

Interview: Bill Smith (BS)

Interviewer: Rod Mickleburgh (RM)

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Transcription: Pam Moodie and Jane Player

Note: Time stamps shown are incorrect after 7:56.

RM [00:00:04] Well, that's a boring name.

BS [00:00:05] It's the one that I'm currently using. John Doe just got boring, more boring.

RM [00:00:12] So, Bill, how long you've been fishing?

BS [00:00:14] About 41 years.

RM [00:00:16] Oh, my God. Are you a native Prince Rupert? You know, how'd you wash up here? Or, were you born here?

BS [00:00:23] No. I was born in Jackson, Mississippi, and grew up in Dallas, Texas. I was living in Arlington, Virginia and I had some friends who were coming to Prince Rupert because their son had turned a draft age. This was 1970 and the foreign draft board was a lot easier than any other because so many diplomats had their kids in the foreign draft board. They tended not to be as harsh as say the Dallas draft board.

RM [00:00:49] Yeah.

BS [00:00:50] I decided I'd ride with them cross country. I'd never been to Canada and planning to go down into Washington or Oregon or California and try to go back to school. I dropped out of University of Texas after two years.

RM [00:01:02] Yeah.

BS [00:01:04] Finally, I gave that idea up—at any rate, ended up staying in Prince Rupert.

RM [00:01:08] But why did they come to Prince Rupert?

BS [00:01:10] They had taught school in Chugiack, Alaska, and also in Sitka. He was the superintendent for the Native schools in Sitka, and they had been to Rupert and so kinda knew the place.

RM [00:01:23] Did they become teachers here—were they teachers here?

BS [00:01:25] No. He was head of the Department of Curriculum for the—was it Curriculum, I guess so, for the Bureau of Indian Affairs in Washington, D.C.

RM [00:01:32] What did he do in Prince Rupert when they came?

BS [00:01:34] Just drove, just drove here to deliver their son.

RM [00:01:37] Oh, I see. They didn't move here—

BS [00:01:40] No, they just drove.

RM [00:01:41] Oh, what happened to the son?

BS [00:01:43] Oh, he got a register assisting with foreign draft board. I don't think—it might have been the time when they were doing the draw with the date of birth.

RM [00:01:54] Yes, that's right.

BS [00:01:55] I don't think he got a draw [unclear]. His younger brother did and ended up being in Peace Corps in Africa.

RM [00:02:01] Wow. So, he went back—they went back to the States then?

BS [00:02:05] Oh, yeah. After—

RM [00:02:06] I never heard this about the foreign draft board.

BS [00:02:07] Yeah. Foreign draft board 100 I think was the number of it.

RM [00:02:11] Really.

BS [00:02:12] Yeah and again because so many diplomats' kids were in it, it tended to be more lenient.

RM [00:02:17] So, you just saw you'd—

BS [00:02:19] I went along—I was living in Arlington, Virginia—

RM [00:02:21] How did you know these people?

BS [00:02:22] I had met them at the University of Texas in Austin and had ended up going to see him in when he was a superintendent of Native schools in Brigham City, Utah. He just kinda of kept up the friendship.

RM [00:02:38] Because you were a young guy then?

BS [00:02:39] I was 27 when I came.

RM [00:02:41] Yeah. What was your first impression of Prince Rupert?

BS [00:02:46] Racist. I was so hopeful that growing up in the racist part of the world that Prince Rupert—well like in the States, the further north you got, the higher the level education generally, then like in the Deep South and the broader people's perspective tended to be until I thought, well, Prince Rupert Canada is that much further north, you know. Plus, at that time Canada was very lenient with draft resisters.

RM [00:03:14] It really was. And dodgers, draft dodgers.

BS [00:03:16] Yeah. I thought well, this is going to be better. It was in a way, but then when I got to Rupert, I was disappointed. You know, like with East Indians, Italians, of course, Natives from—got a lot of prejudice from white people.

RM [00:03:31] Yeah. You noticed that.

BS [00:03:33] It was more evident then.

RM [00:03:34] Yeah.

BS [00:03:34] Yeah. It's that people have got more information now. Trump is trying to damp it down as much as possible, you know.

RM [00:03:40] But you know, in Prince Rupert itself, it's better now?

BS [00:03:43] Yes. Well, it's probably half Native population.

RM [00:03:46] Well, exactly.

BS [00:03:47] Yeah. So, something had to happen.

RM [00:03:50] What evidence did you see of racism against the First Nations?

BS [00:03:54] One of the—I think probably the second job I had in Prince Rupert was with the Co-op. The guy that hires people—I can't think of the title right now.

RM [00:04:08] Human Resources guy?

BS [00:04:09] No, like just for the [unclear].

RM [00:04:11] Yeah.

BS [00:04:12] Anyway, he was openly racist while I was sittin' at his desk, you know, not wanting to hire East Indians.

RM [00:04:19] Jesus.

BS [00:04:25] And I, ah shit! (laughter) This all over again. I'm a couple of thousand miles away and it's still here you know. (laughter) But uh, and you know, it's the way people talk.

RM [00:04:33] Were there many East Indians in Prince Rupert at the time?

BS [00:04:37] A fair number. Yeah. It was a hopping place in 1970. You know, people coming from all over the world here.

RM [00:04:46] Why did you pick the Co-op to work for?

BS [00:04:50] You know, that's a good question. I'm not really sure other than it was herring season and it was available work, you know—

RM [00:04:58] I mean not much fishing in, like that in Texas. You would've got in as a total greenhorn.

BS [00:05:06] Yup. I loved fish when I was a kid, but it was all freshwater stuff.

RM [00:05:08] Yeah.

BS [00:05:09] Yeah. Love to eat fish. Yeah. Just so you know, I'm not a sport fisherman.

RM [00:05:13] Right.

BS [00:05:14] Not in the current sense of the word, anyway.

RM [00:05:16] But you, I mean, were you not nervous you could do the job or what?

BS [00:05:21] I was 27 years old!

RM [00:05:23] What was your job?

BS [00:05:24] Actually, I first worked with the Japanese processing salmon roe.

RM [00:05:29] Oh, in the Co-op?

BS [00:05:31] Yeah.

RM [00:05:32] Wow. What was that like?

BS [00:05:34] It was interesting, but I had a boat. I bought this little double ended gillnetter that—

RM [00:05:39] Right off the bat?

BS [00:05:42] Oh, I'd been around for about a year, I guess. I actually bought it down in Deep Cove. I lived in Port Moody for a year and a half. Here first, then Port Moody, then I came back up here cuz I couldn't catch any fish around Port Moody. They found out I had a boat—the Japanese guys that I worked with—and so on weekends we go out and get crabs or whatever you know. That was a lot of fun.

RM [00:06:05] So, who are these Japanese? They actually come back in spite of what had happened to them.

BS [00:06:10] This was Japanese Co-operative Trading and they were actually based in Japan.

RM [00:06:13] Oh, I see.

BS [00:06:14] They had businesses all over the world.

RM [00:06:16] So, they just came back and forth.

BS [00:06:17] Yeah. They were there specifically for the salmon roe.

RM [00:06:22] For the herring—oh, salmon roe.

BS [00:06:24] For the salmon roe, yeah.

RM [00:06:24] And what about the herring roe?

BS [00:06:28] Well the herring was—They did the herring roe as well. I'm trying to remember. I might have to work on the herring that first year.

RM [00:06:33] Yeah.

BS [00:06:35] And later on.

RM [00:06:36] I mean, that's tough work though, eh?

BS [00:06:39] Not when you're 27.

RM [00:06:40] Okay. (laughter)

BS [00:06:42] It'd be murder on me now.

RM [00:06:44] You were working along with a lot of the women who were doing that mostly?

BS [00:06:47] Mostly women, yeah.

RM [00:06:48] Yeah. Did you stick out like a sore thumb?

BS [00:06:51] Uh, probably, but I was 27, conceited, you know.

RM [00:06:55] But there weren't that many guys doing that, right?

BS [00:06:58] No, well I wasn't popping roe. I was in a position of authority, more or less. They had like four lines of women popping roe and a big hopper in the centre that a friend of mine who ended up being a reporter for the Globe and Mail—

RM [00:07:13] Who's that?

