

Interview: Henry van der Wiel (HvdW)
Interviewer: Rod Mickelburgh (RW)
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Transcription: Pam Moodie

RM [00:00:06] So that's a Dutch name. Even I can figure that out.

HvdW [00:00:08] Yeah.

RM [00:00:09] So your parents were Dutch, obviously?

HvdW [00:00:12] Yeah.

RM [00:00:12] And what brought them to Canada?

HvdW [00:00:16] I had an uncle that had come over a few years earlier and talked about how great it was. They were (unclear) land in New Brunswick or something at first.

RM [00:00:27] Yeah.

HvdW [00:00:28] And I got on the train and kept on going.

RM [00:00:31] And you ended up in Smithers?

HvdW [00:00:33] Landed up in Houston, actually.

RM [00:00:34] Oh, Houston.

HvdW [00:00:35] That's where my uncle and aunt were.

RM [00:00:39] What were they doing up there, farming?

HvdW [00:00:41] Actually, that was their intent, but there was so little land cleared that they did a little bit of farming, but most of it was all logging, bush work.

RM [00:00:49] Yeah. Yeah. It's a funny place for someone from Holland to end up though, isn't it?

HvdW [00:00:54] Yeah. But actually, if you look at Smithers, over half of the community, I think is actually from Holland.

RM [00:01:00] Really? I didn't know that about Smithers.

HvdW [00:01:02] Started clearing land and whatnot. They come over as, well as farmers. Half of them were actually loggers. It was just more and more family came.

RM [00:01:13] Do you know that former Canuck defenceman, Hamhuis?

HvdW [00:01:16] Yeah.

RM [00:01:17] He's from Smithers. Is that a Dutch name?

HvdW [00:01:19] Yeah.

RM [00:01:20] So, he's part of that.

HvdW [00:01:21] Yeah.

RM [00:01:22] Wow. That's interesting. All right, so you. Did you grow up in Smithers?

HvdW [00:01:26] I was born in Smithers and grew up in Houston, actually. I was there until 1966.

RM [00:01:31] Oh, you were in the hospital? Probably, too.

HvdW [00:01:32] That's the only hospital there was in the country.

RM [00:01:35] And your parents? Your dad was a logger?

HvdW [00:01:37] Yeah, that's where he ended up being, yeah, because there was no farmland there to speak of.

RM [00:01:43] Right. And what brought you to Prince Rupert?

HvdW [00:01:49] My wife's half-brother was actually here, and they'd been up there hunting a few trips. And I come out here to go fishing, a fish trip with them on the boat. And then one long weekend went out with him on the boat, and then the next week there was a skipper and half of his crew ended up in jail for the weekend and he needed crew members. So I helped with him and spent the rest of the season working on his boat. And from there on I moved up and—.

RM [00:02:25] So what year was that, Henry?

HvdW [00:02:28] '63.

RM [00:02:28] Wow. You go way back. So you got that taste of fishing and you stuck with it.

HvdW [00:02:36] Yeah.

RM [00:02:37] And what did. What attracted you to fishing?

HvdW [00:02:41] I don't know. It was enjoyable. It was actually pretty fair money compared to what they were making up country and working in the sawmills and that, you know.

RM [00:02:50] And so originally you were a crew?

HvdW [00:02:53] Yeah.

RM [00:02:54] Was it on a gillnetter or a seiner?

HvdW [00:02:56] A seiner. Yeah.

RM [00:02:57] And how long did you crew?

HvdW [00:03:03] Oh, it's gotta be, seven, eight years, I guess it was.

RM [00:03:07] And then you got your own boat or not?

HvdW [00:03:08] I bought a gillnetter.

RM [00:03:11] Yeah.

HvdW [00:03:11] I bought it out of an estate. Started gillnetting.

RM [00:03:17] And how did that go?

HvdW [00:03:18] And that went not too bad. It was quite a little learning experience. Had some good coaches.

RM [00:03:26] What was the toughest thing to learn? Where to be?

HvdW [00:03:34] Where to be. When not to be out there.

RM [00:03:37] Yeah, yeah.

HvdW [00:03:38] Well, actually it wasn't that tough. Because you learned that in a hurry.

RM [00:03:42] Yeah.

HvdW [00:03:43] Get caught a couple times, and—

RM [00:03:44] You learn. But you liked it?

HvdW [00:03:51] I liked it, yeah.

RM [00:03:51] And you preferred that? Owning your own boat than working on a seiner?

HvdW [00:03:56] Yeah. I didn't mind the seine work. I've actually been with some real good crews. I enjoyed it.

RM [00:04:01] Yeah.

HvdW [00:04:02] It was just that I wanted to experience, get a little more than just a couple of months in the summertime. So I had a boat with a salmon licence and a, well, at one time the salmon licence covered everything.

RM [00:04:16] Right.

HvdW [00:04:17] But then I started shrimping because the guy that had the boat shrimped with it. So I did that in the wintertime.

RM [00:04:18] That was what?

HvdW [00:04:18] So, I shrimped with it.

RM [00:04:18] Oh, shrimped. Sorry, I am getting old.

HvdW [00:04:31] That's all right. I've got a hearing aid too.

RM [00:04:33] No, no. Would you tell me. I'm the one who should be apologizing. Donna heard you. Anyway. And when you started, you know, that summer on your first seiner, were you a member the union, did you have to join the union?

