

Interview with Barbara McCarthy

Narrator: Barbara McCarthy

Interviewer: Lynne Williamson

Location: New Bedford, MA

Date of Interview: September 26, 2009

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: Sharon Pollard-Waldron

Abstract

On September 26, 2009, Lynne Williamson interviewed Barbara McCarthy as part of the Working Waterfront Festival Documentation Project. Retired boat owner, business woman, mother and fisherman's wife, Barbara McCarthy, shares her knowledge and experiences from throughout her lifetime in the commercial fishing industry. Barbara, who has a family background in fishing, shares her stories of raising seven children while remaining actively involved in her husband's fishing business as well as in the Fishermen's Wives association, the Blessing of the Fleet Fair and in various market ministries. In this interview, Barbara discusses her involvement and shares the concerns and stories of a fisherman's wife regarding her husband's close calls at sea and shares her knowledge of the safety procedures and practices used during her husband's days as a fisherman. Barbara also reflects upon a life of happiness and hardship which she has faced in making a living in the fishing industry, including the challenges of her husband's blindness and illness, along with her observations of fishing out of various ports in Massachusetts and Rhode Island throughout the decades. In addition, Barbara describes her family's relationships with other fishermen and fishermen's wives as well as different aspects of ship construction and ownership which she has learned and some of the changes which she has noted in the industry throughout the years and into her retirement.

Lynne Williamson: OK, please tell me your name?

Barbara McCarthy: My name is Barbara McCarthy.

LW: And, Barbara, where are you from?

BM: Last couple of years I've been living in East Providence. Before that, we lived in Dartmouth since 1955. And, always kept – had a boat that we kept in Kelly's. Not always the same one. [laughs] We had an older wooden boat that came originally from Provincetown. The GM salesman thought we oughta get somthin' new before we lost our lives on it. [laughs] So, he went checking around and there was... At that time there was a fisheries replacement loan. But you had to be turned down by three banks, which was very easily arranged because we hadn't done—couldn't do that much with the old boat. Then, we, stand Kelly at Kelly's shipyard. He was one of the references and [John Murley?]. I think the GM salesman was also a reference at that point [laughs]. We, this was 1961, and we got the loan after waiting a long time, like three months. Some paper work was sitting on a desk in Washington. Everybody had a copy of something except me. That was the last time that happened. [laughs] Because, the equipment on the old boat was supposed to go on the new one. The winch and the engine, and electronics. It ended up, we thought—we thought that we ought to have a new engine with more power. We had a 671 in the old—old boat. So, we broke out with a new boat after much 'hemming' and 'hawing' and delays. Because, there was a fire in the shipyard too, in the building that the boat was in. Fortunately, they hadn't cut the scuppers out yet and all the water pooled on the whole deck after the rail. And that—So, we had a tempered steel boat. [laughs] So, we finally got that all running about April or May of '62. First payment was due before the boat was ready to go. [laughs] So, upon the recommendation of the local rep, I made the first month's payment. The second months was split between the third and fourth months. We did quite well. As a matter of fact, the first several years we had it, a fifty foot boat brought in a million pounds a year. Not, not every year, but pretty close. Three or four times in five years. After that, things slowed down some. But the prices went up because some of these fish were three or four cents a pound. Especially in May when they were knee-deep to our grasshopper out there. [laughs]

LW: What were you catching?

BM: Black backs or cod, usually. Some incidentals along the road sometimes. Yup.

LW: Was this with your husband?

BM: Oh, I didn't go on it. I did everything else but go fishing. [laughs] Also had seven children at home. [laughs] Whenever the boat was in, the first priority was to get it ready to go out again. And low be the crewmen that didn't — tell him, when they came in, what needed fixing. [laughs] It was frowned upon not to tell the captain what needed fixing.

LW: What kind of crew did he have? Who were they and where did they come from?

BM: Actually, they were mostly locals and they were – One was a Newfoundlander. He was the mate. These were all five year—stayed five years. Then things started to change a little. They thought they'd all heard all of each other's stories sufficiently and by the early 70s... We had a pretty good crew, but they'd much rather then when it said the majority has to be there to take out fish. How do you divide a four man crew into a majority [laughs] if two of them don't want to be there? So, proved interesting sometimes. [05:34]

LW: You were fishing out of which port?

