew so hard." In a few days he would say, "Ettle dear, there wasn't a breath of wind out there, so don't be loosin' sleep," even if it had been windy, just to put her at ease. During World War II while they were out at sea, a German sub came up out of the water and put guns on them. They were told if they radio in, they would blow them out of the water. They only wanted fresh fish and water. The boat came in right away and reported it. The crew were told not to tell anyone, it would cause a panic. We were never told about this until the war was over. My dad loved to cook and when he was home he would cook our holiday dinners and other meals to give my mom a break. My mom and dad had six girls. I was their only tom-boy. I would go down to the boat and help him put his grub, which is food, away. We would be so excited when he came home, but our big black lab dog showed it the most. He jumped right through a pane of glass in the window to greet him. He wasn't hurt. My dad died at the age of 54. It was St. Patrick's Day. He had just come home from putting his foot aboard the boat and walked into the house. He had a heart attack. The crew of five broke up after he died, fishing together for thirteen years.

My husband: I married Donald Leff Calnan in 1952. He graduated from UMASS Dartmouth in New Bedford, then New Bedford Tech. He ran Uxbridge Worsted Mills next to the Fairhaven Mills. They moved to Georgia and wanted him to go there. But he did not want to bring his family up there so he looked for a job around here. Most of the mills were moving south, while going to college, he worked at Hathaway Braley where he learned a lot about engines. So he decided to go fishing. He went out on a dragger with Captain Pike, as engineer. Every chance he got, he would go up in the wheelhouse with him and take notes. And learning from him, he later became a mate. One day he came home and told me he had a chance to buy a boat. I asked if this was what he wanted to do the rest of his working life. I guess by now you know the answer. Our first boat was called the Friendship. Over the years we have owned or been in partnerships of eleven boats. Over the years we had six children, four girls, Nadine, Colleen, Erin and Karen, and two boys, Donny and Michael. One of the...one of the most frightening times while Donald was out to sea was on Father's Day. In the morning I received a call from Paul Saunders telling me he didn't want me there, didn't want me to hear on the radio, but Donald had called a Mayday and was takin' on water. I just didn't know what to do. I called the Coast Guard and was told their pumps were not working. But a helicopter was on its way and dropping them gas pumps. Some time later I got a call

saying they got the pumps and were coming in on their own power. The weather report had predicted 30 miles an hour winds and they hit a storm clocking 90 to 100 miles an hour. I was told they would be in Sandwich on the Canal at 8:00. I thought they meant that night. I packed the children into the car and off I went to Sandwich. Got there, no Donald. And learned they would arrive 8:00 a.m. the next morning. [6:00] Every time it was stormy or windy I would worry and lose sleep even though I know Donald would not put his crew in danger he would pull into Nantucket if a storm was predicted. Most of the boats were wooden and not as large as today's boats. When our last child was born he didn't know till the next day. He heard it on the fisherman's news. In the 60s, I the New Bedford Fisherman's Wives organization. We were a large, very active group. We marched in Boston in front of the state house with the fishermen's wives from Gloucester for the 200 mile limit against the factory ships from Japan, Russia and other European countries taking any size fish and depleting our scallop beds. We had a booth in Boston for the fishing expedition. We made floats for the Memorial Day parade. They had contests for the best float. Our first float was a dory decorated and painted like a fish. In it were fishermen's children dressed like mermaids. We took first prize. Another year we had a large scallop with—made of paper mache and pastel colors with fishermen's wives wearing gowns on it. We got first prize again. This was all done in my driveway. We had Christmas parties with toys given by Santa to fishermen's families who had hard luck. We started the Blessing of the Fleet and the tradition still continues.

As a mother, I would tell my kids, "Wait till your father gets home," if they did something I didn't like. Of course, I didn't tell him unless it was a big problem. Nadine, now deceased, decided to surprise her father on his birthday. So she and her friend Cathy painted a big picture of Donald Duck on the bow of his fishing boat. It was his favorite cartoon. Cathy was petrified, but Nadine said he'd love it. He did. Donny, my son, now deceased, always said he wanted to be a fisherman like his father. He was a scalloper. Michael, my son, also a fisherman and a scalloper and a dragger. We sold one of our boats to our son-in-law; he's a scalloper. Joseph Benard, scalloper, is my grandson. So that makes me a four generation person of fishermen and still those [inaudible]. Even though my husband is retired, I believe the New Bedford fishing industry will continue to be the number one port in the country. May our fishermen be safe, blessed and successful. Bernice Calnan.

