Interview: Joy Thorkelson (JT)
Interviewer: Rod Mickleburgh (RM) and Donna Sacuta (DS)
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Transcription: Pam Moodie

DS [00:00:01] Today is September 19th, 2019, we're in Burnaby at the B.C. Labour Heritage Centre, Rod Mickleburgh and Donna Sacuta interviewing Joy Thorkelson, Part two.

RM [00:00:14] Joy, the last time when I started talking to you, the last time, you were talking about the Mifflin Plan and you've just brought up an interesting point, is that it hurt First Nations fishermen even more. Do you want to just elaborate on that? And what years are we talking about?

JT [00:00:29] Well, the Mifflin Plan really started coming into effect in 1996.It was really between 1996 and 2001 or 2002 that things changed radically. The fleet of 1995 did not look like the fleet of 2002 for a number of reasons. The Mifflin Plan worked. The part of the Plan was a buyout that fishermen had partially paid for. It was on their license fees. They'd had paid for many years an extra toll and that money was going into a buyback pool and so the government used that money and then threw in some of their own.

RM [00:01:14] So they used the fishermen's own money?

JT [00:01:15] Yeah they did, and half was the fishermen's money I think. Half was the government's money. They bought out 50 percent (about 50 percent of each of the salmon years) so 50 percent of the trollers, gillnetters and seiners. Then the other part of the Mifflin Plan was the division of the coast. Your license used to give you the ability to fish coast-wide. It was cut to three, or two —depending which gear you were—areas. In order to fish you had to choose which area you wanted to fish in, and then in order to fish another area, you had to buy another license. If you want to go back to fishing the whole coast

RM [00:01:59] And you could only have two licenses, that was the maximum.

JT [00:02:01] No. You could have all three.

RM [00:02:03] Oh, you could.

JT [00:02:04] Yeah. In order to go coast-wide—they preferred—that's why they chopped the gillnet fleet into three and the troll fleet into three was because they wanted you to have to reduce the fleet by two-thirds.

RM [00:02:15] Right.

JT [00:02:16] The fleet that was already cut in half, they wanted to reduce that fleet further by two-thirds. They thought that each vessel would go buy up another two boats in order to get another two licenses. What the issue was, whether you could stack them onto one boat or not onto one boat, but that those rules change. You can stack all three on one boat. What happened was it was somewhat successful over that time period. There became fewer and fewer fishermen and more and more bank payments as guys were

having to buy up other licenses, so their capital costs went up. They had to buy two more licenses to do what they had done coast-wide before. So the fishermen that couldn't afford to were ghettoized into an area. For example, on the Skeena we used to have maybe 1,100 gillnetters, 1,000 gillnetters on the North Coast on a regular basis for the Skeena and Nass runs. Then when the Fraser came on, the vast majority of those fishermen left the North Coast and it would just be the homesteaders that would be left. Most of the homesteaders were First Nations from both up the Skeena, Kitwanga had a large population of commercial fishermen, for example, and that's a couple of hundred miles up the Skeena— kilometers up the Skeena. Then there's, of course, all the coastal communities. So many of those guys stayed because they did well after that aggressive fleet left to go fish the Fraser River. They usually had bigger boats. They usually fished on the outside. When they left, all the smaller inside boats that normally fished in the River saw a whack of fish go through. They made their seasons in the beginning of August, where the other guys had taken the majority of fish in July and then left to chase the Fraser fish. But now, when area license came in, that didn't happen. So you had a handful of boats that were double-licensed or triple-licensed to begin with and you had whatever, so in our area we had 630 licenses.

RM [00:04:43] So everybody stayed?

JT [00:04:43] Everybody had to stay, they had nowhere else to go. Instead of having 200 boats fish the tail-end of the Skeena, and think it was really good fishing, we had 600 boats that were forced to stay in that area and then as those guys got double-licensed, there is still probably, my guess is 350 single-licensed boats on the North Coast and they have nowhere to go. As competition became, as fishing became more aggressive, more people moved into the River and competed with the guys who just used to fish in the River. There was huge competition. People got angry with each other. Then, of course, people got poorer and poorer and poorer and First Nations people who were unable to raise the capital because, especially if they lived,—if they rented in town, in Rupert or lived in one of the communities—they couldn't (First Nations communities) they can't get a mortgage. They couldn't raise the money to invest in getting a second license or a third license, so the fleet was really ghettoized and the people that paid the prices that ended up losing their boats and losing their houses—I mean, losing their boats and their licenses—mostly came from the First Nations communities.

RM [00:06:08] Wow. I'd never heard that before. Wow.

JT [00:06:09] So if you look at a place like Kitkatla in the early '90s, Kitkatla probably had three or four seine boats and maybe 40, 45 gillnetters. I think the community of Kitkatla has no seine boats. The community of Kitkatla probably has three fishing boats left, three gillnetters left. Port Simpson used to have a couple of hundred at Lax Kw'alaams and they say they can muster 60 boats. I think that's in some cases wishful thinking because they maybe have that many boats and licenses, but people haven't been able to maintain those boats. They might go out and fish just in front of Lax Kw'alaams, but they're not going to go fish anywhere else because the risk is too high. They just have a handful. Those guys used to gillnet and troll most of the coastal First Nations. The guys who lived on the coast used to gillnet and troll, but when Mifflin came in, you had to choose gillnetting or you had to choose trolling. If you were a North Coast gillnetter you used to be able to fish coast-wide, if you were a gillnetter you used to be able to fish coast-wide, used to put trolling poles on if you wanted to. Many of the boats that were on the North Coast were built to do gillnetting and trolling, so they had trolling poles on a drum on the back for gillnetting.

RM [00:07:41] Were most of those First Nations fishermen, were they UFAWU (United Fishermen and Allied Workers' Union) members?

RM [00:07:45] They are either union members or Brotherhood members, either one. The Native Brotherhood of BC had a local in every community and we had a local in every community, so, there was some competition for membership for sure.

RM [00:07:57] Well, I always thought, I always got the impression the Native Brotherhood was mostly seine boats, but maybe that's not.

