

AUD\_2014\_0053 Alfred Lawless 1992-07-18, Saugerties, NY. Interviewed by Marguerite Holloway.  
Transcribed April 2021 by Carla Lesh, Hudson River Maritime Museum, Kingston, New York

Multiple unidentified speakers. Two different women, possibly Mrs. Lawless and daughter.

Alfred Lawless: It's going to be a thing of the past, that's what I think.

Marguerite Holloway: Your father, when's the first time your father

Woman's voice: How many years has your dad fished?

Alfred Lawless: For years, we did since I was 15 we fished in the Hudson River.

Marguerite Holloway: And he fished before?

Alfred Lawless: We had so many fish one time a big ship was coming, we threw out and we picked up as fast as we could. We had 179 fish, we only had 38 roes though. They were huge, some of them. That's back when, this year there were not so many buck shad.

Marguerite Holloway: There weren't many buck shad?

Alfred Lawless: No very few. Like, I don't know what happened.

Marguerite Holloway: Did you get a lot of stripers?

Woman: Look at the size of that one.

Alfred Lawless: Yeah, they're a nuisance in the river. You can't keep them, what good are they? And they bad mouth stripers and won't let you keep nothing. I don't see what's wrong with them.

Man: They have them for the sport fishermen.

Woman: You get them caught in the net you have to release them and by the time you get them out of the net, they're dead anyway. So it's sad to see them thrown back into the river.

Alfred Lawless: They want them for sport fishing anyway.

Cross talk.

Alfred Lawless: Down in Jersey they can keep the stripers and we can't keep them up here. And there's no difference in them there and here. They spawn up here and the go down there.

Man: Because they're salt water.

Alfred Lawless: If that makes them good, I'll put some salt on them.

Woman: You buy a license for them, you know.

Marguerite Holloway: Before the ban, did you fish for stripers? Or did you always just fish for shad?

Man: I don't think you could ever keep them, right?

Marguerite Holloway: Well before 1976, 1975?

Cross talk

Alfred Lawless: Let's put it this way, we didn't get many stripers because the fishermen down there were able to keep them then and catch so many of them they would never actually get up this far. They caught so many. Now that they are so plentiful, you can't keep them.

Cross talk

Alfred Lawless: So now they lifted it and let them keep them down there and they shouldn't be allowed to keep them down there if we're not allowed to keep them. I don't care what they say, it's logical. They can keep them and we can't and they spawn in the Hudson River and if they're bad up here for human consumption, they're just as bad down there. There's no difference.

Woman: They're swimming through, I mean.

Alfred Lawless: They're born here, so what makes them any different down there. Am I right or wrong? It's not right.

Marguerite Holloway: Do you think the state is ever going to lift the ban?

Woman: No, because people like the *Clearwater* are making people so afraid to eat fish because they're saying the levels.

Cross talk.

Alfred Lawless: You know what they did to me one year?

Woman: People are afraid.

Alfred Lawless: One year they told us, me and my son-in-law were going to go fishing. The head of the DEC, he was in New Paltz. We went out fishing and the game warden, Marian, what's her name? She's waiting for me. She says what are you doing on the lift pier. And I says, we were told we could go out fishing.

Woman: They got the okay over the phone.

Alfred Lawless: My son-in-law called them up and hollered at them and that and he says, well, I could have said that, but I wouldn't swear it in the court of law. So I had to go down.

Woman: They told us there was a time, because just the regulations.

Cross talk

Alfred Lawless: I had to go down and pay a fine plus they made my son pay a fine because he was with me because he was with a licensed fisherman. So they made him pay a fine too.

Woman: They took your fish.

Alfred Lawless: They took all the fish, they weren't supposed to give them to anybody.

Woman: They took it for themselves.

Alfred Lawless: They said they gave them to a home across the river and that's not right, because they can't give them away anymore like that. And they lied to me.

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Woman: That's how crooked the DEC is.

Marguerite Holloway: This was when?

Woman: Back, about 5 or 6 years ago.

Cross talk.

Alfred Lawless: So I called the paper, they put it in the paper and they said we won't take your word, we'll take the DEC's word. So I says you're communists.

Woman: They're right in with them. See what we were up against?

Marguerite Holloway: How much was the fine?

Woman: \$150

Alfred Lawless: \$250

Marguerite Holloway: And how much shad did you have?

Alfred Lawless: We had 3 or 4 tubs full, great big roes.

Woman: Big, big tubs full.

Cross talk.

Marguerite Holloway: Why was there some confusion about the lift period?

Alfred Lawless: The year or so prior they let you fish on Saturday. And up there it was different. And then they changed it.

Cross talk.

Marguerite Holloway: Unless they got lucky and someone \_\_\_\_\_ with a canoe.

Laughter

Alfred Lawless: Go ahead, take the coat. So that's you know, they're always doing something.

Woman: They changed the rules and regulations.

Alfred Lawless: I call it trickery.

Woman: They didn't give them the rules and regulations so my husband called and said when is lift period? When can we fish? They told him. He went fishing with my brother. They were waiting at his dock when he came in, because he's smiling thinking he ain't doing anything wrong. And then busted and they're like

Alfred Lawless: I've got you baby.

Woman: My husband's like there's no way, he flipped out and called them on it and the guy said, look I may have said it but I'm not going to swear that I told you

[timestamp 5:11]

Alfred Lawless: So she called down there and he says well, I brought the fish and he says well, we're going to take your net. So when I got the fish up to the road they said oh, we're going to take the fish so they took the fish. He said really, we could send a man up here and take your boat. So the lawyer said, you paid the fine, you admitted you were guilty, I could have got you off that, he said.

Woman: Well, they lied. Who would come in smiling and waving if you were doing something wrong. I mean. [crosstalk]

Alfred Lawless: So they bad mouthed me in the paper and they put, what is it? How did they put that in the paper? Local fisherman

Woman: Arrested.

Alfred Lawless: Something about Jesse James or something to that effect. [laughter] [crosstalk] And the best part of it is, I have the last name Lawless. And that was the best part of it all. The DEC roundup. That's how they put it. That's what it was. Roundup.

Marguerite Holloway: Did you have any other run ins with the DEC in the time you've been fishing?

Alfred Lawless: Well years ago they stole my father's nets out of the cellar. They had no right. They came in they just took them out of the cellar. And then they had a law that you had to be 500 feet from the water. The nets were just sitting. They had to be licensed. And they came right in the cellar my father was drinking and they said you could drop the charges or you'll have every game warden and trooper after you for the rest of your life while you're fishing. So my father dropped the charges and still had to pay a fine. But I'll tell you.

Woman: You don't know what they put us through.

Alfred Lawless: You know what I said, the DEC has too much power.

Woman: They do.

Alfred Lawless: They really do.

Woman: Now if you go out on the boat out on the river.

Marguerite Holloway: Have they gotten more power over the years?

Alfred Lawless: They have more power than State Police, the cops and everybody. They really do.

Woman: I think they use the mass media and they make people hysterical. They're afraid to eat fish. I really do.

Alfred Lawless: But when they took all the fish that time, that was illegal for them to do. But they did.

Woman: They got away with it. See what I mean everywhere you turn...

Alfred Lawless: And the girl says oh we've got a lot of fish here. My son Barry said, Dad did you hear that? I said yeah, I heard it.

Woman: He went down to New Paltz.

Alfred Lawless: They had the fish all boned. They had three people with raincoats and stuff. Had the fish all boned. The eggs all out and everything out of them fish. They stole the fish.

Woman: Stole actually.

Alfred Lawless: Besides I had to pay a fine. They said they're not your fish, they belong to the State. That's where they have too much power.

Woman: Too much crookedness going on.

Alfred Lawless: You pay a fine, plus they get all the fish, plus it was illegal for them to give them away, but they did it.

Woman: So we went down

Alfred Lawless: They kept them for themselves really.

Woman: the following year when you fished. I went down with Jack and I asked them for the rules and regulations for lift area and everything. We went down to New Paltz, my husband and the guy said that there was a very funny story of someone that had been fishing and he didn't know that it was my father. That had been busted. I said really, why don't you tell me the story. And he started telling me, well they went out and whatever. And I said, that was very nice, that was my father that you did that to. So I said, I want the rules and regulations and I'd like you to sign them.

Marguerite Holloway: So he admitted that they had

Woman: They laughed about it. It was a big joke.

Alfred Lawless: They have good times when they do this too.

Woman: Oh, they think...

Alfred Lawless: That's what I say about the power. They have too much power. [crosstalk]

Woman: So you have to be really careful.

Woman: Cautious.

Woman: You have to always cover yourself and make sure that you are going by law.

Alfred Lawless: I wouldn't go out there. Why should I go out there when I'm not supposed to.