BM: At that time, it was New Bedford. At the—but at the same time, you have to factor in the—that when my first husband, he was the mast headsman on a swordfish boat in the late 40s. Sea for miles. Diabetes cut in—came into the picture in 1956. Some of these things brought him, brought him down slowly, due to the medical conditions. Sometimes we had some of the electronics on the boat—he would find [them] on a passenger liner. 'Cause I've seen them on a passenger liner since then—cruise ship. At one time there was a fella— Portuguese fella, heard that our boat was for sale. Because we had no—hadn't even thought of it at the time and he came down and he was drooling over the electronics we had. Then he—Then we told him it wasn't for sale [laughs], through the ice man that was interpreting for him. [laughs]

LW: Did your husband come from a fishing family?

BM: His mother describes it as getting seasick looking in the washing machine. No. His father worked in a foundry [laughs], up in Quincy. [laughs]

LW: How did he get started with fishing?

BM: He left home. One of the things he did was hitch rides and one of the—one was—he was down in Woods—over in Woods Hole and the fella, truck driver, was going somewhere and he went with him and he says, "Think there's a chance of goin' fishing around here?" He says, "If you want to work, yes there is." This fella's brother, own brother, was a lobsterman out of Woods Hole and despised anybody he knew breaking into the business of course. Even regular fishing. At that time, the late 40s, we were quahogging. Because, the boat we had then, the hull was almost new but the equipment was very run down, before we bought it. So we didn't dare go anywhere in it. And, so, you make little tight circles with a quahog dredge. The quahogs were large and they usually got sold to Mr. [Mallows?] in Marion, who delivered them to Blount Seafood or Campbell's Soups. But, when one forces a—gross proceeds is going in the gasoline tank, it doesn't leave much for anything else.

LW: Where did you meet your husband?

BM: In Woods Hole. [laughs] He was down there on the swordfish boat. That was another story too, 'cause it was an old German that wouldn't—didn't even have a receiver radio on the boat until a fellow from the coast guard went out with him dragging in Buzzards Bay—not Buzzards Bay, Cape Cod Bay, in the fall of the year when it opened up. He gave him a receiver so that he could at least

get weather reports. One of the times when they were out swordfishing those two summers, '47 and '48, there was an old Nova Scotian that was cook. He knew that if he edged the boat up every night on his watch for two hours, toward Nova Scotia, eventually they'd get there. He had relatives up there and knew that he'd never see them again any other way. [laughs] [09:59]

LW: Did you—How did you feel about fishing as a family business? When you married, did you know it would be like that?

BM: It sort of progressed. [laughs] Some good, some bad. When we went to Nantucket, we were—he was quahogging, not on our boat, and then he—there was a boat broker in town and he was lining up other things, other boats that—bigger boats. They were, at that time in the early 50s, they were dredging quahogs in Nantucket Sound. That had been a business that had come back, or lied dormant for numerous—quite a while. Because, there were some old timers around at that time, early 50s. They said, “Oh, I—we used to go quahogging down there in the late 20s.” So, it was a—things go in cycles. I think even the fish themselves go in cycles too.

LW: Did you notice the quahog diminishing and then you started fishing for other kinds of fish?

BM: Well, we changed boats. We had—That was when we were working on the old boat that had come from—originated in Provincetown while we were still down in Nantucket. Then we came up here with it to finish getting it ready to go dragging with. In between trips on the railway some time in—It was a leaky sieve, to put it mildly. It would go by everything but a railway. It wanted to sit on it. Then it didn't leak. [laughs] Both because it was out of the water and the planks were tighter. Then we got into the new boat in 1961, '62, and it went along quite well. As his eyesight started to diminish, he didn't like having to go through Woods Hole to make the auction in New Bedford. So that—he took out fish in New Port, in the early 70s, and then we also took out fish in Vineyard Haven. There was a fella that had a place over there that bought fish. He started in Woods Hole and then went to the Vineyard. So, that was convenient as far as, from that angle. Eventually, when he went totally blind in '78, there was a fella that ran the boat for us the rest of that year. And in '79, we knew about who we would like to sell the boat to if we could line it up. It took some time and some doing, uh, and we did sell the boat to him in '79. [laughs]

LW: What was it like raising your children with a husband often out at sea fishing?