MHA: That's Wonderful. What wonderful stories.

BC: Pardon me?

MHA: What a wonderful story you have.

BC: Oh, there's so much more, but you know, you can just take so long

MHA: Right [laughs]. Well...

BC: [coughs] Scuse me.

MHA: What was it like to be part of a fishing family when you mentioned that you, there were times when you would lose sleep with all the worries, but um what was it like in your day to

day life with uh the men being gone?

BC: You're bringing up your children, you see yourself, you know. Sometimes, with six children, they'd kind of gang up on me. You know how kids are. They'd stick together. But every night I used to cook a big meal, it was just one of those things that we grew up with. They'd always be, and I also took them away from the home when he was younger, and what was one more to feed? You know. When their father came home, oh my goodness he was the world. My kids were very, very close. And they are to this day.

MHA: You must have had, you must have known what to expect from your husband since you had grown up in a fishing family.

BC: Yes

MHA: You sort of knew what the system was

BC: Well, I used to pick him up when they got in to the dock. You know it was mad, it was sad because the fishermen had a reputation of being drinkers.

MHA: Mmm

BC: But when they'd get off that boat, they all had that swaggering walk and that's due to their sea legs and until they—once they come up the dock, I mean and they're home awhile, they're fine, but when they're first get in, it looks like they've been drinking when they get off the boat. Although they never took, I think none of them hardly, very few I guess, took any liquor out to sea with them 'cause it was too dangerous.

MHA: Right

BC: The boats were really small then compared to now.

MHA: About what size were they? Do you remember?

BC: Well I'm takin' a guess.

MHA: Mmhm

BC: I would say that maybe 65 feet to maybe 90. I don't know how big the scallopers were.

MHA: They were wooden, right?

BC: They were wooden. Well the last ones we had were steel boats. But back then they were wooden.

MHA: Right.

BC: They weren't, like, the most seaworthy like the boats today. [12:00]

MHA: Right. Did they fish on Georges?

BC: Yes that's when they'd go into Nantucket

MHA: Right. And about how long were their trips, usually, an average?

BC: Well, my dad was five days. Donald was maybe seven to eight days. But the scallopers were anywhere from ten days to two weeks.

MHA: Mmhmm. When they, when they were scalloping did they shuck the scallops out at sea or did they wait till they got back?

BC: Oh no. They shucked 'em out at sea.

MHA: Mmhmmm.

BC: In fact my son was one of the top shuckers. My two sons really and my grandson's very good at shuckin' scallops.

MHA: Huh! Yeah. Great. So, you belong to the New Bedford Women's

BC: Fishermen's wives

MHA: Fishermen's Wives

BC: Back then.

MHA: Yeah. How long did that last?

BC: Oh I'm gonna say about. Well, we had a great big group of us when we started up, but like everything else, it dwindled down. The same people were doin' the work and everything. Then Lucille Swain was the President of it at the time, and she got cancer and passed away. And it got, the group got small.

MHA: Mmmhmm

BC: We were down to, like, about ten people. And then after awhile it just, you know...

MHA: Yeah

BC: It was the same people doin' the work all the time, like most

MHA: Right. Yeah. So, do you think it had anything to do with the politics in the town at the time? Or was it just...

BC: Oh yes, I think that's what we were very active in it. You know. Especially with the factory ships.

MHA: Right

BC: Coming in really, coming in. That's when we went. In fact when we went to Boston that day that we marched, it was snowin' and that, but we went up there with some of the women from Gloucester and we marched in front of the statehouse. I think it helped.

MHA: Yeah.

BC: Bring attention to the 200 mile limit.

MHA: Yeah.

BC: I think.

MHA: You're absolutely right. The Gloucester Fishermen's Wives, you know, are still in existence.