HvdW [00:04:48] I did, yeah. So, yeah. That first summer, we only had a few weeks left here and then I went over to the Charlottes. So I didn't get signed up but the next spring just as when I went fishing.

RM [00:05:01] But you still got the crew share and that was all above board.

HvdW [00:05:04] Yeah. Yeah.

RM [00:05:05] And so you didn't have to sign up with the union, or did you?

HvdW [00:05:08] No, I didn't have to. There was some of them that didn't but, no, I wanted to be a part of it.

RM [00:05:14] Why?

HvdW [00:05:16] I'd actually got terminated on the job in Houston where I talked to an oldtimer that talked union. We tried to get the union into a sawmill there and then they found out that I was the instigator because the guy had brought a bunch of Portuguese over as labourers, and on the greenchain and that, and they were interested in joining a union.

RM [00:05:42] Yeah.

HvdW [00:05:44] But then one of my fellow countrymen kinda squealed and said I was the one that was behind it when the talks started, so—

RM [00:05:52] They fired you?

HvdW [00:05:55] Yeah.

RM [00:05:56] Where was the union, to allow this to happen? Was it a non-union plant?

HvdW [00:06:00] It wasn't, it was a non-union plant.

RM [00:06:01] Oh. So you were hoping to organize.

HvdW [00:06:03] Yeah. I had a few upshoot guys from the prairie that I had talked to that were the same age as my parents, or maybe a little more. And, he's the one that actually got me going on it a little bit.

RM [00:06:19] So your first union experience got you fired?

HvdW [00:06:22] Yeah.

RM [00:06:24] Okay. And so what did you think of the UFAWU when you first joined?

HvdW [00:06:30] Well, it was new because I never really belonged to a union.

RM [00:06:33] Yeah, right.

HvdW [00:06:34] Tried to get one going, you know.

RM [00:06:35] Positive?

HvdW [00:06:40] Yeah. Met some really good people. Some great people, really.

RM [00:06:45] Like who?

HvdW [00:06:47] Well, there's, I'm trying to think of them. There's so many of them because I was on the GEB— General Executive Board—for quite a few years.

RM [00:06:48] Oh, you were? Well, you knew Homer?

HvdW [00:07:02] I knew Homer very well. Jack Nichol.

RM [00:07:05] Yeah. Procopation?

HvdW [00:07:08] Bill Proco, yeah.

RM [00:07:11] Yeah. Everyone liked Proco. Bert Ogden?

HvdW [00:07:14] Bert Ogden, yeah. And, actually I fished with him after he quit.

RM [00:07:18] Was he a good fisherman?

HvdW [00:07:20] He was pretty good at it, cause I think he liked to fish—

RM [00:07:22] Liked to talk.

HvdW [00:07:23] Fished before he got into. Yeah. Before he took a job with the union. He had fished before that.

RM [00:07:29] Yeah, yeah, yeah. And so, what was your impression of Homer?

HvdW [00:07:39] Oh. He had his opinions sometimes.

RM [00:07:42] You think?

HvdW [00:07:46] He had some good positions. Once in a while you'd think he went a little—

RM [00:07:51] Far?

HvdW [00:07:52] Over a little bit. Yeah. But, other than that he meant well with whatever he did. That was what—

RM [00:07:59] Well, they eventually eased him out, didn't they?

HvdW [00:08:01] Pardon?

RM [00:08:01] They eventually eased him out didn't they?

HvdW [00:08:04] Yeah, I think he was to where he wanted to finish his life off in the fishing industry anyway, back on the boat. He seemed to really enjoy it.

RM [00:08:18] Yeah, that was neat. You know—

HvdW [00:08:20] There was an awful lot of pressure on him.

RM [00:08:21] Yeah, well we all enjoyed the fact he was fishing, and then he, when he fished, he put his net down at the wrong time or something. Anyway, he got nabbed, and had to pay a fine or something.

HvdW [00:08:32] Yeah, I think that was over in the Charlottes.

RM [00:08:33] Yeah. It'd been a while since he'd fished, so people got a good chuckle out of that. Well, you fished with him?

HvdW [00:08:42] Well, beside him. He had his boat, I had mine.

RM [00:08:45] Yeah. Was he, was Homer a good fisherman?

HvdW [00:08:47] Yeah, he was a pretty fair fisherman. He worked at it. Yeah.

RM [00:08:51] Was he fishing with his son?

HvdW [00:08:54] John and Nick, yeah.

RM [00:08:56] Yeah. Yeah.

HvdW [00:08:58] Bruce was on the seine boats.

RM [00:09:00] Oh, ok, yeah, I know. I knew about Bruce. So, even though Homer had been away from it for a while and, you know, made that mistake or two early, he picked it up pretty well, eh?

HvdW [00:09:13] Yeah. Actually, I think one of the mistakes was a sort of an intentional one that was over in the Queen Charlottes there when we were trying to get an opening and, it was a bit of a protest.

RM [00:09:29] Oh, that would be Homer. Was he respected by the guys?

HvdW [00:09:35] Pardon?

RM [00:09:35] Was he respected by the guys?

HvdW [00:09:37] A lot of them. The ones that didn't respect him were the ones that thought he was a radical and didn't like what—

RM [00:09:43] Well, he was a radical.

HvdW [00:09:44] And, and they didn't like his political—that had more to do with it than anything, I think.

RM [00:09:53] Because he was good for the union, wasn't he?

HvdW [00:09:55] He was. Well, he sure meant to do good anyway. And I mean, there was always the General Executive Board, if they thought he was out of line they would— it was discussed with the leadership.