JT [00:08:02] No, on the North Coast we've never had as many seine boats as the South Coast. Although we did have, there was a chunk of change of seine boats up there for sure. Many of them were company, owned partially by the companies. But 49-percenters would—that's what the fishermen who would own 49 percent of the boat and the company would own 51 percent of the boat—and the forty, we used to call the fishermen who owned the 49 percent, '49-percenters'. Those guys—if they lived on the North Coast—their boats were on the North Coast and they got fixed on the North Coast and they got their nets mended on the North Coast and they used the net lofts on the North Coast and they use the suppliers on the North Coast. Now I think there's maybe four or five seine boats left on the North Coast.

RM [00:09:00] I think you might have touched on this when we talked last is that, this really—for the union of course, the individual fishermen took the hit—but for the union it was pretty devastating, too, because you couldn't put any pressure on the companies, and so meaningful negotiations on price just went by the way, and I guess your membership really dropped.

JT [00:09:23] Our membership dropped for two reasons, exactly. One was Mifflin Plan. There was just fewer fishermen, so there's just fewer people to draw from. The second thing was that everybody was so desperately fighting for access for fish—and that's when really the union's expertise had to make a switch from expertise in collective bargaining to expertise in dealing with the department—and so those people on staff whose responsibility it was to deal with fishermen either on Vancouver Island, the North Coast or on the Fraser, we all had to become fish management experts.

RM [00:10:05] When did you think—it was harder and harder I guess to exist as a viable union by yourself. Did that lead you into the CAW (Canadian Auto Workers Union)?

RM [00:10:20] Unions had been merging all over the country and it was a time of, also at that time, we were a Canadian union—but other unions who were part of the American trade union movement were leaving their masters in the United States and becoming just national unions. A number of them went through these huge battles with their internationals to become free, to become Canadian. We watched that from aside because we already were Canadian and we watched the battle in Newfoundland and we saw what happened to the Newfoundland Fishermen's Union and we had some connections back east because we had gone back to organize, and so we had some connections back east. We saw what was going on in Newfoundland. We saw the Newfoundland Union become its own union and then joined with the Auto Workers.

RM [00:11:21] Earl McCurdy.

JT [00:11:22] That's right and they joined with the Auto Workers and we were looking for a home and we at that time had been talking about merging in B.C. with a bunch of other marine unions. The Merchant Seaman's Guild, the CBRT (Canadian Brotherhood of Railway Transport and General Workers), ourselves, I think the longshoremen at one time were in talks. That was above my level, but certainly I was aware that those talks were going on.

RM [00:11:52] The old SIU (Seafarers' International Union) goal. One union on water.

JT [00:11:55] Kind of but maybe a little different than the SIU. We looked at that and then we saw on the East Coast what had happened with the Newfoundland Fishermen's Union. Mike Darnell, who had been working for our union in Rupert had been sent back by our union to help out with organizing on the Great Lakes. Mike actually organized a little union on the Great Lakes and found a home for it in CAW, so we had the East Coast, we had the Fishermen's Union on the Great Lakes, and then we had ourselves and so we thought that—had a discussion—and thought, 'yeah, we need a home with their home.' You know, people were licking their lips looking at us besides our little merger. And we're still pretty powerful still in those days.

RM [00:12:47] When was this Joy?

JT [00:12:48] That was just after the Mifflin Plan I think, my guess it would be 19, late 1990s or so in 1999. Yeah.

RM [00:12:59] So was there a resistance within the union?

JT [00:13:02] I suppose some people resisted, but there was no real resistance within the union. I think people were more afraid of UFCW (United Food and Commercial Workers). We just had a battle with UFCW over the Co-op and they called us 'a shitty little union.'

RM [00:13:19] I thought that Co-op was gone by then.

JT [00:13:21] The Co-op was gone—well, yeah, that might've been a little bit earlier—the Co-op was gone, maybe the 19...

RM [00:13:27] Early 1990s?

JT [00:13:27] Oh, not that early, I think the receiver stuff was all 1997, so the Co-op didn't really go down until that time. '96, '97 maybe. Before that we had run a campaign, UFCW and ourselves, had gone to PRASCU who is a CLC (Canadian Labour Congress) affiliated union—Prince Rupert Amalgamated Shoreworkers and Clerks—the CLC was divesting itself of all of its directly chartered locals. And so one of the directly chartered locals who wanted to divest itself up was PRASCU. They decided, CLC decided in their wisdom, even though UFCW had no fish plants on this coast, decided that they had every—

RM [00:14:23] They never liked the UFAWU.

JT [00:14:24] Yeah, that's right. Ever since we turned them down for joining them. CLC set us up so that we had to have a competition and what had happened is at the same time there was a merger of McMillan Fisheries with the workers at the Co-op. We had far fewer workers than the Co-op did, and we only lost by three votes, so we picked up a lot of votes from the Co-op, but we couldn't make up the difference. At the end of that, Leif Hansen

called us 'a shitty little union.' And I tell you that that just grated. Yeah that just grated on everybody. We tried to be very gracious in our loss and our defeat, even though it ground, we'd helped PRASCU, we babysat them through many strikes. Every time they got into trouble, we gave them a hand and here they were turning their—and the old red-baiting came up. 'If you joined the UFAWU, you weren't allowed to go to the States anymore. You couldn't take your vacation in Hawaii and whatever.' That was one of the things they had been, that's who had first organized, that's who the Newfoundland Fishermen's Union were part of was UFCW. When they left UFCW and joined CAW, we thought maybe that that was another impetus. We were worried that there is going to be some challenges at our other plants. That was a the time of merger and a time of corporate concentration—increased corporate concentration and merging—and we were losing plants through mergers and through—corporations were impacted, smaller corporations were impacted by Mifflin as well and they were going down for the count. Many of our smaller plants.

RM [00:16:30] So the fishermen joined the Auto Workers Union.

JT [00:16:31] So the fishermen joined the Auto Workers Union. That's right. So we became UFAWU/CAW, but we had a—

RM [00:16:38] And that was the right decision, right?

JT [00:16:39] Well, I think it was. Where else would we be? We're a tiny little union now. We're just a ghost of our past selves, fishing industry's a ghost of its past self. We have a home at CAW and they helped us financially quite a bit. Then CAW decided to join with CEP (Communications Energy and Paperworkers) and create Unifor. You could vote or not vote your plants—your union had to agree—but we decided that we would at least vote the shoreworkers in Prince Rupert. It was more of a campaign of telling people that there was such a thing as Unifor—

RM [00:17:27] It is a very strange name.

