Interview: Brian Hamaguchi (BH)
Interviewer: Sean Griffin (SG)
Date: November 25, 2019
Location: BC Labour Heritage Centre
Transcription: Joey Hartman and Donna Sacuta

[00:00:03] SG: Okay Brian, maybe you could just give me your full name and your birthdate, and where you were born.

[00:00:11] BH: My name is Brian's Susumu Hamaguchi. I was born April 7, 1950, in Kamloops, BC

[00:00:21] SG: What's your middle name? Can you just spell out for us?

BH: S-u-s-u-m-u.

[00:00:30] SG: So Brian is your official name, or is that an Anglicized name?

[00:00:36] BH: This is kind of a strange subject because I've always been known as Brian Susumu Hamaguchi and I have a green birth certificate, plasticized, that I have had for many years and I always been known as Brian Susumu Hamaguchi. And then I lost it. So I had to go downtown, Robson Street and go and apply for a new birth certificate. I get a new birth certificate and it says "Susumu Brian Hamaguchi." Everything I own, says Brian Hamaguchi or Brian S. Hamaguchi, Brian Susumu Hamaguchi, passport…everything. And now I get this.

BH: And then I go to get my driver's license. And they wanted to see my birth certificate. So I show it to them… and they say "Oh." So then I said "this is wrong. I mean, this can't be right". But they said, no, this is it. Apparently, a driver's license is more important in B.C. than a passport - especially a new driver's license, I guess, because you can cross the border with them. But anyways, I had….So it's everything is Brian Hamaguchi except for my driver's licence. So that causes a problem if they want my ID, or they want a credit card. Well, they're two different names. So anyway, that's my history of my birth name.

SG: Is this a mistake?

BH: I have no idea why that's happened like that. But I guess it is. My brother's name is Alan Akira Hamaguchi. Right. So I guess they decided they would give us Japanese middle names even though we're Canadian born.

[00:02:33] SG: So then the registrar gives you a Japanese first name.

[00:02:37] BH: Yeah, for some strange reason they got switched somehow. And because my original green birth certificate was for Brian Susumu Hamaguchi… Otherwise I would have put everything down as Susumu.

[00:02:54] SG: So is your brother Alan your only sibling?

BH: Yes, my older brother.

SG: Are you married yourself?

BH: Not any longer - no - no kids.

SG: Okay, What about your parents? Were they also born in Canada? Yes, in Steveston. And so then is it your grandparent's generation that was an immigrant, right?

[00:03:14] BH: Yes, right. My grandmother and my great grandmother came together, you know, emigrated at the same time.

[00:03:24] SG: You were mentioning to me earlier that they actually came from a fishing village.

[00:03:28] BH: And yes, in Wakayama in Japan, it's a small fishing village. It still exist and I was told by one of the fellows that I work with — and he's a resident of Vancouver — he goes back to Japan all the time and he's kind of like the unofficial mayor, or the Canadian mayor, of Wakayama.

[00:03:55] And he told me, because I'm a third generation Japanese Canadian I can go back to Japan and be accepted as a citizen. But after my generation no longer can you go back and become a Japanese citizen - automatically.

[00:04:17] SG: So you come from, I presume, from a long line of fishing family members?

[00:04:21] BH: Oh yes…. all my family, my uncles, my aunts, all worked fishing industry. My mother, my brother, my father was a fisherman prior to the Second World War. Then he got sent away.

[00:04:41] SG: Well, yeah, I'm presuming that by the fact that you were born in Kamloops, despite the fact that you had grown up in Steveston, or that the family had grown up in Steveston, that you were sent up there by the federal government's internment orders of 1942. So what were the circumstances of that?

[00:05:02] BH: Well, you know, it's not really … my parents really didn't really talk about it - and my family in general - didn't talk about the internment. They didn't like to talk about being interned. But you get little bits. But they were taken to the grounds of the PNE and all assembled there. And then I guess they were allocated to different areas across Canada somewhere as far back as — a lot of my family friends were sent to Quebec. My friend was born in Quebec and his sisters were born in Quebec and they came back to Steveston. And then lots of people throughout Ontario, and across Alberta. And then in BC, in Tashme and Trail. My aunt lived in Greenwood, and we used to go visit them summers but other than that I really don't know too much about it.

BH: My family were enroute to go somewhere. I'm not sure where, probably Alberta and my grandfather became ill and so he was put in the road and then hospital in Kamloops, and then he passed away. He was buried there. So they allowed the family cause it was fine if away from the coast. I think it was like a 300-mile border or something like that. So they were allowed to stay there. Then they worked on different various farms in Kamloops.

[00:07:00] SG: So what were the circumstances of working in a private farm? Were they paid, or was this just kinda like….?

[00:07:06] BH: I really don't know. I imagine they were probably paid, you know, ten cents an hour or some really low wage. But no, didn't really talk about that much. All I know is

my father worked on a farm. He was kind of like a straw boss eventually. And when we were born and were growing up, we used to go in the summers and go with him out to the farm and pick up the workers. And he used to work for a fellow named Skelley. And we had a cannery in Kamloops, and I guess he grew tomatoes. He also had a mink farm group, grew minks and raised horses to feed the minks. Those are the things that I remember.

[00:07:58] SG: But you provided the labour for it.

[00:08:02] BH: Yeah, my relatives —actually are a lot of my relatives all lived in Kamloops. I'm not sure how they ended up being in Kamloops. I don't know, maybe they were all part of a group that was sent along with my grandfather who died, and they all lived there. But my Auntie Kay, who still lives there. And there is Auntie Mae. She was young when she passed away on the farm. And my Auntie Martha she lived in Vancouver. My uncle Bud, who was a dentist, who graduated from University of Edmonton, he was a dentist. Luckily, he befriended some people from Alberta whose families are…. (audio drops)

[00:09:24] BH: …..For people would bring them like ducks and geese and meat… deer and TV's.

[00:09:32] BH: His basement was full of stuff that people gave in exchange for getting their teeth done. And he used to work for the government as well, used to do all the native people from all around the interior. They would all come to Kamloops, and he would do their teeth. So, but then he died - can't remember how many years ago. but he worked until he was about - I don't know - 75 because he sold his practice to a pharmacist's family whose son became a dentist. They bought this practice. But after my uncle retired.

[00:10:24] SG: OK. So when you when your family left Steveston under federal order, I presume they had to leave everything behind?

BH: Only what they could carry, suitcases or wherever.

SG: Your father had … if he'd been a fisherman, I presume he had a boat, had he?

[00:10:43] BH: As far as I understand, he had a gill-netter and a collector boat. So a collector boat came around to fishermen and collect fish and bring it back to the plants. And he also went fishing. But originally, I guess when they first started, they didn't have powerboats.

[00:11:02] BH: So they were dragged out by a main boat and they were sent out and they would fish ….set their nets somehow and then they would fish, and they would drag back to the dock. And I guess during the day the collector boat would come by and pick up any fish that they had caught. So that's from pictures I've seen of early fishing in the Steveston area.

[00:11:34] But eventually they moved up, got their own boats and they had their own power.

SG: So I presume his would have been a power boat… So this would have been a significant loss for them?

BH: Oh, yeah. Yeah. You know, their main livelihood. And then their home, their cars, all their big belongings like furniture and stuff. So pretty devastating.