RM [00:10:09] Did you, and you probably, there were times when you had to rein him in.

HvdW [00:10:15] No, I was too junior for that.

RM [00:10:17] Okay.

HvdW [00:10:18] Yeah. That was the job of some of them that were a little more outspoken.

RM [00:10:22] What did you think of his politics?

HvdW [00:10:25] Oh, there's an awful lot of good there.

RM [00:10:31] Well, because people said the Communist Union controlled the fishermen's union.

HvdW [00:10:36] Um, no, that wasn't a big, it was the guys with the ideals, I guess that spoke out in the industry. The biggest part of the executive and whatnot were not members of the Party.

RM [00:10:51] Yeah.

HvdW [00:10:54] And that was an experience. I actually belonged to the Party for a while too. I had joined. George Hewison was the—

RM [00:11:01] Yes. Just in time for it to fall apart.

HvdW [00:11:06] Yeah. (laughter)

RM [00:11:06] Well, that was the thing about the Communist Party and the Fishermen's Union. Yes, and to some extent, it was, I mean, they found jobs for people, you know, that was going on. But if they weren't a good union, in an industry like the fishing industry, you know, they were—people didn't become members of the UFAWU because they were Communists.

HvdW [00:11:30] No.

RM [00:11:30] They joined because they represented the members.

HvdW [00:11:33] They represented the membership and negotiated our contracts and whatnot.

RM [00:11:37] And that wasn't easy.

HvdW [00:11:39] Worked hard. No, that sure as heck wasn't. Especially when you had someone that would go fishing while you were tied to the dock.

RM [00:11:44] Yeah. And uniting all the different gear, uh, tendermen, and the shore workers, and the fishermen. I mean, that is not easy.

HvdW [00:11:52] No.

RM [00:11:53] And so that was Homer's big thing too, I think. So were you around for the 1967 strike?

HvdW [00:11:59] I was. I was quite involved in that.

RM [00:12:02] So talk about that. What was that like?

HvdW [00:12:09] I don't know. It created a lot of splits between a lot of the people. I went through that. There are people I haven't talked to since then.

RM [00:12:24] Really? Who supported the Co-op?

HvdW [00:12:28] Yeah. I'd say some of them that were on our side, actually, one of them when I first started, because I used to work construction and whatnot, and wasn't aware of what was actually going on until a guy said, 'Hey, why don't you come down and do picket duty?' And I said, 'Sure.' So I went down after work and was a few times I ended up late for work. Your relief didn't show up at midnight, you know. Yeah, when we got to actually, when the guys that asked me to come down to picket duty, ended up walking across the picket line, and he asked me to come and stand with him.

RM [00:13:15] Really? And is that one of the guys you never talked to afterwards?

HvdW [00:13:20] Yeah.

RM [00:13:21] You never talk to a scab, I guess, eh?

HvdW [00:13:24] No, not if I knew he was.

RM [00:13:28] So what were some of, what was it like on the picket line?

HvdW [00:13:32] Well, it was a hell of a lot of camaraderie as far as the ones on the picket line were concerned.

RM [00:13:38] But were the police there?

HvdW [00:13:40] Quite a bit, yeah.

RM [00:13:43] And was there like fighting and stuff?

HvdW [00:13:45] There was no fighting, we just, you know. Make sure that everybody stayed. And there was no one actually (unclear) picket signs and whatnot. I'd never seen any vandalism or anything going on.

RM [00:14:04] At one point, Homer got arrested.

HvdW [00:14:06] He did. That was for defying an order.

RM [00:14:10] No, there was that one. There was that but there was one time, at least he talks about it in his book, when he and Hewison and somebody else were picked up by the RCMP and held for about 10 hours in the local jail and then released without charge. You don't remember that, I guess?

HvdW [00:14:30] Likely. I was pretty involved with that whole thing. It's likely something that slipped my mind. I remember them all plus a couple of fishermen they picked up because—

RM [00:14:40] And Hewison was around then, looking, looking about twelve probably.

HvdW [00:14:43] Yeah, cause I remember one guy saying when George was making a speech when the auditorium was full of fishermen. And he said, 'Holy God, who hung that punk up?'

RM [00:15:03] (laughter) People were asking that for years.

HvdW [00:15:04] (laughter) he'd never heard George before.

RM [00:15:08] Or. That's very funny. Well, he wasn't really a fisherman, was he?

HvdW [00:15:15] Yeah.

RM [00:15:16] He was a fisherman?

HvdW [00:15:18] Who, George?

RM [00:15:18] Yeah.

[00:15:19] I actually don't know what he's— I think he did because he come from around Rivers Inlet, that's where he grew up.

RM [00:15:25] Oh, he did? okay.

HvdW [00:15:27] So it was sure he was involved in it.

RM [00:15:31] But there is an example where the Party would have found, got him into that position, I would think.

HvdW [00:15:35] Likely because he was so outspoken.

RM [00:15:38] But he could speak. There's no question about that.

HvdW [00:15:40] There's no two ways about it. Yeah, and he actually did a lot of reading, and did a lot of research.

RM [00:15:46] Yeah, yeah.

HvdW [00:15:46] When you talk to him about something, he knew about it.

RM [00:15:49] Yeah, he was a smart guy. Yeah. He's a good musician, too.

HvdW [00:15:54] Fantastic.

RM [00:15:54] He could sing.