JT [00:17:28] It took us a long time to get used to it, but now we're used to it, now it's not bad. It took a long time to roll off the tongue. We voted our workers and there was no opposition, but we thought we better educate people and give them a chance to vote. So that's what occurred and I can't remember what year that was.

RM [00:17:51] How many shoreworkers did you have then?

JT [00:17:52] Oh, we probably had 2,000 in North Coast and maybe 500 on the South Coast, maybe 1,000.

RM [00:17:58] What year are you talking about, like about 2010?

JT [00:18:03] I can tell you it was a year that Riley worked for us. I'm trying to remember what year that was.

RM [00:18:09] Well, Unifor came along around, I don't know, 2008, I don't know. But it was around that time.

JT [00:18:16] It was at that time.

RM [00:18:17] You had that many shoreworkers?

JT [00:18:18] Oh, yes.

RM [00:18:19] Wow.

JT [00:18:19] We had that many shoreworkers on the North Coast until 1996 was the year that—1996, 7, 8— was a year that Canadian Fish and BC Packers merged to create APP, Allied Pacific Processors and we call that 'they got engaged.' They were with Allied Pacific Processors. They were certainly starting to downsize and merge, but we still had at that time probably on our northern shoreworkers' seniority list, just with APP, around 1,200 people. Then we still had other plants on the North Coast operating at that time. We would look at having, I would say, 2,000 shoreworkers work during the summertime.

RM [00:19:17] And what do you got now?

JT [00:19:19] On the North Coast? Maybe if we're lucky, the seniority list has 125. If you ask me how many worked last summer, I would say 20 or 25 worked fairly steady, and the rest, another 30 on top of that worked maybe four days.

RM [00:19:41] Oh my goodness. That's unbelievable.

JT [00:19:43] We were lucky because that was crabs came in big. If we were just relying on salmon nobody really would have worked at all.

RM [00:19:48] It's never going to come back, is it?

JT [00:19:50] Well, I think the salmon. I think salmon is resilient. I don't think it's for the most part—

RM [00:19:58] Will the processing jobs come back or will it be processed somewhere else?

JT [00:20:00] No, it is being processed in China. No, those jobs—if government wants them to come back, government can just pass trade rules that force them to come back. I don't see Trumpism of the Canadian economy. In many cases, I'm very glad, but the one thing that I would have liked to have seen was actual legislation that prohibited us from—Canada—from exporting jobs. Now, those jobs not necessarily end up to be union jobs, but at least they'd be Canadian jobs and we would be able to organize those workers if they want to belong to a union.

RM [00:20:39] As you pointed out, with the fishermen, First Nations, shoreworkers, of course, they would have taken a huge hit because—

JT [00:20:45] Oh, yeah, I mean, that's—

RM [00:20:47] such a part of their employment.

JT [00:20:49] Well, families took a hit because the family structure was fish. The men fished and the women worked in the shore plants. The women and children worked in the shore plants, so when the kids, the boys were old enough, lots of them would go fishing, follow their dad's footsteps. Some of them would stay and become tradesmen or forklift drivers or one of the more skilled operators in the plant. But the workforce mainly was

women—but women and children—and so the family unit at the end of the summer would have made money from fishing and money from shoreworking. You put them together and many families wanted, were actually smart and spread their families out between the fish plants in the old days so that they didn't have anyone—usually between a union plant and the Co-op—but they didn't have any one, they didn't have their whole family dependent on one company.

RM [00:21:47] Wow, god-almighty, let's not dwell. You mentioned a name from the past and I was going to ask you about him. Mike Darnell.

JT [00:21:55] Oh, yes.

RM [00:21:57] What to say about Mike Darnell. Almost a legendary kind of a guy for better or for worse.

JT [00:22:04] Mike came to Rupert off of a fishing boat. He was wet behind the ears, I think, and I don't believe Mike had worked for the union prior to that and he came to Rupert and he really shook things up. Accomplished lots of things. He always—he and George Hewison—used to say to me, 'what have you done for the working-class today?' and I used to go through a ream of grievances that I'd handled and they said, 'no, no, no, Joy, for the working-class, you know, not for Georgina. What did you do for the working-class today?' It took me a long time to figure out what they were talking about. But he certainly—I think for those years that Mike was there—got most of labour to start looking through a different lens. A lens of our responsibility to the working-class of the community, and our responsibility to the people who weren't making any money. So maybe the lumpenproletariat—and speaking in those words— but we certainly were looking beyond ourselves and participated politically. Mike ran for City Council and despite everybody knew he was a member of the Communist Party, he was elected to City Council and Mike served a term on City Council and he was a real whirlwind kind of powerhouse guy to work for. He went after the Cassiar Fishing Company (CASPACO it was called) because of the poor standards of housing and he won a human rights action against Cassiar for that, that got them to improve their housing. Mike—we had quite a few battles—of the three years that he was in Rupert, three or four years he was in Rupert we really became much more militant. Shoreworkers became more militant, I don't think our fishermen became even more militant. They were equally as militant as what they were. Certainly the shoreworkers who were considered within the union structure as more like cattle, showed that they weren't. I think that on the North Coast, a lot of that was Mike—and it was the help of the company too—like that was the first time—BC Packers ate up Canadian Fish at that time. In 1980 BC Packers bought out the northern assets of Canadian Fish and New England Fish had collapsed, taking Canadian Fish with it. Canadian Fish had to sell its northern assets, so sold its northern assets to BC Packers and so BC Packers decided to shut down its plant at Port Edward, its Nelson Brothers plant at Port Edward and those shoreworkers were merged over a period of two years into the Oceanside plant which was a BC Packers, maybe doubled in size. It became the largest cannery on the coast and we fit in all the workers from Port Ed into that cannery, we merged by seniority date, except we protected the senior workers and we had to merge the boat shops, because there was two boat shops. We had to merge the net lofts because there were two net lofts. We had to merge the cannery because there was two canneries. We had to merge two filleting operations—fresh fish, cold storage operations. That was a lot of merging. We had to find everybody's place in the seniority list and come up with a seniority plan that everybody—or most everybody—thought was fair, that they would support. A seniority plan is is how you do a call-out, so if there's a call-out for the warehouse, do you call warehouse workers? Do

you call cannery workers? Do you call fresh fish workers? How much do you want to compartmentalize your plant? How much you want it overall seniority? So those things all had to be worked out with between '80 and '82 and made the shoreworkers stronger rather than weaker.