[00:12:00] SG: But then finally, after the war, your family did come back to Vancouver, but not immediately.

[00:12:05] BH: Right…No, no, no.

[00:12:07] BH: We were there till about ’56 — ’55/56.

[00:12:16] BH: My mother and I actually came down together and we stayed with some friends and we were looking around for a business, a grocery business. So then I guess we decided …and my father came down and we end up buying a grocery store on Hastings Street by Willingdon in Burnaby.

[00:12:40] BH: So he bought the store. We live in the back. We were open seven days a week, 365 days a year. Yeah.

[00:12:50] SG: So presumably the whole family was working?

[00:12:53] BH: Oh, yeah, we were. That’s, how I … I guess - I hope, how I got so good at math because I was good at giving change. Nowadays a computer tells you how much to give back. But no, we had to actually make change. So we get to count the money every night and the end of the day. And then on Friday my father would send me with a little bag, and I used to go to the bank and make a weekly deposit. And I was very young then. So, you know, 8 or 10. But yeah, that was um….

[00:13:25] GH: And take turns eating meals, we were right behind the store. So the doorbell rang and one of us would run out and serve the customer. But yeah.

[00:13:41] SG: So was there still lingering prejudice towards Japanese at that time, like when you went to school did you encounter that?

[00:13:49] BH: No, not really. No. I had lots of friends. They never picked on us.

[00:13:56] BH: So the odd person would call you like “four eyes’ because wore glasses. You know, I was a little bit overweight.

[00:14:06] BH: But it had nothing to do with your ethnicity. You know the first word. They might call you a “Jap” or, but it never really bothered me - I always felt that they were ignorant, so I never really took any heed of them really. And I was pretty, pretty popular. When I was in grade 10, I was the student council president of our junior high school.

SG: What was the name of your school?

BH: Burnaby Heights Junior High. And then the year I was president, they closed it and opened up a new high school, Burnaby North. It was just five miles away or so. And then my principal vice- principal moved with me to that high school. So I was there for two years for grade 11 and 12. But eventually they tore down - or discontinued —the junior high school and made it like a community type of centre, and then eventually it's been razed - it’s no longer there.

[00:15:16] BH: So.

[00:15:18] SG: So I understand you started working yourself in the fishing industry while you were still in high school?

[00:15:24] BH: Yes, so what happened was usually every summer we'd go to Kamloops to visit my grandmother, my great grandmother, my relatives, and then ..so we'd stay with my grandmother. And when I was 15, 1965, my brother had got a job in Vancouver at Canadian Fishing Company. And that time Canfisco had two — one Japanese fellow and one Chinese fellow —who would be contractors to hire Chinese and Japanese workers from the community to work in the plant — in the summertime especially because it was so busy. So my brother had secured a job through my father with Jack Kamikura, who was a Japanese contractor. And so he had got a job and he was working there. And then I guess he found another job at Queen Charlotte Fisheries, which was actually down around Gastown at that time. And he went to work there. They call me up right away to come down and there was a job for me if I wanted. And I was 15. So I took the train and came back and started working in August of '65 at Canfisco.

[00:16:53] SG: So this was just sort of a summertime job.

[00:16:55] BH: It was just. Yeah. I went to school in September, so if you stayed until Labour Day, you were secured a job for the following year. So then I came back. And the next year is July, August for the summer, I worked there. So I worked there from when I was fifteen to grade twelve….so I guess that ... I was eighteen - three years. And then I graduated from high school, and I went to University of British Columbia as a pre-dentistry student, and I continued working there in the summers. But I also managed to get a job at Evergreen Press as a printer on the press machines printing phone books.

[00:17:54] BH: So every April, in April we would be printing phone books for distribution. And I worked there for about two months and then I went back to the fish plant where I got busy in July and August again. So I did that for four years until 1972 when I applied for dentistry, and I didn't get accepted the first year. And then my counsellor advised me that I could either go to fifth year education to become a teacher or go into pharmacy, which neither appealed to me.

[00:18:30] BH: So it was pretty good year in '72. There was king of a full-time — I don't know if there is ever really a full-time, but a full-time job at Canfisco. So I went there, and I kept working September, October. And then luckily that year we used to make wooden boxes to put salmon and halibut to ship to Boston and New York and down California. So all winter long we would make boxes, boxes and boxes and boxes, all different sizes. So I worked all winter …. came back in the springtime …we started halibut and trolled; caught salmon early in April. We do a lot of painting, and maintenance and stuff like that.

[00:19:26] SG: So it was possible to get almost full time work at that time?

BH: In the fresh fish department…

[00:19:34] BH: Yes, More-so. You had a fairly steady crew all winter whereas in the canning department they would lay people off for the winter and early spring and then they would still bring some people back for painting and maintenance and to help the tradesmen get everything ready for the summer. But yeah, fresh fish was pretty good.

Salmon, halibut and herring … bottom fish at one time. And so, yeah, I was just really busy.

SG: So it was an integrated plant?

BH: Oh yeah… We did quite a bit of jobs and I did. I worked in a department called local sales, and they would sell to fish local fish stores. They would come in and then when we had the filleting operation, I would do fillets. I used to deliver to all Woodward's stores, at that time it was downtown. And I used to go to their West Vancouver, and Guilford, and Oakridge.

SG: This is all deliveries?

BH: Yes. There would be bags of fillets of 10 pounds. And then I would drive a truck and deliver. I would deliver Buy-Low stores and Stong's store - those stores. So that was a weekly thing. Almost daily. Every second day or so I'd be driving.

[00:21:22] SG: You mentioned that you got originally hired through a labour contractor for specifically the Japanese community. Was that a pretty widespread practice in the industry?

[00:21:34] BH: I imagine. There was a Chinese fellow - I can't remember his name - but he did the same thing. So I guess they were in competition with other companies to get labour. So I guess they did whatever they could to get not only Japanese and Chinese, but I guess Caucasians…

SG: But those two groups were obviously targeted?

BH: Yeah, I think most of the fish plants used immigrants like Chinese and Japanese.

[00:22:07] SG: Interesting. Is that still done at all in the industry?

BH: No, it's not.

[00:22:13] SG: That's just interesting. It's 1965, which, you know, there was a fairly widespread unionism in the industry but that was still going on.

[00:22:23] BH: Yup, and it was kind of unwritten law that you'd deliver small package of appreciation at Christmas-time to their house. He lived about a block from Renfrew Street by the PNE, so I'd have to go at Christmas-time and take him a bottle of whatever or chocolates or whatever.

[00:22:45] SG: So just as part of the patronage to the contractor?

BH: Yeah. Yeah.

SG: So I presume other members of your family also worked in the fish plant, like your brother?

[00:23:00] BH: Oh yeah, my brother, and my father when we had the store. My father. When they were really busy and a number of other fathers who had other jobs like gardening or whatever.

[00:23:10] BH: Well, a lot of the fathers had grocery stores and they would come down and work when they were really busy, and help with unloading the fish. And then my mother became a filleter at _JS McMillan. There used to be a number of plants on Campbell Avenue - the foot of Campbell Avenue. And then they moved to Commissioner Avenue. But my mother worked as a filleter until she was 71. It was amazing. And she had three hip replacements too, during those years. So for her to go keep going back to work in a very tough job is till she was seventy-one So that's how it was. And then like, say, mom, my uncles are fishermen, and my cousins are all in the fishing industry they lived in Steveston and Ucluelet. They all became fishermen

[00:24:14] BH: You know, it was all in the family, I suppose. I don't know.