BS [00:07:14] Kirk Makin.

RM [00:07:15] You know, Kirk Makin?

RM [00:07:16] Very well.

RM [00:07:19] How come you know Kirk Makin?

BS [00:07:20] We still correspond. I just sent him a couple of cases of sockeye.

RM [00:07:24] Well, how come you know him?

BS [00:07:25] Cuz we lived together on a boat off the breakwater for awhile. But I mean we worked together in the Co-op first.

RM [00:07:30] He worked in Prince Rupert?

BS [00:07:32] Yes.

RM [00:07:32] Kirk Makin? He's not from here, is he?

BS [00:07:35] No. He's from Toronto I think originally.

RM [00:07:36] So, how did he end up in the crew? So, we're off topic. (laughter)

DS [00:07:42] Maybe we'll edit it out.

BS [00:07:42] At that time, everybody came out west. It was just kind of like California during the gold rush.

RM [00:07:45] Oh, no, I know Kirk quite well.

BS [00:07:47] How the hell do you know Kirk?

RM [00:07:48] I worked with him on the Globe also.

BS [00:07:51] Really!

RM [00:07:52] Also, I know friends who knew Kirk and all this sort of stuff.

RM [00:09:14] So, you know, Kirk Makin. Hilarious!

BS [00:09:20] Well again, we lived together on an old packer off the breakwater the Co-op there for quite a while.

RM [00:09:21] He worked in the plant?

BS [00:09:23] He worked initially in the plant and he got a job driving a taxi after a while.

RM [00:09:27] So, he stayed here for what? How long?

BS [00:09:30] Oh, I guess he was here for a year and a half or something like that.

RM [00:09:33] Then he probably went back to journalism school at Ryerson.

BS [00:09:36] Yes, exactly. He sent me a picture of Barbara Frum when she gave a speech at Ryerson.

RM [00:09:42] Oh, yeah. One of his classmates is Wendy Mesley.

BS [00:09:45] Oh, that's why in his book he's got a dedication that includes her.

RM [00:09:48] Oh, really? Typical Kirk. He's always playing the angles.

BS [00:09:51] Yeah. (laughter)

RM [00:09:53] Kirk's a bit of an operator. (laughter) Yeah, no, that is [unclear]

BS [00:10:00] I'm pleased to hear that he's a bit of an operator, you know. (laughter)

RM [00:10:03] But a good guy.

BS [00:10:05] He's a very good guy.

RM [00:10:05] Yeah, I know. Well, that is—okay, I'm really distracted. All right, but you actually had a boat. Do you remember when you first went out fishing? I mean, you didn't know anything about fishing, did you?

BS [00:10:18] I knew how to fish in fresh water.

RM [00:10:20] Yeah, well, exactly. This is different.

BS [00:10:22] Caught crabs at Galveston. Yeah, I was lucky in a way, when I first got a licence, which I had a number of junker boats before that. Norm Iverson over at Dodge Cove gave me lots of information. In fact, I did some work on it in his shed. He was originally from Oona River.

RM [00:10:45] When was this, you got your first licenced boat?

BS [00:10:47] Oh, '79 or something like that.

RM [00:10:48] Oh, so you worked in the Co-op for a while?

BS [00:10:52] Well, yeah, I guess I did. Three and a half years I think I was at the Co-op. Yeah. I don't know I'd have to mess around with the—a year and a half in Port Moody working for Irly Bird.

RM [00:10:59] Okay.

BS [00:11:00] But yeah.

RM [00:11:02] So, you got your first licenced boat in '79 and, well keep going.

BS [00:11:09] At any rate. Norm told me where to go and when to do it, you know, kind of held my hand for a while until I kinda learned about gillnetting.

RM [00:11:20] Yes, exactly.

BS [00:11:23] You know. I just about know how to do it now. (laughter)

RM [00:11:29] What was the toughest thing about it? Knowing where the fish are or what?

BS [00:11:34] Yes. The trouble with the actual fishing is knowing when to be where and what to do if there's no fish there.

RM [00:11:37] Yeah.

BS [00:11:40] Which is basically move or wait until they arrive. It takes so much experience to learn that kind of stuff 'cuz the fish do move around. Sockeye can move—I

don't know—something like 20 miles in a day or something, you know. Well, you hear people on radio saying, 'Oh, I just got 200 in a set.' If you go racing over there—.

RM [00:12:02] It's gone!

BS [00:12:03] It's gone! (laughter) It's best—unless you got one of these really high speed boats—it's probably best to fish in the river, 'cause they all got to go to the river at some point.

RM [00:12:13] Right.

BS [00:12:14] I never enjoyed that very much. After that, it's best to know spots, you know, where they're likely to pass, you know if it's blowing southeast or if it's blowing westerly, that kind of stuff. They change their course a bit depending on the wind.

RM [00:12:27] When you were getting to, you know, learn the trade or whatever, I mean, did you have lean years learning it or. It was it—

BS [00:12:34] This season was the most leanest I've ever had.

RM [00:12:37] This past one?

BS [00:12:37] Yeah.

RM [00:12:38] Did you get any?

BS [00:12:39] I think I had—my numbers might be slightly off—but I caught 68 sockeye this year and delivered 41 and the rest went to neighbours for food. This is going to be the year for that. Last fall there were big predictions for the Skeena, which is where the best food fish come from, or the food sockeye anyway. I was going to make this year primarily a food fishery; I was going to make sure everybody had food fish.

RM [00:13:06] Yeah.

BS [00:13:07] And it never occurred.

RM [00:13:09] But what about those early years? Was it—

BS [00:13:14] Oh, it was up and down.

RM [00:13:15] Yes, exactly. More boats, too, though.

BS [00:13:18] Oh, way more boats and different fishing pattern. We always started at 6 p.m. Sunday night.

RM [00:13:26] Yeah.

BS [00:13:26] We'd fish according to what people were catching. If there were nobody catching fish, then they shut us down. If there were a lot of catches then they let us continue for the next day. They kind of do the same thing now, except we only fish two days in a row because the companies don't want the fish older than that.

RM [00:13:42] Yeah. What did you like about it? I mean, you know, the guy from Texas.

BS [00:13:52] (laughter) I miss the rattlesnakes, and that's true. I do.

RM [00:13:54] Well, you're a strange guy Bill.

BS [00:13:56] (laughter).

RM [00:13:57] No wonder, you know Kirk Makin.

BS [00:13:59] (much laughter) Yeah.

RM [00:14:01] What did you like about him? In your background, you'd never think this guy's a gillnetter.

BS [00:14:06] I always wanted to be closer to the water. In Texas, there was lakes and creeks and stuff. I hitchhiked off to San Francisco to pick up a friend's motorcycle when I was going to university—that's why I left university in fact. I really liked San Francisco and that area. This, mind you, was 1965 or something like that.

RM [00:14:25] That's an interesting time to be there.

BS [00:14:27] Yeah, it's Sausalito where I mostly stayed at that time. Across the Golden Gate.

RM [00:14:31] Did you see the bands? Did you see those bands like Jefferson Aeroplane and stuff like that?

BS [00:14:36] Mostly stood outside Berkeley while they were at the university there while they were playing in an auditorium because I didn't have any money for a ticket. (laughter) I did go to a speech by—well speech is kind of the wrong word—[sounds like] Christian Amurki, ever heard of him?

RM [00:14:53] Who?

BS [00:14:53] Christian, J.[sounds like] Christian Amurki?

RM [00:14:55] No.

BS [00:14:55] He was kinda like one of these gurus—he was being trained to be the Dalai Lama or something like that. Go for it, and so. Very bright, very interesting perspective on things.

RM [00:15:05] All right. So what did you like about gillnetting?

BS [00:15:08] I like fishing. (laughter) I liked fishing since I was about five years old.

RM [00:15:11] But you did it commercially. And you're out in an ocean. I mean, it's not like river fishing.

BS [00:15:17] Or in that case, at five I was fishing—my grandfather had a ranch and a little creek going through it. We were fishing for pan fish [unclear] I'm good. Ever since then I'd

go fishing whenever I could and ocean fishing, the fish were bigger and tasted better!
(laughter)

RM [00:15:34] Is that all you liked about it? I mean—

BS [00:15:36] I like being out on the water and seeing things from that perspective. I liked messing around with boats.