BM: Well, in the first place, most of the—in the early years with the new boat – in the spring of the year, the trips were only two days long, if that. There was one time when, when he went around the Cape, twenty-four hours later he was going out again 'cause they happened to hit a spot. So, my—At the very end, it was getting up to five or six days. But, we were also getting to the end of the fuel supply too. 'Cause, at the time where you build a boat, you had certain areas in the engine room and on the sides and that was the fuel tanks. Not separate tanks like some of them had.

LW: And you had seven children?

BM: Mhmm.

LW: How were they—What were their ages? How were they spaced along your fishing days?

BM: Oh, very busy. [laughs] The first four remember the old boat and the hard times. The younger three heard us talking about it, but they, that was—The youngest one was born the same time we applied for the government loan. She doesn't remember any of that—any of the hard times, of course. She thinks everything came very free and easy. Well, it don't work that way. [laughs]
[15:32]

LW: All this time were you living in New Bedford?

BM: We lived in Dartmouth from 1955 on.

LW: Oh, OK.

BM: Yup. Until two years ago when I went to East Providence. Yup.

LW: What about your children now? Are any of them interested in fishing?

BM: Oh, there's a—There's one boy in the seven. He's always stayed fishing. And every once in a while, when things are getting down or impossible to do something he says, "Maybe I shoulda listened to you and gone to school." [laughs]

LW: So what does he do now?

BM: He's fishing in Kodiak, Alaska. Or as his father says, "As far as away as he could get and still be in the United States." [laughs]

LW: [laughs] What does he fish for?

BM: Well, actually, since he's been out there...and not just Kodiak, he was in the eastern side of Alaska, too. He went sailing one year. He was the twineman on an Indian—the local Indians, none of them knew twine. Another time, there was a factory boat up there. He — in Kodiak, Dutch Harbor, and they—he could get on the down below decks in the processing. But they didn't need anybody on deck. I says, "Go for it! Eventually they will tear up from one end to the other and they will need a twineman desperately." He didn't even finish the first trip and he was up on deck mending twine. [laughs]

LW: Now, how did he learn how to twine?

BM: By doing it on my husband's boat. [laughs] His father's boat. Yup.

LW: And this was something your husband knew and then he could teach his son?

BM: Well, you learned it in a hurry. 'Cause if you had a five-legger, all at once you had a lot of extra meshes that you didn't—had to cut out and start over with. [laughs]

LW: Was that your only son who went to sea?

BM: That's the only son. The rest are girls. [laughs]

LW: Any of the girls do anything related to fishing or the industry?

BM: If you call fly fishing... [laughs] I have two that are interested in fly fishing. A matter of fact, the oldest one is up in Roscoe, New York tying flies at a fly tying show this weekend. She's going to Arizona and Arkansas the next weekend. She and her husband are makin' a trip out of it in their RV.

LW: Is that a hobby for them or do they make a living out of that?

BM: It can work into one. If you get real good and these people running these different shows invite you back. I know she's been invited back to Charlotte, North Carolina next— end of next January.

LW: Hmm.

BM: Mhmm.

LW: Going back to when you were young with young children, your husband's out fishing, what kind of life would you say you had? And what kinds of things did you do? In the way, for instance, of cooking or doing things at home that would help him in his fishing career?

BM: Well actually, he used to leave me a list. "Check on this, this and this before I get back," or "Pick up this, this and this before I get back." [laughs] "I want it for the next trip." [laughs] [19:48]

LW: Were you able to communicate with him while he was out at sea? Was some of this equipment that—

BM: Only through the marine operator. If he was under Sankaty Head Light, you didn't get a signal to the New Bedford marine operator. She was also the Western Union operator. 'Cause I talked with her several years after that. She says, "I don't know why it keeps disappearing." I says, "At down behind the cliff and at Sankaty Light." [laughs] There weren't any cell phones back then either. [laughs]

LW: Was it hard for you? Was it a hard life?

BM: Hmm, yes, quite a lot.

LW: Did you mind it?

BM: Well, we jumped in and we had to keep swimming. [laughs]

LW: Would you cook for him? Would he take food out on a trip?