HvdW [00:15:54] He had a voice like you wouldn't believe.

RM [00:15:56] Yeah, yeah, yeah. Did he, do you remember him playing songs during that '60s.

HvdW [00:16:01] Playing the guitar.

RM [00:16:01] Yeah. Raised the old spirits on the picket line. Yeah. Wow.

HvdW [00:16:06] Solidarity Forever.

RM [00:16:07] Yeah. All right. So. I have to ask you, as you know, The Marching Mothers, tell me about The Marching Mothers.

HvdW [00:16:20] They didn't have a very good name in town, with union members anyway.

RM [00:16:26] But what were they like? You know, who were they?

HvdW [00:16:31] More or less the vessel owners. And actually, it wasn't just vessel owners. Some of the merchants uptown, their wives and one of those storeowners was the upper echelon that was in there. They had a pretty good issue there, fighting the Communists.

RM [00:16:48] But they were marching every day.

HvdW [00:16:51] Yeah, well, actually marching, they were driving around more in their pretty fancy cars than they were marching. They did a few marches, but—

RM [00:17:03] But they harassed you on the picket line?

HvdW [00:17:05] And yeah, actually where I was it wasn't too bad.

RM [00:17:09] When Homer talks about them being, some guys were spit on and called bad names, 'Get the reds out of town.'

HvdW [00:17:18] Along the waterfront. I was down at the Co-op end then mostly. Yeah, they weren't nice.

RM [00:17:26] And that really split the community too, didn't it?

HvdW [00:17:29] It did, it did a big job. Yeah, because one was a scab bar and the other one was the Savoy Hotel is where was most of the scabs hung out and drank. The rest of them were in the Rupert Inn.

RM [00:17:48] Yeah. Yeah. And so tell me about Iona Campagnolo?

HvdW [00:17:54] 'I own a camper trailer.'

RM [00:17:55] What's that?

HvdW [00:17:56] 'I own a camper trailer.'

RM [00:17:58] Why do you call her 'I own a camper trailer?'

HvdW [00:17:59] Oh, that was for Campagnolo.

[00:18:02] Oh, but I mean, she was a figure in town. What was your impression?

HvdW [00:18:06] She had a brother that was across on the other side of the picket line.

RM [00:18:10] But wasn't she married to a fishing guy?

HvdW [00:18:12] She was. They split up, yeah.

RM [00:18:14] But had they split up by then?

HvdW [00:18:19] I think it was pretty close, yeah. He was actually a pile driver who was a union guy too.

RM [00:18:25] Well, I thought he was a fish, he fished too.

HvdW [00:18:28] He fished but he belonged to the Pile Drivers Union, I remember, and then he moved to Smithers.

RM [00:18:33] Oh he did. Yeah. Did you know him? What was he like?

HvdW [00:18:38] He was a hell of a nice guy.

RM [00:18:40] Yeah.

HvdW [00:18:40] Yeah.

RM [00:18:41] And Iona, you know, she was fed up with him, I guess?

HvdW [00:18:45] I don't know if it was, Iona being fed up or him having to live with somebody that was against what he stood for.

RM [00:18:54] Really? You think that was part of it?

HvdW [00:18:56] I think that was—I've got a feeling that played a part.

RM [00:19:00] Well, and she went on to become famous.

HvdW [00:19:04] In her own little circle, yeah.

RM [00:19:07] Well, I mean, was she a federal Liberal cabinet minister and all that stuff. And then Lieutenant Governor. And she, would she know you if you, if you ran into her?

HvdW [00:19:18] Oh, I think so.

RM [00:19:18] Did you ever have any personal run-ins with her?

HvdW [00:19:22] No. Just been at meetings where she was at. She was at the Fishermen's Hall, as a matter of fact, making a speech once. That didn't do a whole lot of weight for her.

RM [00:19:34] Is this when she was a politician? Yeah. Because people would remember. Did they ask her about it?

HvdW [00:19:44] Well, I remember the one lady. She was quite a—she was a shoreworker.

RM [00:19:49] Yeah.

HvdW [00:19:50] And Iona was trying to get this message across. She said, 'Iona, you're full of shit!', (laughter) and you got a fair bit of applause.

RM [00:20:02] Well, in a town like Prince Rupert right, you don't forget these things. But that was a tough strike, wasn't it?

HvdW [00:20:12] It was. It was hard on a lot of people.

RM [00:20:13] Yeah. And you lost it. You took a beating.

HvdW [00:20:17] Well, politics more than anything.

RM [00:20:19] Yeah, but the union was decertified at the Co-op?

HvdW [00:20:24] Pardon?

RM [00:20:24] The union was decertified at the Co-op?

HvdW [00:20:26] Yeah, the Co-op. Yeah.

RM [00:20:27] You know, I mean, that was a strong UFAWU local. What happened there? Did they just have too much pressure put on them?

HvdW [00:20:35] I think it was, because, you know, the Co-op, well, most of the Co-op members were vessel owners and whatnot.

RM [00:20:44] Yes.

HvdW [00:20:45] So it was more of a—it was almost like any other company—big money managed it and run it.

RM [00:20:51] They lost their cooperative spirit.

HvdW [00:20:53] Yeah. Yeah. The almighty dollar. And then they—people they could intimidate down there.

RM [00:21:03] Because some of them lost their jobs didn't they?

HvdW [00:21:06] Yeah. Actually a lot of them worked for the union after that I think. Ray Gardiner I believe was—

RM [00:21:12] You know him?

