

Nordic American Voices
Nordic Heritage Museum

Interview of Marvin Gjerde
On October 9, 2010
At Seattle, Washington
Interviewed by Brandon Benson and Lise Orville

Marianne: [0:03] Oh, hello.

Brandon Benson: [0:07] This is an interview for the Nordic American Voices Oral History Project. Today is the ninth of October, 2010, and I'll be interviewing Marvin Gjerde.
[Shuffling]

Brandon: [0:20] We are in the Ballard neighborhood of Seattle at the Nordic Heritage Museum, my name is Brandon Benson, I'm here with Lise Orville and Kirsten Ericson. Could you please give us your name?

Marvin Gjerde: [0:32] Marvin Gjerde.

Brandon: [0:34] Thank you.

Lise Orville: [0:35] Thank you. Marvin, your family came from Norway?

Marvin: [0:42] Well, my father came from Norway.

Lise: [0:43] Yeah?

Marvin: [0:44] Yeah, my mother was from over here.

Lise: [0:45] Where did your father come from?

Marvin: [0:47] From Sikholden, just outside of Alesund.

Lise: [0:49] Oh, OK. And when did he come over?

Marvin: [0:52] 1923.

Lise: [0:54] Did he come right to Seattle?

Marvin: [0:57] He did, well, he landed in New York and then, I'm not even sure how he got over here. But he came to Seattle, he had a sister and brother-in-law that lived in Seattle. He came and stayed with them. They had a little apartment building that they owned up on Queen Anne Hill and he came over and stayed with them.

Lise: [1:14] How old was he when he came?

Marvin: [1:16] 23.

Lise: [1:17] Young. Had he been a fisherman in Norway?

Marvin: [1:21] He'd been a fisherman, and tow-boat guy, and whatever in the heck else they did. Went whaling a couple of different times, one thing and another.

Lise: [1:32] When he came to Seattle, what did he start with?

Marvin: [1:36] When he first got here, first went out and worked in the woods. He was in a logging camp down somewhere around Aberdeen. Worked there for the rest of that winter. And then that spring, that following spring, then he went up to Alaska and started fishing.

Lise: [1:57] Ah-ha. Did he meet your mother here in Seattle?

Marvin: [2:01] Yeah.

Lise: [2:02] Yeah?

Marvin: [2:03] Mm-hmm.

Lise: [2:03] But she was not Norwegian?

Marvin: [2:05] No. Her family came from Eastern Washington. Her family were German immigrants.

Lise: [2:10] Mm-hm. [papers shuffling]

Lise: [2:19] Have you been back to Norway to visit your family?

Marvin: [2:22] I was back there twice. Once, the first time my Dad went back was in, I guess it was in 1954 we went. That was the first time he'd been home. We went back there and spent, I think it was three, three and a half months maybe? Then I went back there once more. I went back in 1969 for a couple of weeks. But those are the only two times I'd been there.

Brandon: [2:49] Do you keep in touch with any relatives you have back in Norway?

Marvin: [2:52] No. Once my Dad died I don't think any of us have heard from any of them.

Lise: [3:01] How did you start with the fishing industry?

Marvin: [3:05] Well, my Dad was fishing all that time here, so I started hanging around fishermen's terminal when I was around four years old I suppose.

Lise: [3:11] Wow.

Marvin: [3:12] It just seemed like the natural thing to do when I got out of high school. I went sailing and then was going to school in the fall and the winter for a while and then fishing in the summers. And in 1969, I started halibut fishing and that's what I've been doing ever since. Stayed at it steadily since then.

Lise: [3:33] What boat did you Dad work on.

Marvin: [3:38] He owned several. He had a boat called the Western Sun right up until the Second World War. He was in the army transport service during the war. Then when he got out after the war was over, I'm not sure what boat he had right after that. [3:57] He was running herring boats for Wakefield Fisheries in those days, and then started fishing. Then he bought a boat called "The Foremost." It was in 1950 that they bought that. Fished herring with it for a couple of years right up until the herring disappeared, Then in about, it was in 1950, I want to say it was 1952 they started fishing King Crab.

Lise: [4:26] Mm-hm. OK. So your Dad was active up until...