BM: Nope. Always had a—Because, on the old boat there was two men. One of them was a, at one time, was a—known as a complete grouch. And some other fellow fisherman says, "How do you stand that guy?" "He stays up his end of the boat, I stay down mine" [laughs] "We get along fine." [laughs]

LW: What other crew did he have on the boat?

BM: At the beginning he was by himself. I went because he didn't— He says, "If something happens, I want to come home so—if all you do is sit in the pilot house, you're there." You can—'Cause I'd been around boats all my life. Mhmm.

LW: What was your background with boats?

BM: My father had an 18-foot with a one cylinder engine. One of the two engines I've never started. [laughs] You had to crank a knob on the fly wheel and it kicked back once in a while. I says, "No, that's not for me".

LW: What would he do with his boat? What'd he catch?

BM: My father, he, when I was real small he had some lobster pots over at Woods Hole. After that, when I was about seven or eight, he'd have, go out tautoging around Woods Hole. Of course you had to play your tides too, because you didn't go against the tide in a six horse power engine. [laughs]

LW: Did he ever have any adventures or mishaps?

BM: No, because he thought things out ahead of time and that's a very good idea in a lot of things you do.

LW: Did he come from a fishing family?

BM: No. His father was a carpenter. [laughs] But that's one of the things—a lot of people over at Woods Hole, they had a small boat and go out stripe and bass fishing, blue fishing, things like that.

LW: What did your husband do when he became blind afterwards? Did he stay with fishing in some way?

BM: No. Because he couldn't even get on and off the boat. The state under the Mass Commission for the Blind sent him up to the Carroll Center in Newton. You get training there. They had some people up—One woman that was up there at the same time wouldn't even try doing—try to make a baked potato in a microwave. So they would train you and take you shopping on the trolley and all kinds of things. That's when you learn about traffic lights that beep at you; certain signals. I noticed the one over here, there's one in town here that has those same signals in it.

LW: How did he feel about not being able to fi—How old was he and how did he feel about not being able to fish anymore?

BM: He was 48. or theF first year, he hadn't been declared legally blind and it was tough just living with him. [laughs]

LW: What happened to his boat?

BM: We sold it. The next year, after this fall, to get his financing lined up. Yup.

LW: What kind of things did your husband do then, for the rest of his life?

BM: Well, a couple of years after that he also went on dialysis ‘cause his kidneys were failing. That’s a three day a week project too. So, takes up a lot of time and you have to be there. [25:03]

LW: So, your kids must still have been relatively young at that point?

BM: Hmm, well, that was—He died twenty-three years ago. And the oldest one is sixty and the youngest one is forty-six or so. Yeah, something like that. [laughs]

LW: What have you been doing in the la—years since your husband died? Anything related to the industry?

BM: Hmm, keep an ear tuned. What I can learn, [laughs] without showing up on the waterfront. You used to be able to see— if— an old retired fisherman when you went grocery shopping, but then they all died too. [laughs] Mhmm.

LW: Do you like to come down to the waterfront?

BM: Well, not when I see them all tied to the dock now with all these regulations they have now. I don’t know if that’s good or bad. [Car alarm starts going off in background]

LW: I’m going to stop you for a minute because of that beeping.

BM: Mhmm.

LW: Somebody’s car alarm is going off.

BM: Oh, I know. [laughs]

LW: [talks to sound tech and decides to continue over the alarm] Did you ever learn any of the net mending techniques?

BM: I had to tell him when he was making a mistake. So, from that angle, you could say I learned. [laughs]

LW: So, you could tell by looking at a net?

BM: Mhmm. Backwards, because he would be opposite me. He would ask me sometimes, “Do I go here or do I go there?” [laughs] But he went a lot by feel when he was cutting at it — cutting his — the old twine out to replace it.

LW: Yeah.

BM: Yup.

LW: Did you make friends among other fishing wives?

BM: [laughs] I have to chuckle on that one. We were in the local coffee shop over on Union street and this couple came over and asked me — asked him if I could join Fishermen's Wives. That was the first year or two that they were going. [laughs] And he's, "Yeah, I think so." I was the only one that was part—a part boat owner so I had to watch my, what I said. I was notorious for not talking so that went along real good. The other part of it was that most of the time—I think it was in existence about fourteen years or so—and I usually ended up being treasurer. [laughs] 'Cause I, I had a knack for it. If I had a question I just asked [Luce Lane?]. 'Cause she had done a lot of book keeping since she had been—she was president most of the time.