BC: Yeah. We used to keep in contact with them and we also kept in contact with some people in Florida. We wrote to the senator when we, we all wrote letters to the senator for the 200 mile limit

MHA: Mmhm. Excellent. So, I presume that you did not work outside of the home. Right?

BC: Oh. When my last child, my son was in junior high, now I used to take him to the beach and take him everywhere, but now I cramped his style.

MHA: [laughs]

BC: They were getting older. So what happened is I'd go home. [15:00] On a Sunday or weekends if my husband wasn't in or somethin' I'd be bored. So what I did was I ended up getting my real estate license and I worked for Century 21—in fact I was one of their top brokers for quite a few years. But this would, I could get a job like that, they wouldn't know exactly when I'd be home, or when I would be out because sometimes I'd be just goin' to the bank with someone and be gone an hour or just goin' to show a house and they wouldn't know how long I'd be gone and so that way I could keep track of what was goin' on in the house. [laughs]

MHA: Excellent. So when you, when your family was most active in the fishing, about how many boats were in town? Do you know?

BC: No I just can't recall

MHA: Yeah. I know that your family was involved in scalloping, was there also a lot of groundfishing at the time?

BC: Well the ground, my father was groundfishing.

MHA: Oh, that's right.

BC: My dad was, my husband did mostly groundfishin'. But my sons and grandson are scallopers and one of my sons was on a dragger, has a dragger.

MHA: So how are you listening, are they talking a lot about regulations, and what the effect of the regulations are on fishing these days?

BC: Um

MHA: Do you discuss that at all?

BC: My son has. And my son-in-law and that. My husband went down when they and the big meeting at I think the Portuguese club in the south end. In fact his picture was in the front page of the paper, 'cause he was there takin' it all in.

MHA: Mmhmm

BC: So, they are interested in it.

MHA: Mmhmm. Have you, has the view of, or the opinion about fishing—you were mentioning that earlier, that people used to think that the fishermen were drinkers. Has the attitude toward the fishing community changed over time? Have the rest of the, you know, residents...

BC: You know, now at one time there, drugs hit. They went for the fishermen when they were sellin' drugs, 'cause they were the ones that they figured would come in with the most, you know settle up with the most money. So, I think they had more problems thinkin' that they were all drug addicts. And you know, and I guess sometimes some of 'em took drugs because they had a very scary incident out to sea and probably to, that's how it started. [18:00]

MHA: Mmmhmm

BC: You know to give them courage, to go back out. Then it got to be a habit. It's really sad.

MHA: How about now? What do you think people think of the fishing industry?

BC: Well, I think it's come a long way. I don't think they look upon them like that. There's good and bad in every industry. But mostly your fishermen are really happy-go-lucky guys.

MHA: Mmhmm

BC: You know? And very likeable. Most of them, the neighborhood they live in, they're always givin' their neighbors or somebody there some fish or scallops or whatever they have so... They're very, much more looked upon more highly than they did some time ago.

MHA: So you were content to have your boys go into fishing?

BC: Well, it's a funny thing 'cause my dad didn't even want my husband to go fishing. He said since when did you need a college education to go fishin'? It wasn't till after he died and it was so hard all the mills goin' south and the higher you go—'cause he ran a mill—the harder it was to get a job. So, it was something that I grew up with. I wasn't against it, you know, that much. My son, my older son that's now deceased, he, he always said he was gonna be a fisherman. And it wasn't somethin' that you could discourage. You know how a kid get something in their head.

MHA: Mmmhmm

BC: My last son wanted to be, go and you know—it's their life and they're gonna do what they want to anyway so I, I didn't discourage it.

MHA: Did they go out in summers, or you know with your...

BC: Oh, they go out good and bad, in the winters they chip ice. I mean it would ice up and they'd, their boats would, they'd have to chip ice and that. They went all season long. Now I know that, that they're upset over how they cut down on the time that they can have out to sea. That was a big thing that they're still working on I think.

MHA: Did the boys start going fishing, did any of the girls wanna go fishing?

BC: No. That I wouldn't [laughter]. Back then, now women go, but my girls all went to college and have a good education and that so, and they didn't...