Woman: You can't go by word of mouth anymore.

Woman: You have to always second

Woman: Make sure it's documented

Woman: Right. Don't until you absolutely

Woman: Because I've called the attorney that day when I got the call at work and Mr. Carnwright said, Mrs. Lawless what you'd better do it, I'll see what I can do on my end. But don't call or do anything drastic because you do have sons in the family and they will go after the sons. So I let it go at that. They'll pick on the kids. And we didn't want that.

Marguerite Holloway: Does everyone in the family fish?

Alfred Lawless: No, just my son and me mostly. The other boys don't.

Woman: Well, they used to.

Woman: Allen used to.

Alfred Lawless: Well they don't

Woman: Alfred used to.

Woman: David used to do it and Joey did it.

Marguerite Holloway: They used to though.

Woman: My husband used to do it with them to.

Alfred Lawless: That's the boys right there.

Woman: There's five of them.

Woman: But the one that really carries it and fishes all the time with him is Joe and that. But they've all done it.

Alfred Lawless: They've all went out.

Woman: They've all went out.

Alfred Lawless: Kind of resentful like toward it.

Woman: But they ... it's hard work. [crosstalk] It's not like people think. It's a novelty when you

Woman: You've got to really know what you're doing when you're shad fishing.

Woman: They want to go shad fishing but they don't know that you're going out when it's freezing and the waters rough and it's cold.

Woman: it's windy.

Woman: You've got orders to fill and you're tired and you're doing like 7 and 8 stress. Everybody thinks you're making a lot of money. If you got paid, you'd probably be paid in cents. [crosstalk] Because you're not just catching the fish. You're cleaning them, you're iceing them, you're running the nets when it's cold.

Alfred Lawless: If they let you keep the stripers there'd be a little money into it, but you can't keep them.

[timestamp 10:30]

Alfred Lawless: The fish stores would buy them in a second.

Marguerite Holloway: Do you break even in a season? Shad fishing? Or?

Alfred Lawless: I'll tell you, I just get enough to pay the taxes.

Woman: We pay the taxes on the waterfront and here.

Woman: The goal is to make enough to pay the taxes.

Alfred Lawless: There's no money into it. If I had to buy new nets now, forget it.

Marguerite Holloway: Did there used to be money in it?

Alfred Lawless: I imagine the people who are into bigger, you know.

Woman: Yeah, like Turck. [crosstalk]

Alfred Lawless: big nets and stuff like that. My nets there's only like 600 feet or under. And probably if they fish bit, you know, like Catskill they have an outfit in Catskill fish with these big reel things. And I guess they go in pretty heavy into it. A lot more.

Marguerite Holloway: Who's that, in Catskill?

Alfred Lawless: I don't know, in Catskill.

Woman: There's Turck in Kingston.

Woman: He quit early this year.

Woman: He's big, they have the shad festival and everything.

Alfred Lawless: That's not, they didn't have the shad this year. They had to send down to Newburgh.

Woman: They didn't even have the fish [crosstalk] They had to buy them for the shad festival we were told.

Marguerite Holloway: Do all the fishermen stay in close touch throughout the season? So like you tell the next person?

Alfred Lawless: No, we don't bother.

Woman: We don't have that many anymore.

Alfred Lawless: See, when I fish I just bring in what I need. I don't bring in, if I'm not selling them, I'll only bring in what I need, you know.

Marguerite Holloway: Do you sell them locally?

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Alfred Lawless: Yeah and I don't bother getting too awful many because if they're not selling, I just don't go out. Sometimes I won't even go out. And they've got that lift period. And I can't see it because there are so many windy days that you can't even fish.

Woman: And rainy days.

Woman: They're taking some chances. I mean that they shouldn't.

Alfred Lawless: Days that we go out there's like 2 or 3 or 4 days that you can't even fish it's so bad. And then when you can it's on when it's a lift period. They shouldn't even have the lift period the way the fisheries are. There's days and weeks, like 2 or 3 weeks out of the little fishing that you've got that you can't even fish. There's ample time for them to spawn. That's why I can't see the lift period. That they shouldn't even have.

Marguerite Holloway: When did they start the life period? Or did they always have it?

Alfred Lawless: I believe they always had it.

Woman: As long as I remember.

Alfred Lawless: But you don't need a lift period because there's so many days that you can't even get out to fish. It's so bad for 2 or 3 days the wind blows so hard, the fish are spawning, you can't get out there. Probably the best part would be the last part to have the lift period, the last two weeks, when they're really spawning.

Marguerite Holloway: And just not go out at all.

Alfred Lawless: Yeah. They knock off real early. Didn't they.

Woman: This year they did.

Alfred Lawless: They always do. May what? May 20<sup>th</sup>. We used to catch

Woman: Well, in March.

Alfred Lawless: Catch them June the 15<sup>th</sup>, no more. They cut back like the 21<sup>st</sup> of May, they're all done, right?

Woman: By the end of May.

Alfred Lawless: The 21<sup>st</sup>.

Woman: The end of May.

Man: Usually run the license to June 15 with the period from the 26<sup>th</sup> to the 15<sup>th</sup>. [crosstalk]

Alfred Lawless: They should have it from March is no good.

Woman: Years ago it used to be March 15<sup>th</sup>.

Alfred Lawless: It should be April the 15<sup>th</sup> until May the 25<sup>th</sup>. After that, forget it, the fish drop right off, you know. If they done it like that and let the fish spawn they'd be better off than having the lift period.



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Have no lift period. It'd be better fishing. You could fish the days that the weather's decent because account of the wind, so much wind.

Marguerite Holloway: In the years that you've been fishing, have you seen the populations of shad go up and down a lot?

Alfred Lawless: I've seen them, up and down.

Marguerite Holloway: Have you seen it as low as it is now?

Alfred Lawless: The roes are pretty good but the bucks were lower. This year I've never seen anything like it.

Man: Not as many roes. We used to from 80 to 100 roes, now there ...

Alfred Lawless: Yeah, but there is

Man: 40 to 50 at the max.

Alfred Lawless: There are times I'm fishing with 6 inch mesh too and you use a 5-5/8 [cross talk] or 5 and a half.

Woman: Fishing harder too I remember 5 and 6 and 7 [cross talk] You were going out.

Alfred Lawless: See, the fish are smaller this year, the roes sometimes and there'd be some years you'd have a bigger run of roes too. There is a difference sometimes. See they run. They vary like from big to small. Some years they're very big.

Woman: Is that when the lilacs are out, or something?

Alfred Lawless: The best fishing, yeah.

Woman: The best fishing.

Alfred Lawless: When the apple buds start coming.

Woman: They say when the lilacs are in bloom, the shad are running.

Alfred Lawless: When the buds come out, they start fishing. And when the lilacs are in full bloom that's your best.

Woman: That's the best time.

Woman: See here's where they're.

Man: When that big magnolia is fully opened that's when they're heavy.

[timestamp 15:01]

Woman: Showing the kids how to fish.

Marguerite Holloway: Did there used to be a lot of fishermen out of Saugerties?

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Alfred Lawless: Yes.

Marguerite Holloway: Yeah?

Alfred Lawless: There was Harry Myers.

Man: There was Cutler.

Alfred Lawless: There was Dale Silverpaugh. This was Saugerties now and they come over. And they had my father and they had Mercandaugh. And they had Farrow. This is through the years, they had Parrady and Idey. Oh gosh. The game warden, he fished. Through the years there was a lot.

Marguerite Holloway: When did they

Alfred Lawless: 10 or 12 out of Saugerties through the years. And Malden had 7 or 8 fishing out of Malden. Glasco had 2 or 3 fishing out of Glasco. There was a lot of people out. They had to go out there and take turns so the nets, that's how bad it was.

Marguerite Holloway: Did they ever plug each other?

Alfred Lawless: Yeah. [cross talk]

Woman: She knows about plugging! [laughter]

Alfred Lawless: My father and his friend went out one time and this old fisherman Lou Cash started. He said, I'll show you how to do it Mikey. He says, stick in the stone, stick in the stone and he's waiting for Swagger from Glasco. He says, okay let's go. Stick in the stone, stick in the stone. So they got out and Swagger says, okay go get'em. So he throws his net and they go plug him. [laughter]

Marguerite Holloway: Did people ever get into fights about it?

Alfred Lawless: Probably. Always carried an oak oar, my father. Typical Irish, boy, ready to fight too. Nobody bothered him.

Woman: They used to call your father the Mayor of Dublin.

Woman: How long did grandpa fish?

Woman: For years he fished.

Woman: Before you, you've been doing it 50 years.

Alfred Lawless: My father's people in Ireland was fishing. They lived on the fishing port with fishermen. What do you think of that? Lawless, it's right on the map, I tell you. It's a fishing port.

