

[Record of Interviews]

Paper #1

December 14, 1938.

Record of Interviews with Portuguese Fisherman, to date.

From Notebook. (unrevised)

Alice D. Kelly

Description and impression of living room.. house of informant.

Very much like American Cape Cod parlours of early nineteen hundreds. Apparently brought little from old country except tinsel pictures i.e. kind of mosaic made, I think of coloured mica. Mostly religious subjects...group photographs and some glass ware and vases. House immaculate. Must have acquired cleanliness from Yankees. On my one trip to the [Asores?] beauty of country much obscured by filth in streets and houses. Temperature kept higher than average American house and less air admitted. Coffee invariably on stove...home made wine offered almost never hard liquor. Men drink whiskey outside, if any. Women don't drink at all. Wife, Rosa, just come in from Church. Still wears shawl over head except Sundays. Children speak Portuguese only with parents...all born in this country. Manuel is very glad to talk, but gets self conscious if any notes are taken. Shall have to make records immediately on leaving... Manuel owns this house but grudges taxes...most of them seem to feel that rent is legitimate expense but taxes are just a gift to government. Evidences of side lines in business. Rosa makes 2 cakes and pies for sale, rents small apartment third floor of house. Manuel himself, between fishing trips runs his boat on excursions for tourist trade, rents himself out with buzz saw for fireplace wood, and has privately an interest in a package store down Cape.

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Q. You were grown up when you came over here weren't you, Manuel?

A. I was nineteen. My old man came over and my mother and three of us.

Q. From Lisbon or the Azores? (Note; great rivalry between 'Isladers' and Lisbon men. Lisbon considered superior. Cape Verde people called 'Bravas' and generally have some negro blood).

A. My mother's from Lisbon. She moved to the islands when she married my father. We come from—— Island off Gibraltar. (Note. must ask someone for correct name and locale his pronunciation peculiar and his ideas of geography vague)

Q. The Captain (his father) was a fisherman, wasn't he?

A. Sure. We're all fishermen. My grandfather, too, in the islands. I wouldn't be anything else. I tell my wife sometimes the sea's my mistress. Makes her mad. She thinks I'm crazy.

(Rosa. Don't talk that way to Miss Alice. You sound tough.

(Note. I have been down here off and on since I was fourteen and am still 'Meesh Alice' to the old timers who know my people and knew me before my marriage) Manuel. I got to be tough. You can't be a fisherman and be soft. What is it you want to know about fishing?

A. It's a good life. You got to be strong and there used to be big money in it. Not no more though. Now the middleman he gets everything and they don't pay the prices anyhow. Sometimes you might as well throw away the catch.

Q. You do throw a lot of fish overboard sometimes don't you?

A. Sure. It don't keep forever. Give it away or throw it away if you can't sell it. I think it's like this, the government don't know the conditions of fishing. You make a big lot of money some seasons, then for a long time we're broke...we got to get good prices. There's a lot of

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things to think of, see? Like storms and then sometimes the fish don't run so good...there's good and bad seasons for fish just like crops to a farm. Ever think of that?

3

Q. No. Why is it?

A. You can't always tell. Sometimes waters get too cold and drive the fish away. Sometimes the feed's not right. This year was a terrible year for scollops, but good for tunny... It goes like that. (Note. Must check information of this kind). Then there's credit we used to get credit eight months...a year maybe...Now it's tough to get three months. Money's scarce, they say, but I dunno. There's plenty for mortgage houses, for projects, for new playground... I tell you, people don't appreciate the fisherman. Look...we made the Cape.

Q. You mean the fishing industry built it up?

A. You bet she built it up. We're the Portuguese pilgrims (very proud of this. repeated it three or four times) Us and the American fisherman.

We made Gloucester, too. I was up there a couple years. I fished all over, out of Chatham, out of Gloucester everywhere...When first come here there wasn't nothing but sand and a few houses and docks and boats. We used to dry the codfish out on the Dunes...there'd be pretty near miles of it spread out. The whole place stank of it.

Q. I remember that. And the wailings, too. A. Yes. The women used to get down to the beach and yell and pray when there was a storm. They stopped it, though. Anyways the fish was running like an army those days. They started the cold storages and say, there was years they paid two and three hundred percent on your money.

Q. But not any more?

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A. I'll say. Anyways there was fisherman all up and down the Cape. The old Whalers went out then. Cap'n Avila down here, he found a chunk of ambergris once. And fishing off the Grand Banks was a gold mine. You'd get so much you couldn't load it all...times you'd be up two three nights cleaning... up to your knees in it and half frozen...

