

FISHERMAN: Mr. Murray Dobrilla,
4407 W. River Road,
Ladner, B. C.

Researcher: Darlene Clyne

- Born in Austria in 1908, left there at the age of three with parents.
- Came to Vancouver, Devils Island.
- Then came to Ladner to start school.
- Father was a gillnet fisherman on the Fraser River.
- I fished with Uncle and Dad for smelts in Port Moody and English Bay.
- Fished in what was called a "one lung" boat, it was a one cylinder "Put Put".
- Everything was done by hand in those days, you rowed by hand, pulled in by hand (the nets).
- We had a skiff, there was four of us, two would handle the nets.
- We would go way out and see the fish, and then we would circle them and then we pulled this drag scene in by hand.
- We would get smelts and sometimes herring mixed with other fish.
- There was always a market for smelts, but never was for herring.
- We used to sell our fish for 7¢ or 8¢ a pound and that was big money in those days.
- We sold our smelts to the Chinese men and fish markets mostly.
- My Uncle fished for salmon around the Point Grey area and the Gulf.
- When I was ten, used to help my father fish in the summer time.
- Used to fish five days a week at that time in the Fraser River.
- There used to be a gun that went off Sunday evening and then we would fish through to Saturday morning.
- There was a lot of fish in them days, but you got nothing for them.
- Remember getting anywheres from 35¢ to 50¢ a fish but it depended on the companies.
- As soon as the canneries got all they wanted down would go the price.
- Sometimes you couldn't sell them, I have thrown as many as two to three hundred fish away.
- Seeing as how the canneries only paid us ten cents per fish, whether the fish weighed ten pounds or fifty pounds, we would shake the big ones loose and only kept the small ones.
- The canneries sure didn't like that, but our boats were small and the larger the fish the less we could get into our boats.
- Most of the boats could carry up to 200 maybe 300 fish.

- The boats then were long, lots of them were 26 to 28 footers but they were narrow and they didn't have the facilities they have today.
- The living quarters were pretty rude, we used to have a little iron coal stove in them and that kept us warm in the winter time.
- For sleeping we had a mattress that we just threw down on the floor.
- My dad worked for a cannery and so did I, we worked mostly for B. C. Packers.
- Mentions the unions and how they started, and what it was like when they first came in.
- In those days you could get paid whenever you wanted, I used to get paid once a week because I needed money.
- If you made twenty bucks a catch, then you were really doing good.
- And you always owed money to the cannery because you got your nets from them and your other equipment that you required.
- If you had a hundred dollars after the season was over for the winter then you were really sitting pretty.
- I always fished in the Fraser River, but sometimes you were forced to go outside the river because the fish wouldn't come in until they were ready to spawn and by that time the canneries didn't want them.
- They always closed for a week even in those days to allow the fish to go up the river to spawn.
- In them days it didn't require any longer enclosure than that because the nets weren't as efficient as today.
- The nylon nets are really efficient compared to the old linen nets we used to have.
- With the old linen nets we could throw the nets over and only get a quarter of them (fish), there was always a good escapement.
- Goes into detail of how the cannery would only take so many fish, then you had to throw the rest over board.
- A law came in where you weren't allowed to throw any fish over board, so then they started to close the river.
- This was done by the Fisheries Department.
- Speaks on the Japanese fishermen.
- The companies definitely preferred Japanese fishermen to White fishermen.
- If you were a good fisherman you could make agreements with the canneries especially when there was a demand for the fish.

- Explains how the fishermen used to make deals with the canneries.
- Back in the early 1900's you could fish anywhere you wanted although the Japanese at one time were restricted where they could fish.
- In the early years they used to row it sure made a big difference when the gas engines came in, it was "God-send" to the fishermen.
- It was really hard work when you had to pull the nets in by hand.
- Speaks on some of the early Fisheries regulations.
- If there was fish in the early days you fished five days a week, twenty-four hours a day with very little sleep; if I could get three to four hours sleep a night that was really good.
- There was a collector that came every morning that picked up your fish.
- In them days, having linen nets the first thing you had to do especially if you were catching lots of fish you had to wash the slime off your nets.
- Then you put your net into blue stone solution for a few hours then you would pull it out and put it on the rack and mend it.
- These nets cost you on the average a hundred and fifty to two hundred dollars.
- Depending on the type of net you had, it went by weight, the more it weighted the more it cost.
- These nets lasted two years, sometimes three years if you looked after them and "blue stone" them every week.
- Speaks on some of the superstitions he and other fishermen had.
- Had a lucky hat: if I had the hat on I would catch fish, if I didn't have it on, no fish.
- Wouldn't open a can upside down, that was really bad luck.
- If you whistle in the morning that meant bad luck - no fish -.
- Was on a seine boat for three years, fished for salmon and pilchards on the west coast.
- Believes the canneries made a good profit in the early days.
- In them days believes the fishermen was better off in wages than the average worker, according to the Times.
- There was no pollution on the water like there is today.
- You could drink the water out of the River in those days, but not today.
- A lot of the pollution comes from fishermen who cleaned their engines and dump the oil over board.

- This pollution really hurts the fish, makes fishing bad.
- Mind you, the fishermen are a lot better today, they don't do it as much now.
- The early engines were pretty small; they were four or five horsepower and one cylinder.
- You had to start them by hand, they were slow but very reliable in them days.
- At that time I thought the Easthope was a real good engine.
- Speaks on how the fishermen used to use car engines.
- Says a lot of fishermen today still use converted car engines.
- The early sail boats had to be towed out and it was always a cannery boat that towed them.