DS [00:21:14] Ray is my father-in-law.

HvdW [00:21:15] Oh is he?

DS [00:21:16] Or was.

HvdW [00:21:20] Yeah. Because it was about that time that Ray, cause Ray did work down there, didn't he?

DS [00:21:23] Yeah.

RM [00:21:26] Is he a good guy? Ray Gardiner?

HvdW [00:21:30] I worked with him for a while cause I worked as an organizer here for a year. Yeah, and yeah, I got along with him 100 percent, actually. Well then he was reluctant to really—he could have—but he always felt, I guess he was stepping on somebody's toes. He was being a little stronger than the leadership, me being as a greenhorn, I had to find some things out on my own. But the thing is any time I got into trouble he was there to back me up.

RM [00:22:07] Good guy. And what was it like being an organizer for the UFAWU? Were you organizing the fishermen? So going out on the water to get them to sign up?

HvdW [00:22:18] Yeah. Fishermen and I worked in the shore plants a little bit.

RM [00:22:20] Okay.

HvdW [00:22:22] Because of this, we had our northern rep, who was Ray at that time, because I took over from George Hewison.

RM [00:22:30] Yeah.

HvdW [00:22:31] So that was a big, big draw too, trying to fill his boots. Well, I never could have filled his boots, but he left a big, big hole when he left.

RM [00:22:42] Why do you say that? He was just a kid.

HvdW [00:22:46] He had a way of talking to people a lot better than I did. I was a little laid back and George just said it like it was.

RM [00:23:00] So what do you remember about your time organizing?

HvdW [00:23:05] Um, I had a few of them that threatened to throw me off the dock.

RM [00:23:10] Who? Who was that? Who threatened you?

HvdW [00:23:12] He's not here anymore. He was a big guy, and he was actually sort of the deck boss and the guy he was working for at that time had the Lily Mack II, I think it was. And he was actually a big, big shareholder. He was sitting in some high-rise apartment in Vancouver, leasing his licences out. I am trying to think of his name.

RM [00:23:44] But he threatened to throw you in.

HvdW [00:23:46] Yeah, I come down and try to talk to the crew. Because that was halibut, and they were just giving and he was taking end-breakers just about every trip.

RM [00:23:56] He was what?

HvdW [00:23:57] Taking what they call end-breakers.

RM [00:23:59] What's that?

HvdW [00:24:00] And that's where somebody was just learning.

RM [00:24:02] Oh, yes.

HvdW [00:24:03] So they pay them whatever they please.

RM [00:24:06] Oh yes.

HvdW [00:24:07] Give him 200 or 300 bucks for the trip or whatever, when they should have had about 3,000 or 4,000 or more.

RM [00:24:14] Oh yeah.

HvdW [00:24:14] And then if they didn't quite make it, the deal was that after two trips, if the guy don't, if the crew doesn't think he's up to snuff, we're supposed to let him go. But this guy here, if he could keep an end-breaker all summer, he did. But he never paid full-share or anything.

RM [00:24:33] Yeah, yeah. Did he, but it was a hollow threat. He didn't throw you off the dock?

HvdW [00:24:41] No.

RM [00:24:44] So is it a well-run union, the UFAWU?

HvdW [00:24:48] I think so. I had some great, great members, some great guys in the leadership.

RM [00:24:53] Yeah. Yeah. Jack Nichol.

HvdW [00:24:57] Scotty.

RM [00:24:57] Oh, Scotty Neish?

HvdW [00:24:59] Scotty Neish

RM [00:25:00] Scotty Neish, right. You knew Scotty?

HvdW [00:25:02] I knew Scotty quite well.

RM [00:25:04] Tell us about him. He was a real old-timer.

HvdW [00:25:08] He was. Yeah.

RM [00:25:09] And firebrand.

HvdW [00:25:13] Yeah. He was actually quite a bit quieter. He was from Victoria as well. He had a troller. Forgot some of those names. I should have written them down when I was thinking about it, I guess. And then there was Walter (unclear).

RM [00:25:33] Oh, yes, I know that name. Yeah. Walter. Tickoff or Tickove.

HvdW [00:25:38] And Rich, or Ray was his son and Ray's wife, actually, she remarried, but she was President of the Teachers Union here a couple years ago. Susan, but it was Susan Hixon, she was a schoolteacher.

RM [00:26:00] Lambert? Not Susan Lambert?

HvdW [00:26:02] That's who it is. That's her last name now. She was Hixon, married to Hixon, and—

RM [00:26:08] I didn't know she was from Prince Rupert, did you?

HvdW [00:26:10] She wasn't from Prince Rupert—

RM [00:26:10] No, no. But she spent time here. No, I didn't know that.

HvdW [00:26:16] She taught school here for a few years. One of my kids had her actually.

RM [00:26:16] Hixon. Was that it? It was Hixon?

HvdW [00:26:16] Yeah, it was Hixon, Walter Hixon was—

RM [00:26:16] Yeah, that's right. Now I remember that name. Yeah. And you used to go down to meetings at the old Fisherman's Hall on Cordova?

HvdW [00:26:27] Yeah.

RM [00:26:28] That was quite the place.

HvdW [00:26:28] Yeah.

RM [00:26:30] Ha, ha. God Almighty! It was barebones.

HvdW [00:26:34] Yeah.

RM [00:26:35] Sister O'Shaughnessy?