Marvin: [4:31] Well, then he did that, he was fishing king crab for a while, then he started running processors for Wakefield until he retired in, God when did he retire? He must have retired in 1969. I believe. '67 or '69, I can't remember.

Lise: [4:51] He was pretty old?

Marvin: [4:53] Yeah.

Lise: [4:54] Hmm.

Brandon: [4:57] Growing up, did your family follow any Norwegian traditions for the holidays or any other times?

Marvin: [5:03] Not an awful lot. My Dad spent some time doing things with Norwegian Commercial Club and Sons of Norway, and all that business. We used to go to some of the Christmas things, but I don't really remember an awful lot of that.

Brandon: [5:21] Mm-hm.

Lise: [5:23] Maybe because both your parents weren't Norwegian it would have made a difference.

Marvin: [5:28] Yeah, it probably would have.

Lise: [5:29] Yeah. Has fishing changed a lot in the years?

Marvin: [5:39] Well, Longlining for us once we got the IFQ system. That made a whole world of difference. If it hadn't been for that, I'm not so sure any of us would be at it.

Lise: [5:49] Yeah.

Marvin: [5:50] I don't think there would be a fishery left if that hadn't happened.

Brandon: [5:55] Could you explain the IFQ system a little bit? [laughter]

Marvin: [6:01] Yeah, I guess. Basically, the boat owners have individual quotas that they own now. What they did, is they went back and took the history and then figured out the

average percentage of the quota that people took over all those years. Then some of it was taken away for community development quotas and one thing and another. [6:27] And then, area-by-area you got the percentage of fish you had been taking, whatever it was, the 10 years previous. It saved the fishery. It completely saved the fishery. Things were getting so over fished, and so many boats, and such short seasons that I don't think any of us would be doing it anymore, if it hadn't happened that way.

Brandon: [6:51] When you talk about an area, what, how do you describe 'an area'?

Marvin: [6:55] Well, for halibut fishing, the Halibut Commission is set up different. They set up different areas with different quotas and in each area, so we wound up with quotas and in four or five different areas. For black cod, the National Marine Fisheries Services has busted the Gulf of Alaska into different areas. It was the same deal, where you would have quotas in each individual area.

Brandon: [7:24] Thanks.

Lise: [7:26] So the owner of the boat gets the quota.

Marvin: [7:29] Yeah, it went to the ownership of the vessel.

Lise: [7:31] And then if the owner doesn't want to keep fishing and sells his boat to someone, can they take over?

Marvin: [7:38] Yeah, they can buy the quota as well. Buy the boat and the quota.

Lise: [7:40] I see.

Marvin: [7:41] It's all transferable. There's been quota that's been bought and sold and traded, since it went into effect in '95. I guess it was.

Lise: [7:51] Really, it was that recently. Wow.

Marvin: [7:54] Yeah. Up until then it was just basically a wide open fishery. Well, it started out being pretty much a wide open fishery. And then we got to the point where short

openings were dictated by the Halibut Commission, Or National Marine Fisheries Service in the case of black cod.

Lise: [8:14] What boats did you own before you had "The Tordenskjold?"

Marvin: [8:19] I owned part of another schooner called the "At Too" for a few years.

Lise: [8:23] "The Attu?"

Marvin: [8:23] Yeah, I had a third of that. I can't even remember the years. It must have been from '72 or '73, until 1976 probably.

Lise: [8:40] And was that halibut?

Marvin: [8:41] Yeah. Yeah, we were fishing strictly halibut in those days.

Lise: [8:48] And then at that point, did you buy "The Tordenskjold"? [8:52] B; No. I had sold out of the "Attu". And then I went crab fishing for a year on a boat called the "Anna Marie." I spent a season there. Then I went halibut fishing on "The Chelsea" for a year. It must have been in '76. And then bought into. No, it was later than that because we bought "The Tordenskjold " in 79. That's right.

Lise: [9:24] OK.

Marvin: [9:24] Yeah. It must have been 78 that it was on the Chelsea, '77 that it was on the Anna Marie.

Lise: [9:34] When you bought "The Tordenskjold." did you have to do a lot of work on her?