Marguerite Holloway: Where? Which county?

Alfred Lawless: Where?

Marguerite Holloway: Which county?

Alfred Lawless: It's in Ireland, that's all I know.

Woman: Ireland. [crosstalk]

Man: It was on a fishing port in Ireland that's all I know.

Alfred Lawless: I seen it in the paper one time. And I tell my father, you look there, family were fishermen originally from Ireland fishing.

Marguerite Holloway: So it's been in your family forever.

Woman: Three generations.

Woman: Three generations.

Woman: His father and my father.

Alfred Lawless: I don't know if his father had fished. But I know

Woman: Your father. That's three generations. Grampa, you and Joey.

Woman: I hate to see it phase out. Something they should keep going.

Alfred Lawless: Mostly accommodation, there's no big money in it [crosstalk]

Marguerite Holloway: Did people used to make big money off of it?

Alfred Lawless: Back when they made a living that's all I can say. My father, they had no money, they were poor. We were so poor we didn't even have shoes on our feet sometimes. You had to go to the Poormaster for money for shoes. Back then was bad too. They had the Depression, you know.

Woman: So that was his job, right? Grampy fished.

Alfred Lawless: That's all he did.

Woman: When we were little we used to have a big clawfoot bathtub down in the basement and he used to have all fish swimming around in it and people would come down and pick what they wanted.

Marguerite Holloway: So he would fish all year round for many different kinds of fish, not just for shad?

Alfred Lawless: We fished with fike nets. And we fished with scap nets the big 10' square nets. We still have the old ray but we don't use it no more.

Woman: They ice fished in winter.

Marguerite Holloway: So what would you catch? What are all the different species?

Alfred Lawless: Yellow perch

Woman: White perch, smelt we used to catch which we haven't had in a dog's age. Oh they were wonderful.

Alfred Lawless: We used to catch bullheads. Once in a while you'd get a couple of pickerel in the next. You weren't allowed to keep them you know, in the net.

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Woman: We have contests up here. Catfish contests. I caught a striper, 23 pounds.

Woman: I don't have my pictures, but I caught a big perch.

Woman: Yeah.

Alfred Lawless: Yeah, she stole all the meat I put here the other night. When we were outside talking, come in and the whole plate was gone.

Marguerite Holloway: What kind of dog is this?

Woman: That's a chihuahua.

Alfred Lawless: Where's Bambi?

Woman: I've got a little one. [crosstalk]

Woman: A couple of years ago we saw blue crabs coming back in the Hudson. Which I haven't seen.

Alfred Lawless: We caught a bunch of them.

Woman: They're coming in now.

Alfred Lawless: About three years ago we were getting big ones.

Marguerite Holloway: Like six inches?

Alfred Lawless: Catching a piece of shad, like this, nice ones.

Woman: Blue, pretty blue on them. [crosstalk]

Woman: We'll say five inches. But it was very strange because it's almost like you have to think that the river is getting cleaner.

[cross talk of Alfred Lawless and child]

Woman: Blue crab, something that we haven't seen in so many years.

Marguerite Holloway: When did you last see them?

Woman: Last year.

Woman: Oh, god they're coming back.

Woman: I have never seen them myself. My father has. There's now zebra mussels in the Hudson, right?

Man: Oh, there's millions of them zebra mussels.

Woman: I haven't seen those either in a while.

Marguerite Holloway: Before last year, when had you last seen blue crab?

[timestamp 20:00] [crosstalk]

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Alfred Lawless: They were always up here but not as plentiful and as nice as they've been. Not last year, the year before they were real nice. I don't know what happened last year. They were smaller.

Marguerite Holloway: What other species have you seen coming back?

Alfred Lawless: They caught a flounder in the Hudson River. A little one like this come swimming along. They caught fish with them in the belly, flounder in the belly.

Woman: Was that Pat?

Alfred Lawless: Yeah.

Woman: Who caught it?

Alfred Lawless: Flounder.

Woman: Pat caught a flounder?

Alfred Lawless: And somebody else caught one in a dip net they caught it going along.

Man: They've seen a dolphin. Two years ago they had a dolphin down by Kingston. By the sewer.

Woman: It was confused. They released it or did it die.

Marguerite Holloway: Do you think the river is getting cleaner?

Alfred Lawless: Oh yeah.

Woman: I think it is. I really think it is, I really do.

Man: It is.

Alfred Lawless: We go swimming down there.

Woman: We swim down there.

Marguerite Holloway: When was it really dirty?

Alfred Lawless: Back, back before the 1950s, in the 1940s like the mills and that. And they had the rope would go down on the paper and it would float up on the top.

Woman: The sewage was running

Woman: The paper mills.

Alfred Lawless: All the different colors would come down in there. And then the sewer would run right into the creek a lot of times.

Woman: The sewer.

Alfred Lawless: You could see it floating, you know.

Marguerite Holloway: People would still buy shad even though they knew the river wasn't clean?

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Alfred Lawless: That had nothing to do with. The river itself was a long ways out there.

Woman: The river was quite a ways from the sewer.

Woman: The creek comes out like this and then there's the river, the channel. And so the way station is, right in the creek.

Alfred Lawless: They said that years ago there was lobster and clams in the Hudson River. This is years and years ago.

Marguerite Holloway: Were there oysters?

Alfred Lawless: Pardon?

Marguerite Holloway: Were there oysters?

Alfred Lawless: I believe there was everything. I don't know if the water was more brackish back then or what, I don't know. But it seems like it's getting more brackish now. On account of these fish coming up. Who knows.

Woman: I think last year we were getting crabs.

Alfred Lawless: That's not as big as the year before. We didn't get any yet this year. [cross talk]

Marguerite Holloway: Have you set the crab pots this year?

Alfred Lawless: I have one.

Woman: He's got one.

Alfred Lawless: This man from where we worked, he sent down to, where was it, Florida, somewhere down there. Sent me a trap he brought up for me.

Marguerite Holloway: So just one.

Alfred Lawless: Because I give him some yellow perch we catch here, you know. They're real good eating. Bone them, you know.

Woman: We've got some good fish out of this river.

Alfred Lawless: Oh, yeah.

Woman: Excuse me. Where did you say you were from again? My daughter asks.

Marguerite Holloway: I'm doing a project for the Hudson River Foundation. And these tapes will go to the Hudson River Maritime Center.

Alfred Lawless: We get a lot of fish from the Hudson River Foundation. Their tags and stuff.

Marguerite Holloway: Yeah.

Woman: Yeah, I caught one last year. A striper \_\_\_\_\_ [timestamp 23.05] Society.

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Marguerite Holloway: The Literal Society?

Woman: Maybe, is that what it was?

Marguerite Holloway: I don't know.

Alfred Lawless: And the Hudson River I've caught them before.

Woman: There was an orange tag through it and I wrote it was very hard. I found out who caught the fish and when it was released.

Alfred Lawless: Well, they release them by the hundreds, the Hudson River Foundation and tag them, right? Do they still do that?

Marguerite Holloway: I think so, I don't know. I know that they are just starting a study on sturgeon and they're going to start tagging the Atlantic sturgeon.

Alfred Lawless: There's a certain time of the year you can go down to Barrytown and you can fish in there and you get a. This one fella he had so many sturgeon he had to call in another boat for help.

Marguerite Holloway: Who was that?

Alfred Lawless: Potsie his name was, this was years ago. He's dead now. But he had to call, he had a great big round bottom boat and he couldn't get all the fish he had so many. He used to take them and smoke them and that.

Marguerite Holloway: And they were Atlantic sturgeon?

Alfred Lawless: What do you call \_\_\_\_\_ [timestamp 23:59] or sturgeon, I don't know, long nose, short nose. And they say Atlantic sturgeon has a fin up in the middle of the back. So I don't know. The size, is so big, that you have to be lucky to catch something once in a great while.

Marguerite Holloway: Did your family ever fish for sturgeon commercially?

Alfred Lawless: No, just lucky to catch one in the shad nets.

Woman: Many years ago your father did.

Alfred Lawless: No, he didn't fish for them. So what happens. Once in a great while you'll catch a sturgeon. Now you have to have the tags and permits and you have to have them come here. I wouldn't even bother, that's the thing. They're too strict. They're getting even stricter every year. It's a thing of the past.

[crosstalk]

Marguerite Holloway: Do you think the shad fishing is going to survive?

Alfred Lawless: Yeah the shad fishing but the sturgeon are going to be so over plentiful in time that because the laws are. And I think it's stupid myself. They just don't want you to catch only certain size. There's so many sturgeon in that river

[timestamp 25:05]

You go at the right time of the year down there you can fill nets with them.