LW: So you were a business woman?

BM: Yeah. No, you had to to keep track of things. I was also known as the "gofer." "Go for this, go for that." Also did the accounts payable book for the accountant who—he set it up and I, if I had a question, call him up. Don't do the settlements. Let somebody else do those. I says fine.

LW: Was this for your husband's business?

BM: Mhmm. Yup. Yup.

LW: How many people did he have working with his business?

BM: Well, you had three men and himself on the boat. Then of course if you came in here, you had lumpers, depending on how many fish—weight, how much weight you had. Then they added fish weighers and, oh, I forget all the other categories that they added as they went along.

LW: And the bookkeepers, accountants also?

BM: Mm.

LW: Were they independent contractors or was it a business that paid these people salaries?

BM: You mean the accountant? Well, the main accountant we had was up in the lawyer's office or worked out of one. Did a lot of his work at home. Also had a problem with arthritis, something wicked. So, it was easier for him to work from home. Mhmm.

LW: You were keeping an eye on all of them?

BM: Oh, yes. I'd look over the forms afterward, "Oh, is that where it went to?" [laughs] And the information that I had given them. [30:09]

LW: Did you have good relationships with the other wives? Sound like you were a little bit different from them.

BM: [laughs] Well, to the extent of some of their husbands had been on our boat at seven thirty in

the morning. They'd get a phone call and they'd answer it and I'd say, "May I speak to..." and ask for their husband. "Who's this woman wanting to talk to my husband?" Took 'em years to find out. [laughs]

LW: Did you share any concerns, or fears or worries while your husband was out?

BM: Mhmm. Yes, as a matter of fact, one of the—one time it was blowing Northwest Gale and my husband called up and he says—called me, and he says, "We're down underneath, underneath the cliff outside of Chatham. Call up Jen and tell her the *Act I* is out here too." So I did. [laughs] 'Cause you couldn't get around the end any more, not with the wind blowing the way it was.

LW: Did it take him a while to get back in that time?

BM: Eh, a couple of days more. [laughs]

LW: During that time, how did you feel about that?

BM: I was alright. Yeah. One time in the year, when one of those—I think they were inside more and more this particular one time and the *Lynn* was there and they were anchored, several boats. And the next morning the *Lynn* had disappeared. So, when my husband got in from the trip the rain safety officer in Providence was on the phone, "We'd like to do an interview with you this afternoon so we'll see who produces..." Said, "Oh you can come up to our place." They wanted to know all of the things, "Did you know what shape that boat was in?" "Yes, it was a rundown wreck. The guy was an alcoholic, so was his crew." "Anything going wrong on the boat?" "Yes, you had pipes bursting." And if they—you mix different materials in the piping they eat one another up.

LW: What happened to that boat?

BM: It sank; disappeared. They're on a plaque up at the Seamen's Bethel. That's why it—sometimes I can stand goin' up there and sometimes I can't. 'Cause if you read all the plaques up there—the *Midnight Sun* was another one. That was new when the same time our boat was. And yet, you found that the guy had the—the captain and owner had mixed galvanized pipe with copper brass and all the other materials you could use for piping. And it eventually, it ate through. In two and a half years, you've got this new boat disappeared.

LW: Was that a case of the captain, the owner of the boat, not understanding about that?

BM: Well, he was looking for the cheapest way out and it didn't work.

LW: Sounds like you have to be very careful about a lot of different things.

BM: Mhm. [laughs]

LW: How do you learn something like that?

BM: You ask a lot of questions of the right people. I know my husband would figure out something

on—using his former mast and then he'd go over and see Mr. Conroy, who had been a school teacher up at Voke and he was upstairs over at Hathaway Machinery. He'd get out his slide rule and come up with the same answer. [laughs]

LW: When your husband was learning all these things, you were learning too?

BM: Well, at that time I was—that was when the children were fairly small so that—he was on his own with a lot of that. [laughs]

LW: Sounds like you know a lot yourself though.