[00:24:20] SG: So it doesn't sound like you have any regrets giving up dentistry for what seemed like a decent job.

[00:24:26] BH: No, I really didn't like working in an office or anything like that, so I enjoy working out in the outdoors type. You know, it was cold in the winter, but I liked it — it was no problem.

[00:24:43] SG: Had you been encouraged by your family to go into dentistry?

[00:24:46] BH: Encouraged?…. Oh, because of my uncle? Yeah, my uncle who was a dentist encouraged me. Uncle Bud encouraged me to become a dentist. And my parents encouraged me to be a dentist.

[00:24:58] BH: … And my brother was encouraged to be a dentist but he quit after the first year. He was there one year in before he quit and the program is four years. But it was pretty hard, you know, chemistry, physics, biochemistry, anatomy, physiology. All those courses are pretty tough courses.

SG: That's for sure.

[00:25:23] SG: So in the fish plant at this point, which is in the 60s and 70s, was there one predominant sort of group of either males or ethnic groups that were in each of the departments, like fresh fish in the cannery and so on?

[00:25:39] BH: Well, as far as the fresh fish department was a smaller department and we just dealt with fresh, high quality fish ,whereas the cannery canned everything. So we would take fish that was caught all up and down the coast by trollers…

[00:26:04] BH: And trollers would fish with fishing lines and they catch them individually so they would dress them out on the boats and then they would deliver them to the caps and then the caps would either ship them in to anchor by truck from Vancouver Island or by boat through up the coast.

[00:26:24] BH: So they would drop by and pick up from the camps and cap boxes of fish with ice in them. And then there were hooks on the ends and the hook would lift it up. I went inside the hold of the boat where the boat and one of those for whatever the time would come into Vancouver once and once a week. And we'd unload the boats and dump the fish on to the tables and then we divide them up by size and quality. So and then we

then we chopped the heads off them and then we'd put them into a freezer and then people would buy them frozen.

[00:27:07] SG: So being where they mainly men then working in fresh fish?

[00:27:10] BH: For most of my career there was exclusively men.

[00:27:16] BH: Over my years, there are two women that can I recall that worked in the fresh fish department. And then later on when we went into herring, we were doing herring…

[00:27:33] BH: And what we did was we had these Ryco machines that they had, they would take the herring and put them into these slots with holes in them, and a light would flash through them.

[00:27:46] BH: So the light would flash and by the density you could tell if it was a male or female herring. So it would kick out all the male herring. And all female herring would go into another tote. So you'd have two totes. The male herring were sold for bait for fishing or to aquariums to feed the fish. So at one time….

[00:28:12] BH: I guess probably in the '70s, early '80s, that's what we used to do. And then there was also - I'm not sure it was a government subsidy, to do this work.

[00:28:29] BH: And then because they sold the males, they would make enough money to pay for the labour to do that kind of work. And then in turn, they have the female fish. There'll be less - hopefully because there were less males in there. So when it came turn to pop open the hearing to take the roe out, you'd do less work because potentially 50 or 40 percent of the catch would be males, if not more, and that made less work. So it kind of worked all the way around for a while. And then they stopped that. And there was a dog fish subsidy for some reason - a dog fish subsidy. And so because of the dog fish, they allowed them to get some money to do this, some reason, sexing the herring. So also when the bait industry went down, they stopped being able to sell bait. So there was no extra money. So they didn't want to incur the extra costs of sexing the herring. But when you get a ton of herring and half is male and half is female, you still have to open every herring. So you need more workers, more time. So it was kind of — you had to balance to see which was the better way of doing it.

[00:29:59] BH: So hopefully stopped the Rykos.

[00:30:02] BH: But then at that time, they hired a lot of women in the fresh fish to run those Ryko's and we used to run them 24 hours a day.

[00:30:11] SG: So it's interesting that they would even know they had the machinery and they would not use it just because didn't get the subsidy. .

[00:30:21] BH: I - guess they crunched the numbers and they felt it would be better.

SG: So that meant job losses for the women? Yeah. Yeah, yeah.

[00:30:31] SG: So where there wage differentials between the two different departments - cannery and fresh fish?

[00:30:35] BH: Yes. There were negotiations. They have different rates. The canning had so many different categories and I don't know how they figure out what the rates were, but in general what we call a probationary rate. So from zero to 400 hours of a probationary rate and after 400 hours you get an increase and became regular, not probationary. So then you would get a higher rate for it. And then for fresh fish, we had a thousand-hour rate. So you go from four hundred hours to a thousand you get the higher rate. And the reason for that is that in the cannery the jobs are specialized, whereas the fresh fish you had to be able to do everything.

[00:31:24] BH: You have to be able to do everything. So unfortunately ….we also did round salmon with the guts still in them.

[00:31:40] BH: When the bulk of the fish came in. We graded out the higher quality of sockeye salmon and the coho salmon and we'd dress them. By dressing I mean you split the bellies, pull the guts out, and clean the roe out and the milk, and clean out the kidneys and blood out, and cut the heads off.

BH: Normally we always dealt with trolled fish, and which was already cleaned on the boats. So they'd come in, we just cut heads off basically in one motion and then send them to the freezer.

BH: But the round fish, we have to split the bones, then you had to pull the guts out, you know….

[00:32:33] BH: So then you had to take a spoon, cut the kidney and scrape up the blood and then go into the washer… and then we would finish washing it with hoses and spoon with a spoon and scrape the blood out in it face wash. And then it would go down the drain.

[00:32:51] Then grade by quality and size. So it's a lot more work to do with the round fish as opposed to fresh fish that came in from trollers.

[00:32:59] SG: So if you were working fresh fish, you had to know all these processes?

[00:33:03] BH: One of the hardest things was chopping off the heads - that was probably the most onerous job, so a lot of people refused and mostly it was women who refused to do that job because it was pretty hard.

[00:33:19] SG: So they were offered it and didn't want to do it?

BH: Yeah, they'd rather get less pay.

SG: But I do know that in 1974, after a lot of women had been pushing for it, there finally was an agreement signed that brought up some rates to equal levels with men working. Did that affect all departments then, or did it largely affect the cannery department?

[00:33:43] BH: Well, it was mostly to do with the cannery because the majority were women. At least 75 percent of cannery workers were women. Whereas in the fisheries department it was all us. Like I said, there was only two (women) at the beginning. And then later on we ended up having a lot more from the sexing machines so they were on our fresh fishing or less so they would do they would do whatever jobs.

BH: And so there are also women who did butchering. But in general, they didn't really chop heads that much. Occasionally they would do the spreading and the cleaning of the removal, gut the kidneys and things of that, but also washing fish. But at least they wanted to do it so they would be qualified to get those right. But if you refuse to do that at all, then you wouldn't get the 1,000-hour rate in the cannery because there was so many women there. And then to kind of standardize all the different rates, they were given the 400-hour rate in general so that it would be less complicated for the payroll staff to have to keep track of all the different jobs they did.

[00:35:07] SG: And it was a long, sort of process for women fighting for this?