Marguerite Holloway: So it doesn't need to be regulated?

Alfred Lawless: I don't believe it does. They say they're going to be extinct. I don't believe them myself. Just because they're not as plentiful as they used to be. They said they used to go out and they used to jump right in your boat almost. That's what they claim. They used to be so plentiful. So I don't know. Who knows, maybe they'll come back better. I think there's a lot of them. They say not, but I think there is. You don't fish for them up here. You fish down like Barrytown. There's certain spots in the river where you fish. And there's certain spots where you can't fish because you rip your nets, you know.

Marguerite Holloway: Because of the bottom?

Alfred Lawless: Because of the bottom all so many trees. If they'd ever clean that bottom, clean the brush and stuff out it, I don't know, trees and logs. We towed a big log like this about 30 foot long, over into the tracks and tied it fast and now I see it's floating back out into the channel more now that little channel over there. Very dangerous, but I don't have the facilities to pull it to shore

Woman: That's the Coast Guard's job.

Alfred Lawless: My rope is too short, I tied it, it broke back loose. I see it floating again.

Marguerite Holloway: You said there were lots of people who fished out of Saugerties. When did they stop fishing? When did you become the only one?

Alfred Lawless: Through the years they died, they'd give it up. Like one went to Florida. He gave it up. He died. The year before, his brother died, a year or two before.

Marguerite Holloway: Who is this?

Alfred Lawless: Overpaugh. And before them was Harry Myers years ago and he died. He fished.

Woman: What about in Malden?

Alfred Lawless: Oh, there was a lot in Malden.

Woman: They passed a lot

Alfred Lawless: There had to be at least, Ted Fraley fished. There had to 10 or 12 in Saugerties over the years there, they fished shad. But now we're down to one or two or three. There's Ed and a couple, but they don't even haul the fish.

Woman: They don't know the first thing how to go about it. You've got to know more details on it how to do it.

Alfred Lawless: There's less people fishing now

Marguerite Holloway: Has anyone ever come to you to learn how to shad fish?

Woman: Oh, he's had people want to go out with him.

Alfred Lawless: They've come and asked me to take them out.



Woman: Or teach them.

Alfred Lawless: But you don't want to

Marguerite Holloway: Do you teach them?

Alfred Lawless: No, no I like to go out

Woman: He doesn't have the patience. He wants them to know what they're doing.

Alfred Lawless: It's like you don't want so much competition, you know what I mean.

Woman: Who's the one that threw the whole net over? Which one of the boys did that? [crosstalk]

Man: How much do you get for your fish, they ask you and you say so much and they want information. They just want to know what you're doing, you know.

Woman: How did you learn?

Man: I call them spies.

Woman: I don't think you have to worry about anyone learning it, trust me. People do some idiotic things [crosstalk]

Man: They're in for a rude

Woman: Wasn't there someone who fell in their own net?

Man: They're in for a rude awakening if they think it's something easy. And they think there's money into it, there's not.

Marguerite Holloway: What's the most you've ever gotten? How many pounds of shad? By the pound?

Alfred Lawless: I don't ever sell them by the pound.

Woman: We sell by the fish. [crosstalk]

Alfred Lawless: The reason why, the reason for that is, if you sell them by the pound you have to weights and measures the scale by the State. We don't even bother with it. [crosstalk]

Marguerite Holloway: How much do you get per fish? What's the most you've gotten and the least you've gotten?

Alfred Lawless: Quite a bit.

Woman: Selling per fish?

Marguerite Holloway: This is not a spy network.

Woman; The most you ever asked was 2.5 for the roes right, A dollar for a buck?

Alfred Lawless: Let's put it this way. We get enough to survive.

AUD\_2014\_0053 Alfred Lawless 1992-07-18, Saugerties, NY. Interviewed by Marguerite Holloway.  
Transcribed April 2021 by Carla Lesh, Hudson River Maritime Museum, Kingston, New York

Marguerite Holloway: But has the price gone up or down over the years. Does it change with the seasons?

[crosstalk]

Alfred Lawless: They tell me I should charge more but I don't. I do it for people and I know them pretty well over the years.

Woman: A buck for a buck.

Marguerite Holloway: People come to the house. Everyone knows.

Woman: You see the big sign out front. "Shad"

Alfred Lawless: There's no big money. It doesn't even really pay. If I had to buy a new net, I wouldn't even bother with it any more. In fact, I don't know if I'll fish next year.

Marguerite Holloway: Why?

Alfred Lawless: I'll be 65.

Marguerite Holloway: There seems to be some skepticism about that.

Woman: Dad will fish. He says it every year, that's why. [laughter]

Alfred Lawless: We're both retired and I don't have to fish. There's no.

Woman: He likes doing it too much.

Marguerite Holloway: Would you miss it?

Woman: Yes, you will. It would kill him

Alfred Lawless: Like I said, if I didn't have it, I'd miss it.

Woman: Now he heads for the islands, he goes for [29:42 missed word]

Alfred Lawless: No, I don't.

Woman: This is about fishing.

Alfred Lawless: No, I don't.

Woman: This winter, my husband and I were down there watching and he was taking an ax and chopping the ice as a sluice way so he could get his boats in the water. He's the first person to put his boats in.

Alfred Lawless: We taken them out when the ice is so hard we can't put them in anymore. [timestamp 30:00]

Woman: He hates to see the summer go, I guess.

Woman: He hates to take his boat out of the water.

Woman: I know it, he waits, the last one to do it.

Marguerite Holloway: When did you make the boat that was in the video?

Alfred Lawless: Year before last. Last year we didn't fish it because it leaked too bad and this past year we [crosstalk]

Woman: He made a 12 footer too. He makes his own boats, shad boats.

Woman: Rowboats.

Alfred Lawless: That's the last boat. I destroyed two of them that I had, one big one and another one.

[crosstalk]

Alfred Lawless: It's not the last of the Mohicans, it's the last of the boats.

Woman: Next year he'll be building another. [crosstalk]

Alfred Lawless: No I won't. No more boats.

Marguerite Holloway: Did you ever sell them to other fishermen?

[crosstalk]

Alfred Lawless: No I've made small ones.

Man: When they run the out do they fall apart? [laughter]

Marguerite Holloway: Tell me how you designed the boat that makes it good for shad fishing?

Alfred Lawless: Well, you have to use the back transit and the middle spreader board, you just cut it on an angle and then you spread your board on the back and you cut that on an angle too. Like whatever angle you want on it, you know, to throw the water away. Then the front the bow stem, you just cut them on an angle. 3 inches on the bottom less than the top. When it draws in, it curls the boat around. And the same with the back, you bring it in like 3-1/2 inches it curls that one a little bit more. It gives it the shape, you know what I mean? I call it the batter board, it's like a form for bending the boards, you have to bend the line, you twist it with a rope and you bring them in. Then you have to plane the bottom board. Then you take 2-1/2 inches or 2 inches in the middle, to nothing on both ends. That gives it the shape, the flat bottom. Helps gives it the shape. Then you have to put ...

Marguerite Holloway: That's important in terms of when you load up all the fish to try to make you ....

Alfred Lawless: [unclear] the boat I took a little too much out. I took 2-1/2 inches, 2 inches is plenty to take out of the middle when you're cutting the boards. Do you have to go somewhere else today too?

Marguerite Holloway: Up to Catskill, I think.

Alfred Lawless: You're going to go to Catskill?

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Marguerite Holloway: Yeah.

Alfred Lawless: He fishes with them big reels and stuff, doesn't he, Joe? We were selling to the

Marguerite Holloway: Powell? Jack Powell?

Alfred Lawless: We were selling to the fish market down there to Cousins and last year. And this year he got it because he gets so many more shad. I was a little disturbed with him, but I said, eh, I don't care.

Woman: It's market, if they can him to sell them the fish cheaper.

Woman: Two Cousins were buying the fish.

Alfred Lawless: So not much, very little I sold them this year.

Marguerite Holloway: Do you ever ship down to the City?

Alfred Lawless: No. Years ago they did, years ago they shipped to the City. And the Mafia held a gun to them and told them don't bring no more fish down here. Mack's friend, this was years ago. They told him don't bring anymore fish to market. And that was the end of that.

Woman: They have the market down there.

Alfred Lawless: That was years ago when the Mafia controlled everything.

Woman: They still do, you just don't mess. You let them have their market.

Woman: Just stay away.

Alfred Lawless: They control everything, they're even in the government.

Woman: They're in the garment industry. They're in a lot of stuff.

Alfred Lawless: Big thing now over that was in the news yesterday, some trouble.

Marguerite Holloway: At the Fulton Fish Market?

Alfred Lawless: No, not there but something, the Gambino family. You've heard a lot about that. It was on the news yesterday.