RM [00:26:38] That's when Mike was up there?

JT [00:26:39] And Mike was up for the first part of that and then Mike left and came down here, worked a couple of years down here.

RM [00:26:46] I didn't know he'd been sent East, I guess I have a vague recollection.

JT [00:26:49] Yeah and then he went back East. I can't remember, I think somebody in CAW reached out to us—somebody reached out to us anyway—and so we sent Mike back we probably paid for six-months of his wages or something like that. I can't really remember what the arrangements were. Then I think probably CAW picked it up and created this local.

RM [00:27:16] He' was quite this legendary figure. I remember always hearing about Mike Darnell, and without really knowing, people would always talk about him. Geoff would often talk about him.

JT [00:27:25] Yeah, his heart was in the right place and Michael was able to rally any troop. He could just rally the troops. He had an intellect—a sharp intellect. It's one of the sharpest intellects I've worked with, Michael.

RM [00:27:48] Do you feel comfortable talking about the role of the Communist Party in the UFAWU?

JT [00:27:52] I don't think it plays much of a role since the fall of the Berlin Wall. But yeah, I think that—

RM [00:28:02] Is that good or bad or did it—

JT [00:28:04] Well, I think the whole labour movement hurts for the lack of an active Communist Party. I do believe so. It sharpened the debate in all Labour Councils. It sharpened the debate in the BC Federation of Labour for sure, sharpened debate at the CLC. Tried to create a left-caucus that wasn't a Communist caucus but a left caucus within both the CLC and the BC Fed, and they're of course much more active in the local Federations of Labour, because the policies that they came up with within the labour movement were policies that most working-class people could support. I talked a couple of years ago—they're never going to invite me back—to the BC Federation of Labour. Well, we're kicked out of it now anyway, but the BC Fed had a regional meeting in Terrace and I brought my old CLC and BC Fed books out. I have books going back to the 1940s for resolutions, and so I brought some out from the '40s and '50s and '60s and '70s and read them resolutions out of that that we had passed—nationalize the banks, stop transport of money across the borders because we were talking about ourselves being a branch-plant community. The hinterland also applied to Canada as United States as well as within Canada, as the East versus West. Those debates were really sharpened. International solidarity—the Nicaragua Boat Project and solidarity with Chile, solidarity with Guatemala workers. Those things were all pushed by the left faction which was really Party-influenced for absolute sure. The Party wasn't just in the Fishermen's Union. It was in many unions

and many left-wing unions had Party members in leadership positions. It was just that our Party members more outspoken, so we got tagged with it.

RM [00:30:24] You were a member?

JT [00:30:25] Of course.

RM [00:30:26] I didn't know that. For how long?

JT [00:30:32] Probably five or six years and, I didn't join when I was staff because there was a split and there's certainly there was a split between basically the left-wing NDP—because it wasn't really any right-wing people in there—so the left-wing NDP and the Party. There was hard feelings, and the Party used to organize within the Union if they thought something should go a certain way. In lots of ways that created hard feelings because lots of those things were not issues, working-class issues. They were issues about should we buy this kind of engine for the boat or that kind of engine for the boat? We didn't need to be organizing on those kind of lines within our own union. The peace movement. Things that we discussed within our union were different than many other unions without left-Communist leadership discussed. The peace movement was discussed. It was discussed in many other unions as well, but not so much in the unions that didn't have Communist influence. The peace movement was pushed by the rank and it was Jonnie Rankin was one of the big—but there is a whole left-wing caucus that if it wasn't Party, it was close to Party. Again, the Party tried to branch out so that it wasn't just a handful of people looking at their navels, but trying to look and see what needed to happen in broader society.

RM [00:32:18] You didn't feel though that there was the legendary—like Jack Phillips and all these people with the Communist Party's Labour Committee or whatever it was—that things would get hashed out in there, behind closed doors, and then it would kind of be imposed on the Communist-influenced unions.

JT [00:32:38] I heard that, but I don't know what the imposition would be. Those unions were all very democratic. They're probably more democratic than many unions that—we talk about the internationals—the unions that we had that were Communist-influenced were very or left-wing influenced were very much more democratic than I would say many of the other unions that were particularly American-dominated. What do I think? I can't ever remember ever being ordered by the Party to do anything before I was a member, when I would just close to them, or after I became a member. There were discussions. Yes, there was a left-wing discussion within the union. Yes, we had those discussions. But Jack—other officers of the union weren't Party members.

RM [00:33:32] No, Jack was definitely not a Party member.

JT [00:33:35] There was always that give and take within the leadership of the union and on the General Executive Board there was always a give and take within the Executive Board. Certainly, if we were going to go and have a BC Federation of Labour strategy, it was a strategy that was worked out between many left-wing people. The Party wasn't dictating to anybody. The Party might say, 'we think,' might be a discussion or, it wouldn't even be dealing with a resolution. The Party, like the Canadian national party, might say, 'we want to raise the issues of peace. We want to raise the issues of disarmament or of the banks making too much profit', or whatever. 'These are the general bigger issues we

believe should be raised,' and then they would definitely get raised. So if that's an order, then I suppose you could say that, but I don't really, I think people raised those.

RM [00:34:38] Was there tension between Jack Nichol and the Party at all?

JT [00:34:39] Oh, I think there was, I think at the leadership level.

RM [00:34:42] Did you ever talk to him about it?

JT [00:34:45] No, but there was sort of like this left-wing faction that's kind of grew around Jack, but I think Jack—I think Jack was Jack. Jack did what he thought was best and didn't look at whether that was a Party policy or a policy that came from somewhere else within the union. I think he just looked at it and said, 'this is good for the union or not good for the union.' Really, when it came to the leadership of the union, when we really sat, we had 32 people on our General Executive Board elected by a Convention of 250 people or 300 people. Those people were on the Executive Board were very strong-minded people. They weren't going to—just because three or four people were Communists in that room—they weren't going to be swayed by an allegiance or loyalty to certain people. They were going to be swayed by what the arguments were.

RM [00:35:47] Party candidates didn't always get elected, did they?

JT [00:35:50] Oh, no. Not all the time. No.