RM [00:15:44] Yeah.

BS [00:15:46] You know, I've had a whole series of wooden boats. This last one we've got now, we've had since '83 and it was basically junk when we got it and we rebuilt it. The O'Hara Three—it was the Japanese guy, named O'Hara, I guess, is the way you pronounce it. It was his third boat. It was lost in the fall of 1941 and confiscated in the spring of 1942. It was live combo, you know, like with water tight fish holes with holes at the bottom that the water could circulate and, at any rate, BC Packers ended up with it. They used it as a river collector for a while and it then it was kind of a rental boat and went more and more downhill all the time. He bought it and decided that he wasn't—he lived down south and decided he didn't want to tow it south and rebuild it. So told us—offered it to us and we bought it and rebuilt it.

RM [00:16:40] That's amazing. So, it started out as an originally Japanese-owned boat?

BS [00:16:43] Yes.

RM [00:16:44] And then was, of course, confiscated.

BS [00:16:47] Yeah. And BC Packers had it for many, many years.

RM [00:16:49] Wow. What a story. And then this guy, this Japanese guy bought it back?

BS [00:16:53] No, no. This was a white guy from down south—fisherman.

RM [00:16:57] Oh, sorry, sir. I missed that.

BS [00:16:59] Yeah.

RM [00:17:00] You bought this in '83?

BS [00:17:01] Yeah.

RM [00:17:02] And you still have it?

BS [00:17:04] Yeah. Trying to get rid of it now. I'm trying to retire. (laughter)

RM [00:17:08] Well, after last year.

BS [00:17:10] I'll be 75 in October. (laughter)

RM [00:17:13] Is it the oldest boat out there?

BS [00:17:15] Probably not. It's the oldest boat I know of out there.

RM [00:17:19] Yeah.

BS [00:17:19] But there have been some really old ones out there. Most of the old gillnetters—well some of them had eavestroughs on them to start with.

RM [00:17:25] Now, gillnetters just have one guy on them or are two?

BS [00:17:28] It depends. I fish by myself now? Carol fished with me for a few years that year.

RM [00:17:35] Is that your wife?

BS [00:17:35] She's my landlord now. (laughter)

RM [00:17:38] OK. Said nothing.

BS [00:17:41] You asked. Relationships change. (laughter).

RM [00:17:43] Of course. She's probably happier. (laughter)

BS [00:17:47] Yeah. Oh, yeah. Oh, no doubt. We get along way better than we probably would married, you know!

RM [00:17:51] Yeah.

BS [00:17:53] I've never been married. You know, idealist, you know, never thought marriage was [unclear].

RM [00:17:59] So, you generally fish by yourself?

BS [00:18:01] Yeah.

RM [00:18:03] Talk about the good years of fishing. What were they like?

BS [00:18:07] Oh, one of the best years I had was only about four or five years ago.

RM [00:18:11] Oh.

BS [00:18:12] I was in Ogden Channel. There are two other boats that I know of there, and I was getting sets of over 100 each one. You know, up to that I think one of the biggest was about—I mean, that's not huge. Some guys on the Fraser get a set of 5,000 or something.

RM [00:18:27] Yeah.

BS [00:18:28] In the river up here, there's a lot of guys get a set of two, three, 400. But that was big for me. I seldom get a set over 100.

RM [00:18:36] How much would that have brought you?

BS [00:18:39] Well, in two days I had—I don't know what was it—1,150 sockeye or something like that. More than I could have made on UIC all winter. You know, it was—I don't remember the exact total, but, you know, it was quite reasonable money. That was way it used to be in the past fishing; you get slack years, but you get bumper years.

RM [00:19:04] Yeah. The four-year cycle, sort of thing.

BS [00:19:06] Yeah, and so unpredictable because so much of it happens on the open ocean where you don't know what's going on. Right now, part of the reason for this poor return, maybe that, what are they calling it, the blob or glob something.

RM [00:19:17] Yeah, the blob.

BS [00:19:19] Yeah.

RM [00:19:20] Yeah, horrible. I mean, what are the prices like?

BS [00:19:26] Well, when there's very little fish the prices are pretty good. Five-fifty a pound, and stuff like that. When there's lots of fish the prices go for a lot more.

RM [00:19:33] Of course. Go down. Did you join the union right off the bat?

BS [00:19:36] No, I fished for the Co-op.

RM [00:19:38] Oh, you fished for the coo-op.

BS [00:19:40] Finally, when the Co-op went belly up and McMillan started up, I started thinking about it. Well, actually, I went to Ocean Fish before I joined the union. The union was the only outfit that was consistently talking the way I was thinking in terms of what was happening with the fishery and politically. They seemed responsible. They seemed to care about the environment, and, like Joy works with homeless people and stuff like that, you know. It just seemed like a good thing to do in terms of, you know, if I was going to try to continue fishing. I think, if it hadn't been for Joy, I think we would have been shut down way before this, you know. She's so astute and can learn like the fisheries' maths and stuff like that. I'm very, very lucky to have her.

RM [00:20:30] Yeah.

BS [00:20:31] I kind of realised that early on.

RM [00:20:33] What took you so long to join the union?

BS [00:20:37] Well, there was a union at the Co-op, Shore Workers Union and I actually was a—

RM [00:20:44] Didn't they get busted in the '67 strike? Was there would—

BS [00:20:47] I don't know. That was before my time.

RM [00:20:49] Yeah, I know, but then maybe—I think they lost their certification at the Co-op.

BS [00:20:55] You mean UFAWU (United Fishermen and Allied Workers Union)? Oh, I didn't know about that.

RM [00:20:57] Yeah. So, it might have been another union.

BS [00:21:00] Yeah, it was something shoreworkers, or something like that.

RM [00:21:02] Yeah, but I don't think it was the UFAWU.

BS [00:21:05] No, no, it wasn't affiliated.

RM [00:21:06] Yeah.

BS [00:21:07] But it turned out the business agent for them was a—in fact, there was going to be a strike and George Mills, the charge man in the cannery where Kirk and I worked, asked the both of us if we wouldn't write a letter, you know, against the union. We weren't specifically in the union at that time, but we said, sure, but I suggested to Kirk we go talk to the union first, you know, and talk to a business agent there. It convinced me that the way it was being presented with the company wasn't what was going on. Actually, shortly after that I ended up being a shop steward at the Co-op there for the union.

RM [00:21:50] They didn't go on strike till that year, did they? Didn't they go on strike in '89. Just before the Co-op folded?

BS [00:21:58] Well, actually, it wasn't a strike, it was a—oh, you know when the company does it, what do you call that?

RM [00:22:04] Lockout?

BS [00:22:04] Lockout, it was a lockout, yeah.

RM [00:22:06] Yeah. I see. Yeah.

BS [00:22:08] At any rate—yeah. That was the first year I had fishing—'89?

RM [00:22:13] '89, I don't know. [unclear] It's interesting the difference between the co-op and the union. Right? Because the co-op is trying to—has a different philosophy.

BS [00:22:22] Yes. Well, the proposal for the Co-op was that the shore workers become a part of the Co-op; like it was kind of nice for fishermen because they kept the prices high, you know. The shoreworkers rejected that because they felt like they needed somebody to speak up for them when, you know, when the charge hand or whatever would get out of hand. There was—that did happen, you know. Some of the people running things they weren't very concerned about the shoreworkers.

RM [00:22:52] Well, it was said that the co-op was under—you know, starts off with this great co-operative idea and they're taking on the, you know, the big guys and all this sort of stuff. You know, the members are all in it together. Then it's sort of—but it's still in the marketplace, so then they start to wanna make more money, and then more money, and then they can't tell the difference between a co-op and a big company.

BS [00:23:18] Partly, what happened with the co-op was to the one percent. You know, like people who were—

RM [00:23:22] The vessel owners.

BS [00:23:23] Yeah. Well, people who had—

RM [00:23:24] People like you. (laughter) The big vessel owners.

BS [00:23:30] Yeah. There were some families that wanted—like they started up a fish farm, for Christ's sake.

RM [00:23:34] Really?