Marguerite Holloway: So after that experience with the gun, no more selling to Fulton?

Alfred Lawless: Bringing carp down there years ago and they said no more carp to the City. They held a gun on them. And that was the end of it. My father used to sell them carp from the Hudson River years ago. It was a pretty good market, didn't make a lot of money, but they lived, you know.

Marguerite Holloway: What else did he sell?

Alfred Lawless: Then? That was about shad and carp, that's about all. Maybe bullheads and yellow perch years ago.

Woman: Did he ever catch eels? Did he ever do eel pots and people buy, them, or no?

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Woman: I catch many of them on my fishing pole.

Alfred Lawless: I used to hate to clean them, so slimy. I used to hate to clean the carp, stink, awful stink.

Marguerite Holloway: Did you like to eat eels?

Alfred Lawless: No, not me, I wouldn't eat eels. A woman tried to put one in my mouth and I says get that out of here, I'll punch you. Oh they're good, they're creamed, get out of here, I don't want them.

Man: Smoked them, they smoked them.

Alfred Lawless: I don't even smoke cigarettes.

Woman: Jack's father used to eat eels. We used to bring them up to him, he'd like them.

Alfred Lawless: Yeah, he took them.

Marguerite Holloway: Do you eat a lot of shad?

Woman: I love it.

Alfred Lawless: I eat a lot this year, probably more than other years.

Woman: There's a good recipe with the cutting board. [crosstalk]

Alfred Lawless: There's one up there that fishes sturgeon.

Marguerite Holloway: Everett Nack and there's Ian Burlick [sp?] in Durham. He was fishing for sturgeon and then I think.

Alfred Lawless: He fishes for the big ones. I don't know how he fishes for them. He fishes specially for them, big anchors or nets, or I don't know how they do it. But I was tempted last year, I was going to take and make. Take my big deep net and go down in the deep holes, because I know you can see there's sturgeon down in the holes. I was going to fish for them. But when they come out with this tags and all this stuff, I said, I'm not even going to bother with it, it don't pay.

Woman: It's too regulated.

Marguerite Holloway: They only got one month this year.

Alfred Lawless: It's not only that but there too much [crosstalk]

Marguerite Holloway: You had to tag it and it had to be followed. Only one month and it was very, very cold so they ended up getting very little time and the month wasn't flexible so.

Woman: It became too much of a bother.

Alfred Lawless: We don't get any to begin with so they're over protective and you don't care to bother with them. There's no big money.

Marguerite Holloway: It's just Powell, Nack, Ian Burlick, up here basically. And Bush and down in Haverstraw Bay there are only about four guys. So that's it.

Alfred Lawless: Used to be [crosstalk]

Marguerite Holloway: But not for sturgeon, there were only about 4 or 5 guys out of Haverstraw for sturgeon.

Alfred Lawless: Years ago I knew Hasting DuBois from down there, from Haverstraw, my father knew him. Used to bring shad and sell them to my father.

Marguerite Holloway: Really. Did you ever get shad fishermen coming all the way up on barges?

Alfred Lawless: No but there's big, I believe they're commercial boats come up, don't they Joey?

Man: State boats.

Alfred Lawless: I don't know if they're State white boats. They have big spool.

Man: Big spool. Like they do the shrimp type.

Alfred Lawless: They said they catch shrimp in the Hudson.

Woman: I wish.

Alfred Lawless: The *Clearwater* claims they get small shrimp in the Hudson River. Now you talk to them, the *Clearwater*.

Man: Down Delaware, Chesapeake Bay

Alfred Lawless: They have big nets on there. I know they have on the deck of the *Clearwater* and they claim they catch shrimp in the Hudson River.

Marguerite Holloway: Do you think the environmental organizations have done good things for the river? Or you were saying earlier

Woman: I think yes and no. But I think it put such a fear into people that the first thing is that it turns people away from the river. Not wanting to swim in it, not wanting to

Alfred Lawless: There's too much bad mouthing.

Woman: Bad mouthing it too much.

Alfred Lawless: And the sewer plants. [crosstalk] Can you see giving a person a license and bad mouthing the Hudson River. It's okay to keep the shad but it's no good to keep the stripers.

Woman: They sell you the license and then they write in the paper, but don't buy them.

Alfred Lawless: They don't do it, like the *Clearwater* bad mouthed it last year, the fishing.

Woman: Well they had a thing up at the mall, the Hudson Valley Mall, and the *Clearwater* did some type of study and wrote about PCBs and that they were saying that if you're pregnant not to eat it, and eat a certain amount and there was a limit. [crosstalk]

Alfred Lawless: I don't have to worry about getting pregnant. [laughter]

Man: There are pictures of the *Clearwater* dumping garbage in the water.

Woman: You have it?

Man: A friend of mine has pictures.

Marguerite Holloway: Really?

Woman: Yeah.

Man: They want to bad mouth too much.

Woman: They want to bad mouth [crosstalk]

Alfred Lawless: The thing is I still say about the stripers. I can't see the logic of telling us you can't keep stripers. When they can keep them down there. What's good for the goose is good for the gander. If they can keep them, why shouldn't we be able to keep them?

Marguerite Holloway: If you could fish for stripers now, would you, and would you sell them?

Alfred Lawless: Sure, if I could. [crosstalk] Like I tell you there's no big market into the shad anymore. And they've got the people scared to death of them and they won't buy them, they tell you I won't eat a shad out of the Hudson River.

Woman: They're scared.

Alfred Lawless: They'll tell you, right out. They're just afraid.

Woman: It's really hurt the Hudson Valley.

Woman: It really hurt the fish

Woman: People have hurt it by what, and just because it's in the paper doesn't mean it's true. But people read it and they believe it.

Alfred Lawless: You tell me turkeys are bad, don't eat them, what's the people going to think, we won't eat no turkeys.

[timestamp 40:00]

Marguerite Holloway: Up here you must know people you've sold fish to for years who aren't scared.

Woman: Yeah, they keep coming back.

Alfred Lawless: This man is, what, 92 years old, he says I've been eating shad all my life and I'm going to continue eating them, he says. If they're so bad, how come I'm still walking around.

Woman: We're all going to die sooner or later of something. Sooner or later you're going to die, if you live long enough you would die from cancer or something. I mean, if you're not going to get it in the fish, you're going to get it in the drinking water...

Woman: different foods too.

Woman: Why blame the fish all the time.

Alfred Lawless: See they take, I don't know, like this one person said, they went after Rotron one time, he says 1 part per billion is like a drop in the, it's nothing, the DEC or the environmental, make a big thing of it. And they make them come and check these to harass them all the time. We're going to check your water, we're going to check this.

Woman: They ought to check our water sometime, the chlorine is so thick you can't drink it.

Alfred Lawless: Oh, that'll kill anybody.

Woman: The water is

Woman: Well I think the smell and actually this is probably a very good idea for you to do sometimes is when it's very hot and you go down Lighthouse Drive, take a whiff of that sewer plant.

Woman: Then you know what we're talking about.

Alfred Lawless: Lately they've

Marguerite Holloway: Is it chlorine?

Woman: Oh, no, no, no, no, no, a week and a half ago we went down there it stunk so bad [crosstalk] Sewage.

Alfred Lawless: They closed the hatches now, it don't smell as bad.

Woman: A week and a half ago it was nasty, it was very bad. I wouldn't want to go for a day of fun in the sun. I wouldn't want to go out on that river if I didn't live right here. I wouldn't want to fish, I wouldn't eat anything.

Woman: I'm paying a good sewer tax.

Marguerite Holloway: Do you ever smell chlorine? Do you ever smell chlorine on the river?

Alfred Lawless: No, not on the river, no.

Marguerite Holloway: It's coming out of the faucet.

Woman: The faucets, yeah.

Woman: Because they're on Village water.

Alfred Lawless: This guy who worked in the sewer plant he come up to the druggist I says to him you know, that chlorine is terrible you know that'll kill you. So this guy who worked in the sewer plant he says, you don't know what you're talking about. The druggist says, hey, yes he does, he knows what he's talking about, you don't know what you're talking about.

Woman: He's been near the water all his life.

Alfred Lawless: The thing is chlorine, it stands to reason you put a fish in it, it turns him white. What's it do to the human body, right.



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Woman: And you put it in a swimming pool.

Alfred Lawless: I can't stand it, I couldn't swim in that chlorine.

Woman: One morning you turn the faucet on I couldn't even drink the water.

Woman: It's very nasty tasting [crosstalk] I can taste the difference when I come down.

Alfred Lawless: It stinks sometimes. Sometimes it's good. They said the state says we've got to put it in the water, what are you going to do.

Woman: I guess because it kills bacteria, chlorine, really higher concentrated.