RM [00:35:53] But that reminds me. The legendary Fisherman's Hall on 138 East Cordova. I attended one or two of those conventions, and they were like nothing else. You got good memories for those? People just—battered old hall and—

JT [00:36:10] All of that

RM [00:36:13] Do you have good memories of that?

JT [00:36:14] Yeah, our convention, we had huge conventions. We used to send a delegation of 16 shoreworkers just from Prince Rupert alone. I think the northern delegation was—by the time you added Masset and all of the other outlying locals, fishermen and shoreworkers—I think we probably would have about 35 or 40 people just from the North Coast. We used to host what they call the Northern Hostility Room every night which is where probably most of the arguments actually happened was three in the morning after too many people have had too much to drink. But everybody straggled in the next morning. At least from our group, you got a real big fine if you didn't show up—no matter how hung over you were—you better get to that convention the next day. Those were the days when our conventions were ten days long.

RM [00:37:14] Yeah.

JT [00:37:15] Every night was an evening session. People would get up in the mics and you'd have one topic or one resolution, and it could take half a day. Nobody was in a rush to get through something. It was like ten days of this intense discussion about the problems of the commercial fishing industry and the problems of the working-class. It was uplifting. When you left the convention, everybody felt uplifted.

RM [00:37:45] Because they were the real people there. These are the real fishermen, the real shoreworkers, it wasn't sort of guided by bureaucrats or whatever. It was still rank and file.

JT [00:37:56] It was the people. It was the people. It was the people of the fishing industry. They were elected by their peers in their own areas, so the Prince Rupert—

RM [00:38:08] They weren't shy about speaking.

JT [00:38:09] Oh no. We used to try to—the local in Rupert, we would try, and I think the other locals started following our lead—but we used to try to have two new people every year. We would have an affirmative action for two out of 16 or four out of 16—whatever it was—new people so that it wasn't just the same old, same old going down every time. We tried to get that new blood in and we would always—I can't remember what it was now, but I think two, three or four out of the 16, I can't really remember—would 14 or 16. We never really had fewer than 14, all those big years and we'd be never more than 16 depending on the size.

RM [00:38:57] What hotel did you put up at?

JT [00:38:59] When I first started coming down here, the Niagara Hotel and the Regis, the old Regis Hotel, were the two hotels that northern people stayed at. Then the Ritz became our home for many, many years. Then after they tore the Ritz down—and they couldn't care—and they had the most beautiful rooms, huge rooms for partying. I used to ask for a really small room because after about the first two years, I'd see Mike Darnell got a small room. I couldn't figure out 'why is Mike getting a small room?' Then I end up with this huge room. Couldn't even see one end from the other end when you're lying in bed and that's because all the parties ended up in my room because I had the big room. I ended up getting a small room and told Mike he can have the large room. I figured this out. Socially we were tight and I think that made a huge difference. We were tight in our communities and we were tight within the union. I think some of that was when we went to a convention there, people from other unions we realized were much different than us and, and they would go and talk about ridiculous things. Our rank and file delegations thought 'why would anybody oppose a peace rally? Are you a nut? Why would you want to chop all the trees down in the province? Don't we think that—because with the IWA and ourselves, of course, we had many, many battles—we used to say we had a Local in every cove where there was a boat and we used to say they had a Local in every cove where there was a tree. (laughter)

RM [00:40:56] That was because you felt the logging endangered the habitat of the salmon.

JT [00:41:00] Oh yes. Of course, we ended up with resolutions at the Fed that were calling for no more clear-cut logging, without trying to come to any meeting of the minds with the IWA about what could look at. Later on we did. Later on we started working with a couple of locals on Vancouver Island, which also had Communist Party leadership.

RM [00:41:32] Sy Peterson.

JT [00:41:34] Started having a look at what we could do, not just say 'no clear-cutting,' but what we could do to refine those kinds of motions so they weren't just anti-logger. Now I suppose the logging industry and ourselves are in the same boat. Everybody hates

commercial fishermen. Everybody hates loggers. If you're a logger or a commercial fisherman, you know, (spitting sound) on you. That's really sad for a province that was built on the back of those two. It's not the fault of the fisherman or the logger of any of those policies. All those policies that were followed were policies that—many of those policies—were opposed by both the IWA and ourselves that have led to the destruction of both of our resources.

RM [00:42:18] One last question on the CP (Communist Party). How significant was red-baiting in terms of hampering your union, or was there also internal red-baiting and so on? Because most of the members, of course, wouldn't be members of the Communist Party.

JT [00:42:33] No, I don't really think there was any red-baiting. I was never red-baited. People would speak. The Tribune—the old Tribune—you go hand out the Tribune. But other people would hand out the Tribune, too. Sometimes people wouldn't know exactly what they were handing out was a organ of the Communist Party and somebody would tell them. I always tried to make sure that the UFAWU members knew what they were handing out, but they did anyway. That was a CP-paper. When you read it, they liked an article in it or two.

RM [00:43:15] It was very good. Sean Griffin did a great job. As a labour reporter, I'd often get really labour news because they covered labour. Even those obscure little disputes and all this sort of stuff. You could read the disputes where you knew there was a Communist union involved because suddenly this obscure speaker had a lot of prominence, but you just knew that when you were reading it, and you ignored the editorials from the east on peace. It was a very good newspaper.

JT [00:43:44] Yeah, oh, the Tribune was a good newspaper.

RM [00:43:47] Which reminds me, talk about the role of The Fisherman newspaper.

JT [00:43:51] Oh, Sean, imagine that, was also the editor of The Fisherman newspaper at the time.

RM [00:43:54] There were others before him, some guy named Meggs and Sinclair and Hal Griffin.

JT [00:43:59] Yeah oh yeah. You can go back—

RM [00:44:01] It actually played a significant role within the industry didn't it? I always heard that all the industry guys read it.