BM: Mhmm. [laughs] [34:42]

LW: Do you, with all these experiences, all your knowledge that you have, do you feel like you want to work with anyone these days to teach some of these things?

BM: Hmm, I don't know whether I would or not. I moved into a retirement center, and if this is retirement, we've been out five times—five days this week goin' somewhere on the bus. [laughs] one of which was a trolley ride to New Port. Now, if they could come out with something like that around here—they might, might have. I think it's been tried some over the years, but you can't—you don't have the people—or you might now judging by the number of people I see around today. Get people informed and get things working, quote unquote. I think this weekend is a good idea too. Excellent. We have a lady that comes in our place— building, as a farmer's market. But she has to serve over in Rhode Island— she has to cover in— in the summer months she has to be at a certain number of farmer's markets in the state in order to qualify. So we don't see her from May to October. But she was real nice fruits and vegetables, and jams and jellies, and sometimes bread, grape nut pudding, things like that. [laughs].

LW: I wonder, what do you think about the idea of having fish at some of the open air markets?

BM: We have a country store in our building and it's open three days a week from 11:00 to 1:15. The most frequent call is, "Why don't you have bread?" Well, you'd want to break it up into four-slice packs or something like that and you've defeated your own purpose then. That would also go for your meat and fish. One, they don't have room for it. Refrig—We have one of those double door refrigerators for the milk and orange juice and sodas and V8. Ice creams on the other side; a few types. But you gotta be able to handle it. Then you run into the board of health coming in to inspect you and all those kinds of things too. I've worked in market ministries up here, dealing soup for about 14 years too. [laughs]

LW: What is that?

BM: They serve lunches on Monday through Friday. Soup and sandwiches. Yeah.

LW: Uh, who come in for that?

BM: Anybody can walk in. Like one fellow that did it before I got involved with it, you know they shouldn't be here but you can't say anything. [laughs]

LW: Are there people that come to that from the fishing industry who might be falling on hard times?

BM: Oh, yes. One guy had just unloaded a boat over in Fairhaven and he smelled the high heaven. [laughs] We served him—asked him to please leave or sit over in the corner. He was almost—We were closing anyway. [laugh]

LW: When you were younger, you had your kids, your husband was out at sea, would you cook a lot and eat a lot of fish, your family?

BM: Yes. Fresh off the boat. [laughs]

LW: What were some of your favorite ways of preparing fish?

BM: Well, at that time we thought that the only way to cook it was fried. [laughs] Or the—those certain types that we brought home. Preferably with pork—pork—salt pork. Little things cooked—tried out first. [laughs] Now you don't look at fried fish.

[both laugh]

LW: Do you eat—get to eat much of it now? Do you like it?

BM: I make a point of finding them. I find the restaurants in East Providence, they sell—have fish and seafood on Wednesdays and Fridays. If you're looking for it any other time, you're out of luck. [laughs]

LW: Do you have any stories that you'd like to tell that are different from the ones you've been telling?

BM: Hmm.

LW: Any unusual occurrences that might have happened?

BM: Hmm, I can't think of any. [laughs]

LW: Did your husband ever have any close calls out at—while he was out?

BM: Oh yeah. He was on the Smiling Number 1 when it ran around on No Mans. [laughs] When I first knew him.

LW: How'd they get out of that one?

BM: Let's see. I don't even remember. I know they had a dingy that they had— they had picked that up on the bow there. They had picked it up drifting around and that's what they got off in, off

the boat. Because it was smashing on the rocks and the bulkheads were coming up through the deck.
[40:12]

LW: But it didn't put him off fishing?

BM: Nope, nope. [laughs]

LW: Did he love fishing?

BM: Yes. We used to tie up in the wintertime over in—on a finger pier over at Kelly's. Of course they had this, UMass, formerly SMU, boat was on the other side and this fella would usually keep—come down and make sure the engine would run and the generator was generating and the—keep it pumped out. He says—came over and says, "I'm graduating next week." My husband wished him well and, "What are you going to do?" "I don't know." My husband says, "After four years of college, you don't know? I knew what I wanted to do all along." [laughs]

LW: What do you think about the industry today? Do you see a lot of changes?