Alfred Lawless: I think bacteria's better than the chlorine. [laughter] [crosstalk] We worked out in the woods we'd go up and drink right out of the stream. When I was in Korea, I'd drink out of a stream and didn't even know that there was bodies all over the place up above. We found out a couple of days later. They said put your [unclear 43:16] pills in. I got dysentery. Pills in the water. [crosstalk]

Marguerite Holloway: Have you always had waterfront properties?

Woman: Twelve years.

Alfred Lawless: When they put the sewage plant in they stole it from us. [crosstalk] My father gave the property for the right of way. They said we don't have it in writing.

Woman: Then they condemned it and they took it and they offered the family a very, very small amount and they put at million dollar sewage plant. [crosstalk]

Alfred Lawless: So we bought another piece of property. We bought other property.

Marguerite Holloway: So you would have access to the river?

Alfred Lawless: Yeah.

Marguerite Holloway: Do you think that the numbers of shad fishermen has decreased in any way because there's less access to the river? Or no?

Woman: Yes, and less knowledge because they don't know what to do. That's why they ask can I go out or can I learn or do this with you, because they want to have some knowledge.

Alfred Lawless: Different ones ask me to take them out, but I don't.

Woman: We've had the DEC ask him. They had him so mad he told them to walk the water.

Woman: But he did one year, you took them out, a marine biologist. He took them out and told them about the age of the shad by taking the scales, the scales tells the age. So you've done that. He was able to comply. But it's hard to get, to be nice with the DEC when they aren't nice to you. They make it very difficult.

[Timestamp 45:00]

Alfred Lawless: DEC Roundup, that was a joke. I laughed about that.

Woman: This is where the family all comes down, where we all get together.

Marguerite Holloway: And that's where you keep all your equipment?

Alfred Lawless: No, no. Right here.

Woman: We keep the equipment here but we keep our boats down here.

Alfred Lawless: The motor.

Woman: The family they've all got their boats. The put their boats in and out. We have our picnics down there and everything. We've had the place 12 years now. It's paid for, thank god. So they only way to keep it we've got to pay taxes on it.

Marguerite Holloway: So how did they condemn the land. What did they say was wrong?

Alfred Lawless: Well, they wanted to put the sewer plant there so they condemn it.

Marguerite Holloway: But what did they say that the buildings?

Woman: Condemnation, that they weren't.

Woman: Yeah, that was a really dirty thing that they did.

Alfred Lawless: They gave the family \$1000 for the property.

Marguerite Holloway: Oh, that's unbelievable.

Alfred Lawless: They go away with it too.

Woman: Million dollar sewer plant and the place stinks. They were pretty rotten.

Marguerite Holloway: Have you changed the way you fish at all, since your father first taught you?

Alfred Lawless: There's a lot of different ways you can fish, high or lower on the buoys, fish a little higher on the buoys you caught more roes. Sometimes when the weather warms, they have a tendency, they come up high. And I told one of the fishermen one time we were getting roes and he called me a liar and I says look, I don't care if you believe it or not, the heck with ya. I was catching roes. He wasn't getting any. He was getting a lot of bucks. Because we move the buoys in. As it gets warmer, the roes come up higher.

Marguerite Holloway: Did your father fish more net than you do?

Alfred Lawless: No.

Marguerite Holloway: No. About the same amount.

Alfred Lawless: Sometimes years ago they used to fish bigger nets but I won't say more.

Marguerite Holloway: So have you changed the nets or the approach, or have you done anything differently or is it basically the same?

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Alfred Lawless: Instead of a 5-1/2 inch mesh, I use a 6 inch mesh now mostly. Because I let the little ones go by, there's no market for little ones. And they're easier to take out of the net, you know what I mean.

Boy: Grandpa, what's this fish?

Alfred Lawless: Yes?

Boy: What's that fish?

Alfred Lawless: That's one of them, right there, they caught through the ice.

Woman: Ice fishing, get them out of the ice.

Alfred Lawless: That's a Northern, I think, or a Tiger Muskie, one of them. That's not a big, big one, either. That's probably 11 pounds maybe.

Marguerite Holloway: That's huge, though.

Alfred Lawless: They catch them, the ones that we seen are 40", how much they weigh, I don't know.

[Crosstalk]

Alfred Lawless: If you talk to these bass folks they catch Muskies and Northerns in the creek here all the while. In their contests, you know they have these contests? And they catch them once in a while. We put out Wall-Eyes in the upper creek it was about 3 years ago, and I sneaked 500 down in the lower creek. [laughter] And someone caught one this spring. Years ago my father used to catch them. It's part of the Esopus though, it doesn't matter.

Woman: That's going to be typewritten and they're going to come and get you.

Alfred Lawless: What do I care?

Marguerite Holloway: It's going to take so long for me to transcribe these tapes.

Alfred Lawless: So they did catch one already. I don't know about the upper creek, they're not doing nothing. But it's all part of the Esopus, it says on the permit the Esopus so that's the Esopus. It is, lower Esopus.

[timestamp 50:00]

Woman: You give me an address, when I get the pictures developed I'll mail you one.

Marguerite Holloway: Oh, that would be great.

Woman: Because I'm having copies made. Because everyone wants to know what the hell. I call it the Loch Ness, little Loch Ness because I don't know what the hell it is.

Marguerite Holloway: Because you've been talking about it.

Woman: It's like Alien, did you see Alien?

Marguerite Holloway: No.

Woman: All the teeth.

Marguerite Holloway: That's amazing.

Woman: Jaws.

Marguerite Holloway: Have you fished?

Woman: Yeah.

Alfred Lawless: I've had her out there, yeah. The ship is coming right for us, it's coming right for us, it'd be way over there.

Woman: Yes, he'd say we're going to run on this sandbar. Yes, I've fished with him, it's hard picking up.

Woman: Remember years ago, the big ship come up and took one of the nets.

Woman: I remember rowing and the waves were so bad that we headed toward New York City before we got the net out of the water.

Marguerite Holloway: Wow. So it's usually two people in the boat?

Woman: The person rowing and the person pulling the net out. And your hands are frozen, you can't wear gloves because you can't get the fish out of the net and you don't want to break the mesh and then when you get stripers in the net, that's worse because they cut your hands. I mean, by the end of shad season, everybody's hands are like somebody took razor blades because they're deep cut.

Alfred Lawless: Hands are rough.

Woman: It's a lot of work.

Marguerite Holloway: What do you like about it?

Woman: I don't know, I think it's a lost art. It's going to someday be something of the past.

Woman: I hate to see that happen.

Woman: Like anything else, no one's going to know about it.

Alfred Lawless: I say that someday the DEC is going to take over the fishing and they're going to have big draw nets and haul them in. And have it for themselves. That's what it's coming to. That's my guess.

Woman: They've got too much power.

Woman: They have too much control and when people don't have control there's a problem.

Woman: That's really a big problem, people lose control.

Marguerite Holloway: Have the fishermen ever tried to organize to get the DEC

Alfred Lawless: Yeah, they have things. I never go to it because

Marguerite Holloway: Why?

Alfred Lawless: Why? Because I figure I'm older now and not that much more into fishing and you can't win the battle anyway. This striped deal. Like I said about the stripers you can't win the battle. They're the law and they've got the law on their side and there ain't nothing you can do about it. The only thing you can do is take it.

Woman: They only do what they want for themselves, that's it.

Woman: But it's coming back, the stripers.

Alfred Lawless: There's lots of stripers.

Woman: People love it, I mean, more women are fishing.

Woman; Yeah, you can see them out there in their boats this year.

Woman: More people every year are becoming involved in fishing for striped bass.

Alfred Lawless: They'll never catch all the stripers out of the river because they always reproduce so many.

Marguerite Holloway; Even if you lifted the ban?

Alfred Lawless: There's so many of them.

Woman: Caught 120 some.

Alfred Lawless: We've had them, we've had so many stripers in the net the year before last, that we had them floating from here to Kingston. Big ones, huge, floating on the top of the water, dead, what could you do?

Woman: They threw in the net and then my husband and I

Alfred Lawless; The whole net come up to the top of the water was white with stripers.

Woman: They couldn't haul them out fast enough to save them.

Alfred Lawless: And there was a tugboat coming for us and we had to go fast. We couldn't get them all picked out. We couldn't get them all picked out we had to get in by the island and pick them out.

Woman: Because you're not allowed to keep them. You've got to get them out of the net and out of your boat. That's 127 fish and they're cutting their hands. [crosstalk]

Alfred Lawless: Some of them lived but there's an awful lot of them died, like I said, they're dead anyway. That's it.

Woman: That's wasteful.