Marvin: [9:39] We did a lot because it wasn't rigged for halibut fishing at all. It wasn't set up to be long-lining in those days. The man who owned it before us, Carl Servold been dragging with the boat since 1939. Was the last year he'd been longlining. And he'd been dragging pretty much all the way through. Except during the war years he was shark fishing. And then he went back to dragging.

Lise: [10:08] When you say dragging you mean...

Marvin: [10:10] Bottom fishing.

Lise: [10:10] Bottom fishing, longlining.

Marvin: [10:12] No. Trawling. Bottom trawling.

Lise: [10:14] Trawling OK. So you redid it.

Marvin: [10:21] Yeah, we had to take off all the trawl gear, and rig it up. Get a gurney back on it, rig it up for halibut fishing. We had to change out all the hydraulics. We wound up having to put refrigeration in the boat. We didn't realize it at the time, we bought it, but most of the well deck was pretty rotten. [10:38] We had to replace the entire well deck. The electrical system wasn't all that good, so we went through the entire electrical system. Required the fish-hold, the engine room, and the pilot house. It was a long winter.

[laughter]

Marvin: [10:56] Yeah, it was a lot longer winter than we thought it would be.

Lise: [10:59] What's the well deck?

Marvin: [11:01] Just the main deck.

Lise: [11:02] Oh, OK. How many men or people do you go out with?

Marvin: [11:10] There's six of us.

Lise: [11:14] Are they locals?

Marvin: [11:17] Not anymore. I've got one guy who lives in California, one that lives up in Seward, one that lives down in Aberdeen. The other two are fairly close by here.

Lise: [11:31] What is it like going out on the Trodenskjold for your fishing gear?

Marvin: [11:37] Oh I don't know. It's just going fishing. [laughter]

Brandon: [11:45] How long do you get to go out for?

Marvin: [11:47] Each trip is usually only for, five, six days, something like that. The way it is now, you'll leave towards the end of April and come home for a little while in June. Then go back up and finish up the season and get home the first part of September.

Lise: [12:05] When you say five or six days that means you bring the fish?

Marvin: [12:08] Back here. We've been selling most of our stuff in Seward, in one of the Alaskan ports.

Lise: [12:17] It's all Halibut?

Marvin: [12:18] Halibut and Black Cod.

Lise: [12:27] There must have been a point when it carried dories?

Marvin: [12:31] Yeah, it was built with dories. I don't know when they quit using them. Late '20s, early '30s I would imagine? I'm not sure exactly. It varied from boat to boat. I can't remember what year they were actually outlawed. That was sometime in the early '30s. When Carl stopped using dories I'm not sure.

Lise: [12:54] Carl was the man who...

Marvin: [12:55] Carl Servold. His father actually built the boat then Carl ran it for years and years.

Lise: [13:02] That was really dangerous wasn't it?

Marvin: [13:04] Dory fishing would have been, yeah. They used to lose a few guys. Dory swamping. Dories getting lost. Never getting back to the boat. I wouldn't have liked it.
[laughter]

Brandon: [13:24] What are some special features about your boat that make it good for Halibut fishing?

Marvin: [13:31] They were just well designed boats. They were purposefully built for long lining. They're good sea boats. They're very efficient. They're relatively cheap to operate,

although maintenance is getting to tougher on them every year. It's just getting more and more expensive. Lumber is harder to find and getting more expensive. Caulking is getting more expensive. Labor is getting more expensive. It's just getting tougher and tougher to keep them up.

Lise: [14:02] Do you have trouble finding parts?

Marvin: [14:06] No, all the mechanical stuff is common. Marine gears and engines and electronics. There's no trouble finding parts. There's trouble finding wood.

Brandon: [14:21] Mm-hm.

Marvin: [14:21] You know? That's the toughest one is just finding a piece of lumber to put in 'em.

Lise: [14:25] What kind of lumber?

Marvin: [14:27] It was all built of Douglas Fir.

Lise: [14:28] OK.

Marvin: [14:30] Island grows Douglas Fir in those days. They might cut it down right here in Ballard back in 1911. That kind of material is getting harder to come by.

Lise: [14:58] I was reading the Seattle Times article about your boat and it said that it tended to...