[00:35:11] BH: Oh yeah, they wanted the 1,000 hour rate too, and they never got that. I know women never got the 1,000-hour rate except the ones that worked in the fillet room. And oh, I forgot to mention we had a smoke house. Well, there's a few women that worked in the smoke house that were actually from the fillet, from the fillet rooms where we brought bottom fish, cod and halibut, and they would stuff that, and process them in a freezer called the birds eye, it would come out in blocks, and they would take those and bag them, and put them in the freezer or box them and put them in the freezer. But, um, there weren't too many women got the 1,000-hour rate, but some of the cannery men qualified for the 1,000 hour rate.

[00:36:12] SG: So, I'm trying to get a sense of what the feeling was in the plant when this equal pay arrangement was negotiated? Was there a general sense that this is this something whose time come, or was there pushback?

[00:36:29] BH: I would say probably the first fish department they really care about much or they didn't really notice that, whereas cannery women, because it affected most of the kind of women and men, that it was important in negotiations.

[00:36:45] SG: So they were pretty much doing equal work in the cannery department?

[00:36:52] BH: Yeah. In general, it was it was hard work wherever you worked. And so, like, I don't know why those… how — that's before my time, when they negotiated those different prices and rates and whatever - that was before my time, so I can't say much too much about how it was established. But yeah, I think it was made sense to make it less complicated and give parity, especially to the women, because their job was just hard or harder than men's jobs.

[00:37:30] SG: So that was generally accepted when this came about?

[00:37:33] BH: Oh yeah. I was with fresh fish, and they didn't lower the wages - so that was the main point. That they would just get a raise. But on the whole, people got a pretty good raise when the time came because they got the regular rate raise that we had negotiated, plus the extra raise to bring them up to parity with our rate, so they were pretty happy.

[00:38:03] SG: One of the issues in the fishing industry that a lot of people don't understand is that there's a huge number of barriers to organizing. One of them being the fact that it's still the RAND formula and most of the plants that you come into work, you have to pay dues under the RAND formula that you don't automatically join the union. So the union has to win and organize them.

[00:38:25] BH: That's a big contention because I always was against an open shop. An open shop is where you don't have to join the union. But you pay union dues, and you get the benefits. Whereas in a closed shop is that you have to like a longshoreman, you have to become a member and join the union before you can work. And I prefer that system to our system. And my brother was one of the outcries of the union. He was telling people…

[00:39:01] BH: Why, join union? Because you just got to pay $25 - or whatever it was to join the membership - or if you didn't. You still get the same pay. But you stop paying dues. So why join a union? So it was a pretty hard struggle to get people, especially immigrants, especially people who didn't speak Chinese. And the Japanese people were a lot better because they spoke —mostly spoke — English. But the Chinese mostly didn't speak English. You never know. I can see her face - Helen O'Shaughnessy - wondering "what are they saying."

[00:39:42] BH: And so you have to trust that the interpreter was saying the right things.

[00:39:49] BH: So but like when earlier when Mickey Beagle was organizing and Helen O'Shaughnessy, we'll be out there at lunchtime, mostly lunchtime because it was longer, and they would come down to the plant.

[00:40:07] BH: So they come down and talk to people and get them to join. Students didn't want to join because they were only gonna be there for so many years and then they would be going on to hopefully graduating from university or high school and getting a job, a real job.

[00:40:32] BH: So they'd say, well, why should I pay this extra money which I need for tuition or books or car or whatever? And they were fairly resistant to join the union cause they weren't going to be around for a long time. And then the Chinese people - I don't know. They didn't seem to be joiners of anything. I don't know. Even when we were on strike, they had a hard time getting people to picket because they didn't understand the idea of picketing. And with them, it was a pretty hard struggle to get people to join the union.

[00:41:18] SG: So given that your brother was one of those who said, "why bother joining the union" … how was it that you came to join the union?

[00:41:27] BH: I just felt that, you know, there's strength in numbers and people are working hard to get you a raise. You know … better….

[00:41:42] BH: Well, I can't say better benefits, because we never went for benefits at all for so many years when I was first there. All they are interested in was getting a raise, an hourly raise.

[00:41:53] BH: And it took so long to get them to realize that, you know, we need benefits, medical, dental, pension plan. Those things were brought up so many times in negotiations. And when we talk to members at meetings and stuff like that, we have to give up something, like give up some wages, to get some benefits. But it took many years but finally we did get a pension plan and we did get medical and dental benefits.

[00:42:26] BH: So, you know,

SG: it was very much a question of educating?

BH: Oh, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.

SG: So when you when you were signing up, you know, in the days when there was a fair amount of work, how many of those you approached to sign up would actually join the union - maybe 50 percent?

[00:42:46] BH: No, I think you're lucky if you get 20 percent or so. A lot of people would join thinking, thinking, that secures them a job, and that they would get more work. Maybe people give them the wrong impression and that if they join the union, you would get something extra, So a lot of people quickly, especially new hires, would come in and they would, "Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah… I'll join the union!" … Right. So they'd think they were going to guarantee them a job. Or when you first start, you're on probation, so 400 hours of being on probation, assessed by the company and the union, well not by the union, but the company as to whether you were a good worker or not. So these people may have thought that it kind of guaranteed them a position for as long as they wanted. So this may be some misunderstanding why people join union. Mostly white people - Quite a number of senior white guys. And especially in cold storage, there's a lot of Caucasian workers. As far as I can remember there was only one black fellow that worked there. And Bob Culbreth got a job there. He was a native Indian. But those were the only two ethnic people I know that got a job in the cold storage. It was dominantly always white.

[00:44:25] SG: So I guess these would have been considered somewhat skilled jobs, so to speak? Not the trades, but….

[00:44:31] BH: Yea, I think then there was kind of like a brotherhood like firemen and policemen. There was like this brotherhood of ….because we work in the cold … and they would they would hire all white people in the summertime, all white students.

[00:44:46] SG: Were trades people predominantly white?

BH: YBH: Yes, predominately white, yeah. It was kind of "if father works there, the sons too".

[00:44:58] BH: The sons came from school and they get hired as an apprentice and then they become millwright. And then when their fathers retire, they assume the position of the father.

[00:45:15] BH: You know, quite a number of fathers and sons…..

SG: Daughters?

BH: Yes, one daughter …. actually she worked in the cold storage too. Lawrence Smele's daughter, she worked in cold storage. And there was another girl working. And a friend of hers worked in there for a short while but did not last too long. Was pretty cold in there. Pretty hard work.

[00:45:52] SG: So in addition to joining the union, I understanding that you also became shop steward?

BH: Yeah, I was a shop steward, no one seemed to want to volunteer to represent the worker

[00:46:10] SG: Fresh fish or cannery?

BH: I mean so much. But mostly fresh fish and so on. You know, I was approached and then I went through some training, and I became a shop steward.

SG: Where did you get the training?

[00:46:27] BH: I can't really remember. Well, I guess the one ranger that we got. I know later we went to that place up on the lake - Harrison. Yeah. I used to take a couple of week seminars. Yeah, I would learn quite a bit.

[00:46:55] SG: I know that one of the longtime shop stewards, a Canadian Fish, was Mike Lum, who was Chinese. Did his position enhance any Chinese support of the union and people joining at all.