BM: I don't know what to think, frankly. I mean, I read what I can about it.

LW: Do you think things have changed for the worse?

BM: Drastically.

LW: Do you see—What do you think about the future of the industry?

BM: I don't know. I know if some young person could come along with an idea if that would change—change things or not.

LW: What do you think is the—some of the biggest problems faced today?

BM: Well, I go back to the '77, when congress passed the law that anybody could invest in anything, forgot what they called it. Then you had, you had lawyers and everybody else going partners in—having new boats built. And all that's when a lot of these boats were built originally. He says, "They don't have any interest in it. They don't go on em." He says—My husband says, "All I was doing was guaranteeing myself a job." [laughs] And these other people don't care.

LW: How about the regulations? Are they a problem?

BM: I think so. Are they a problem or aren't they? I had a son-in-law that was—went fishing, he went scalloping, and eventually he ended up on the Albatross in the Delaware. You can't always go by their—what their results are either. [laughs]

LW: Why is that?

BM: Because if the—There was a mishap in the net and the one, one main wire was out longer than

the other and they missed the toe, “Oh, there’s nothing here. We didn’t catch anything.” [laughs]
You gotta have things right.

LW: There’s a lot fewer people fishing these days?

BM: I think so.

LW: Ironic, ‘cause there’s a lot more people eating fish.

BM: Mhmm. Yes. Sometimes I ask for fish and chips and I can’t identify what fish it is that I’m eating. [laughs] I says, “Wait a minute. That shouldn’t have that brown strip down the middle of the back.” [laughs]

LW: Can you think of any possible solutions for how to get over some of these difficulties today? You’ve got a lot of experience.

BM: A lot of these—they used to blame it on the foreigners after they, uh, coming over here and before they got—‘cause those 200 mile limit.

LW: Mhmm.

BM: I don’t know where that stands now. I don’t hear much about that one anymore.

LW: Who was that? Who was coming in?

BM: Mm, the foreign factory boats that were out here ten, twelve mile—well, twelve miles off it was originally before they went to 200. But I don’t hear anything about those anymore. [laughs] But I know all the small boats have disappeared. Yup.

LW: Sounds like the individuals, the people that are directly connected to fishing those kind of family boats—

BM: By now all the people we knew are long since retired. As a matter of fact, when I was down in the restaurant in New Port, Tuesday, I saw a boat that we knew real well from Scituate, Mass. go by the end of the walk. Well, that means that that fella up there is retired, ‘cause he was about our age, I think. Or a little—maybe a little bit younger. But there’s very few fishing boats down in New Port either. [45:22]

LW: Mm.

BM: When I saw a truck that said Paris [Gondola?] on it, Johnston, I says, “Hmm.” I didn’t see any boats where they used to take out fish down there either.

LW: Is your boat still on the water?

BM: No.

LW: What happened to it?

BM: The fellow we sold it to sold it after my husband died because he knew that my husband did not approve of this other fella and the way he operated. So, after my husband died, within a month or two, he had sold it to him. He had other people running it and there was two—two men on it. On a Friday evening, they got the bow up on Great Point Rip. The Brant Point station sent out a boat with a seaman in command. Everybody else, all the big leagues went home and he didn't ask approval. He put the—we had an A-frame on the stern and he put his line on a cleat on this A-frame and—which was up about four feet above the water, and he flipped it over. One guy got lost. And his wife sued the government and when it came down to it, they very grac—generously gave her 250,000 if she split it with the other guy who survived. She wouldn't do it. They also were notorious for not paying their taxes, which had been one of the requirements for getting the, uh, replacement loan in the first place. So, she couldn't even collect social security as a survivor. [laughs]

LW: What was the name of your boat when you had it?

BM: *Lark*.

LW: *Lark*?

BM: Mhmm. [laughs]

LW: How did it acquire that name?

BM: Years before there had been one of the highliners up the Boston fish pier. One of the line trawlers that had been named the *Lark*. I do believe that's the way it was. [laughs]

LW: And h—What size was that boat?

BM: The previous one? I want to say a hundred feet, but I'm not sure. 'Cause it was a wooden schooner like.

LW: And your *Lark* was how big?