Marvin: [15:05] Yeah, they roll.

Lise: [15:06] They roll. [laughter]

Marvin: [15:08] Well they're round bottom. They roll like a barrel.

Lise: [15:11] Oh, is that right?

Marvin: [15:12] Oh, sure.

Lise: [15:13] There's no Keel?

Marvin: [15:16] Well there's a little. No they're just basically round bottom boats. You got to keel 'em. They're heavy on the bottom. They always stand back up again. If they're light they roll and they roll pretty quick. Once you get some fish in them they're very comfortable, but to start with they bounce around little bit.

Brandon: [15:43] What's the size of your catch typically?

Marvin: [15:45] Oh that varies so much from trip to trip. A boat will pack about 95,000 pounds but we don't ever make those trips anymore.

Lise: [15:57] Because of the quota system?

Marvin: [15:58] Yeah. For one thing there's no reason to do it. We don't even have any areas now where we have enough quotas to make a 95,000 pound trip. Sometimes you'll come in with 30,000. Sometimes you'll come in with 60,000 it just varies from trip to trip.

Lise: [16:20] How does it work? They tell you before you go out what your quota is?

Marvin: [16:25] Yeah. The Halibut Commission will set the halibut quota and the National Marine Fishery sets the black cod quota. You get a notice in the mail as far as how much you've got to catch in each individual area.

Lise: [16:44] Last year what did they tell you was the quota?

Marvin: [16:47] Oh, I can't even remember exactly what we did have.

Brandon: [16:59] What's the size of an area typically?

Marvin: [17:02] I couldn't give you the dimensions of it. I don't even remember for sure without looking at a our chart exactly where the lines run.

Brandon: [17:10] How do you decide where in the area you're going to decide to go fish?

Marvin: [17:14] Usually where you've been before and had some success or something on the chart that looks like it ought to be good or some place you've heard somebody has done well in the last three weeks.

Lise: [17:29] When you get up there in that area are there a lot other boats?

Marvin: [17:33] Hopefully not. You know?

Lise: [17:34] Yeah. [laughter]

Marvin: [17:35] That's one of the beauties of the IFQ system .It gives everyone a standard, so typically you don't have too many problems with other boats.

Lise: [17:45] What is staggered? What do you mean?

Marvin: [17:46] Well, just going out at different times, there's a statutory opening in the spring and a statutory closing in the fall and in between there people can fish when they want or where they want depending on where they got quota. [18:02] It's not like before where you go into an individual opening and open for two days or three days or eight days or whatever it was. And by golly! You went fishing then it didn't matter.

Lise: [18:14] Right.

Marvin: [18:15] Yeah, it didn't matter what was going on and it didn't matter what the weather was or what the tides were doing or anything else, when you had the opening that's when you had to go.

Lise: [18:24] This is better?

Marvin: [18:26] Oh lord, yes!

Lise: [18:27] Yeah.

Marvin: [18:29] Yeah, we do things now, weird stuff like eat and sleep. [laughter]

Marvin: [18:33] Those sort of things during the trip.

Lise: [18:38] Is one crew member your cook?

Marvin: [18:41] Well there's one guy that does the cooking, that's not all he does.

Lise: [18:44] OK.

Marvin: [18:45] He works on deck as well, but, yeah there's one person that's responsible for feeding us all.

Lise: [18:51] Yeah. I was looking at the boat and the captain. You are up front. You have your own.

Marvin: [18:59] Up in the pilot house, back aft,

Lise: [19:00] In the pilot house you sleep up there?

Marvin: [19:02] Yeah.

Lise: [19:04] The crew?

Marvin: [19:06] Well, we got some of them sleeping. In our case unless three guys are sleeping in the fo'c'sle we also have a cabin behind the engine room that a couple guys stay in.

Lise: [19:15] OK.

Marvin: [19:16] Yeah.

Lise: [19:17] And the fish go...

Marvin: [19:18] In the middle.

Lise: [19:19] In the middle.

Marvin: [19:20] Yeah.

Lise: [19:23] You're talking to a bunch of novices. [laughter]

Lise: [19:27] You know we're just trying to figure out what your life is like up there. When you put it into shore do you spend a couple of days?