[00:47:10] BH: Ahhhhhh, yeah, he was pro-union. He was an activist.

SG: But did he pull any of the…

[00:47:22] BH: I can't really say he did, but he was a shop steward and talked about union.

[00:47:34] He was a translator. And then there was Henry Lam, who was a forklift driver. He became a shop steward. There was Carolyn Coville, of course. And then there was Nancy Jir and quite a few shop stewards because it was so huge.

SG: How many people would it work at the plant?

BH: Well, from the very, very peak when we ran two shifts, it was about a thousand people.

[00:48:06] BH: 500 each shift …

SG: When the cannery was running?

BH: BH: Yes, and they ran 24 hours a day, so about 500 per shift.

[00:48:15] BH: So it was pretty amazing

SG: compared to what it is now…

[00:48:22] SG: I understand that you also had a couple of opportunities to become management but you didn't want to didn't want to go there?

BH: No, I ah, yeah.

[00:48:32] BH: I was approached when my foreman retired, Art Swan. And because I was in charge and then I guess they decided I would make good foreman material. So they took me into their office.

[00:48:50] BH:.. with about five of the office staff were there and they discussed my file, and they went through all the years I worked there and what I made and all that stuff. And they were saying how beneficial it is to become a company management and all your benefits and…. But the wages was less than I was making as a union shore worker because with all the overtime, because they weren't, they don't give you overtime. Plus unemployment. …. Would make way more than they were offering you.

[00:49:31] BH: So I thought, okay, I would take it…

[00:49:34] BH: and the union would give you a one year grace period from the union to try out these positions. And so I did. And then within a year I had declined the position.

[00:49:52] BH: So I didn't lose my position as a union member and I didn't trust the company very much so I stayed with the union. And then I was offered the plant manager position and that was kind of like the same thing. I declined right away because I knew that if I took that position, I probably be fired because I was pro-union.

[00:50:21] BH: And so I thought that if I did what I thought was right, it didn't conform to the company policy, so I didn't want to jeopardize my job or my security with the union.

[00:50:38] SG: Your union membership, was it important to you?

[00:50:41] BH: Oh, yeah. Yeah, yeah, yeah.

[00:50:44] BH: I've always been, you know, for the workers. I mean, especially for people who didn't understand as well. And, you know, to look after their rights as well and not let them get abused or whatever. So I don't know if that's a good thing or a bad thing. Here I am, still union, which hasn't got many workers and real work and still trying to do whatever you can.

[00:51:22] BH: But you think I was in union for many years, you know.

[00:51:31] BH: I guess, as you know, I wasn't on the GEG (General Executive Board) all the time, but I was in negotiations, as a shop steward and things like that.

[00:51:39] BH: But I was on, during negotiation.

[00:51:47] BH: Even on the union executive I was on the Finance Committee and back then, we used to have so much money. We had millions of dollars coming into our coffers. And prior to our AGM, we would have two days of meetings and one day you'd go and you would meet and talk about the union finances and all stuff and we would always make suggestions about not doing this, not doing that, not spending all this money in, but we're always rejected by the higher-ups and the union saying that we need the money to do … not organizing…. but, you know, political things like going to the government, asking for more things for fishermen, always for fishermen. Nothing for shore workers … so I fought and fought and fought for so it many years when Jim Sinclair in the union and he would come. He was on the Finance Committee, too. And we'd discuss all things. And I would say we shouldn't spend all this money, you know. And yet always got turned down at the AGM and they kept on spending the money and spending the money. And like water, they'd just spend money like crazy. And I wanted to be more fiscally responsible to the general union membership.

[00:53:25] SG: Tell me about negotiations, because negotiations in that industry was always really complex because you had three sections: the fisherman, the tendermen, and the shore workers. I presume you sat on the Shoreworkers Wage Committee that they would have?

BH: Oh yes, for many, many, many years.

SG: How did that work out? Did you have a big meeting?

[00:53:43] BH: …….then go down the negotiating committee, which is quite large - I'd say about 30 people because there were so many plants and Lower Mainland at that time.

[00:53:56]

[00:54:00] BH: We had a subcommittee which would be about four or five people who would actually go and face the companies in negotiations. So the bigger committee would meet - put forth all these demands — all these demands that were written down, and then went through them all. In normal procedure you cross out the ones that were least important, and then come down and that's all we wanted…. And it was usually always wages. Right?

[00:54:31] BH: But there was always some benefits things in there, but never more for union dues…. That was always a big one.

[00:54:44] BH: So anyways, anyway, yeah, let's go out and then we're got to negotiate the companies and then we'll come and we'd go back and forth, back and forth…. And then when we got to a certain position, we call in the whole committee and then we'd let the whole committee know what was going on.

[00:55:03] BH: See what they felt. And then eventually we had the vote on whether we were going to go on strike or not. So either we were going to endorse the company's offer, or we were going to reject it and go on strike and take a strike vote. So that was usually the procedure.

[00:55:22] SG: The strikes were pretty common occurrence in union, in the industry at that time. So was that a fairly sort of fractious process of trying to come to strike votes among three different sections here?

[00:55:37] BH: Well the fishermen basically. I don't know if …they couldn't strike? I don't think they were allowed to strike.

[00:55:50] SG: They did end up bargaining, right?

[00:55:53] BH: They could physically stop fishing. That was it, and that was pretty hard to get everyone to agree to not fish, but shore worker…. the tendermen. … I don't know. We didn't have a lot of interaction with the tendermen because they're all over the place. And whereas most like the officials who are B.C. Packers, the two biggest groups at that time.

[00:56:36] BH: So. But I think that once we decided to go on strike, it didn't really matter if the tendermen were going to go on strike or the fishermen went on strike…

[00:56:50] BH: And we're going to go on strike co-efficient and proceed on strike. But when we were going to go on strike, a lot of times they would say, you know, you shouldn't really go on strike. It's a bad time said the union executive.

[00:57:04] SG: So at the end of the day, Shore workers did have that one sort of lever to pull, which I guess.. they could decide to go on strike and carry the day?

[00:57:18] BH: Well, the Fishermen really couldn't do anything for us. I mean, they weren't going to hurt us. Either they go fishing or they don't go fishing. And then there's non-union fishermen who'd go fishing. If the union fishermen refused to go fishing or have a strike, there'll be non-union fishermen and wouldn't strike and they would still get a fish. And we know if that happened and we had not gone on strike or we weren't on a strike year, we would refuse to process scab fish. The people were caught during a fishermen's strike per se.

[00:58:05] That was always a dilemma to the company and to the workers because they would threaten you with jail or being sued for your property or whatever. So that was a dilemma for shore workers who vowed to do that. But if the fishermen all went fishing, all union fishermen went fishing, and shore workers were on strike, I guess they were delivered to non-union plants. I imagine. I don't know.

[00:58:43] SG: But I actually did have some of that, particularly in the 89 strike? We'll come back to that in a minute. But just you was right around this period in the mid-80s when Canadian Fish, which was owned by a New England Fishing Company in the US, actually went into receivership. And it was at that point that Pattison took over?

[00:59:06] BH: Yeah, we were in receivership for a few years, and I guess the receivers were trying to find a buyer, and I'm not sure how many people were interested in buying, but eventually it went to an auction.

[00:59:31] BH: And Jimmy Pattison bought the company.