BM: Fifty. One time, he was out on George's in the summer time 'cause there was absolutely nothing going on in shore. He was beside the *Shamrock* and he, "Hey Mickey, how big do we look?" Mickey says, "Mighty small." [laughs] He says, "That's all I want to know. Bye. See ya." Tied up—We tied up for a month or so, took a vacation. [laughs]

LW: How did your husband know where to go to find the best fish grounds?

BM: Well, he asked some of the old-timers what you look for. Cod fish are notorious for having—feeding on certain types of bottom. If you filleted one and cut it open, did it have certain things in its gut? Worms, things like that. Certain types of worms. You had to know what you were looking at—looking for.

LW: I heard a story yesterday about some old timers, old dorymen—

BM: Mhmm.

LW: —who would come down

BM: Mhmm.

LW: —to the bottom and bring up some from the bottom and taste it.

BM: Mhmm.

LW: To see what it was made out of. Do that all the way out.

BM: Mhmm.

LW: Did your husband do that?

BM: As a matter of fact, when they had a—this swordfish boat he was on in the late 40s, um, he didn't have a sounding machine either. He still used the sounding lead, where you take the lead that's so long, with a carved out bottom molded. You put grease or wax in it and you picked up the bottom if it was pebbles. Mhmm. Same thing. [laughs] [49:53]

LW: Any other old time tricks your husband had? Any knowledge that he had that wasn't related to equipment?

BM: Mhmm.

LW: About weather, or...?

BM: Well, we gave up on the weathermen. We used to do one of these things, go out and see which way the winds blowing that way. [laughs]

LW: Did he ever get caught in any serious storms?

BM: Oh, you had to play it really close sometimes. He used to be quite friendly and talkative with some of the P-towners. They'd go North, and if they made it around the race before a certain squall hit he would—he'd call em, "Well, how are you doing? Did you get in and around the race?" So, then, he'd also follow the wind down the coast and scoot around Monomoy before it—before it hit there. It all makes a difference too. One time he called me up and asked me if the wind had shifted at home, in Dartmouth. He says, "Well, I've got 'x' number of hours in order to get in around the—in around the points there." He says, "I'll be in." [laughs]

LW: Would you say, Barbara, it was a good life for you?

BM: Yes.

LW: You were happy? Your family was happy?

BM: Mhmm. [laughs]

LW: Do you have anything else you'd like to talk about or say?

BM: Hmm, no. [laughs]

LW: Is this your first time at the festival? This festival?

BM: This festival.

LW: The first time—

BM: I was involved with the Blessing of the Fleet Fair for quite a while. Had to show up at that. Sometimes I gave an honorable mention to the first coast guard district because the president had banged up her knee at home. So, [laughs] that was the year I think we did it on the light ship. [laughs] Mhmm.

LW: In the Blessing of the Fleet, was that an important ceremony for—for you, thinking either spiritually or emotionally?

BM: Yes, but I never could get my husband... He says, "If you want to decorate it, you can decorate it and you can take it." [laughs]

LW: He didn't want to participate?

BM: Nope. Nope.

LW: [laughs] Why not?

BM: He wasn't that type of person. [laughs]

LW: Did your family have a strong religious belief?

BM: I do. He says he's a "non-cramist." He didn't care what I did, as long as I didn't cram it down his throat. [laughs]

LW: What is the denomination that you...?

BM: Methodist. Yup. Oh, yeah. My father would wait outside over on Main street in Woods Hole, talking with all—anybody else who was going by while I was in— going to Sunday school. [laughs]

LW: Do you think the festival is a good way for people to learn about the industry?

BM: Yes. Yes. Publicity is the name of the game.

LW: Do you think it'll have an effect on changing people's thinking? Or changing people's behavior around the industry?

BM: Mhmm. Possibly, yeah. 'Cause I don't know—who the younger people are and what they're thinking either, so.

LW: Do you have any parting words of wisdom for us?

BM: [laughs] Things are really complicated. But find out all you can about it before you start. [laughs]

LW: Anything more or do you wanna stop now, or go on?

BM: That's it.

LW: That's it?

BM: Yup. [laughs]

LW: Thank you so much.

BM: Mhmm. [54:52]

-----End of Interview-----
Reviewed by Nicole Zador, 12/5/2024