JT [00:44:07] Oh yes. And the death of The Fisherman's newspaper was one of the biggest mistakes that I think that we made since I took any kind of leadership role in the union, was allowing The Fisherman's paper to die. We should have cut staff rather than done that. Now we've cut staff and don't have a paper. We have no way of communicating what we're doing, either to our membership or to the bigger fleet in large, and that has really hampered organizing efforts. If we ever get back on our feet again, if we ever are going to make the leap from being this tiny little union to something that represents a power of the working-class being fishermen and shoreworkers within the commercial fishery, we're going to have to have a newspaper again. I tried to do something online, but it is really, really difficult if you don't have somebody who is dedicated to communicating and reporting, who's going to go to the meetings, who has an understanding. You can't just

send somebody to a meeting to report on a meeting if they don't understand what the information is in the media and then is able to write, and is able to write in a sense of writing for a newspaper, not writing a long-winded—

JT [00:45:36] We had Jim Sinclair, we had Geoff Meggs, we had Hal Griffin, we had Sean Griffin. Hal was, I think the editor of the paper just when I first started working for the union. Sean, yeah. They had Elias Stavrides and—geez I can't remember—I know I'm missing some people. I feel bad about that. The paper was so important. The companies all read it. Everybody read the newspaper.

RM [00:46:15] Because it had lots of information in it.

JT [00:46:16] It had THE information in it. It had the information that was important to shoreworkers and fishermen.

RM [00:46:28] And lots of ads.

JT [00:46:29] Well, the ads were important, too. When it was our ad revenue going down—and it was because the industry—the industry loses boats, you lose all kinds of, people start looking at sports fishermen, instead of commercial fishermen. Other people just went out of business. The ad revenue wasn't there for us anymore and that's the reason we shut down the paper. It was either that or start charging. The union had been backstopping it. It wasn't the cost of the actual newspaper. It was the cost of the reporters. It was costs of the staff. It was the salaries that—

RM [00:47:09] That's the whole thing. I want to touch on something we haven't touched on so far, and that's health and safety and fishing. The west coast fishing industry is considered one of the most dangerous industries and you must have seen a lot of that. Can you talk a bit about the dangers of fishing and what's happened in the past and stuff you remember?

JT [00:47:32] Well, I just went to a funeral last Saturday of another fisherman who died. He got pulled over the end of his boat wrapped in his net and caught in his net, pulled over the boat. My understanding is that the net got caught in the wheel, pulled him under. Fishermen were there and tried to pull him out, couldn't get him out in time. When they got him out they tried to work on him while he's going to shore and of course, it's always in a remote area where they're fishing. That was very sad for very, very many people because he was a well-liked Vietnamese-Canadian fisherman and he was a leader of the fishermen that fish for a Canadian fishing company. It was very, very, very, very sad.

RM [00:48:27] You must have been to more than one, though, in the past.

JT [00:48:30] Oh, I have been to many. When a boat goes down like a seine boat, you don't just lose one friend. You lose five friends. When a trawler goes down, you lose six or seven friends.

RM [00:48:44] They've gone down.

JT [00:48:46] They've gone down and I've lost those friends. I made my mind up never to marry a fisherman, and I didn't. When I had my second child—our second child—he's a carpenter and there's no carpentry work. Rupert was depressed that year, so he could get a job fishing. I said, 'don't because the only job in fishing—if you haven't been on a boat for

a while—you're not going to get the cook's job and you're going to go get one of the more dangerous jobs.' I just said, 'no, no, you stay home, look after the baby and our older boy, and I'll go work in the fish plant,' because I would not have him go out fishing because it was too dangerous. I just couldn't stand the knot in my stomach if he was going to go out. I've had way too many friends die and I think everybody in the fishing industry can say that. Boats blow up. People die in horrible fires. They fall overboard, never to be seen again. Not missed for an hour or two on deck of the boat. They get crunched by doors or gear or drum on a boat. They're hauled over by their nets. They fall overboard and their boat just keeps on going and they're left behind. They fall in and get too weak, they can't climb out of the water onto their boat, because even if they have a buoy that they can hang on to, they just don't have the strength because cold water just robs you of your strength right away. Many of my friends have died. Boats have sunk and they've died.

RM [00:50:39] Is there an indictment here of the industry or is it just part of the hazards of fishing?

JT [00:50:45] There's been a great deal of—there's Fish Safe. We used to have a committee that just dealt with safety, with our Standing Committee on Navigational Aids and Safety. As we became smaller and the industry became more aware and we started working with WCB (Worker's Compensation Board) and they started stealing our organizers, they became more aware really. I think the NDP government during the Clark government, WCB expanded its tentacles into the fishing industry and hasn't really looked back since then. There are certainly—I don't want to say boats are safer because I don't believe boats are safer now—I believe there's way more. The reason I don't think boats are safer now is because nobody has any money to spend on their boats, so they spend a lot of time jury-rigging stuff on the smaller boats, the boats that have to go through steamship inspection, the bigger boats are probably safer than they were before. There's drills on the bigger boats. None of the smaller boats that I'm aware of have a drill. Guy drills himself on what he's going to do if his boat catches on fire. He's going to grab a fire bucket that has—some of the rules are so ridiculous. One year somebody decided to go bust everybody—it wasn't WCB, it was somebody else, probably Transport Canada or somebody I don't know—none of the fire buckets on the gillnetters, none of them on any of the gillnetters met the WCB standards. They had to be white and they couldn't be used for anything else and they had to have the word fire on them in red. It was fishing two days a week, so guys had five days a week with nothing else to do and so they got paint and beer, and so one guy was in charge of—I guess it was a Tom Sawyer kind of thing—the guys that bought the beer and bought the paint didn't do the work or whatever. One guy, he painted them all white, all the buckets were lined up down the dock and he painted them all white. Then another guy had a pretty steady hand to begin with and he wrote FIRE on all these in red and the Coast Guard red paint. Then, of course, as more and more beer got drank, the FIRE started going at an angle and started dripping— They all had their fire buckets that year. I think that, though, that WCB and Fish Safe have both done a very, very good job in raising awareness of safety and what you need to do for personal safety. Boats all have blowers and sniffers on them now, or sniffers and blowers on them now. They didn't when I first started in the industry, which meant that a lot of boats blew up, because guys didn't have something on that told them that there was some fuel in the bilge and no sniffer and there's no blower, which is blowing out your bilge fumes before you start your engine. Those kinds of accidents are very rare now. But you can't deal with the weather and guys think that the weather's going to be different when they take off, or a freak wave hits them or their load—no matter how careful with it they are—changes, it shifts when they're because they hit a wave or I don't know, my friends have died from all sorts of reasons. You go outside, you take a pee off the edge of the boat and

a big wave hits and you go over and because you were just in the galley, you're not wearing your life jacket, work on the deck of a boat. Now most guys wear life jackets when they work on the deck of a boat. But, if you're standing on the back of the boat and you don't put your life jacket on before you go out and take a leak over the side, you could be gone. And that's how many of my friends have died.