MHA: Have any interest

BC: No, they didn't have an interest. Although my oldest daughter, and I can't remember the name of the boat, when they were bringing a new boat back, she went on the, she went with them and came back, as a, with them. [21:00] She went as a cook, when they were bringing a new boat back from somewhere down south I think it, or Florida, or someplace like that. But I can't remember the name of the boat.

MHA: And...

BC: I can give you the name of the boats we've owned over the years.

MHA: Oh sure!

BC: [shuffling papers] Ok the boats we've owned or been in partnership with.

MHA: When you read that, could you tell us what kind of boat they are too, at the same time, do you remember, if you remember if they were a scalloper or dragger or whatever?

BC: The Friendship was a dragger, that was our first one. The Christina J. is the one he was on when the weather was bad. That was a dragger. That wasn't very big either. The *Ellen Marie*, she was a dragger. I'm not sure, I think she was a scalloper, I'm sorry. The *Betty and*



*Earl*, that was a scalloper. The *Louise* was a dragger. The *Mary* and *Ethel* were draggers. The *Wisconsin* was a scalloper I think, I'm not positive on these, you know. *The Dan, the Daniel and Jordan* was a dragger. The *Bernice C* was a scalloper. The *Donny C* was a scalloper. The *Kerry Anne* is a dragger. And the *Majestic* is a scalloper. In fact, the one that we have right now are the *Kerry Ann* and the *Majestic*.

MHA: Now, most of these boats you owned just with your family or did you have partnerships with other...

BC: Well, the one we own right now, the *Majestic*, we have a partner with Mike Smith who's a distant cousin of mine. But see when you can, it's better to have a partner when you, you can't go fishin' yourself on it. Like my husband can't anymore or something. It's better to have a partner because they'll take better care of the boat and watch out for it. We're, my husband's very fussy about the boats being kept up. The *Kerry Ann*, my son takes. The *Donny C*, we're not partners anymore, my son-in-law owns that. [24:00] That one, that's John Wright. That one is a scalloper.

MHA: Did you, most of these did you own them one at a time. Did you own one and then sell the others?

BC: I think we owned, at one time we owned two or three at a time.

MHA: Uh-huh.

BC: I know that the *Ellen Marie* and *Louise* we owned and I think at that time we owned the *Christina J*. You know at a time we were in partners with someone on these boats.

MHA: Very good. So, let's see, has, I know that they, the park service just came in here a while ago. I know for a time they were talking about wanting to bring a casino in or something into New Bedford. How has the relationship of the fishing industry and the tourism industry? Do you notice any interaction between the two?

BC: Well, I noticed comin' here today there was an awful lot of traffic so it was attractin' a lot of people. I'm very glad to see it and very glad it's a nice day.

MHA: Yes.

BC: Tomorrow's supposed to be nice. The traffic I find, I don't really know how much, but I know every time I get a chance, I tell people about the Whaling Museum 'cause it's one of the best, we've traveled, and it's one of the best places that you can go, really the least amount of money and what you see is really remarkable. And our downtown area, I hope will come back even more. But the tourism I think, I think it's picking up. I think we're getting more known around the country, especially when some boats come in. They come in out of the storm, so they go tell somebody you know, so word of mouth is a big thing.

MHA: Alright, let's see and how about, do you ever, did your family members who were out on the water, did they ever talk about running into recreational fishing boats and if there's

any...?

BC: No they don't. But I know that they had a few bad incidents at one time. My son, he said, and the only reason he told me about this is because he said, "Ma, you must've prayed real hard for me this trip." He was washed overboard; a wave picked him up and put him back on the boat. So that was...it gives me the chills even when I think of it. [27:00] Then my husband, I didn't, he didn't tell me this, but he fell overboard while they were out to sea and they picked up the net, and he was in it. They brought up the net, and he was in it. When he came home that trip, he was all black and blue, but he told me he fell on the deck. And not till months afterward, we were out with some fishermen and their wives. One of the men that we were with said to him, "Boy, you had quite a bout a little while ago, didn't you, Donald?" And he said, I said, "What, what was that about?" He said when he was washed over, when he fell overboard and they put, brought him up in the fishin' net. Now those kind of things, our husbands didn't tell us, because they were, didn't want us to be upset over it. So I mean as far as I know, I got off the subject of what you asked me,

MHA: No, that's fine

BC: But pleasure boats and that, I imagine they see them out there, but I'm...