Marvin: [19:44] Yeah, usually we spend a night or two in town and then turn around and go out and do it again.

Lise: [19:48] Yeah.

Marvin: [19:49] Yeah.

Lise: [19:50] What's the best place to go into?

Marvin: [19:52] Well, I don't know if there's a best place or not. We've been selling almost everything in Seward for years and it's you know that where we're comfortable and that's where we'll probably keep on selling as long as I'm fishing. Some guys go into New Homer some guys go into Kodiak. It just depends on where you feel comfortable and who you're used to doing business with. In our case it's Seward.

Lise: [20:16] Do you ever use tenders?

Marvin: [20:18] No.

Lise: [20:22] Because you'd have that...

Marvin: [20:25] We ice everything down and just go in and unload. It's not like on a seine boat where you're going to pop it out. You're going to fish a day and pop it out and go back out there and fish and fish a day and pop it out. It's a different story for us. We'll ice everything down and then run down to wherever we are going to sell it.

Lise: [20:45] So, the seiners just get it all up and go to...

Marvin: [20:52] Because those guys all got refrigeration and chill water, when those guys went fishing maybe they'll be out there for a day or two but for the most part. Yeah. They fish a day and then unload to the seiner. And then go back out and do it again. Or unload to the tender rather.

Lise: [21:12] Now when "Tordenskjold" was built in 1911 there was no refrigeration.

Marvin: [21:16] No.

Lise: [21:17] Right.

Marvin: [21:17] It was just...

Lise: [21:18] So where did they fish?

Marvin: [21:20] Well I don't know where Carl would. Or Carl's dad in that case, I don't know where they would've started. Carl fished a lot outside of Seward, outside of Kodiak and up in that area. They used to ton a lot of fish to Seattle in those days as well. They'd take a boat full of ice and ice the fish down. In fact in those days most of that fish came to Seattle. Very little of that fish went came from Alaska because there was no way to get it down and there was no way to get it to market unless you were selling in Seattle.

Lise: [21:50] So was it just sales to start with in 1911?

Marvin: [21:54] No, there was the Tordenskjold. I can't remember the make of it. I believe it was a two cylinder gasoline engine that they had to start with and they had sails as they needed them, or as auxiliary power. No. They were powered in those days. [22:16] I don't remember when they put a diesel engine in, but to start with it was a two-cylinder gas engine.

Lise: [22:26] So how long did it take to get to Seward?

Marvin: [22:30] For us, from here to Seward was about six days.

Lise: [22:37] And that's when you're rolling.

Marvin: [22:41] Yeah a little bit. If you get outside, it's a little bit nasty. Yeah she rolls around a little bit.

Brandon: [22:49] Do you remember any significant trip you made? Maybe there was some bad weather?

Marvin: [23:00] I remember a couple of trips when we were fishing before the IFQ system, that were particularly miserable. Because we had a four day opening where we fished for four days. I think we took three hours off or something somewhere in the middle of it.

[23:19] We had a three-day trip that we just went straight through for three days and then everybody slept for a week when it was all over with. Then there was a trip out west that I remember was just absolutely miserable.

[23:36] About half of the time out there, I think we had about six or seven days out there and half of those days we shouldn't have even been working at all. The weather was so miserable. But you had an opening and you just had to fish. It's things like that, nothing that stands out particularly.

[23:56] I remember a Bering Sea trip when I was in the fourth year I was Halibut fishing. I know they had a Bering Sea opening that must have opened the first of April, or maybe it was the fifteenth of March. It was just so damn cold. My God! It was cold up there.

[24:22] What few fish we got, we had to get it aboard. Get the fish dressed and iced because if it was on deck for 10 minutes it was a frozen fish and you couldn't dress it and ice it.

[24:37] I remember standing in the checker dressing fish. We weren't catching anything. We starved to death on that trip. You had keep your feet moving when you were dressing fish, because as the water and blood would run off the hatch and into the checker it kept freezing.

[24:57] It would be like standing in mud. You had to keep your feet moving, so your feet didn't freeze there. Because you just kept getting taller, because that blood kept freezing and freezing and freezing.