RM [00:55:26] Do you remember the herring? You know, one of those herring seasons when so many boats were lost?

JT [00:55:32] Yeah, I think it was just when I started working for the union.

RM [00:55:36] Yeah. What was that like?

RM [00:55:40] Every time there's a loss, a big loss of life—like the Cap Rouge went down—there was a big Transport Canada had a huge look at it. When the draggers Scotia Bay went down there was a lot of people that looked into that. There's a lot of things you can say in the end, but fishing is dangerous. It's just a dangerous job. You can have your survival suits on board. You can have your life jacket on. If you get hooked on some gear that's going down, you're going to go down with the gear. No matter if you have a life jacket on or not. Most of the guys are fishing with a smaller and smaller crew because they're paying quota payments and so they want a smaller crew so they can make some money.

RM [00:56:40] Are there any women who fish?

JT [00:56:43] Oh, yes, there's women that fish, but there's—

RM [00:56:47] As skippers or?

JT [00:56:50] I don't know any women right now that are seine skippers. Probably—if I put my—I probably could think of one or two in the past. Certainly for gillnetters and trollers, there were women. Now there are, you would find women mostly as, a handful of women run their own gillnetters. You'll mostly find women on the decks of seine boats.

RM [00:57:19] Has that been a struggle or is it just the nature of fishing that there aren't more women?

JT [00:57:26] I think it is the nature of fishing, it's a tough job. Remember you're sleeping in close, close quarters. I'm not so sure. When I was young, I thought going out fishing would be really cool. To fish and then I looked at fishing on a seine boat, never appealed to me, ever, because I just couldn't imagine being in a fo'c'sle with four stinky guys. It just never appealed to me. I think that that gillnetters—mostly gillnetters—work alone or they work with somebody and so lots of times a husband and wife team would start out and then the wife would get her own boat. Then they would have two boats.

RM [00:58:12] That's the way the First Nations fished back in like 1900. The guy would fish and she would row the boat kind of a thing.

JT [00:58:23] I think lots of women go on boats with their husbands in gillnetters. In fact, that's what most of the crew was, the wives and kids of the fishermen on the gillnetter. On a seiner, lots of times wives did go out as well. They went out as cooks, but now I think

you see more and more women on the decks of seine boats as, not just cooks. I don't know why I say 'just cooks' because that's a difficult job, but in other positions as well.

RM [00:58:57] Do you represent any fishermen anymore?

JT [00:58:59] Oh yeah. We represent—

RM [00:59:01] Like they sign up?

JT [00:59:03] Oh yeah, sign up and pay their dues. A new guy just signed.

RM [00:59:06] How many do you have?

JT [00:59:07] Well, I think we probably have 300 gillnetters and 300 seiners and probably 10 trollers.

RM [00:59:20] Wow.

JT [00:59:21] Trollers are always harder to organize.

RM [00:59:24] Why would they join the union? I mean, what do you do for them?

JT [00:59:27] I think it depends which section you're looking at and which area you're looking at. The gillnetters join because of the access issues. They still have huge access issues. They also join because they know it's better to talk to each other and work out problems to their access issues so they're speaking with one voice, not 20 voices. Then northern gillnetters can talk to southern gillnetters, so there's sort of this community of interest. What we've been saying to fishermen is, 'there is no boss, there is nobody who sits at the top—certainly not me—and tells fishermen what to do. You guys have to get together and make your own decisions. This is a place if you pay money to that can facilitate, but nobody can facilitate this without cash, so you have to put some cash on the barrelhead to have somebody that can organize your meetings, so that you can direct staff what to do.' That is what a union is, when the membership tell the staff what to do, not the staff tell the membership what to do. I think with the seine fishermen, they're interested in their share agreement and prices.

RM [01:00:47] You just won that Labour Relations Board decision.

JT [01:00:51] Yeah, and I think that fishermen want to make a living. For seine fishermen, it's price and share agreements. They want to talk about licensing too, because they don't want to have to start paying a lot of money to Canadian Fish, to go fishing. Because Canadian Fish owns access to the resource through licenses and quotas. Canadian Fish isn't the only one—there's other companies—it just happens to be the biggest. Those are the seine issues I would say is certainly quota payments, share agreements and prices and licensing. I think in the gillnet fleet, licensing is an issue, but it's not as big as an issue because there's no quota fisheries in any of the gillnet fleets. They've managed to stay away from that. They've managed to come to the conclusion collectively that it's really stupid to pay somebody to stay at home (laughter) and fish when you're getting his fish if you're staying at home anyway? Why would you pay him for it? If he's made the decision to stay at home, his fish just go back in the pool. You shouldn't have to pay for his fish. Most gillnetters are looking at it that way. They need access and they're the bad boys, they're the 'walls of death.' Carl Walters called them 'walls of death' and people picked that

up. There's certainly the sports fishermen target on the gillnet fleet, so they feel very beleaguered and they want to have these discussions on how to access more fish so that they're really fishing plans and accessing more fish. Seine boats are also about accessing more fish, but Canadian Fish isn't speaking for them. They have felt—not the access to fish issue as much—as sharply as gillnetters have, who don't have the company's backing for the most part for access.

RM [01:03:13] So is anyone still making a living?

JT [01:03:17] You can make a living in the commercial fishery if you fish more than one species.

RM [01:03:22] Yeah. I was going to ask you about that. How that's changed?