MHA: No interactions

BC: Today they have radar and all that. Back then, they didn't have the radar and all of the things they have aboard the boat today. One time, when my husband was comin' in, he looked behind him and he said there was somethin' like 15 boats followin' them. Because it had been very, very windy. And very, very, the fog, not windy, I'm sorry, it was very, very foggy. You could hardly see a hand in front of you. And they followed his lights to get in. And they were pleasure boats that were out there, coming from like say the Vineyard or somethin'. And they followed them in. He said he looked behind them and he thought he had a parade. There was somethin' like 15 boats followin' them.

MHA: Like Rudolph!

BC: Yeah [laughing]. That's right.

MHA: Ok. So, um.

BC: I wanted him to come today, but he's shy. And he's getting' up, we're both getting' up in years. And he's 82 and he just doesn't like, he's very set—

MHA: Right.

BC: back, you know.

MHA: Well maybe sometime, we can come to him. [Laughing]

BC: Well, today I said to him, "Please, come with me," and he said, he has a, he broke his, he

had a hip replacement, which he was doin' fine and then, he broke the, two months later, broke the bone from his knee, femur bone I think it's called, from his knee to his hip, so they couldn't put that right up against that, where they gave him the hip replacement so there's a place there that's pinchin' you know when he walks. [30:00] So some days, especially damp days and things, it's worse than others. So he kind of uses that as an excuse if he doesn't want to do something.

MHA: Yeah, we all

BC: But he is in a lot of pain at times.

MHA: Yeah. You know some of the details are things that he would need to answer, but, you've told us such a great story, that that doesn't matter. Maybe, maybe you could just tell me a little bit about what you think makes a good fisherman. Since you've have so many experiences with fishermen in your family.

BC: Well, I think getting along on the boat, being able to get along with others, I think that makes a good fisherman. Or showin' up on time, because when they don't show up on time, they have to let them go, because somebody else will. I would say, being good family man.

[End of Tape 1]

BC: That's about all I can think of—

MHA: Yeah.

BC: At this moment. I'll probably get home and think of a dozen things that's more or less why I wrote down everything that I was reading.

MHA: Yeah, this isn't meant to be a quiz. It's just a conversation. [laughter] So that's fine. When you're on your boats, do you know how the payment system works?

BC: Yeah some boats, my husband was always pretty fair, some boats take more than others, for the boat share. I know that the boat takes, I think it's 45-50% I'm gonna say, but that's, they also pay the expenses for the food, the fuel and everything. Then the skipper gets a percentage more than the men. He has the responsibility, and the engineer. I'm not sure today whether they gave the cook more. Because even thought they cook, they have to work. Even the engineer has to work on the boat. But I think that's the way it...then the rest is split up evenly among the men.

MHA: How many crew members were there on your boats?

BC: Well, back years ago, they probably, there was 11 men on the scallop boats. Today I think they go with, I don't know 9, some time a shacker. A shacker is a, someone learning to shuck scallops. I guess that draggers now have a bigger crew 'cause the boats are so much bigger. But I know that the draggers used to go probably anywhere from five to seven men. The scallopers, used to go with about 11 men. I mean, a lot of this, don't hold me to it, but that's

more or less from what I know.

MHA: Right. Yeah. That's what I was asking, generally speaking. Is there anything that I haven't asked you? Oh I know, what do you see as the future of the fishing industry in New Bedford?

BC: I think they're gonna be number one and, again, and I think that 'cause we have such a good port here for them to bring scallops and fish into.

MHA: Do you watch any of the T.V. programs, like the *Deadliest Catch* or...?

BC: Well, I watched a couple of times, but I didn't watch, what was that one, the movie that they made the storm—

MHA: *The Perfect Storm*?

BC: *The Perfect Storm*, because I just figured I've got enough to lose sleep over without thinkin' about that, you know. So, I, it's been on quite a few times. I thought about it and then I thought no, why give yourself somethin' else to worry about.

MHA: So, and the *Deadliest Catch* is the crabbers out of Alaska and there's another one.