[25:13] It, was like you were getting boosted up all the time. That year we started icing down. As soon as we went into Petersburg, we got ice and bait.

[25:30] No. We took a load of Herring across into Kodiak. Then we took ice and bait. We started icing down as soon as we left Petersburg. We never thawed out again until we got back out of the Bering Sea.

[25:44] It was just miserable. Just, absolutely miserable! We actually had the ice come down on us. We were down below the Pribilofs I remember when a flow of ice actually came down.

[25:55] We were hauling a couple strings of gear through the ice. We were actually out walking around the boat while we were hauling which was a bizarre feeling.

[laughter]

Brandon: [26:14] Have you ever encountered ships that have had trouble?

Marvin: [26:20] I don't know trouble. Yes. A few years ago, we were off of Cape Saint Elias. there was another boat close by. He got pretty well busted up. [26:30] Actually, he would have been in real trouble. There was a tanker that had come out of Valdez that actually escorted him back and around in behind the island where he could get some shelter.

[26:44] It was blowing a big storm. A North East came in there. We wound up jogging all night, and part of the next day. We could not get anywhere. I remember hearing the distress call from him.

[26:57] We turned to see if we could go over close to him. There was no way we could get anywhere. All we could do was jog into it and hold on. If it had not been for that guy to escort him around, he ran in the lee of that tanker. Otherwise he would have been in real trouble. He would have busted up his pilot house pretty bad.

[27:22] Other than that, you have trouble, breakdowns, but nothing of any real serious business.

Lise: [27:35] You must belong to a fishermen's union.

Marvin: [27:38] Well the Seattle Fishing Vessels Association. Yes, sure. We joined that as soon as we bought the boat. Before that, I was in the Deep Sea Fisherman Union.

Lise: [27:50] What do they do? The owner's union? What have they done?

Marvin: [27:54] Well the vessel owner is almost more of a political organization now. Mostly what that organization does now is just keep track of the rules and regulations lobby other people, get rid of some of them. And add some. [28:13] It is more of a political organization really, than anything else. It started back when there was a whole lot of fishermen and a whole lot of boats. The Deep Sea Fishermen Union was a pretty strong entity.

[28:26] Then there were a lot of negotiations between the vessel owners and the union about keeping some of them back when there were a lot of boats. Over the years now, the number of boats declined. The Deep Sea Fisherman's Union really isn't much anymore as far as any strength at all. As far as negotiations there, that's done. Now it's more politics than anything else.

Lise: [28:51] What are some regulations you'd like to get rid of?

Marvin: [28:54] No. I'm actually pretty happy with what we have now. There are some things they're talking about now. Things like pumping the boat. Things like pumping the fish hole. [29:09] They're talking about any water that comes off the boat has to be contained, or has to be tested and filtered. Stuff that really shouldn't apply to us, but might.

[29:23] It's that thing that comes down every once in awhile. There's some new regulations as far as insurance and lawsuits that are liable to happen. Things that we won't be able to get insurance for.

[29:37] That could be a real serious problem for us. No, it's things like that that we have to try to keep track of and try to talk some sense into people.

Lise: [29:48] Who insures you, though?

Marvin: [29:53] There are a couple of insurance pools here in Ballard. I don't know even what year they started. My dad was one of the first four or five guys that were involved in it, back in the late '20s or '30s. [30:11] There are a couple of insurance pools we have for hull insurance. With the liability, we started our own with the vessel owner's liability association. The first part of that insurance we've got through ourselves.

Lise: [30:23] So you put in money . .

Marvin: [30:24] And then you go outside for the rest of it.

Brandon: [30:29] Your father sort of got you into this. Is this something that's going to continue on in your family?

Marvin: [30:34] No. [laughter]

Marvin: [30:38] Do you have a reason that it's not going to?

Marvin: [30:39] I've got a couple of daughters that don't have much of an interest in it. This tradition will pretty much end with me.

Lise: [30:55] You'll sell the shares and quotas?

Marvin: [30:58] At some point. I don't know when it's going to happen, but at some point I'll decide to retire and we'll sell the boat, and sell the quota. Somebody else can go decide to have fun for awhile.