BS [00:23:35] Yeah, you know down in—but, you know, which went against what the rest of us were doing and they lost [unclear] stratus and a bunch of stuff like that. They spent some big money and that was part of why they went belly up.

BS [00:23:51] You know some people have glorified ideas and really it should—if it had taken a small boat operation it might still be going—although the way the fishery has gone who could really say.

RM [00:24:01] Did you feel conflict with the UFAWU in those days because you would have fished during their strikes?

BS [00:24:06] Yeah. I wasn't that aware, you know. My only union experience before that had been with, like, Teamsters and (what do you call it) the Labourers. Big unions that—

RM [00:24:25] And pretty corrupt.

BS [00:24:26] Pretty corrupt, yeah. I think the Labourers probably the most corrupt of the bunch.

RM [00:24:31] The Teamsters gave them a good run for their money.

BS [00:24:33] Pardon me?

RM [00:24:33] The Teamsters gave them a good run for their money.

BS [00:24:35] Yeah.

RM [00:24:35] All the labourers were—

BS [00:24:37] I was also a member of the Seafarers International for awhile.

RM [00:24:39] Oh, my God. You're one of those horrible SIU people.

BS [00:24:42] I worked for—what the hell was his name? Canada's sweetheart.

RM [00:24:49] Oh, Hal Banks.

BS [00:24:50] Hal Banks.

RM [00:24:50] Oh, God.

BS [00:24:51] Down in Brooklyn, I worked for him for a while on a SIU project.

RM [00:24:55] Really? In Brooklyn where he was hanging out?

BS [00:24:57] Brooklyn, yeah. Well, I was—I had—

RM [00:25:00] Did you actually know him?

BS [00:25:02] Worked with him. I sat at the same lunch table with him.

RM [00:25:05] Hal went to jail or something.

BS [00:25:06] Pardon me?

RM [00:25:06] He eventually went to jail, didn't he?

BS [00:25:09] He left Canada because there was something about a murder.

RM [00:25:12] Oh, yeah, I know about their history in Canada.

BS [00:25:17] He used to regale us with stories about having a gunfight in warehouse in San Francisco and this kind of stuff.

RM [00:25:21] Well, no, he was a thug.

BS [00:25:23] He was a thug.

RM [00:25:24] You know, he really, really was. He was mob thug. They actually tried to move in on the UFAWU because they wanted to represent everybody on water.

BS [00:25:36] Wow.

RM [00:25:37] They sent in their boys and they made these little attempts. They didn't get very far, but they went after the UFAWU. It was the early sixties or something. We invited them in. Canada invited them in and they didn't know what they were doing because they wanted to crush the Canadian—the communist union.

BS [00:25:55] Oh, gosh.

RM [00:25:57] Once he got in, then he started turning on all the CLC, Canadian Labour Congress unions, you know, and taking them over and—

BS [00:26:06] Wasn't he running the Great Lakes union or something like that?

RM [00:26:07] Yes. That was the original Canadian Seaman's Union. They got that because the government wanted to get rid of the CSU, which was causing problems. So, they thought, well, this'll get rid of the CSU. Then, of course, they created a monster and, you know, and they wanted him on racketeering charges and finally there were murders. I think it's a big scandal in Canada. The great thing was nobody knew where he was after

he went on the lam. This reporter for the Toronto Star got this great scoop because the authorities, the RCMP, nobody knew where he was, right? Where Hal Banks? So, he goes down to Brooklyn and there he is on a yacht and he interviews Hal Banks. (laughter) Hal Banks spilling to a reporter for the Toronto Star.

BS [00:26:51] Yeah, like nobody knew where he was.

RM [00:26:53] He finds him, you know, in Brooklyn. You know, exactly as you say. Anyway, we're off topic here. What did you notice when you joined the union? How things were different? Even though it wasn't when the union was at its strongest but still.

BS [00:27:11] Well mostly that, as I said earlier, they were talking about stuff that I was thinking, you know, in terms of the way the fishery was being run and what was happening politically. That's mainly it, you know. They seemed to care about the fishermen, you know, and as a group rather than just a few guys trying to get some sort of scam going for themselves. I always liked that idea.

RM [00:27:36] When did you join the union?

BS [00:27:38] Oh, you would ask that wouldn't you.

RM [00:27:43] Were you part of the union during the 1989 strike?

BS [00:27:49] No, I must not have been because I don't remember it.

RM [00:27:51] Because the Co-op was still going then, although it was starting to run into trouble.

BS [00:27:54] Had been later in the nineties.

RM [00:27:56] So, you were one of those guys that fished during the 1989 strike.

BS [00:28:00] When was the ferry—

RM [00:28:02] That was in the mid-nineties.

BS [00:28:04] Okay. It was shortly after that I joined.

RM [00:28:06] Oh, really? It took you a long time.

BS [00:28:09] Well, the co-op was still going.

RM [00:28:11] Didn't the Co-op go down the tubes in the early nineties, '91?

BS [00:28:14] Well, yeah, but then McMillan—

RM [00:28:16] Oh, yes, that's right. You went over there.

BS [00:28:17] Yeah, and then—

RM [00:28:18] Anything to not join the union.

BS [00:28:20] Well, no, it was (laughter). Actually, I started out with a real distrust of unions because of my earlier experiences, you know?

RM [00:28:27] Yeah.

BS [00:28:29] You know, it took a little while to get over that.

RM [00:28:34] You know, there were bitter feelings between the union and the Co-op?

BS [00:28:38] Yeah, I can understand that. Yeah.

RM [00:28:40] Yeah.

BS [00:28:40] And other than the Co-op, did help keep prices up.

RM [00:28:43] Yeah, but the Co-op—

BS [00:28:44] Themselves.

RM [00:28:45] The co-op broke the strike by the UFAWU. The troll fleet was down and they helped break that strike in 1967.

BS [00:28:55] Yeah, before my time.

RM [00:28:55] Yeah and as Arnie says, there's still bad feelings amongst some people about that strike. (laughter)

BS [00:28:59] Well there's people in the south, at least when I still lived there, that were still hot about the civil war, you know.

RM [00:29:06] Of course. Absolutely right. So, you took part in the boycott and the blockade?

BS [00:29:12] Only at the very last. A friend of mine who was also a Co-op fisherman, he said, 'No, I got to go to the blockade.' I fished another day was but then I got starting feeling too guilty so I left for that.

RM [00:29:26] So, you did take part in it? What was that like?

BS [00:29:28] It was like a big party in a way. (laughter) We got to test our—not flame throwers (laughter)—flares. We got to test our flares.

RM [00:29:39] (laughter) Flame throwers. (laughter) You burned the boat!

BS [00:29:43] We both had—Paul and I were tied up together and we both had a lot of old flares on our boats and people were blowin' off flares and all kinds of stuff out in front of the town. So, we fished out all our old flares and tried them out just cuz we were curious how long these things last, you know. We had very few duds.

RM [00:30:03] Yeah.

BS [00:30:04] They can be 20 years old and still work.

RM [00:30:05] Yeah. Were you worried that the U.S. Navy was going to come in and bust you guys?

BS [00:30:12] (laughter) We didn't really give that much thought. It was only later they were talking about they were gonna have police on an Alaska ferry, you know, or something.

RM [00:30:21] Yeah. Well, that was a good one.

BS [00:30:24] Yeah.

RM [00:30:26] Any close calls out on the grounds? So, you know. Well, because it's dangerous, right? Deep sea fishing.

BS [00:30:32] Yeah. Another fellow and I—another friend who used to live in Salt Lake, we were fishing in a rental boat—Henry van der Wiel do you know him?

RM [00:30:37] No.

BS [00:30:37] Okay. He was kind of big with the union here.

BS [00:30:42] Oh, are we—

DS [00:30:42] I think he's coming later today.

BS [00:30:42] Oh, okay. Good. He'll have some stuff. We were leasing his boat and we were trolling out in the middle of Hecate Strait. Neither of us knew much about trolling or Hecate Strait, and it started to blow up, and we kept trolling until it really blew up. The chain fell on the fish [unclear] and I was steering. He went out at the stern to throw gear overboard because the scuppers were getting plugged and he thought we were going down. He told me later on, 'I thought we were going to die.' It's funny you see the waves and they look mountains; they don't look like high waves anymore. They look like big islands. That was a close one. I had a closer one out on a ship to Okinawa. I didn't know any better then so we got into a big typhoon. Other than that, I've been into bad weather. You know, you can't predict it all. I try not to fish in bad weather, but sometimes you get caught.