BC: Yeah, they're mostly, I know I've watched that, *The Deadliest*, is shrimp, a lot of shrimp too, out that way. They don't have too much on the fishermen out of this area at all. It's mostly like Alaska and that.

MHA: Is there anything else that you can think of that I haven't asked you that you would like the festival goers or the people that listen to this oral history to know about your life?

BC: Well, I think it would be nice if the fishermen's wives now helped more and got together. I think that it is a nice, nice to have an organization. We used to have great Christmas parties, it was called, it was Gaudet's Pavilion, but it's now Gaudet's. It's now, I think it's Century 21. We'd have Christmas parties for the fishermen at night. You know, an evening party. We'd have as much as a hundred people there, you know or 125. We'd have a big group. They would show up and really it was very, very nice. We'd have a good time and everybody was social. Never had any problems or fights or things like that. It was really quite a thing.

MHA: So, do you think that that sort of sense of community as a fishing industry has been lost or do you think people just got to busy in their lives.

BC: I think it, they're too busy or sometimes things that, see lots of times, the wives have to do things like we did, because the men were out to sea. That's like when we walked in front of the state house for the 200 mile limit because boats were out to sea and you couldn't, you know enough men couldn't go, so the wives took over. So I think it's good to keep in contact with one another like we did, it kind a helps in case things were needed.

MHA: Well let's see. Some years ago, there was here a herring plant in Gloucester and they

finally got rid of it because of the smell. Have you ever heard of any complaints about the industry here, either the smells or the noise or anything like that?

BC: I've never heard of the noise. But years ago once there'd be I mean if you got down around the dock or down there, but not throughout New Bedford, there was, I mean it didn't travel that far. But there would be a fish smell sometime, you know. But other than that I don't think New Bedford really, every really was, you know, smelly. [laughter]

MHA: Let's see. I feel like there are a million more questions I should be asking you, but you told me such an interesting story about your family that I'm still thinking about that. Did your husband ever, or your father ever talk about anything interesting that came up in the net, unexpectedly?

BC: Well, let's see. I have a little medicine bottle and some things they just don't bother and I also have a bean pot jug. At one time my daughter has—I gave that to one of my daughters. I had a vase, but I think it got broken. It wasn't really a vase, it was a pottery, out of pottery or something. But other than that, I don't know of anything

MHA: How about weird fish?

BC: Well, they—I can't, he'd have a fit if I told you, but at one time they reported what they call, it was like a very unusual fish or mammal that came up out of the water. They called it, sea monster really, because it had, it didn't go out seemed to have a long neck on it and a long body and it traveled and looked at them and went along the side of the boat, but they didn't really make a big thing of it, because they'd say they were either drinkin' or kooky

MHA: [laughter]

BC: So I don't know if he'll have a fit because I mentioned it. But they did say, he was interviewed, about it, but, 'cause the crew had seen it.

MHA: How long ago was that?

BC: Oh, that was years ago. 'Cause my husband fished for well I guess about 35 years and so and that was I guess months after, or maybe a couple of, a few, maybe year, maybe 25 or 30 years ago, I mean. But he'd never talk that much about it because right away they'd say they were crazy or drinking or something and he said, and they never took, they would not take liquor out there. Then there was another time that he spoke about, it had nothing to do with fish, but it was a relative of mine that was on the boat with him, Johnny Fennessy, he had a heart attack and they did everything. They called of course for a Coast Guard and they did everything to try to save his life, but he didn't make it. They gave him mouth to mouth resuscitation. What am I trying to think of the word—

MHA: Resuscitation.

BC: Resuscitation, yes.

MHA: It's a hard one. Do your, does your son and son-in-law, have they taken the safety training classes?

BC: Oh yes, yes. They went to the safety. They've all taken that.

MHA: Let's see, can you think of any other questions [laughing] I haven't asked? What advice would you give young people now?

