

Researcher: Don Banister

Tape 65; 1

Interviewed: February 23, 1976

Mr. Sid Swenns,  
773 Blundell Road,  
Richmond, B. C.

- He was born in Finland in 1928.
- He emigrated to Canada and stayed in Port Arthur for a year but found the weather too cold so he moved to Richmond.
- He worked for ten hours a day on the elevators in Port Arthur.
- Like many other immigrants, he worked in the logging industry .(2 yrs)
- In 1946 he heard about the "big money" that was being made in fishing.
- He was exempt from military service during WW II as he was involved in an essential service. (logging)
- When he started fishing in 1946 he had only one net, most other fishermen at that time had two nets, one for sockeyes and one for fall fishing.
- He used to return to the logging camps between fishing seasons.
- His brother was already working on a packer in 1946.
- He did not find it difficult to get into fishing in 1946 and also a little expense as he rented his brother-in-laws boat for "a song you might say".
- About the changes in working hours he says "you fished, when you were young like that, you know, you don't mind working 5 or 6 days a week, it was a style, nowadays if we fish 3 days and if they give us a day extension we are mad, we don't want to fish".
- He has been gillnetting since 1946: "every year without fail; I have been going up to Rivers Inlet every year except for one year when I retired".
- He was retired for a year but it did not agree with him so he returned to fishing.
- He kept his boat at the foot of #4 Road in Finn Slough.
- Finn Slough got its name because Finnish fishermen kept their boats there.
- The first fall he went fishing (1946), he made \$1,000 a week.
- He fished for two years with a rented boat, then built his own boat with his brother who was a carpenter.
- It took them about three months during the winter to build the boat.
- He sold this boat in 1972 when he retired for a year, and bought another one when he returned.

- There were many fishermen from Steveston going up to Rivers Inlet in 1946. There still is.
- It takes about 34 hours running time to get there. "The Straits and the Gulf here was full of boats, you could see them, they were all heading up North, so if you broke down or anything you could get help quick".
- Tells of an incident of when he hit a deadhead which consequently brought his boat to a full stop. The boat did not receive any major damage; "I promised to myself right then and there, never will I travel in the dark anymore".
- Tells of another incident when his boat was tied to another one and they both went into a whirlpool. "Our boats knocked and it stopped the engines and we spun out." His boat was lower and received no damage whereas his friend's received wheelhouse damage: "Another promise I made to myself, I'll wait for high water slack before I tackle those rapids".
- Steveston fishermen usually allow themselves three days to get to Rivers Inlet; "You gotta travel everyday, wind or no wind on Johnson Strait, that northwesterly gets pretty tough".
- Describes Fort Neval: "That's where the inside passage and the outside passage come and meet and the water's always a turmoil there".
- There was limited electronic equipment in 1946; all he had was a compass and a battery radio.
- Comments on radio phones: how one fisherman will hear about good fishing somewhere else, travels to the location only to find that the fish are gone.
- Discusses about cannery houses that used to be at Rivers Inlet.
- Of the inhabitants of the Rivers Inlet company houses he says: "You know the Indians, we keep our woodshed cleaner than they do their houses, I shouldn't say that really, but it's a fact....."
- Recalls that there were several boot-legging places in Steveston in 1946. That was before the Steveston Hotel had a liquor licence. "I used to go down there with my father-in-law and he liked to take a drink once in a while, and there was 3 or 4 bootlegging joints there. You could always go in and get a drink. They had sort of a little delicatessen, but there was some booze at the back and you could go in and order a drink, reasonable too, they supplied a service that was needed."

- "The Japanese that were fishing then (1946) they had come from Japan and they were kind of clannish....the Japanese that were born here, they're just like you and I".
- "When I first started fishing, some of the old-timers (Japanese-Canadian fishermen) after they came back they can live off the land, those fellas, you know, they always had something drying on the yard-arm, you know, drying it out in the sun and serving them".
- Talks about the abundance of food available in Rivers Inlet for anyone wishing to live off the land.
- Talks about the centralization of the canneries.
- Talks about selling fish "on the side" and loyalty to the companies.
- Talks about the price difference between the fisherman and the consumer.
- Talks about when the fishermen attempted to form a co-op.
- "Without a U.F.A.W.U. we are nothing...it's a good union but I don't happen to go along with their politics, you see, they're supposed to be a red led union...We're no more red than any other union".
- Talks about the changes in fishing regulations.
- Talks about the worth of buying expensive electronic equipments.
- Talks about strikes and feelings running high between U.F.A.W.U. and the Prince Rupert Co-op who fished during the U.F.A.W.U. strike. "It made for a bad feeling all around...apparently there was some ramming and tire slashing".
- About the boats in 1946 "They were so small they were creep ins, you had no room in the boats, you never had them fixed up for stove, or running water or anything".
- Norwegians call red snappers "The Strawberries of the Sea".

*Handwritten notes:*  
- 24-3  
- Canned  
- U.F.A.W.U.  
- 1946  
- Regulation  
- Marketing  
- 1946