Brandon: [31:15] It's been a good career for you?

Marvin: [31:16] It has. It's been very good to me. I've got no complaints whatsoever. It's afforded us a very nice living for a long time now. Longer than I like to think, sometimes.

Lise: [31:32] You were gone from April to September?

Marvin: [31:37] Yeah. We actually sold some quota a number of years ago, so our season got shorter. Yeah. It runs for us, from the first part of May to the middle of September.

Lise: [31:52] How does that effect your family? Or did it your wife?

Marvin: [31:56] It's pretty tough on her. Especially when we first started having kids, because we were fishing longer seasons. We were gone a long time she'd spend half the year basically being a single parent, which is tough on anybody.

Brandon: [32:18] During the off time and later did you work on a boat?

Marvin: [32:22] Yeah and then I turned into a commuter. I'll be down at the boat two or three days a week and then It was almost like a regular job, even if I don't do much at least go down there and act like I am. [laughter]

Brandon: [32:39] OK.

Lise: [32:41] Has everybody else hung out down there?

Marvin: [32:44] I've been going down there since I was four years old and it's a hard habit to break. That's the weird thing about thinking about retirement. I've spent a lot of time down there.

Brandon: [32:59] That's your community.

Marvin: [33:00] Pretty much.

Lise: [33:07] Fisherman's Terminal back started back then, too?

Marvin: [33:12] I can't remember what year they actually put that facility in. 19...

Brandon: [33:17] It was 1911 or 1913.

Marvin: [33:19] Something like that. Yeah. Right after they built the Locks, which was sometime shortly after the Tordenskjold was built.

Brandon: [33:28] Mm-hm.

Lise: [33:29] Yeah, so the Tordenskjold was based somewhere else just starting?

Marvin: [33:35] I don't know where they would have tied up in those days. I'm really not sure. The yard where she was built was actually almost where the locks are right now. They must have tied up downtown some place or I really don't know.

Lise: [33:53] Do you know the name of the yard?

Marvin: [33:55] Yeah, the builder was John Strand, the guy that built the boat.

Lise: [33:59] OK.

Marvin: [34:00] ...yeah and he also built the Vannsea, he built the Republic, he built the Polaris, he built a sister ship to the Tordenskjold that was named the Orient. Those are the only names that I remember. But, he built a bunch of boats.

Lise: [34:20] So, he came over from Norway and started building?

Brandon: [34:24] Yes, he did. Of all the schooners that were built, the ones that were built by him that's the most of them that are left. There's still four of them pounding around out there. I don't think there's that many from other yard, I am sure there are.

Lise: [34:49] Was that because he built them better?

Marvin: [34:52] I don't think. Like the guys at Sag Stead and there were a couple others. They built good boats too, it's just for some reason those four were just lucky in who bought them and who kept them up.

Lise: [35:09] Could you explain why this schooner is?

Marvin: [35:13] In this case it's just basically a boat with a house aft. It's a misnomer. Schooners are rigged for sailing boat, that's one of the sailing rigs. None of us are set up that way but for whatever reason probably because the dory fishing back on the East Coast, actually. [35:39] Schooners that were doing it. They started building these boats out here with the house aft and the sails on them and they gave them halibut Schooners and that's what they were given and that's what stuck.

Interviewer: [35:55] A lot of easterners came?

Marvin: [35:58] When the halibut fishing first started, yeah it was boats that came in from the East Coast that started it. Started dory fishing.

Lise: [36:08] Did they come all the way around the bends? [laughter]

Marvin: [36:13] Mm-hm. Yeah. It was a long sail.

Lise: [36:16] Then that was a sail!

Marvin: [36:17] Yeah, it was indeed. They had the sailboats when they started . Then they had some steamers they were using too, bigger boats. They were again, dory fishing, but steam powered instead of with sails. Then they started longlining and then started with gas engines and went on from there.

Lise: [36:44] When did they all start crab fishing? Was that recent?