HvdW [00:26:36] Yeah. Helen O'Shaughnessy.

RM [00:26:39] What did you think of her?

HvdW [00:26:40] She was a hell of a nice lady.

RM [00:26:42] Yeah. Is there anyone you didn't like?

HvdW [00:26:47] I can't think of one, no. There was a few in the Albatross Club they called it. (laughter) That doesn't have much to do with the—

RM [00:27:03] What's the Albatross Club?

HvdW [00:27:05] That was a small group there that used to nitpick anything at all. If there was something going on, it was the Communists that were doing it.

RM [00:27:15] Yeah, yeah, yeah.

HvdW [00:27:16] A few of them wanted to play a part, like they were, believed in that but had no—we used to call, when we used to have public meetings, and that was sort of the right-wing element. And we called them the Albatross Club.

RM [00:27:32] So how hard was it to sign everybody up every year?

HvdW [00:27:37] Actually, there was some of them you had to go after, but a lot of it was voluntary and especially with the gillnets, you know, those guys. You would go down to the dock with your organizing kit and get some of them, and some of them would be coming up from down south that didn't get a chance of getting everything ready, but any of them that belonged to the union had no problem with it. If they didn't go (unclear). Usually, you know, the ones that didn't belong you couldn't talk into joining.

RM [00:28:10] But they were kind of free-riders, weren't they?

HvdW [00:28:13] Yeah, oh yeah.

RM [00:28:13] Because the union would set the prices.

HvdW [00:28:15] Yeah, whatever we fought for, they got too.

RM [00:28:17] Yeah.

HvdW [00:28:17] The only thing they were exempt from was our benefit fund.

RM [00:28:21] Yeah. Yeah, yeah. Because the fishermen who are basically independent, recognize what the union did for them I guess?

HvdW [00:28:32] Yeah. And had everybody been on-side when we tied up, the settlements would have been made a lot sooner.

RM [00:28:42] Yeah, yeah, yeah. And the 1989 strike? Were you a part of that? That was the free trade strike. That was mostly a shoreworker—

HvdW [00:28:53] The ferry?

RM [00:28:53] Oh no, that was the '90s.

HvdW [00:28:56] Okay.

RM [00:28:57] This is 1989 when there was a strike and this was—

HvdW [00:29:01] I would have been involved, I think, because I never missed one from '67 on.

RM [00:29:05] But you don't remember that? That was mostly a shoreworkers' strike because you guys would have tied up anyway, you know.

HvdW [00:29:14] Yeah and my wife actually worked for Canadian Fish at that time.

RM [00:29:18] Yeah, yeah, yeah. And was there sometimes conflicts between the fishermen and the shoreworkers?

HvdW [00:29:26] Ummm, to an extent with the guys that didn't understand that, you know, they were getting their price, now let the shoreworkers work on trying to get a half-decent wage. And some of them, 'Well, you know, I—'

RM [00:29:41] 'I want to go fishing.'

HvdW [00:29:42] Yeah. 'Don't stop me from going fishing.' Yeah. There was that element.

RM [00:29:48] So what are the fishermen like in Prince Rupert?

HvdW [00:29:56] I don't know. Most of our strength, I would say, was from the guys from down south, that come up fishing.

RM [00:30:05] There was not so much up here?

HvdW [00:30:06] Not so much up here. The Co-op is the biggest commercial fish.

RM [00:30:09] Oh, of course. Yes, absolutely right. A lot of them fish for the Co-op because then they could fish whenever they wanted, right?

RM [00:30:17] Yeah. Yeah.

RM [00:30:17] They were free-riders, too.

HvdW [00:30:19] Yeah, they were.

RM [00:30:20] And that's tough in the community, isn't it?

HvdW [00:30:22] It is.

RM [00:30:23] Yeah. So what did you think when the Co-op finally went belly-up?

HvdW [00:30:31] It was long past due. Ha, ha.

RM [00:30:31] What's that?

HvdW [00:30:31] It was long past due.

RM [00:30:36] And so did a lot of those fishermen then come back, come to the union?

HvdW [00:30:40] Yeah, well, no, they didn't really come to the union but companies would take their fish anyway, the Packers and whatnot.

RM [00:30:48] Some of them did, though, I guess, eh?

HvdW [00:30:50] Yeah, not very many.

RM [00:30:52] Not very many.

HvdW [00:30:52] Actually, it took quite a while because some of them now actually that belong to the union are taking part in it, but it took a long time to get them there.

RM [00:31:06] And so these days. You don't fish anymore, do you?

HvdW [00:31:09] No.

RM [00:31:09] When did you stop? When did you retire?

HvdW [00:31:14] I haven't been retired, but I had to quit commercial fishing. Well, our very last buyback they had.

RM [00:31:21] You took it.

HvdW [00:31:22] Yeah. I put my boat in, and put my licence in and then finally a lot of work because they had bought a lot of licenses that did nothing. And the very last one was sort of a buyout by the government was because I had a shrimp licence on the boat and a salmon licence. I could keep my shrimp licence and they would buy out the salmon licence. So what they really did is they took some pressure off the salmon, but put more of it on the shrimp because guys were fishing, shrimping, you know, you had that licence left.

RM [00:32:02] Are they still shrimping?

HvdW [00:32:03] There's still. Yeah, there's, not so much here now. It's mostly a seasonal thing. They start in November and whatnot and there's a few of of them because some

Chinese company, and I think all the product is going to Arrow, has bought the boat that I had, the Grenada. Its re-named now, and the Chinese outfit owns four or five of them here. Actually, it's tied up down at the dock now. Its called the Alicia Marie, they changed the name of it.