Alfred Lawless: Yeah, well, there ain't nothing you can do about it. You gotta go by the \_\_\_\_ [timestamp 53:45] and they said you can't transport them. And here are these guys fishing and they're coming in with three big stripers in a row and they said the Hudson River Foundation, I got a letter, said we can keep each fisherman in the boat can keep a striped and the shad and they kept them this year. And we couldn't keep them.

AUD\_2014\_0053 Alfred Lawless 1992-07-18, Saugerties, NY. Interviewed by Marguerite Holloway.  
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Woman: No but that wasn't true, they lied to you.

Alfred Lawless: No he said he got a permit.

Woman: He lied. He never showed it to you.

Alfred Lawless: No, he said he got a permit and a tag from the Hudson River Foundation said that he could keep them.

Marguerite Holloway: Who said this?

Alfred Lawless: One of the fishermen.

Woman: It was another fisherman who would love to have you hung and caught.

Woman: I know who it was too.

Marguerite Holloway: Commercial fisherman who said that he could keep one

Woman: Three, he could keep three.

Alfred Lawless: Each fisherman in that boat could keep one. But you can't transport them. What stupid. I mean it's idiotic.

Marguerite Holloway: Why would one of the fishermen want you out of the way?

Alfred Lawless: You can't transport it by truck they tell you.

Woman: Competition, competition.

Marguerite Holloway: He's the only one in Saugerties.

Woman: No, there's another person who does fish. [crosstalk] but he doesn't do it like

Woman: like he does

Alfred Lawless: They say you can't transport, the DEC says you can't transport the striper. Now what's the sense, mumbo-jumbo and getting, that's what they do, they try and get people all messed up.

[Timestamp 55:00]

Woman: And try to get you in trouble and you don't listen to them.

Alfred Lawless: So my friend, he's a cop, he called the DEC and they told him, no, there's no way he can get. And this guy insisted that Hudson River Foundation give him a permit that he could keep, for each person in that boat could keep a striper.

Woman: I just think it was dirty politics for the fishermen.

Alfred Lawless: Well, that's what I was told.

Woman: Politics and fishing.

Alfred Lawless: They kept them and they kept a good many of them this year.

Woman: Yes, they sure, certainly did.

Alfred Lawless: Well, you know that's not my business. But the thing is, nobody checked them. I didn't see no warden around checking them.

Marguerite Holloway: Now if you take a pole out there with you there you can keep

Alfred Lawless: No. With a net.

Woman: No.

Woman: Well you can't but if you try to and they're watching. [crosstalk]

Alfred Lawless: It's not worth it.

Woman: Just binoculars.

Woman: They watch along the coasts. They spy on you.

Marguerite Holloway: Do they watch you closely?

Woman: We've seen them with binoculars, yeah, they have.

Alfred Lawless: I don't know.

Woman: Didn't they ask about you this year? Al, didn't they ask

Alfred Lawless: Someone told me they were out to get me, now for what, I didn't do nothing wrong.

Woman: He don't.

Woman; No wait no someone said, as a matter of fact, there was a thing that they

Alfred Lawless: thought that they were going to get me. For what? I didn't do nothing.

Woman: They were fishing illegally and that they were going to make sure that if there was any illegal activity going with fishing that they were going to bust us.

Marguerite Holloway: Why did they think you were fishing illegally?

Woman: Well, you know, someone can very easily

Woman: Jealousy.

Woman: go when someone's over there, he's not, you know doing lift period or he's taking what he shouldn't be taking. That happens all the time. No matter, fishing or hunting or anything.

Woman: There's always a fall.

Woman: The first someone that went back said no I know the family and I know that they're not.

Alfred Lawless: And another thing, when you're catching sturgeon you catch a sturgeon like 21 inches and up you should be able to keep it in the net. You don't only get a few in the season when you're

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fishing shad. They don't let you keep nothing. They're ridiculous. You're not actually fishing for sturgeon. You just once in a while you'll get a couple in the net. So you can't even keep them.

Woman: You get carp, you get stripers.

Woman: Without asking you.

Alfred Lawless: The size limit is too big on them. They went too big.

Woman: They swim along with the shad sometimes.

Alfred Lawless: I think it should be 21 inches and then they went up to 39 of 40 inches. Then they went up to 45. Now they're up to 60 inches now is it. 6 feet.

Woman: No 5 feet.

Alfred Lawless: Five feet. It just gets, you know. [pause] So who has to do with the stripers? Who has all the say on that? They said the Hudson River Foundation have a lot to say about that? I don't know. Do they have that much power they can tell a person

Marguerite Holloway: The Hudson River Foundation?

Alfred Lawless: They give him a permit, a card he said, that told him that he could keep them stripers. That's what he told me. He swears up and down.

Marguerite Holloway: I would think that only the DEC would be able to do that but the Hudson River Foundation, if someone was sampling, if they were doing a scientific study I think they would give them permits for.

Woman: This guy

Alfred Lawless: This guy, he said he got a permit and each person in that boat were allowed one striper. And then he had these three big stripers. I said we threw them all back, we couldn't keep them.

Woman: He's not telling you the truth, Dad.

Alfred Lawless: Well, if he's lying or not, you know, I'm just telling you

Marguerite Holloway: I'll ask the Foundation because I haven't heard that.

Alfred Lawless: He said that he got a card from them. That's what he told me.

Woman: You know what, they would contact everyone, why just him.

Alfred Lawless: No, no, he said that he sent to them and they sent him a card and he went right up there to the office. I think he went to Albany.

Woman: Where is this Foundation place, anyway?

[crosstalk]

Marguerite Holloway: The Foundation is in Manhattan.



Woman: Do you think he went to Manhattan?

Alfred Lawless: Do they have an office in Albany too, or something?

Marguerite Holloway: I don't think so.

Woman: No?

Alfred Lawless: Maybe he lied, I don't know.

Woman: I think he did.

Woman: I think he's a pretty good liar, this guy.

Alfred Lawless: Well, regardless, you know, I say that's up to DEC.

Woman: Don't listen to what this guy says. Because this guy is likely to get you in a lot of trouble.

Woman: Yeah.

Alfred Lawless: He didn't get me in no trouble.

Marguerite Holloway: How many years has he been fishing?

Alfred Lawless: Who?

Woman: This guy.

Alfred Lawless: They're like skip to the lou, they're out there then they have a six pack or a case of beer and they're all drunk out there.

Woman: They're all drunk.

Alfred Lawless: And they make two or three.

Woman: Gave him a net and they wanted him to make him another net and then the guy

Alfred Lawless: Two or three drifts they're all done for the year. They don't make much. Once in a while you see them out. Like they did fish for like a week or two and then they were all done.

Woman: They were just horsing around.

Marguerite Holloway: And they live in Saugerties?

Woman: Oh, yeah.

Alfred Lawless: They give the fish, the last bunch of fish they didn't even bother cleaning, they give them to somebody.

Woman: Half of the time they fished

Marguerite Holloway: Do you ever debone the fish when you sell it?

Alfred Lawless: No, I can't.

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Woman: We've had people ask to have their fish deboned.

Woman: They're hard to, shad's a bony fish.

Woman: Hardly any fish left when you get through deboning them.

Alfred Lawless: And it's time consuming, you wouldn't have time to do all that.

[Timestamp: 1:00:00]

Woman: I remember somebody's running nets, somebody's cleaning fish, waiting on customers and then there's people out there catching fish. [pause]

Woman: Well, it would have been nice if you'd have come in March, you could maybe have come out on a drift.

Marguerite Holloway: That would be lovely, maybe next year.

Alfred Lawless: Yeah.

Marguerite Holloway: Because this project is taking me a long time.

Woman: It's going to be an experience. Dress very warm. Pictures are very deceiving to look but it was like this that day. It was rough.

Woman: The waves were rough.

Alfred Lawless: You've got a place on Lighthouse Drive, that's where you go out on the river there. It's all fenced in. That's the only one down there.

Woman: Maybe we can go on a nice calm next year. We'll try to film it again. That was the first time.

Marguerite Holloway: But that worked out really well.

Woman: But you get sick watching it. But if it was very calm and like you said it's hard to get a day.

Alfred Lawless: You can't keep the boat still.

Woman: The camcorder and the tripod in that boat because it shakes. It was hard.

Marguerite Holloway: Have you ever been hit by a tug coming up the river?

Alfred Lawless: Nets, yeah.

Woman: They took a net in half.

Woman: Wasn't it one of the kids had to dive overboard one year.

Alfred Lawless: They told me one year I was ready to get in the tracks over there, so close that the channel, they told me "get out of the channel" he hollers. So now they want you to carry a big buoy, a great big flag. I said cripes, there ain't room enough in the boat for all that stuff.

Woman: Flares, everything.