[00:59:36] BH: But prior to that Canadian Fish… and I don't know why and how … but they had a large … millions of dollars in the bank, and they wanted to transfer it to Seattle to Neumeyer Fishing Company.

[00:59:53] BH: But the government wouldn't allow that. So when Jimmy bought it, he got this large amount of money as well, a lot of boats and the licenses, and the plants

BH [01:00:05] That come Canfisco had.

BH [01:00:06] And so I think at that time, I'm not sure if one of the...the Prince Rupert plant was sold to B.C. Packers. I'm not really sure, because at one time BC Packers bought a plant in Rupert. And I don't know if that was during that when they were in receivership. Whether they sold that plant, maybe that money from there had been part of...

SG [01:00:33] And it ran for a number of years under the Allied Pacific thing.

BH [01:00:37] Well that was later, that was later when BC Packers and Canadian Fish or Jimmy Pattison bought B.C. Packers and then became Allied Fishing Company.

BH [01:00:48] So that was later on, after he bought it.

SG [01:00:52] So after Jimmy Pattison took over Canadian Fish, where did you see changes taking place? Did that sort of affect the amount of work or did they drop...?

BH [01:01:03] No, everything was pretty much as it were.

BH [01:01:09] I mean, Jimmy Pattison, per se doesn't really get involved in the operation. He has, you know, as the president and I guess they have the board of directors and they run the business. If they don't make money, they're on the hot seat. If they make money, they're in the good books. So that's how I think that's how Jimmy Pattison runs his operation. He lets them, if it doesn't work out, then they either fire the president and get a new one. In that respect, so he's not really hands-on. He did after Bobby did come down, they had yearly board meetings upstairs. And he would come down with his executives and they would meet upstairs and they would come down, take a tour of the plant. And if a guy, one time when he first bought the place he used to come down at Christmastime, we always had a Christmas party in the lunchroom.

BH [01:02:09] He would come down and play his bugle.

SG [01:02:13] His bugle or his trumpet?

BH [01:02:15] Whatever it was...a trumpet yeah, his trumpet. So that was the highlight...

SG [01:02:17] In the plant?

BH [01:02:17] Yeah, in the lunchroom…

SG [01:02:24] Little known facts of Jimmy Pattison.

BH [01:02:25] He was just on TV today on the BNN, the stock market network, he was on their boat.

BH [01:02:38] He has said he's going...he's buying...expanding Alaska.

SG [01:02:43] In the fishing industry...

BH [01:02:44] In the fishing industry.

SG [01:02:46] The big blow that really hit the fishing industry, though, was in 1988 with the GATT ruling that said that the previous ruling, whereby all fish caught on the coast, all salmon and herring caught on the coast had to be processed in Canada and basically took that away. That really hit the industry hard. And you guys had to fight quite a pitched battle to try and stop it, even if it was unsuccessful.

BH [01:03:11] Oh yeah, there was always a discussion about BC herring time to send herring... In herring time, we'd send a lot of herring down to Bellingham to be frozen because there was a lot of herring being caught at one time. And so, there wasn't enough freezer space.

BH [01:03:35] So a lot of the herring went down to Bellingham and then there was some discussion about wasn't it gonna come back. So, it was going to be frozen inside the pad or some other place. And we were always leery about that.

BH [01:03:50] But it never really came to fruition, it kept on....

BH [01:03:54] Herring kept on coming back and then they were talking about sending some directly from Vancouver or Prince Rupert to Japan to be processed, to China to be processed. So, there was always a worry to workers about losing work to overseas.

BH [01:04:10] And salmon, not so much salmon.

BH [01:04:19] I guess I can't recall them talking about sending salmon to...well there were...

SG [01:04:26] There were huge rallies that went from Fishermen's Hall down to the docks in '88. A friend from Canadian Fish while not opposing this particular trade ruling and whatnot, you remember being part of those?

BH [01:04:44] Oh I probably was, I mean, I remember exactly '88.

BH [01:04:47] No, but obviously, you didn't want any government regulation where it allows them to take our resources and whether it be forestry or mining or anything to another country. So, we were always opposed to anything like that. Now, even we were opposed to well processing fish on big ships offshore, especially when the Russians or the Ukrainians or Polish came over and they were allowing them to take bottom fish, hake or whatever off the West Coast directly onto the boats for processing and so we always... I can't remember '88 exactly, but yeah, rallying the union and getting people to rally against the policies of the government. Yeah, we are always going to partake of that. But I can't remember exactly '88.

SG [01:06:03] But the (unclear) ruling led directly to the '89 strike, cause the company said well we don't have protection from having this stuff exported and processed elsewhere.

SG [01:06:16] So we're sticking it to you in terms of wages and whatnot. You guys fought a fairly lengthy strike in which the shoreworkers at that point,

SG [01:06:28] from what I understand, had to take a lot bigger role in prosecuting that strike. As you pointed out earlier, fishermen were out fishing and the only way of stopping things, was at the plant gate. Do you remember any of that?

SG [01:06:42] Particularly? I think you mentioned.

BH [01:06:49] That strike...I hear all the details about the strike. We had we had gone on strike and we were picketing. And I was at union hall and I was on what you call a flying squad, which I would go to all the trouble spots. So, one of our places we had was on down Marine Drive on Kent Street near the railway tracks here and it was a labelling warehouse. So, I had gone down that way and just to check was going on and they were loading a truck up with canned salmon. So, I parked my car in front of the truck and refused to move it 'til they unloaded, because we were guaranteed by the president that they weren't going to do that. So, I had to call headquarters and let them all know what was going on and ask for support. So, more people would come down and they eventually agreed to unload the truck and not do that anymore. That was one of the things I came (unclear)

BH [01:08:00] I know you were out at Spetifore, out in Delta?

BH [01:08:12] Along River Road there.

BH [01:08:12] And we were out there and I came over and picketed that place. But they did mostly halibut and they did salmon too. I can't remember why we were picketing out there and stopping the truck from leaving that place, I can't remember what year it was.

BH [01:08:30] But we had a fairly good-sized workforce, so we were just doing Gore Avenue, but we still had quite a few number of members that were on the list. And then we have now five people per shift to just to patrol the front entrance of Canfisco. It wasn't super hard to get people to come out, but there was a lot of times when people didn't show up. Like a lot of Chinese people didn't show up. I don't know if it was the language barrier or what the heck was going on, but we noted who they were,

BH [01:09:15] and after the strike, we had words with them and stuff like that, but nothing serious.

SG [01:09:24] But nonetheless, I presume you were a lot of shoreworkers more than usual involved in this particular strike because of the need to spread your pickets wide and far ay?

BH [01:09:35] Well some of the plants were smaller too, and so they needed assistance to man their picket lines to any strength for like 24 hours a day.

BH [01:09:48] So usually at night we didn't have too many picketers, but around the foot of Main Street, it was crucial to have a fairly good size because the area we were in, with lower income and indigents or whatever.

BH [01:10:12] We were always worried about people's safety.

BH [01:10:14] So we didn't really have security driving up and down in those days as like they do now. But so other than that. And then day shift we wanted to have a pretty good presence, especially Monday to Friday when the staff came to work. So always want to have a large group of people standing picket. But again, we had to help other smaller plants

BH [01:10:44] man the picket lines.