Marvin: [36:49] Well king crabbing? I'm trying to remember now. There was a boat call "The Deep Sea," what was Wakefield built. That was built in 1947. Lowell Wakefield was the guy who built that. His father was in the herring business. [37:09] They had a salting and reduction plant on Raspberry Island. He'd been in the herring business for years and years and years. His son was looking at it. Everybody saw King Crab up there but there was no market for it. Lowell built "The Deep Sea" and started dragging and processing on board. He was basically the one that pioneered that whole fishery.

[37:40] When it really started to take off. He'd been trying to market it in one thing or another for years. But then in 1950 right after the Second World War the herring fishery back in Kodiak basically collapsed.

[38:04] The year my dad bought that boat, the year before he told me one time how much Herring they deliver. I don't remember what it was but it was a lot of Herring. The following year they went up they didn't have one single delivery for the season.

[38:19] The next year they went up there was also nothing, completely blank. They borrowed some money and rigged it up and started dragging and processing on "The Foremost." I believe it was 1952.

[38:31] There were actually three of those guys that started that year. There was "The Foremost" and "The Chalikov" and the "Janet F." One of those boats was run by the brother of the guy that we bought the Tordenskjold from, Arnie Servold was his name. They started fishing King Crab there in '52 and then it just went on from there.

Interviewer: [39:02] There was a market for it at that point?

Marvin: [39:05] Well, there was a market but it was barely a market. Those guys, weren't making much. I can't remember now what my dad said they were getting paid in those days, but it was like \$15 a case for a 60-pound case of finished meat in those days.

Lise: [39:23] Finished meat?

Marvin: [39:24] Yeah, yeah. Just a pure meat pack. [laughter]

Brandon: [39:27] That's incredible.

Marvin: [39:28] Yeah, compared to what they, you know. Even when I started, I went King Crabbing the first time in 1967, on "The Foremost," and we got 10 cents a pound that year. [39:46] The next year I went back on there again and I remembered we started at 12 cents. By the time I flew home. We started at 12 cents and we went to 14. The last delivery made when I was there, I think we got 16 cents for it that year.

[40:08] Then that winter that boat burned up and got lost. Otherwise I probably would have been back at it, and would have probably been a head Crab fisherman instead of a Halibut fisherman.

Lise: [40:20] Which is harder? They're both hard.

Marvin: [40:22] Oh, I don't know. They're different. I find Halibut fishing, especially on deck, to be more interesting. There's just more going on and there's a lot more skill involved in it. Both of them are tough and , both of them are long hours and both of them are a long time away from home. I just found Halibut fishing to be a lot more fun than Crab fishing was.

Lise: [40:57] Are the Herrings still all gone?

Marvin: [40:59] No, there's Herring around up there now, other than in Prince William Sound. That fishery collapsed when they had the Exxon-Valdez spill and they haven't had an opening in Prince William Sound since, but it had turned into basically a Roe fishery.

[41:18] The reduction market was gone and the salt market was gone. Whatever Herring is up there now, and there's not very many of them. It turned basically into a Roe fishery in the spring or else a bait fishery later on in the year.

Lise: [41:33] What's a reduction fishery?

Marvin: [41:35] Oil and meal.

Lise: [41:36] Oh.

Marvin: [41:37] Yeah. Early in the year, when the Herring were skinny, they'd bring them in and they'd put them through the cookers and produce fishmeal or fish oil. Then later on in the year, getting into July or August, when the Herring would start getting fatter. They'd start salting them. Then those would be shipped all over the world for pickled fish and salt fish.

Lise: [42:05] Yeah.

Marvin: [42:06] One thing and another.

Brandon: [42:11] We're getting close to the end.

Lise: [42:13] Yeah.

Brandon: [42:12] Is there anything you'd like to say about your experiences or your career?

Marvin: [42:16] Oh, nothing particular. It's been a good career. I've had a lot of fun at it. I've made a good living at it. I've got no regrets about it, whatsoever. I've got some regrets about it on a day-to-day basis when we're actually doing it. [laughter]

[42:34] There's a lot of days you wish you were someplace else, but all in all, no, it's been good.

Brandon: [42:40] Very good. Lise, do you have anything else?

Lise: [42:45] No, that was fascinating.

Marvin: [laughs] [42:46]

Brandon: [42:47] Great. We'll conclude the interview

Transcription by CastingWords

DRAFT