RM [00:31:36] So, why do certain fishermen prefer trolling and others prefer gillnetting and all these various different gears?

BS [00:31:42] Oh, I think it just depends on how you started out. For me, I used to (maybe still) get seasick. I'm not sure I haven't been in that kind of weather a long time. Trolling you're out in the weather; there's no avoiding it. Whereas with gillnetting, usually find someplace to kind of tuck in or at least not too far from an anchorage, you know.

RM [00:32:02] Why is that? Why do you have to stay out there with the troll boat? Because they're bigger or what?

BS [00:32:06] That's where the fish are. You know, after the troll fish.

RM [00:32:10] They're in a different view—they're further deeper or what?

BS [00:32:13] Well, they're still coming in. So, you're getting first crack at them in a way, and they're in prime condition because they haven't gotten into fresh water yet.

RM [00:32:21] So, why isn't that also true if you're gillnetting?

BS [00:32:25] It can be. If you're can gillnet outside Stevens, Dundas and all those places. That got shut down eventually to where all the gillnetting was inside. And there's still good quality fish.

RM [00:32:36] The trolling is out in the wilder water.

BS [00:32:38] Yeah. West coast of the Queen Charlottes.

RM [00:32:41] Oh. So, the locations are different?

BS [00:32:44] Yes. Oh, I didn't understand what you were saying. Yeah.

RM [00:32:46] No, I'm the one that doesn't understand. You just take it for granted that I knew what was talking about. (laughter)

BS [00:32:53] There was inside trolling like up top of Dundas there was Goose Bay. A lot of old guys, well young guys too, they troll out of there. That got shut down by Anderson, mostly because the [sounds like] sporters were there.

RM [00:33:04] Yeah. Yes, that sounds right. Yeah, well we'll talk about that. What about the conflict with sports fisherman?

BS [00:33:12] Well, I don't have any conflict if they're fishing to feed themselves.

RM [00:33:17] Yeah. The sports fishermen.

BS [00:33:21] But when they're fishing for sport—why would you pit yourself against a fish? What does that prove, you know? Like if you can catch an animal that in about 90 seconds has forgotten everything it knew, you know, and learnt the previous 90 seconds. No, they've been really favoured over the sports fishery and that's because David Anderson, who did most of the dirty work, was one of the founders of the Steelhead Society—a past president of the Steelhead Society, which is the most right wing of the sports fishing groups that I know of at any rate. Basically, he tried to shift it over to sports fishing as much as he could. Made coho and pink salmon sports fish.

RM [00:34:03] And they don't like you guys either, do they?

BS [00:34:05] No, because we've got our walls of death (laughter), which originally was going for off offshore, you know, these mile long gill nets that these factory boats had, but some people picked it up for our gill nets which are—

RM [00:34:20] Not exactly a wall of death.

BS [00:34:22] No and they're very selective, as selective as we can make them because you don't know want bad catch. You don't want stuff you gotta throw back.

RM [00:34:29] Yeah, I know there's lots of conflict there. So, why are you still fishing?

BS [00:34:34] I'm not. I'm trying to retire.

RM [00:34:36] But, I mean you—

BS [00:34:37] Well, as far as work goes, I really like it. I like eating fish a lot, and I like messing around the boats, fixing them up and—

RM [00:34:46] So, how many days would you fish these days?

BS [00:34:49] These days—the pattern normally was you start out the season with one or two days to see what was around, and if there was fish around, they might open it again later in the week but it usually goes to the five—well normal on Monday, Monday, Tuesday, maybe. The next week, fish Monday, Tuesday. Then when the fish started to show, you can fish Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday off, and go Thursday, Friday. Or maybe even Friday, Saturday or something like that. Four days a week was the most we'd get or got in modern times.

RM [00:35:19] Yeah. But now?

BS [00:35:22] Well, this year there was no fish to speak of so we'd get one day, maybe mostly, odd time, two days.

RM [00:35:30] How many guys would be out there? Would guys bother going out?

BS [00:35:35] Yeah, there'd be a bunch of guys from Simpson and from Kincolith up in the Nass [unclear] we fish this year. They might as well, they live there. We had a handful of guys from town, as well. Not many guys from down south; they started to trickle away fairly quickly. Hoping to get something up in area 8, or Barkley, or somewhere, you know.

RM [00:35:55] You mentioned about river fishing, but you didn't like as much.

BS [00:35:58] I got a slow, old wooden boat. It doesn't like to be pounced on the rocks, and—

RM [00:36:04] That happens with the river fishing?

BS [00:36:07] It can.

RM [00:36:08] Yeah?

BS [00:36:10] If you really know what you're doing, like if you've already fished there with your dad or you've been there for 20 years, then it's a pretty good fishery. For a guy like myself who's trying to learn the whole kit and kaboodle, I think I've been in the river maybe six times, and just too fast, too dangerous, you know.

RM [00:36:29] I didn't realise it'd be dangerous. You'd think the ocean would be more dangerous.

BS [00:36:32] No, the river moves really fast. You can sit on one side and the next thing you know you're on the other side sittin' on a rock.

RM [00:36:39] Yeah.

BS [00:36:41] If you know what you're doing, then you know what the river does at different phases, but that's a whole other thing to learn. I just do with a slow wooden boat. That's the other thing, if you make a set and you drift down river, then you got to go run back to river again to make the next step. If you got a slow boat, it takes a lot of time.

RM [00:36:59] So, why are we stuck with a wooden boat? An old wooden boat?

RM [00:37:03] That's what I could afford (laughter). I mean, over time—

RM [00:37:06] There's way more modern boats out there, you're fishing against?

BS [00:37:09] Yes, you need a lot of cash to buy 'em, you know. I never liked being in debt.

RM [00:37:15] But they're more efficient, aren't they?

BS [00:37:18] Yes. Sometimes people run away from fish because they're too fast, you know. I was setting outside Kennedy Island, one day, and the fish, which I kind of homesteaded, the fish just started to show up. I had like 30 in a set so I knew they were coming. There was two fast boats down below me. I thought, 'Oh, shit.' They're both kind of talkers, so I thought they're gonna be getting in the way and they're going to have a fleet here pretty quick. But they both ran away, you know. They were fast and they ran into the river or somewhere because they hadn't gotten the fish yet. The fish were moving toward them.

RM [00:37:49] They didn't have the patience because they got a fast boat.

BS [00:37:51] Yeah. If they'd been slow, they probably would have made another set and they would have realised the fish were coming.

RM [00:37:58] That's interesting the way you put that. It made me think like, so you're members of the union, so you've got that solidarity, but now in the fish grounds how much solidarity is there?

BS [00:38:08] Usually there's a group that you fish with. It's handy because—

RM [00:38:12] Because you see these guys show up and you say, 'Oh, shit.' You don't think they're part of the union so—

BS [00:38:18] I don't know if they were or not.

RM [00:38:20] You see the point I'm making?

BS [00:38:22] Yeah, and they both had fast boats. Yeah, you know, so.

RM [00:38:26] But you see the point, I'm making?

BS [00:38:27] Yes.

RM [00:38:27] You know. He—

BS [00:38:28] Well I like the idea of employment of, of people being able to fish. People who like to fish and weren't just in it for the money, you know. Really different types. Some are real wheeler dealers and that's how the double licencing started in way. A bunch of wheeler dealers bought second boats and then pushed the Ministry to go to double licencing and they were already set you know. Of course, as soon as they went to double licencing, the licences started to jump up in value. Then there's people who fish traditionally you know because their family did. I probably like them the best. There's still a lot of people got into it because it was a lifestyle that they liked. If you don't see it as a lifestyle, I think you're missing out on a lot. You're probably just a fucking entrepreneur! (laughter)

RM [00:39:12] I wouldn't want those.

BS [00:39:14] No, I don't like the word at all.

RM [00:39:16] So, you've seen obviously lots of changes in the industry. Do you blame the disappearance of the salmon—blame government policy, this double licencing, all that kind of stuff?