BC: Well, let's put it this way. I wouldn't want to see the industry die. But I would say, that if your parents want you to go on and do something else and go on to school, and I'll tell you it doesn't hurt to have an education to fall back on cause you never know when you're gonna be hurt out there. Even if you do go fishin', you never know if you're gonna be hurt or what's gonna happen that you can't go fishin'. So, I know my youngest son took welding and he used to do welding underwater at the dock if, you know, if the propeller wouldn't take the boat from one place to another, 'cause he took, when he graduated from high school he went to New Bedford Vocational, and he did welding and then he took diving on the side, so he would do that. This is why it doesn't hurt to have an education. My husband's education helped him to be able to go up in that wheelhouse, take notes and see what was goin' on and then later becomin' a captain. So. I would advise them all to have an education and if they wanna go fishin' its good in case they get hurt out there for something to fall back on.

MHA: Sounds very wise. Did you ever have a wish to do anything, I don't know whether you were the shore captain for any of your boats or you had your hands full with six kids

BC: Yes, yes. No. I didn't have anything to do with the boats at all really.

MHA: Did they use a settlement house?

BC: Yes. In fact it was Solveigs over in Fairhaven.

MHA: Right.

BC: She passed away from cancer, but they had used her for years. Now I, I'm not sure which one, I know one of the boats settles up, I'm tryin' to think of the name, can't think of it off the top of my head. But they use a settlement house. Then the other boat is a smaller boat, the one my son has. They, my husband does the bookkeepin'. So, 'cause it's only, well that boat is 65 feet long, but it's a boat that he fishes inside the 200 mile limit when they're able to catch fish there and after then he'll go draggin' or scallopin'.

MHA: Right. I see. Yeah.

BC: Yeah.

MHA: Good. Let's see, what would Donald want to be sure, oh, what would Donald want to have you say? Or what would Donald want people listening to know that maybe you haven't said already?

BC: Well, he feels that same way about education.

MHA: Mmmhmmmm

BC: And bringing up a family and have them be close. My goodness, my children, grandchildren, great grandchildren, they're all very, very close. He'd feel as though if you have family, don't hold grudges. Just you know, life's too short and he'd want, if you're mad at someone, or you're mad at a family, before you go home, after you, if you've had an argument, say goodnight and forget it. Not to not say your piece or something that's bothering you, but that's how he would feel and I feel. That's what keeps a family close. I'm not just talking about your children, but this is all your family.

MHA: Right. Did he also come from a large family?

BC: In his family there was 2 boys and 2 girls. He came from a family of firemen. His grandfather and father, well his father was a fire chief and fire inspector and his grandfather was a fireman. I don't know if he was a chief anyway, but he was a, he was a fireman, so he came from a fireman family. Now most of his family are school teachers.

MHA: Huh. And are they all local too? Are they from New Bedford?

BC: Yes, my brother-in-law, Donald's brother was principal of New Bedford High, Theodore Calnan. He's got children that teach in school. In fact, my, one of my daughters right now, she was a consultant, she used to travel all over. But now as you get older and you get tired of travelin' and bein' a consultant, you can't really mingle with the people you work with because you might be costin' them their job. So she now is substituting.

MHA: Huh.

BC: And part time workin' as a waitress also, just till she gets into the school for full time.

MHA: When did your, you send your family originated in Newfoundland, your side of the family?

BC: Yeah. They're Irish decent, but—

MHA: I see.

BC: My father came from Newfoundland and my mother and their—I have an uncle that owned a boat called the *Newfoundlander* and during World War II they took that. It was one of the bigger ones here and the government took that boat and returned it to them after the war. They used it for supplies and that. That was one of the bigger, I don't know, I think it was a dragger. But it was a bigger boat at the time.

MHA: What attracted them to New Bedford? What brought them from Newfoundland?

BC: Well I guess, way back then even it was a fishing port, but when we first came here, not

when we first came, my father, „cause we were all born here, the kids. When my father first came here, we lived in Boston and he would commute to New Bedford. Then we moved from Boston to Acushnet and then we moved to New Bedford. My father couldn't swim a stroke, but he used to say to my mother, “What good is it out there in that water when it's cold,” and that. Didn't know how to swim. “You're better off if you drowned faster.” He'd say to her “Don't worry,” he said, “You know you can get hit by a car crossing the street.” We were fortunate he was home when he died.

MHA: That was good. Ok.

Sound Engineer: 10 minutes left

MHA: Ok, we're discussing the time. I don't have a watch. I forgot to bring a watch.

BC: I don't think there's too much more we can cover.