Q. And that was really what brought prosperity to the Cape?

A. Sure it was. More of us come over from the islands and sent for our families and our friends. The Yankees went in with us. We had a great fleet. Fished mostly on shares same like now but we took in more. Then the artists they come down. And they thought it was picturesque...They must have painted a hundred miles of nets and boats and docks. And then the writers heard about it and the summer people. But we 4 started it. Even now they'll ask you to take them out in the boats and they ask questions. It seems that fishing's kind of romantic to some people. (Rosa. Or maybe it's a fishermen they like. The city folks act crazy. Not you, Miss Alice) Q. It doesn't sound very romantic to me. It sounds like a lot of grief and hard work. What is it you like about it? Couldn't you make more money on land. A. Women don't like it. They get afraid because of the drownings and the storms and like that. They like to keep a man home warm and safe. But I wouldn't want to work on land all the time. Lots of the men do when they got older, but not me. I feel at home with a boat under my feet. I'm a good fisherman, maybe I wouldn't do so good with a regular land job. Q. Do you remember fishing in the old country? A. I used to go out with my old man when I Wasn't bigger than Jo here (Jo is a grandchild, about eight) I could work most as good as a man time I was fourteen. Q. Wasn't it pleasanter over there? I mean, it's warmer, isn't it? A. The sea's about the same everywhere, and the fish. The sky's prettier over there. Bluer. The American sky's more threatening. Q. Are the methods very different? A. I don't remember they were when we first come over, but of course we have better equipment now. But maybe they have in the islands too. Q. Have you ever been back? A. Yes, two or three times but I didn't fish. Didn't stay long enough. It's awfully old fashioned back there. Q. You like it better here? A. Oh, I like it a lot better. A man can get

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somewheres here. Q. Even when fishing doesn't pay? A. Well, what I mean, your children can get a good education, there's more progress here. The kids are too fresh though. They don't have any respect for the old folks.

5

Q. I'd like to hear some stories about your experiences. I mean things that happened to you when you were out fishing. You must have a lot of interesting things happen.

A. Oh, you bet. I don't know if I can think of anything right now but there's a lot of those old stories...I'll think them up...My wife'll remind me... (Note. Must concentrate on anecdotes one whole interview or more. Will have to get over his self consciousness)

Q. What type of fishing do you do mostly?

A. I go out to the traps. I put some pots out, too. (Lobsters) I started in on the crew of a seiner.

Q. Now you own your own boat?

A. My brother and me to-gether.

Q. It must be quite a responsibility owning your own boat?

A. It is. You get to keep her in repair and carry your insurance on her. If she gets battered up in a storm it can eat up a lot of profit.

And then besides you lose time when she's up for repairs. But it's better to own just the same. When there is any profit you get most of it.

And you can borrow on her...you got something to leave your family.

Q. It must be hard to save when there are so many ups and downs.

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A. You won't find many fishermen nowadays got much of anything saved. We most of us belong to one of these burial insurance societies...But the widows of most of us wouldn't have much if we went. That's why a man's foolish not to buy a house if he can, even if he has to have a pretty big mortgage and that's why it's good to own your boat. The Portuguese aren't as good for business as the Yankee fisherman.

Q. But most of your wives do something, don't they?

A. Yes. They rent rooms and when the kids are old enough they work out for the summer folks. But I don't like that. I like my wife to be home. If she wants to bake or maybe take in a little washing or sewing, why, I don't mind. Of course as soon as the kids get jobs they help out. They aren't like the American girls and boys, spend all their money. They expect to help out.

Q. Some Americans do, too.

6

A. Not like the Portuguese. A Portuguese son or daughter don't keep no money for themself if the home needs it. Not unless they get married.

And a good son don't get married if his mother needs his pay. There's a school teacher here...young girl...Last year her father didn't make anything. She's keeping the whole family. She won't get married till her family's all right.

Q. That doesn't seem quite fair. Don't you think she has a right to her life?

A. You can't let your father and mother want. I gave my father half my wages when he had bad seasons after I was married and had two three children. Americans don't feel for the family like we do.

Q. Do you have any trouble working with Americans?

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A. I am American. I belong to the Portuguese American club.

Q. I mean, born Americans.

A. Well, on land the Portuguese and Americans don't always get on so good. But we fish together all right. It's different out in the boats.

Q. How?

A. There's the same rules for everyone. The rules for a captain and crew are the same everywheres and we all want the same things...a good catch and a good market. We get on good on the sea.