BS [00:39:25] Well, it's a combination of stuff, but who knows what global warming is going to end up doing. There's something going on for sure, you know. That's nobody's fault. Well, it's everybody's fault and nobody's fault. I'm really conflicted in terms of who might be to blame, if anybody is. I know the government has been pretty ignorant about it all, if not calculating. Like we've got a guy that works for the fishery now that does their openings and closings, and he's really good. He tries to give us time, but he's got a fight with the biologists about it, you know. They don't want us to fish. It seems like, until the fish are already gone and they know exactly what the escape is you know. That's no good for us. We've got to catch the fish while they're coming in rather than after they're got by.

RM [00:40:11] What about these government policies with the, you know, the Mifflin plan and all these kinds of things?

BS [00:40:19] (laughter) That was going to be less most, more fish. That was the big thing was that they cut down the fleet with buybacks and those of us who were left would have more fish.

RM [00:40:28] And?

BS [00:40:28] Never, never materialised that way.

RM [00:40:30] Why not? What went wrong.

BS [00:40:31] Well, probably partly because the fish were beginning to disappear—probably did from the turn of the century—the other century. Partly, the sports fishery was growing, and, you know, different user groups.

RM [00:40:49] Then guys started buying up licences, right? Didn't they?

BS [00:40:52] That's so they could fish in different areas.

RM [00:40:53] Oh, that's it.

BS [00:40:54] Yeah.

RM [00:40:56] Is that good policy?

BS [00:40:58] Well, if you don't mind travelling the coast it is. It wasn't for me because that's too slow. I couldn't do it now. I'd fall asleep before I got there. (laughter)

BS [00:41:07] Yeah, at the time if you could afford it and early on the licences weren't that unaffordable. Once it became the speculators, then it really messed everything up. At least, this quota system is just awful, you know, for other fisheries. In gillnetting, we don't have quota system yet.

RM [00:41:24] I guess you've never fished down south?

BS [00:41:26] I fished down as far as area eight.

RM [00:41:29] Yeah.

BS [00:41:30] Which is part of this area.

RM [00:41:31] Yeah.

BS [00:41:32] You know, part of this licencing area, but further than that no. Most guys had, particularly if they lived down south, had a licence for—not Grenville Channel—Johnstone Strait, Roller Bay, and all that, but I didn't have. I didn't really want to go that far anyway. Even in area 8, I fished the been channel place [unclear] for logs still could be difficult to get regular fish and to get ice for the next opening.

RM [00:42:01] So, when you started out fishing, I guess there were a lot of old timers?

BS [00:42:04] Yes.

RM [00:42:05] Did you learn from them? Were they [unclear] guys, they told great stories?

BS [00:42:12] Absolutely. Some were very helpful. Some of the stuff that had worked for them in the past, like using large mesh nets and catching big sockeye, turned out to not be—and long sets, like sitting on the net for three hours—turned out to not be the best way to fish. It's the traditional way to fish and when there was lots of fish it didn't make any difference. What works best for me, and I think it's the trend now, a smaller mesh nets and quick sets, relatively quick sets. Just cuz get a small mesh net and big sockeye hits it and gets just its nose caught in there. Soon as he dies, he's gonna fall out, you know.

RM [00:42:48] And you hate seals the way everybody, all these fishermen do?

BS [00:42:52] They gotta eat too. I mean, I think there probably could be a seal fishery. There's so many of them.

RM [00:42:57] That's what the First Nations are calling for.

BS [00:43:00] Oh, I support that.

RM [00:43:01] Yeah. One of the First Nations, anyway, on Vancouver Island wants to and, of course, everyone goes oh! (laughter)

BS [00:43:11] They're not sea kittens, I know that. (laughter)

RM [00:43:14] Were you ever tempted to take a shot at one?

BS [00:43:17] Are you trying to get me to admit stuff now? I have shot maybe three seals. I ended up feeling so bad about it, I quit.

RM [00:43:25] Really?

BS [00:43:25] Yeah. I mean, you know, at the time, I was feeling desperate because they come and rip stuff out of your net.

RM [00:43:31] And the sea lions too, eh?

BS [00:43:32] I haven't had that much problem with sea lions. It's like a bus going through your net when you got one of those [unclear], it can do some serious damage.

RM [00:43:40] Right.

BS [00:43:41] The seals do damage, but it's not quite so bad. Just that when you're really fast fishing, you got a seal working your net, you know, and like I say—I really like animals to start with and it was hard shootin' 'em in the first place. After I got thinking about it, mulling it over, I decided no, I can't do that, you know. Even though I know there's having a problem with them like places on the river, unless there's lots of boats and lots of fish you don't dare put your net out hardly.

RM [00:44:10] Yeah. Do you remember some of the old timers and some of the stories they told about the real old days?

BS [00:44:16] Oh, just when I had Norm Iverson hide your fish on the outside of Banks Island and stuff like that. Now [unclear] cut out. Them getting a—oh, one of them, not whale sharks, the other one.

RM [00:44:29] Dog sharks?

BS [00:44:30] No, the big ones. Second to the whale shark in size.

RM [00:44:33] Tiger sharks?

BS [00:44:34] No it's a bayling feeder, I think. Anyway, they get a lot of very—

RM [00:44:39] White sharks?

BS [00:44:40] No. It's like one the poster, you know, that they're worried about now. They kinda disappeared. They used to go 'em outside Banks there and be as long as the boat.

RM [00:44:51] Wow.

BS [00:44:52] Yeah. I've heard [unclear] right up to—

RM [00:44:54] And now they've disappeared?

BS [00:44:56] Yeah. Too many of them killed. The fisheries' boats used to have like a knife on the bow underwater and they'd run across them and kill them when they—.

RM [00:45:04] On purpose?

BS [00:45:07] Yeah, on the old days.

RM [00:45:07] And that's because they were eating salmon?

BS [00:45:09] Yeah. People were ignorant, you know. We still are! (laughter) We still are otherwise Trump wouldn't be king of the world. You know, it takes awhile; people just throw their garbage overboard.

RM [00:45:21] Yeah.

BS [00:45:23] You hardly see that at all now.

RM [00:45:24] Were you fishing when the Vietnamese started entering the industry?

BS [00:45:27] Yeah.

RM [00:45:27] How was that?

BS [00:45:29] Terrible. They came from a very impoverished country where there's not much and lots of competition. They fished out here in the same way. It must have been like heaven for 'em to come out here where, you know, everybody gave everybody room and wasn't aggressive and relatively speaking—

RM [00:45:47] Yeah.

BS [00:45:47] I mean, they're learning, I think. Of course now, it's kinda too late to turn the [unclear] fishing left—

RM [00:45:52] But they were resented. I guess, eh?

BS [00:45:55] Well there was some racism involved, but it was a lot of it was just fishing practises.

RM [00:46:02] Because they didn't know them, right?

BS [00:46:05] Well, or just we're used to being in a very competitive environment.

RM [00:46:08] Yes.

BS [00:46:11] You know, it takes a couple of generations probably before it'll all get sorted out.

RM [00:46:14] Yeah. So, are you—you know, I mean, people running over other people's nets and all that stuff?

BS [00:46:20] You don't do that on purpose because usually end up with it in your propeller.

RM [00:46:24] But I mean—sometimes that kind of stuff goes out on in the fishing grounds, doesn't it?

BS [00:46:30] Well, again, probably not intentionally for the most part. I mean, that happens a lot, but very seldom—

RM [00:46:36] What about cutting nets or something like that. Would anyone ever do that?

BS [00:46:40] Oh, I'm sure people have, yeah.

RM [00:46:41] You've never done it?

BS [00:46:42] No, I never have. No.

RM [00:46:43] Did the Vietnamese do it? Oh, corky, what's corky?

BS [00:46:46] That's when you set too close to the other person.

RM [00:46:48] Yeah. So, I maybe I should have used that?

BS [00:46:50] Yeah. Okay. That's happened to me a few times.

RM [00:46:52] Yeah. So, what do you do about it?