SG [01:10:44] That would have made a difficult strike because of things being so far flung and so many people involved.

BH [01:10:51] Well they're all pretty tough.

BH [01:10:53] But I guess, like, I guess my memory isn't as good as it used to be, but

BH [01:11:06] I can't recall exactly, but like I say all the strikes were as far as I'm concerned, were bad. Like hard to get people to come out and hard to make sure that things in general, like I said, we were headquarters at Cordova Street. Union headquarters we'd be all sitting around and waiting for, like I said the flying squad. We have to go out to where there is a disturbance or people, companies trying to do something against the strike or whatever. As far as I remember, though, I mean, '89 was a real vivid \memory.

SG [01:11:57] Did the strike was finally resolved with Vince Reddy, was appointed as a mediator with an Industrial Inquiry

SG [01:12:06] Commission was appointed to come down with a settlement. One of the things that came down with was a pension plan for shoreworkers. So, I'm presuming that it was on the bargaining table at the time negotiations...You'd finally got that issue on the table.

SG [01:12:22] And then when that recommendation was made in the final report, how did members feel about that, having finally achieved this, even if that was the way they got it?

BH [01:12:33] Most members were very happy they got it like especially the senior people like who had been, who worked a whole lot more and who had been around a long time. I mean, that was it, you know, when you're at the top of the list, you're always...you got a fair amount of work, whereas you're on the bottom of the list, you're not getting as much employment as you'd want, but yeah. to regular higher seniority workers, it was really important. Even dental was super important. And extended health was super important.

SG [01:13:09] Were they part of the settlement, too, or they...

BH [01:13:13] I can't remember if it was that year, or if it was earlier, but extended health probably. I can't remember if it was same time as dentists. But it took...in order to qualify for dentists, dental and extended health, you'd have to be working a fair amount. The lower workers wouldn't qualify. II mean now, workers wouldn't qualify because you had to be there for X number of months for so many years in a row, which is impossible. But so, like I said, most of the senior workers would get those benefits.

SG [01:13:54] I guess the biggest change really started to come after the Imperial plant closed in Steveston.

BH [01:14:00] Well, yeah, you think, you know, we are told by all the execs that this is the best thing that is going to happen for us.

BH [01:14:11] We were going to get all this extra work from B.C. Packers. They're working year-round and all this stuff, and didn't happen, got less work, if anything. And way more workers. And B.C. Packers had a bigger crew than Canadian Fish. And they had worked, probably most of the year-round because they had so many departments, they had the cold storage and then they had, which is an extension of...they had packing. So, they were packing frozen salmon all winter long to ship to wherever. There was prepared products that filleted and froze the fish all winter long. And then they would transfer into the cannery during the salmon season. And then there was I guess there were still bottom fish fishing at times of the year. They had the last smoke house. They had...a fresh fish department, which is (unclear) the troll fish like we did. So, yeah. And then they had reduction, they did herring reduction, reducing fish guts and heads and herring to fishmeal...stunk like crazy. And so, yeah, they had a lot more senior members so that when we are negotiating our

BH [01:15:55] merger, it was a very very tough thing to do.

SG [01:16:00] When you merged the two seniority...

BH [01:16:00] Yeah. Labour Relations and they finally decided on a one-for-one from the senior top. For some reason they let Canadian Fish have first, then BC Packers and the (unclear) down to a certain level. Don't remember exactly what the level was. And then after that they- all the people would go on the list according to their seniority.

BH [01:16:27] But the first 30 or 40 people were one-for-one.

BH [01:16:33] And so it was pretty tough because.

SG [01:16:36] So was done strictly on the list or did companies have some say in who they chose?

BH [01:16:41] No. No. You took the Canadian Fish seniority list, and the BC Packers seniority list

[01:16:46] And you go, one, one, one. All Canadian. All the way down.

BH [01:16:52] It was tough because you have to work with people you know, and you're on the top of the seniority list, and they had a certain way of doing things at BC Packers and we had things the way we did it at Canadian Fish. I guess there was a lot of animosity to a certain degree.

BH [01:17:10] And then yeah, but I knew quite a few of the Japanese people that were on the high seniority list from

BH [01:17:19] BC Packers. I knew them. Some of them were my relatives, couple were more like...I don't know...they're like second cousins in a way. So and the other ones I had known, one of them was Konishi He was one of the top guys, a general labourer in BC Packers and him and my mom were the best were best friends. He was born in Quebec. But they used to have a company house right on the dyke, off No. 1 Road of the dyke, their house was the first one. So it was BC Packers' housing they lived in.

SG [01:18:05] So I presume that this resulted in a significant loss of jobs, and there just weren't that many jobs at Canadian...

BH [01:18:14] Well yeah, there wasn't more jobs than were promised, and there was just the same amount of jobs and there was like more than twice the number of people.

BH [01:18:22] So my brother was one of the ones that had come back to Canadian Fish.

BH [01:18:28] He had originally worked there, that he worked at Queen Charlotte Fish and he worked for Norpac, but then he quit Norpac, and went on the big barge, called the ultra processor.

BH [01:18:43] And when it was towed to Alaska to process salmon and crab,

BH [01:18:56] But unfortunately there was a big, huge storm and they had this huge anchors, I couldn't believe how big they were, but there were four anchors in the back and they would drag along the bottom of the Bristol Bay and smashed on an island. And so, they had to be rescued by the Coast Guard and then brought back to Vancouver. So, I got him a job at Canadian Fish again so he was working at Canadian Fish in the fresh fish

department, and then when the merger came, he got dropped down, seniority way down, so he wasn't getting any work.

BH [01:19:30] So then he went to work at magazine distribution company, and I think it was in Burnaby, South Burnaby, and so he was there for a number of years. And then Jimmy Pattison somehow managed to buy the company. He had bought up a number of publish...magazine distribution companies across Canada and his number one right hand man

BH [01:20:02] now, Glen Clark was the manager of the plant. So, it was a union plant, too. So, my brother was a member of the union of all things and always causing problems.

BH [01:20:13] So eventually, Jimmy Pattison, the magazine distribution business was going downhill. They were getting more magazines back from the stores than they were actually selling. So, he moved his operation to Alberta and my brother ended up losing his job.

BH [01:20:31] And then he went to work driving a taxicab.

SG [01:20:34] So, yeah, that's kind of the nature of all of these industries to be transitory. In fact, there were huge numbers of consolidations in the industry, and now there are no canneries left at all on the BC coast.

BH [01:20:51] Well, there is one around on Vancouver Island...Saint-Jean custom thing.

SG [01:20:59] So what you've gone from being a fairly almost a full-time worker in the industry to what you're... and you're still working there at Canadian Fish.

BH [01:21:08] Yeah. Yeah.

SG [01:21:10] So what would your average year look like now?

BH [01:21:15] Wow. I guess it's been going down for the last 10 or 12 years. Been declining, you know, slowly. This year I made $8,000.

BH [01:21:29] Last year I made $10,000. And mostly because of herring. And then prior to that probably like 15,000, 20,000 type of wages.