RM [00:32:39] So what's shrimping like? How do you shrimp?

HvdW [00:32:42] It's a trawl.

RM [00:32:43] Yes.

HvdW [00:32:44] And 90 percent of them up here use what they call the Tokyo pole to hold the net open and you drag it along the bottom. And you're dragging it about a kilometre or a mile and a half an hour or so. And then drag it for—

RM [00:33:04] How far offshore would you be?

HvdW [00:33:04] Um, we find them just off the Kinahans and whatnot out here. Meantime, you can get into about 60 fathoms of water at mud bottom.

RM [00:33:15] Did you like shrimping?

RM [00:33:16] I enjoyed it. Yeah.

RM [00:33:17] Sounds boring.

HvdW [00:33:20] I'll tell you what, the shrimping is half decent, not very boring because the minute you get the net and dump it, you are sorting right until it's time to pick up again.

RM [00:33:32] (Laughs) And is it still doing well, the shrimp?

HvdW [00:33:35] Yeah. I'd like to have got the price when I was shrimping that they are now.

RM [00:33:40] Yeah. But is that because there's fewer shrimp, or is there more demand for it?

HvdW [00:33:46] There's more demand for it.

RM [00:33:47] China.

HvdW [00:33:47] There's fewer fish actually, or fewer fishermen doing it.

RM [00:33:50] Yeah. But it hasn't. It's not as bad as what's happened to salmon.

HvdW [00:33:54] No. Well, there's some good grounds out there. And what we've talked about, and what I'd love to see, is that they wouldn't allow—I've said we should have an area here where there's no doors allowed because they tie them up.

RM [00:34:07] When what?

HvdW [00:34:10] The doors. Like the big draggers use, and they use that on shrimp too and you can tell. We only had one boat, local, that did it for a little while. He found out it wasn't really the way to go. But it tears the bottom up and you know, they say 'Oh, no, no!' Well I've heard them, the guys on another channel, there because one guy's saying he's getting something and the other guy, well, he wasn't and he said, 'Well, maybe you're not digging enough.' And, 'Oh, I've got a foot and a half of mud on my doors.' These guys, 'the doors aren't touching the bottom.' But I mean, all the dead stuff that we used to pick up in our nets, that they dug out of, you know, just from the shrimp trawlers we used with a Tokyo pole, you'd get that shit in your net, you'd know just as soon as you were on the grounds where they were working.

RM [00:35:12] Yeah, yeah, yeah. You never went halibut fishing?

HvdW [00:35:16] I made one trip.

RM [00:35:17] Yeah.

HvdW [00:35:18] Yeah. And I said, 'If I ever, somebody ever talks me into going on another halibut trip, have me committed.' (laughs)

RM [00:35:30] Why? A lot of guys like it.

HvdW [00:35:32] That was the ugliest trip I ever made.

RM [00:35:34] How come?

HvdW [00:35:36] Well, it was just me and the skipper and he just wanted to be the skipper.

RM [00:35:42] Oh. It was one of those kind of trips. So it wasn't so much the halibut fishing.

HvdW [00:35:45] Wasn't so much the halibut.

RM [00:35:47] But your skipper.

HvdW [00:35:48] Yeah. You baited, you did every bloody thing. He steered the boat and he'd actually run a drum picking up, so—

RM [00:36:00] Not for you.

HvdW [00:36:01] Wasn't for me, and especially when I put about six weeks in getting the boat and everything ready and that, the only thing I got outa it was a pair of gumboots that I charged to the company.

RM [00:36:13] So, what was I going to mumble at you? Oh, did you have any close calls out on the water?

HvdW [00:36:21] Myself?

RM [00:36:21] Yeah.

HvdW [00:36:22] Yeah, a couple.

RM [00:36:23] What was the worst?

HvdW [00:36:26] Well, I was fishing up off of Dundas there once, and, I had a partner actually, old Mike Ames. We used to fish together quite a bit. Hadn't heard anything from him and I heard him call me and I wasn't paying attention. I'd run over my net, and, while I was trying to get it out with a pike pole and was walking alongside alongside the cabin and the handrail on top and had the pike pole in my hand and, I missed the rail on top of the cabin and I went in the saltchuck and I can't swim—

RM [00:37:05] Oh, my God!

HvdW [00:37:07] So, anyway, a seine boat was not too far away and they saw me.

RM [00:37:10] Did you have a life jacket on?

HvdW [00:37:11] No.

RM [00:37:12] Oh my God.

HvdW [00:37:15] Life jackets come in after that a bit. Shortly after that. But anyway, I guess I was on my—I don't remember other than laying on the deck of the boat, puking saltwater out. They had used the tow line. It had a big steel hook on it. And, fortunately, I guess they didn't see me come up anymore and the guy threw this line down and, reflexes or something, I grabbed ahold of that tow line.

RM [00:37:44] Underneath the water?

HvdW [00:37:45] Yeah.

RM [00:37:46] My God!

HvdW [00:37:47] The guy had to have thrown it just perfect.

RM [00:37:50] Oh, my God!

HvdW [00:37:52] Then they pulled me out. So that was—

RM [00:37:57] I mean, yeah. I don't know what to say. Do you ever think about that and think—

HvdW [00:38:04] Well I've, yup.