BS [00:46:54] Well, one time it happened off Smith Island, like the guy's net had drifted into our net and the worst thing you can do then is troll because the fish will be laced through both nets it tears your net all to hell and the other guy's net too when you're trolling. You tie the two boats together and you both pick up at the same time and then you can get your net back without it being wrecked.

RM [00:47:17] Will people do that on purpose sometimes?

BS [00:47:21] Yeah. Oh yeah. This guy did, totally.

RM [00:47:24] That was on purpose?

BS [00:47:25] Oh yeah.

RM [00:47:26] You couldn't take any revenge on him?

BS [00:47:29] Well, mostly I wanted my net back.

RM [00:47:31] Yeah.

BS [00:47:32] Revenge is never—

RM [00:47:32] Why would anyone do that?

BS [00:47:34] Because he was going to get the fish before I got 'em. The fish would—my net was here, his net was here, and the fish were coming this way.

RM [00:47:41] You know, that's what I'm getting at. I mean, there's allegedly solidarity, but on the other hand when you're out in the fishery—

BS [00:47:46] There's a lot of greed. It's just like regular people.

RM [00:47:48] Yeah, and none by you?

BS [00:47:52] Absolutely not! (laughter) I used to lie about how much fish I caught, you know. Particularly this one guy [unclear] he always wanted to know how much I caught because he fished the same area I fished. I always downplayed it a lot because I knew if I told him what I was getting, he was going to be crowding me, you know.

RM [00:48:11] And he probably did the same to you.

BS [00:48:14] No, he was honest. It was kinda hurtin' a little bit to lie to this guy that was probably—I wasn't asking him how much he caught! He was asking me and then finally we were [sounds like] livering on this little packer, his blowing on one side and mine on the other, and he saw how much fish was coming off the boat. Then he kind of gave me shit.

RM [00:48:32] So, why do those guys go on the radio and say where the fish is?

BS [00:48:36] God only knows. (laughter) I mean I fish with a group, or did.

RM [00:48:40] Yeah.

BS [00:48:41] We had a private channel. You know, and so unless somebody was really good with a scanner, they wouldn't be able listen to us.

RM [00:48:48] Yeah.

BS [00:48:50] That's really handy because we spread out different parts of the fishing area. It gives you an idea how the fish are moving. If you're in a bad spot, then you don't go move to somebody else's bad spot, you know.

RM [00:49:02] Exactly.

BS [00:49:03] You try to go where there might be fish.

RM [00:49:05] So, I mean, you've done more than salmon?

BS [00:49:09] I used to fish halibut and herring a little bit.

RM [00:49:13] You never did the herring roe?

BS [00:49:15] Well, that's what it was.

RM [00:49:16] I've mean herring but for the roe.

BS [00:49:17] Yeah, that was what it was, roe.

RM [00:49:19] Not food anyway?

BS [00:49:20] No, that's in November [unclear] This was in the spring or [unclear].

RM [00:49:24] What was that like? Did you like that?

BS [00:49:26] Oh, I didn't do it for very long. It was okay. It's strenuous.

RM [00:49:33] Oh, it is. Why?

BS [00:49:33] You shake it (laughter) and comes across, goes up one side, down the other. If you got a beta bar, that helps a lot. When I first went, there was—

RM [00:49:44] What's a beta bar?

BS [00:49:45] It's this long bar that's got a bar like this, with blades on it like this, and it spins. It's hydraulically powered. It beats on the net as it's coming on board because that's coming open across it and knocks most of the herring out.

RM [00:50:00] Oh, cool.

BS [00:50:00] You don't have to shake as much.

RM [00:50:02] Yeah.

BS [00:50:02] Then there's hot wheels, which helped pull it the net aboard so you're not doing it all by hand. God only knows what they're doing now. It's been 25 years, probably, since I fished herring.

RM [00:50:14] Halibut, what's that like?

BS [00:50:15] That's not much fun, except that now there's cameras and observers and all that kind of stuff. When I fished there wasn't any of that kind of stuff.

RM [00:50:25] Why was it fun?

BS [00:50:27] Well, you never know what you're gettin'. You know, you're watching the line come up and you never, you know, it can be almost anything. We got a lot of bycatch that we'd take on we'd eat like red cod, black cod and red snapper and [unclear] backs, whatever, you know.

RM [00:50:42] So, you don't go out then fishing for red snapper. That just sort of came when you when you—

BS [00:50:48] Well when they went to [unclear] licences which is rock cod licensing basically—

RM [00:50:51] Ground fish.

BS [00:50:52] Yeah, well it's not just ground fish cuz you can fish halibut which is a ground fish without [unclear] which you probably [unclear] because you're going to catch a few rock fish and stuff and now you've got to keep 'em which is—they got swim ladders and so you can't let them go. They can't get back down again—

RM [00:51:08] Right.

BS [00:51:09] When they come up for any kind of depth. You know, I love eating fish and I was always fishing with friends so it was pleasant.

RM [00:51:19] What's the most amazing thing you found in your nets? Did you ever get something that really surprised you?

BS [00:51:23] I got a whale this year.

RM [00:51:25] An orca?

BS [00:51:27] No a humpback.

RM [00:51:29] What's that?

BS [00:51:32] Oh, a humpback whale.

RM [00:51:33] Humpback—oh, yeah, I just heard you.

BS [00:51:35] Yeah. I was thinking, well, how many of these interviews have you done! (laughter)

BS [00:51:40] I was fishing in the Southern Gulf in a spot a friend had told me about a slack tide set and so I set the net out, and I was running back the line to see if there's any fish in it because there wasn't any boats around me so I didn't know if there's anything there or not. I didn't want to waste a lot of time in a spot where there wasn't any fish. I looked over to the side and, you know, I'm here, the net's here, and there's a humpback coming this way. The next thing I know, my kurk line is going over his back. I was thinking to myself, 'This can't be good.' (laughter) Then my net starts to go down because he's diving to get under the boat. I was thinking, this is really not good because I might end up with a net in the propeller and stuck there. He came up on the other side of the net kind of turned a little bit, I said, 'Maybe he's mad.' (laughter)

RM [00:52:28] Moby Dick! (laughter)

BS [00:52:31] Then he turned and ambled off, you know. I was lucky; he hit the net square. The worst thing is if they hit it at an angle because then that's when you get a lot of tangling and stuff, you know. Hit it square, I mean, there's nothing for him to break through a gill net and that's what he did.

RM [00:52:44] So, your net survived?

BS [00:52:45] Well, it looked like a Volkswagen bus had been through it.

RM [00:52:49] (laughter) Well apart from that. (laughter)

BS [00:52:52] The bloody line was broken in two places and I coulda tied it all together and kept fishing but I had, at that point, eight sockeye and eight pinks so I decided, the hell with it, I'm just going to go home and change nets.

RM [00:53:05] Was that a first?

BS [00:53:06] I got a whale once before, but it was with a 90 mesh with a deep weedline and it went between the corkline and the weedline, and didn't do a lot of damage, but I could not figure out what it was. Even the net boss he looked at it and, you know, some little bit of white stuff on the line and didn't know what it was either. A friend told me later, 'Yeah, I was watching and there was a baby humpback going through your net,' you know.

RM [00:53:33] Wow.

BS [00:53:35] I was probably lucky too because it could pass between the two lines.

RM [00:53:39] So, talk about whales. I mean, more or less than there used to be?

BS [00:53:44] More. Oh, I saw more whales this year than ever before out here.

RM [00:53:47] Why is that?

BS [00:53:49] They're not being harpooned anymore.

RM [00:53:51] Yeah. So, gradually they're building?

BS [00:53:53] Yeah. Humpbacks were [unclear] figures, you know.

RM [00:53:56] Yeah. Right.

BS [00:53:58] The sperm whales, I guess the trollers are having a bit of a problem with out on the West Coast, you know, cuz they'll go take the fish off a gear.

RM [00:54:04] Yeah. Yes, they will?

BS [00:54:06] Yeah.

RM [00:54:07] They're pretty big to do that aren't they?

BS [00:54:10] They like fish.

RM [00:54:11] Do you remember the days when fishermen tried to kill the orcas?

BS [00:54:15] I've heard about it. I think that's a little bit before my time. I think anybody trying to do that—

RM [00:54:20] Oh no, not today.