JT [01:03:25] Well, it's changing back to where it was when I first started. When I first started, there was just an A-license and you fished everything. In a year when salmon was good, well, you didn't have to, you took your family to Hawaii or Mexico on your salmon earnings. When herring was really, really, really good for those two years? You'd fish, salmon and herring, maybe you only fished herring. You didn't even bother going on set. Maybe you took a summertime holiday, but most fishermen didn't, they fish both herring and salmon. Then guys would go fish halibut—put a little extra money in their pockets—although there were people who were just dedicated halibut fishermen, but they could also go fishing, seining if they wanted to and many halibut fishermen did, or gillnetting. Fishermen had in their minds what their boats are built for and what kind of a boat they bought. Certain boats were in a certain shape to be a troller, certain boats were in certain shapes to be gillnetters or seiners. Certain boats were in certain shapes to be crab boats or halibut boats. The shape of the boat mattered. You get a boat that could do everything and it wasn't really a great boat for anything. You could have built a boat that was great at trolling, but for gillnetting wouldn't catch very much fish. Most guys kind of had a speciality, but they were also able to—in years of low abundance on one species—go try to rely on another species to make a little extra money. Then after DFO (Department of Fisheries and Oceans) decided—really in the late '80s and really heavy in the '90s—to split off all of the species from the A-license, so the A-license, which used to be an all-species license, became a salmon-only license. Like we've talked about, the salmon-only license where you could fish the whole coast and you could fish if you're a seiner, you could fish three gears. If you were gillnetter and troller, you could fish two gears if you wanted, and you could fish the whole coast. Then down into this ghettoization of fishermen into one area with one gear, unless they had enough money to buy themselves out and then their capital costs went up. What do I think for the future? I think climate change has brought this discussion—I think this year particularly has brought this discussion—on to us now, and we've been having discussions over the last three or four years about licensing and the impacts. The fleet has sharply been having these discussions over the last year, because of the proposed Fisheries Act changes for the East Coast, and whether those should also be applied to the West Coast. We've been having these discussions on this coast. Fishermen have been having these discussions amongst themselves, and there's been a campaign, there's been a FOPO (Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans) report. These discussions were being held on 'what is good for me now,' with a perceived idea that everybody—if we just got rid of the quota costs—everybody would be doing fine. Well the thing is, if you get rid of the quota costs, you will be doing way better because you'll be able to fish without having to pay somebody for the privilege of fishing. But, now when you're looking at climate change, that puts an extra layer on those licensing discussions. So it is now, the discussion needs to be 'okay, do we still want to pay investors in the

fishing industry for access to our fish?' That's the question that fishermen were dealing with. Do you want to pay investors for the ability to access fish or do you want to have to go lease license? Do you want to have to go lease quota from somebody who is just an investor staying on shore, who got their feet up? Maybe they're a doctor or a lawyer or maybe they're another retired fisherman, or a fish plant. Do you want to do that? Then the secondary question is do we want to change the whole licensing system to make—including not having to lease access or buy access through a license into the fishery—so that you can now go back to having multi-licenses in order that if there's climate change you're able to take advantage of a species that—because the species aren't all going to go up and down at the same time. Crabs did exceedingly well last year in the North Coast and crew shares of $80,000 are normal this year. Yeah, big money and on the northern crabs this year.

RM [01:08:13] Wow! How are we doing for time?

DS [01:08:14] Probably should wrap up.

RM [01:08:14] Okay. Let me just ask you then. Let's end on a fun note, maybe. Listening to you talk about the old days. You must feel in a way—despite all the struggles, and maybe because of all the struggles—you've kind of blessed that you've experienced all that, and were part of it, when you look

JT [01:08:32] Oh, I can't think of a career that I would of rather have had. I can't think of a career that I would have rather have had. This career that I've had, and this union has made the opportunities for me. I've been a lawyer when I'm in pretend-lawyer, when I'm in arbitrations. I've represented people in courts. I've written so many WCB appeals that they fall out of my ears. That's kind of satisfies that side of me. Then, you go out on the floats and you get to talk to fishermen or going to plants and talk to shoreworkers, deal with their problems, whether it's problems with the Fisheries Department or whether it's problems with on the plant level.

RM [01:09:17] They're not your ordinary people, right?

JT [01:09:21] Well, they're not your ordinary people and the industry is so politicized. It's not an ordinary industry. You have to know everything about fish biology if you're ever—fish biology and fish management—it's just very challenging and it's been very rewarding, other than seeing the demise of the industry. That is—and I see the shrinking of the union as—just really a reflection of what's happened to the industry. It's just sharper for us because of the things that have happened to the industry that were DFO-driven, such as the splitting of fishermen into different small little groups, then creating these—

RM [01:10:02] On a personal level, all those characters that you got to know?

JT [01:10:04] Oh, yes. Well, on a personal level I can think of so many things that make me feel warm and fuzzy. I can remember Homer talking over the radiophone in code and us trying to figure out what the code was, (laughter) so I ask a question, but everybody in the world can hear that you're on the VHF (Very High Frequency). I can remember setting up radio conferences, coast-wide radio conferences, using VHF through all of the BC Tel radio stations on the coast. You gotta say, 'any boats on Gill Island? Gill Island 13. Any boats on Gill Island? What about' whatever the next Telus station was, and you go down the whole coast. I remember going up to the top of Mount Hays with Bruce Logan, we drove up in the car. It's a mountain behind Prince Rupert, and it has a bunch of

communications towers on it. We found that we could speak further if we went up—not just because we think, the theory is, not just because it was fun and I needed a 4X4 to get up there—but it was because the skip from the other stations carried your signal out so we could talk on the VHF out there in the fleet. I'm remembering couple of times in 1982, '82, '90, 1992 was one of the years we did it for sure, and it just made the hair stand up on our arms. It was taking a strike vote of the fleet just before they went fishing. 'Are they going to fish or are they going to come in?' It wasn't like a strike vote. 'Are you fishing or are you coming in?' Just call every single boat. In 1992, there was sill probably 300 seine boats and you're calling out 300 names. 'Are you coming in?' 'Yep, we're coming in.' 'You coming in?' 'Yep, we're coming in.' And the hair just goes, and then you just watch these boats just come back in. That was just incredibly powerful and you just looked at it and you thought, 'the shoreworkers walked a plant over an issue.' They would walk the plant and I can remember Emily Brown just moving an arm like that. (gestures) Everybody just shut down the machines and the plant emptied, and it would be done in such an orderly fashion and done immediately. Nobody was ever left behind in there. Everybody walked. Those pictures of the shoreworkers walking out of those plants are real. Those really, really happened. Those hundreds shoreworkers, 500 shoreworkers on a shift just, out of a plant in less time than if you'd had a fire drill. I remember picket lines and the workers in the kitchen putting together coffee and Baker Boy in Rupert giving us doughnuts to take to the picket lines—

RM [01:13:04] Ha, ha, ha, you've got to wrap it up.

JT [01:13:06] Wonder, we had a wonderful time.

RM [01:13:07] We could listen to this forever but you've got to go.

JT [01:13:09] Yes, I have a flight to catch.

RM [01:13:10] And boy, that's great again, Joy.