MHA: I need to be able to take your picture too. So, if you don't mind.

BC: No.

MHA: And—

BC: Oh by the way when they dropped the gas pumps to my husband, when they were takin' on water, I have a picture

MHA: Oh.

BC: That the helicopter took and sent to us showing, they hovered over them and it kind of pushed the water away so that their pumps they could work the gas pumps that they, and it shows the boat and then the water is all like lifted around them like pushing the water away so they could use the pumps.

MHA: How close were they to the water? I mean was the boat sinking? Actually sinking?

BC: Well it was takin' on a lot of water. The engine room was fillin' up see. That's why

MHA: That's why they had to drop them.

BC: The pump, yeah the pumps. Wouldn't work once they got wet, I don't know too much about it. So that's when they dropped 'em the gas pump, see. They can't take gas pumps out there because if they smoke or there's a spark you would blow up the boat. So they can't take those with them.

MHA: I see.



BC: But today they have so much more that, like the radar and the, which they didn't have back then. And the radio, they didn't radio in, but they used to listen to the fish news to see what the prices were, you know everyday.

MHA: I understand that it wasn't easy to communicate with the boats, you know as you as the wife.

BC: Well, that's what I was sayin', like I couldn't call out there and that. Because out to sea, they didn't call in fact when they'd pull into, out of a storm and they'd pull into Nantucket to put me at ease, my husband would call from Nantucket, you know, to say that they were in Nantucket.

MHA: Uh-huh.

BC: To put us at ease, and I would call some of the other wives or their husbands would call them and tell them, you know, that they were in Nantucket out of the storm. Lots of times it was real bad, wind and snow storms because they went out really all times of the year too.

MHA: Did they ever have to use the marine operator?

BC: Oh, I'm sure they did when they called the Mayday when they were takin' on the water or I'm sure they used a marine operator when Johnny Fennessey had the heart attack on our boat.

MHA: Did they helicopter come in for him?

BC: The Coast Guard picked him up. They were close enough at the time. I think, I think that's what it was, either the Coast Guard picked him up because or else I'm not sure they might have taken a helicopter because the, thinking they could save his life, you know.

MHA: Right.

BC: But I know the things they had out there to work with, they used to have a big first aid kit and things like that, but I mean, with a little wire they'd have to fix something on an engine or anything like that. They had to know their engines and know I mean it's like havin' a, well I would say the boats were in stormy weather were like toothpicks in a bathtub, you know!

MHA: It is interesting, too, to think about how the attitude towards safety has changed over time. You were saying your, was it your husband or your father who didn't know how to swim?

BC: Oh, he didn't know how to swim—no, my father.

MHA: Your father.

BC: My husband could swim.

MHA: And how about your boys? Did they?

BC: Oh yeah, they were good swimmers too. In school, well I would say, they were in the Y. They used to go to the Y swimming, but they used to go to the beach. I used to take 'em to the beach every day in the summer, pack up a lunch and take 'em to the beach and that in the summer till I cramped their style, you know [laughter].

MHA: When did they start getting survival suits, do you remember?

BC: Well, I know it's been quite a while because I'm trying to think. I can't remember exactly when, because I know that there was, while my husband was fishin' there was a boat that sunk and I know that they got the men and they were in survival suits so that was, you know...

MHA: Alright, I think we will wrap up now, 'cause I'd like to take a picture of you before the next interviewee comes in. But I really appreciate your talking to us. It's really been fascinating.

BC: Ok. Thank you

MHA: Maybe sometime we can —

BC: I'm a little nervous and I probably made a few little mistakes and that, but I —

MHA: It's really not—

BC: But to the best of my knowledge, everything I told you and I mean nothing was exaggerated.

MHA: Right, yes. No, this has been very, very interesting. I really appreciate it, your spending the time with us and I—

BC: It's been a pleasure to help you.

MHA: Well, thank you. Ok I'm gonna grab my camera. [sounds of Velcro] Maybe we can talk your husband into—

BC: Is that still on?

MHA: At some point maybe we can get your husband to talk to us.

BC: I wish I'd found that picture to see how much that scalloper, I mean that...

-----End of Interview-----

Reviewed by Nicole Zador, 12/06/2024