BS [00:54:21] No. I mean, even when I started fishing, I think the awareness of how little damage they actually do. You know, there's such mythology about them before and I think that's pretty well all gone now.

RM [00:54:33] So, when you look back on your years, you're still fishing, even though you're trying to get out of it, what are your memories of what you put in? You know, good life?

BS [00:54:42] Yeah. I mean, I thought at one time I was going to be a professional student. Thank God, I didn't try to do that. Just because I couldn't figure out anything I wanted to do. I got into merchant shipping very briefly. That's how I knew Hal Banks—

RM [00:54:56] And Kirk Makin. No. (laughter)

BS [00:55:00] That was no—I had bought an old packer that I thought I would fix up and didn't have an engine in it, but that's what we stayed on. We didn't take it anywhere. He did end up with one of my boats, I think. Back when I was running old, retired gillnetters and stuff that the cannery didn't want to fix anymore because it wasn't worth it, you know. That's how I learnt to fix old wooden boats was having these old junk boats. Had to have some version of repair to continue to float.

RM [00:55:27] I'm interrupting a bit, but what do you love about wooden boats?

BS [00:55:33] I know how to work on them. (laughter) They feel nice too. They're very comfortable boat to be on as compared to aluminium or even fibreglass. Aluminium is so light and noisy. I'd be on drum and fibreglass is heavier a bit. Probably what I would do if I was going to get into gillnetting again, try to get a fibreglass boat. But wood—and then I'd have to get somebody to fix it for me because I'm not going to mess around with fibreglass. Very little have I messed round with fibreglass—just doing patches, you know. Wood's bad enough using creosote and copper paint, but fibreglass, it's the fumes from it if you're going to do the work yourself. It just didn't appeal to me like wood did. I got a wooden commuter skiff; that's how I got to town today. Built in the early fifties in town here, and I've rebuilt it once. Probably going to do that again at some point.

RM [00:56:25] How are your relations with the Native Brotherhood and stuff like that? Is that all fine?

BS [00:56:29] The group I fish with is mostly Native.

RM [00:56:31] That's part of the Native Brotherhood?

BS [00:56:34] Not as far as I know. Two of the guys lived in Dodge Cove for a while.

RM [00:56:38] Are you one of those guys that resent the fact that the First Nations now are getting more and more of the fishery?

BS [00:56:42] Absolutely not.

RM [00:56:44] Why not?

BS [00:56:44] Well, because, fuck, I'm over so mad. It's way past time to compensate and, you know, those guys, they live right on the water. It's kind of like me and Dodge Cove, you know, not like they're coming from Vancouver or somewhere. They should be able to make a living outside their door.

RM [00:57:01] That's not a universal feeling amongst their non-native fisher—

BS [00:57:03] Oh, people are people, you know, most of them are pretty ignorant.

RM [00:57:07] Yeah. Sorry I interrupted you about, you know, your life fishing. I mean, what do you take away from it?

BS [00:57:14] Well. I've eaten a lot of fish.

RM [00:57:16] So, that's the big high?

BS [00:57:17] I know how to do hydraulics. I know how to do planking. Ribs. I'm fairly comfortable with woodworking, at least for a boat; I don't know about furniture and anything like that. My mechanical skills are pretty good. You know, I installed two engines on this little pit that we're finishing now, or that I'm trying to get rid of now. Now I'm the old timer that people come around to ask me questions, you know.

RM [00:57:46] You are the old timer. (laughter)

RM [00:57:48] What do you tell them? Don't go into fishing. (laughter)

BS [00:57:52] Hardly anybody asks me about that. It's, you know, how do I fix my lawnmower and stuff. What's wrong with my outboard?

RM [00:57:59] Well, you know, you started out—you went through a lot of good times, obviously.

BS [00:58:04] Yes. I just—I caught kinda the tail end of it. The prices were getting better, but fishing was becoming more political and sparser, but I did have some pretty good times.

RM [00:58:15] And now you look at it, and you must shake your head.

BS [00:58:20] I'm not religious, you know. I don't, you know, I don't really know how things work. I think the jury is still out in terms of what's really going on, in terms of the government, the fisheries department, the fish and global warming, all that kind of stuff, you know. I'd shake my head— well, I shake my head about Donald Trump and that ilk, you know.

RM [00:58:41] We never thought it would come to this—

BS [00:58:45] No, I did not. At the time I got into it, it didn't look like it was going to.

RM [00:58:49] And now it's—

BS [00:58:50] Now it's been decimated.

RM [00:58:51] Is it over?

BS [00:58:54] Fish are funny things, particularly fish with such a short lifecycle as salmon. Given the right circumstances, they could come back like gangbusters. When you think about the Fraser not too many years ago when they had really poor year, they said the fish were done, and then the next year they had a huge—

RM [00:59:10] Record catch.

BS [00:59:11] Yes.

RM [00:59:11] I know, it was unbelievable. People didn't know what to do.

BS [00:59:14] Norm Iverson, who grew up in [unclear] River, he said that one year they had so many—so few pinks come back that they figured they were done. Then in the cycle year, they just were everywhere, you know, practically going up people's drains looking for a place to spawn.

RM [00:59:29] It's tough for the Chinooks, though.

BS [00:59:31] Yeah. Well, everybody wants them.

RM [00:59:35] Yeah. Clear the whales. Yeah. All right. Anything else?

DS [00:59:39] Anything we didn't touch on that you'd like to mention?

BS [00:59:44] It's just a shame how many people got to do boring jobs now. You know, one nice thing about fishing was it was seldom—repetitious but was seldom boring. That's something I think people miss when they're looking at it is how much it lends itself to a lifestyle rather than just a job. That was certainly important to me, that it was a lifestyle. I didn't earn any respect for it of course. My neighbours still brow beat me. (laughter) I do live in Dodge Cove.

RM [01:00:18] Yeah. Sounds like quite the place there. Get out of Dodge. (laughter)

BS [01:00:22] Get out of Dodge. Yeah. (laughter) It's changed a lot from a fishing boat building community to almost a bedroom community. Kind of half assed monster homes.

RM [01:00:34] I got one more question. So, what kept you in Prince Rupert? What's great about Prince Rupert? Or is it great, you know, talk about Prince Rupert just a little bit.

BS [01:00:42] Well, it's on water and I want to be on the water. At one time, Salt Lake (I don't know if you know anything about Salt Lake) was a thriving community over across the harbour. During the war, it was a—there was a swimming lake there. [unclear] By the time I got here, it was a alternative community, kinda like what's on the Fraser down here. Oh, God, where those little houseboats are and stuff.

RM [01:01:08] [unclear] In slough?

BS [01:01:09] Yeah. Kinda like that. People from all over the country came there mostly of better educated or at least independent thinkers. You know, it wasn't just a kind of run of the mill stuff, you get.

RM [01:01:27] But that's not Prince Rupert.

BS [01:01:29] The Salt Lake, which is just across the harbour.

RM [01:01:31] No, I know. But talk about Prince Rupert.

BS [01:01:33] Well.

RM [01:01:35] That's where we are.

BS [01:01:36] Are we? (laughter) How can you be so sure!

RM [01:01:39] It's such an up and down place, full of characters and history and everything. Is that it.

BS [01:01:44] Yeah. Absolutely. You've summarised it well. There is a lot of—I've met a lot of people in Rupert that would have been hard—well I didn't meet in San Francisco or New York City or any place else I ever lived, you know. Certainly not in Dallas. Yeah, its big attraction is that it was—I felt like a world community because it was a port city and it—people—there was work and people came here from all over. The weather was hardest for me coming from Texas realising there was never going to be a summer. (laughter)

RM [01:02:16] Still waiting.

BS [01:02:18] When I was a kid in Texas and it rained, we ran out in the street to play in. (laughter)t.

RM [01:02:22] And no regrets?

BS [01:02:23] No regrets, no. About being here?

RM [01:02:25] Yeah.

BS [01:02:25] Oh, I wish I'd been some kind of high powered academic and could travel all over the world or something like that, but no reasonable regrets, no.

RM [01:02:32] Great.

BS [01:02:34] Rattlesnakes! Did I mention that?

RM [01:02:35] You mentioned that.

BS [01:02:38] I used to catch.