Woman: They don't know how to drive. They just don't know how to drive.

Woman: And remember the year the boys went out and he was at work. And a big ship come down. The Chinese. They didn't hurt the net they just pulled it down. There were so many fish in it that it sank more or less.

Marguerite Holloway: So it went over.

Alfred Lawless: It went over. It didn't really hurt anything.

Woman: Joey lost his net, remembers?

Marguerite Holloway: Did you get to know over the years the captains that were going up, the tug captains? Did they watch out for you?

Alfred Lawless: No, they usually, they most of them are pretty good.

Woman: But if you're in the way, too bad.

Alfred Lawless: They messed my net up pretty bad this year. One of them twisted it all around, they got too close. But usually they're pretty good. Mostly we'll throw out when we know there's no boat coming either way because your tide is usually 15 to a half hour or something. Quick enough, usually I give them plenty of room.

Marguerite Holloway: Can you see pretty far in both directions so you can tell?

Alfred Lawless: Most of the time, yeah.

Woman: It's clear.

Alfred Lawless: But, you know, once in a while you'll get where a boat comes up on you faster than you anticipate. But a lot time we'll pick up and then go out again if we have to. It's very hard, fishing.

Woman: The night fishing is the worst. [crosstalk]

Alfred Lawless: The boats is not too bad though. But right after the fishins season, there's a lot of traffic out there now.

Marguerite Holloway: Really.

Alfred Lawless: Big boats.

Marguerite Holloway: What do you do at night? Do you have lights?

Woman: They've gone fishing.

Alfred Lawless: Yeah, I have lights [crosstalk]

Woman: My brother went and a ship came and they didn't realize it was that close up on them. They heard the rumbling sound and they [crosstalk]

Alfred Lawless: I was out one night and I heard "chug, chug, chug, chug". We looked up and there was a big ship right next to us.

Woman: They pushed off of the ship.

Alfred Lawless: We were just about picked up with the net too. You can't hear a ship like you can another outboard.

Woman: They're very quiet.

Alfred Lawless: Low sounding you know, you don't hear them.

Woman: Didn't see it until it was on them.

Marguerite Holloway: But you've never been hit by anything? That was a close as

Alfred Lawless: I've never been hit by anything.

Woman: That's about the closest that I know.

Alfred Lawless: They're getting very strict on the river now with these boaters and their drinking.

Woman: One of the local officials kids drunk hit a buoy up in Kingston. Totalled a \$28,000 boat two weeks ago and one of the people is in Intensive Care.

Woman: Didn't a little boy get run over? Died?

Woman: No, he was in the boat. They hit a buoy. It was a \$28,000 vessel. He totaled the boat and one of the people in the boat is in Intensive Care.

Alfred Lawless: How about them other ones that got hurt.

Woman: Got run over in the water. One of the kids. A little boy. He died.

Woman: Oh, that was up on Lake George when the camping boat ran into a canoe and knocked them out and a little boy got run over, 9 years old.

Alfred Lawless: Water skiing. That's something they should have classes. Make them go to classes. They want to water ski and tell them they have to abide by these laws.

Woman: No, it's not the skiers, there's supposed to be somebody who's watching and there are supposed to be other people honoring the skier in the water, not to run them over. People are like this with their drinking.

Alfred Lawless: Yeah, that's getting pretty dangerous out there now.

Woman: People drinking on the river. It's as deadly as drinking and driving a motor vehicle.

Alfred Lawless: You know what I'd wish they'd do?

Marguerite Holloway: They don't regulate.

Woman: Yachts, the yachts is the absolute worst. They show no respect.

[Timestamp 1:05:00]

AUD\_2014\_0053 Alfred Lawless 1992-07-18, Saugerties, NY. Interviewed by Marguerite Holloway.  
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Alfred Lawless: We found this big log like I told you, floating. I wish they would get somebody out there to pull something like that that's floating up and down. Boats would hit that at night. Forget it, they'd get killed, a lot of people. We tried to take it out of the river but

Woman: The Coast Guard will do it.

Alfred Lawless: I don't know if they will or not.

Woman: You go in and tell them. There's something floating out there that if somebody hits it, that's it.

Alfred Lawless: Yeah, and then they get on your case for telling about it.

Woman: For what?

Alfred Lawless: I told them one time about a float or something out by the dike there and it stayed there, they never bothered with it. They don't bother nothing. The big log floating, somebody hit that it's got a point and it's this big around. She's giving me heck about that's not your job to move.

Woman: That's the Coast Guard's job.

Alfred Lawless: Don't want somebody to hit that, right?

[crosstalk]

Woman: It didn't do them any good anyway, it floated back out.

Woman: or Allen gets it or

Alfred Lawless: If I had a long enough rope I would have fixed it, you know.

Woman: Or Joey gets it

Marguerite Holloway: So you already tried to fix it once but it came loose?

Alfred Lawless: Yeah.

Woman: So that's up to the Coast Guard. What are they there for? Nothing.

Alfred Lawless: They should go up that river and go along and pull all them things. Especially the ones that's just floating logs, you know. They're a danger to boats. There's a lot of them out there too. In fact from Saugerties up to Malden there's about three into the water floating logs. That and two others.

Woman: Somebody should tie off bright red or orange things on them, so they can be seen.

Alfred Lawless: Well, they should do something, take them out of there.

Woman: At least they'll be visible.

Alfred Lawless: See they have this hoist, they can hoist them right up on the boat and bring them into shore and get rid of them. They're very dangerous out there. And they should do something because the boating is so bad now. The State is getting all this money from the license, they should have a boat patrol for logs and stuff. They go out and harass people like my one son. They gave him the State Police gave him two tickets for pillows and he didn't have life jackets.

Woman: Oh yeah, floatation device and he didn't have a life jacket.

Alfred Lawless: So they give him two tickets and he's still got to go pay the other one. I don't know how much the fine was. He didn't pay it yet. And they said they're going to pull his license.

Woman: Isn't that discouraging?

Woman: We were told that they need funds. So now they're going to try to fine anyone they can on the river for any reason if you don't have.

Alfred Lawless: But these logs can float up and down freely. You know, and it's not right. They can float up and down the river and somebody hit them. Somebody's job besides mine to check that and take them out of the river and check it out at least. Because there's an awful lot of that.

Marguerite Holloway: So you called the Coast Guard and let them know?

Alfred Lawless: Oh, I didn't and I was debating on it whether I should. But the next time I go out if it's out there I'm going to stop and let them know and see if they do anything about it., you know. See if they do anything about it. [side conversation about dog]

Woman: They used to dump that bilge stuff.

Alfred Lawless: All the boats used to dump. Yeah, they can't do that no more. And they get in trouble for that.

Woman: Another nice thing they used to do floating on the water.

Alfred Lawless: I often wonder about all these yachts and stuff. What do they do with their stuff from the bathroom and stuff. They take that into stations?

Marguerite Holloway: I don't know.

Alfred Lawless: I was wondering about that. But the water is nice and clean out there. I'm sure they abide by the law.

Woman: I hope.

Alfred Lawless: Yeah, it's pretty nice. The river is clean.

Woman; Cleaner than it was.

Alfred Lawless: I'm happy with the river but I'm not happy with the stripers.

Woman: We got our share of them this year. We all went out there.

Alfred Lawless: On poles.

Woman: On poles.

Alfred Lawless: You could keep them on poles.

Woman: We had a good time with stripers. Catch'em on poles.

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Woman: And more and more people are doing it. And enjoying it. But if they really want to attract people to the Hudson River, the way they're doing it isn't the way.

Marguerite Holloway: Do you think that having a lot of sports fishermen makes people have a connection to the river that they don't usually.

Woman: Yeah, I think they really enjoy it. I mean more people this year and more female, I think are fishing. My daughter caught a beautiful fish. I just see a lot of women. My mother fishes for stripers. There's just, I don't know. It used to always be the man's sport.

Woman: Now the women are getting into it more.

Woman: Women are really getting into it and enjoying it.

Woman: And that's why we have a lot of these contests to try to keep the people towards the water.

Woman: You have to respect the river. A lot of people don't. You see somebody throw paper cups in there.

Woman: You let them know about it. You like to see it clean.

Woman: I don't know why that they don't. It's the joke. You see the \$100 fine for littering. You see holes shot through it and you see garbage under it. I mean, like on Old King's Highway. That's a joke. Do they ever enforce it? Have you ever seen in the paper so-and-so was fined for dumping?

[Timestamp 1:10:00]

Marguerite Holloway: No.

Woman: So it's a joke.

Alfred Lawless: Waste of my money.

Woman: Oh well, next week hon. Try again.

[side conversation about dog]

Woman: So Dad, do you want to take her out next year?

END OF INTERVIEW