RM [00:38:05] You've got all these extra years. I mean that could, that was it, really, wasn't it?

HvdW [00:38:11] Really. Yeah. That was Eddie Plante, actually that—and his crew.

RM [00:38:17] Did you ever buy him a beer? For the rest of his life. Oh, my God. What a story, though, that is. I mean, that is an amazing story. What was your feeling when you realized you weren't dead?

HvdW [00:38:38] I don't know. Oh, I just—your whole—actually, your life just flashes.

RM [00:38:43] Yes. Like what they say is right, eh?

HvdW [00:38:45] It just, you know. And the next thing you know, well I would say it was just pretty well black and then I ended up puking up a couple gallons of saltwater on the guy's hatch, cause they brought me aboard the seine boat and one of guys jumped aboard my boat and got the net out of the wheel.

RM [00:39:05] What good guys! Boy, that's the fishing industry, eh? You're competitors, until something like this happens, right? Wow, that is quite the story but what are you doing going to sea? You can't swim!

HvdW [00:39:22] Well, if you look at them after they grew up, none of us, had had ever (unclear) and my brother up in Smithers were talking to my brother. He'd learnt to swim. I didn't know he could swim either.

RM [00:39:35] So, are there many fishermen can't swim?

HvdW [00:39:38] There's lots of fishermen can't swim.

RM [00:39:40] Wow! I guess you've known guys that went down and lost their lives. It's a dangerous industry, isn't it?

HvdW [00:39:48] Yeah. I actually I just saw in the paper there where, (unclear) or something a guy went overboard, a fisherman.

RM [00:39:57] Oh, it was Port Alberni?

HvdW [00:39:59] I think it was. It was just in the paper the other day.

RM [00:40:04] Did you ever do herring?

HvdW [00:40:06] Yup. I was on the seine on the roe herring one year and then I worked on the gillnets for a couple of seasons.

RM [00:40:18] Did you like that? It is crazy.

HvdW [00:40:20] Yeah, it was actually the seining was fairly relaxed but the gillnetting, if you're in the fish is, backbreaking work.

RM [00:40:30] Yeah, yeah, yeah.

HvdW [00:40:31] Well, it got a little bit better. They got the paddlewheels and everything else, but when you used to have to do it by hand, that was a hell of a lot of work.

RM [00:40:37] And there was that one year when all these people lost their lives, eh?

HvdW [00:40:44] Yeah. I can't remember what year that was.

RM [00:40:46] '08? or something? Somebody was saying '08.

HvdW [00:40:50] There was a few seine boats that went over.

RM [00:40:51] Yeah, well that's just terrible.

HvdW [00:40:54] Yeah.

RM [00:40:55] But I guess when you go to sea, you've got to be a bit fatalistic, eh?

HvdW [00:40:59] Yeah. Some of them take too many chances.

RM [00:41:03] Just to make an extra dollar.

HvdW [00:41:04] Yeah. And in a hurry and not taking the proper procedures, skiffs up on the drum and have a full net and no ballast.

RM [00:41:18] So you look back on your time with the union pretty good, eh? You enjoyed working for the union and still support the union?

HvdW [00:41:25] I was proud of the years that I have put in.

RM [00:41:29] Never had a disagreement with the union?.

HvdW [00:41:36] No. A couple with Homer a few times maybe but, other than that—

RM [00:41:37] But was there anyone that didn't have an agreement, disagreement with Homer?

HvdW [00:41:42] And other than that, you know, sometimes you didn't agree with everybody's policy but that's—

RM [00:41:51] (Interruption, questioning if they are behind.) We're just about to finish. (Okay. I just was wondering?) 5 minutes. 5 minutes, okay? Yeah. We're talking to Joy after this.

HvdW [00:42:00] It's with a little disagreement here and there you come up with more constructive policies.

RM [00:42:07] I agree. Yeah. Yeah.

HvdW [00:42:09] If everybody agrees and nobody looks at the night—

RM [00:42:14] So what do you miss most about fishing?

HvdW [00:42:17] Oh, quite a bit of it, because I just got some static from my kids. This outfit that bought my boat are desperately looking for somebody that is responsible to run it.

RM [00:42:33] You're not tempted?

HvdW [00:42:36] Almost, then I said you've gotta put a couple of deckhands on there because I just finished a triple bypass, so I can't do a hell of a lot of it.

RM [00:42:44] How old are you?

HvdW [00:42:46] I'll be 80 in a couple months.

RM [00:42:48] And you're thinking of going fishing, again?

HvdW [00:42:52] I've got a little backhoe, actually, and I work for one of the outfits locally here, Saanich. If they got a broken water main or something that's too big or too deep to dig by hand, I do it. It keeps me off the couch. It's not that I really need to, need it anymore, but it's up for something to do.

RM [00:43:16] And of course, you got wealthy fishing.

HvdW [00:43:19] No. I likely made more money when I sold the boat than I did when I was fishing.

RM [00:43:26] Well, you know, that's the—

HvdW [00:43:27] I fortunately sold out when there was still a few dollars there. Right now, I feel sorry for anybody that's in it.

RM [00:43:34] Well, it's like that old joke about a farmer who wins the lottery, and they say, 'Well, what are you going to do? Well, I'll just keep farming till the money's all gone.' And I guess it's almost like that with fishing, right?

HvdW [00:43:46] Yeah.

HvdW [00:43:47] All right. This is great. Thank you. And that's an amazing story about your—