BH [01:21:49] But the last two years was the worst in 54...I've been in the industry for 54 years since 1965 so. But last two years have been the worst. I mean we didn't see one salmon this year and not at least last year we are a little bit of summer chum from the central area. We were a few days in the summer chums from there, but herring was fairly not too bad, two years ago. Prior to that, it's been fairly good herring and salmon so-so through the (unclear). I'd say the most in the last 10, 12 years I made was 30,000 in a good year, would be that would be the maximum I made.

SG [01:22:38] So again, it's a big drop.

BH [01:22:42] Yeah and I'm a top employee, senior employee. So just imagine what the other people are making. You know, not very much. I used to make, I used to qualify for unemployment up to two years ago. This year and last year, I never collected unemployment, I couldn't qualify, I didn't have enough weeks in to qualify.

SG [01:23:06] Not even for that?

BH [01:23:07] No, couldn't.

SG [01:23:09] I believe the union just had a delegation to Victoria seeking disaster relief for fishermen. Yes. You were on that delegation? Yes.

SG [01:23:19] So what was the ask of government for?

BH [01:23:27] As our president put it, "light your hair on fire", to one MLA. "Light your hair on fire and getting moving and do something about this." Because fishermen, quote fishermen,

BH [01:23:40] mostly are very poor this year, especially salmon and herring fishermen who didn't... Salmon fishing and herring made a little bit. But salmon they didn't make anything, they paid for licence fees and equipment and all stuff and they didn't get to go fishing one day. So, he said that people are starving. They have no income. They have no way of getting ready for anything for next year, licence fees have to pay, fish book fees. So they're asking for return...returning those fees to inshore fishermen and potentially giving them maximum unemployment, I guess 500 bucks a week for

BH [01:24:33] what they normally would make if they were fishing.

SG [01:24:38] Were they asking for any provisions for shoreworkers?

BH [01:24:41] Yeah. I spoke up and I said that I worked 54 years and I only made like 8,000, 10,000. I couldn't collect unemployment. Luckily, I was collecting pensions. But most of the people are going without, so I don't know how they're surviving. So that she had included shoreworkers in the calculation of how much it would cost for the government to supply unemployment for those workers that are affected. So, she came up with a maximum of 35 million dollars but she said it will probably be less than half. But she had projected a maximum of 35 million dollars.

BH [01:25:34] I mean, you're talking to people in government who have problems in oil, or forestry, not so much mining, but on environmental issues and things like that. So, we were just part of, you know, part of the problem.

BH [01:26:00] I guess we're not a priority, I suppose, depends on what. We had a meeting with an MLA for forests. I was kind of wonder why are we here for forests? But he was apparently interested in steelhead. He was a real advocate for steelhead, so we went to talk to him. We went to Minister Bains for Labour and we discussed this organizing seine fishermen that fish for Canadian Fish. And so that was the issue we only discussed with the Minister of Labour. We met with Minister of agriculture which I guess it was originally agriculture and fish, I suppose.

SG [01:26:50] It was at one time.

[01:26:50] Yeah. So that's the only person that we could see about that. And she was very sympathetic. And that's the one lady she talked about "lighting your hair on fire". Approaching MP's and the federal government as well as the various BC legislature regards to funding, emergency funding for shorework to the fishermen.

SG [01:27:18] It's kind of a sad commentary that the industry has come to this. Things are so bad that you're looking for disaster relief, that's for sure.

BH [01:27:26] Oh yeah, I mean, there's I mean, in general, like I'm also I was also a director of G and F, the Fishermen's Credit Union, I've been a director for 36 years. I just retired in April, but we used to give fish loans. I mean, we give so many fish loans. We were the first...for boats. And, you know, there was so many times that I was specialized on the credit committee, which would give loans and the loans we gave were fish boat loans. So we're the only financial institution that gave fish boat loans with annual payments like you only pay once a year after the season was over. Whereas banks would want payment every month and which was impossible for fishermen. And there was a time when fishermen had hard times and we wouldn't do anything. We would just let them carry till next year. And then they would repay a loan, because maybe a motor burnt out, or all different kinds of reasons why they couldn't pay in a bad year. So, we were pretty sympathetic to fishermen.

BH [01:28:40] So but eventually we gave less and less fish loans out because we started putting loans on their houses. Fishermen own their own home and so...

SG [01:28:54] You're not allowed to mortgage boats really by legislation.

BH [01:28:57] No, you could, but the credit unions and banks will want more security in your house than your boat. And you can get a lower rate, interest rate on a house loan than a boat loan. So, you look at G & F's books and you probably won't see any fish boat loans. But there are fishermen have loans because they have their house up for collateral.

SG [01:29:25] Had collateralized mortgage their house.

BH [01:29:26] Yeah. So, I mean, for some people say still you're coming to take your boat. I say most of the fishermen don't have boat loans. The have house loans. So they'll come and take your house maybe.

BH [01:29:38] But they won't take your boat.

SG [01:29:40] How is you came to be a director of the Gulf and Fraser Fishermen's Credit Union?

BH [01:29:44] Well, my good friend, who is Bob Long actually, when I first started, he worked in cold storage at Canadian Fish, he worked in cold storage, and then eventually he got a job in the engine room as an engineer because we used to run our engine room 24 hours a day for cold storage. You have three eight-hour shifts. So, he became an engineer and then his boss retired and he became chief engineer. So, Bob and I were friends for a long time and he was also the president of Gulf and Fraser Fishermen's Credit Union. So, he asked me to be on the credit committee. That's how I became involved in the Credit Union. We used to meet every Wednesday, 52 weeks of the year to give loans.

BH [01:30:39] And even there wasn't a loan, we'd still meet and then we'd say there's no loans. So, I think I was on the credit committee for four years and then a couple of directors quit. One was this guy with the cold storage at Canfisco. He only lasted a year, he quit. Another guy was Ron Robertson, who was a skipper on one of the Packer boats.

He was a...and then he worked in cold storage. He was a director for a couple of years and then he quit. So, two positions came available. So, Bob said, if I want to run for director. I said, "sure, OK". So, me and this other fellow name is George Stott,

BH [01:31:28] He worked in the office at Canfisco, put our names forward, and there was no people running. So, we got acclaimed as a director to start with. And that's how I got involved in the Credit Union.

BH [01:31:43] I was 36 years.

SG [01:31:47] 36 years. So, do you see your union activity and your activity and volunteer activity with the union, with your credit union initially, part of the same sort of philosophy for you?

BH [01:31:57] Well yeah, I mean, credit unions are for the people. I mean, they're co-operative. They're completely different principles than a bank, and we're under different legislation and then a bank has. And so, yeah, we're there to help people. And our employees were union employees. We made sure that they got treated fairly and so yeah, I just thought it was a great atmosphere to work in a credit union. Whereas like a bank represented

BH [01:32:37] I don't know, the establishment. Credit unions were kind of same as unions. Unions are a little bit out there to represent the workers, whereas the owners were the bad guys.

BH [01:32:52] So I've always been for the underdog and for general population, middle-class, never really wanted to be rich. I knew how to be rich, but I never, wanted to be rich.

BH [01:33:07] So I just, you know, I just like to volunteer for all kinds of things in general. So they were hand in hand.

BH [01:33:19] You know, a lot more of our employees were members of the credit union, I touted the credit union forever and ever, get them to help them in their finances and telling them, well the credit union okay, we'll do this for you. And they would come and they would become members.

BH [01:33:37] So it worked out good for both parties.