

This interview is with Delbert Guerin, retired longshoreman (local 500), fisherman, and former chief of the Musqueam First Nation (1973-1982), He was also the lead plaintiff in *Guerin v. The Queen*, a land rights case decided in favour of the Musqueam in 1984. Topics discussed include: fishing industry; longshoring; job duties; equipment; technology; workplace safety; race; gender; rates of pay; alcohol use; and the evolution of work duties and culture. Short video interviews can be found at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D-tek-n3rcE> and <http://vimeo.com/29239271>

Interviewer: Leigha Smith & Peter Hall

Date: 18 November 2013

Date range: 1961-2003, with limited mentions of before and after

Sound Recording Length: 1:31:28

Born in 1937, Delbert Guerin attended St. Paul's residential school in North Vancouver until grade 9, when he transferred to public school. Beginning in 1957, he worked in the fishing industry; after his father introduced him to longshoring work in 1960. He was told to quit fishing in 1962 if he wished to have more steady longshoring work. Guerin details the various longshore duties he performed, primarily on Burrard Inlet, until his retirement in 2003. In addition to his discussions of labour, Guerin makes several remarks about Native politics, including identity, territory, language, and legislation.

Delbert Guerin died in May 2014.

0:00-9:30

- Describes start as a longshoreman in 1960, same year he got married. Guerin's father, who was a longshoreman, encouraged him to work longshore. His father got started in 1935 working with the North Shore Indians (Bows and Arrows gang) which amalgamated with Vancouver longshoremen in 1936; this eventually became Local 500. Delbert Guerin became "registered" as a longshoreman in 1961, during previous year got very little work – sometimes as little as 4 hours a week. Became a full member of the union in 1964. Describes the transition from hand stowing to mechanization c. 1965 and arrival of larger ships with built in cranes and larger ships with multiple hatches by end of 1970s, then transition to gantry cranes. Beginning of packaged lumber, discusses mechanization - lift truck for loading packaged lumber c. 1964, received training on lift truck. Also trained on gantry cranes in 1975, enjoyed working on cranes.

9:31-12:01

- Retired in 2003, his start date was recognized as 1961 because he did not get enough hours during his first year in longshore. Describes transition from five-day work week, with time-and-a-half for nights and Saturdays to 24-7 operation of the port during the Trudeau era. Was paid double-time for

graveyard shift. Trudeau government caused the port to operate 3 shifts, 7 days a week, and Guerin worked seven days a week. Guerin discusses an automobile accident he sustained in 1975 while driving from Squamish where he had been working. He was off work for a year and a half as a result.

12:02-18:50

- Describes early life. Lived on Mission Reserve in North Vancouver until age 15. Father was working longshore on the North Shore of Burrard Inlet, mentions 1936 strike and the 1935 riot at Ballantyne Pier. Describes parents' marriage, mother's reluctance to move to Musqueam until after her mother-in-law died. Even then parents stayed on North Shore so that Delbert Guerin could continue as a day student rather than as boarder at St. Paul's residential school. He then attended Lord Byng High School in Vancouver for a short period.

18:27-29:42

- In Grade 10 Guerin's father encouraged him to begin longshoring, but Delbert was afraid and did not attempt to. Instead he worked in Steveston for BC Packers cannery, then started fishing with an uncle. Guerin details his work as a deck hand for his uncle between 1957 and 1961, frequenting Deep Water Bay and Seymour Narrows. In 1958 worked Guerin digging ditches and working the backhoe to build Shaughnessy Golf Course until the fishing season began again. [note: Guerin v. The Queen was over the land that became Shaughnessy Golf Course.] Guerin recounts that there was no refrigeration on fishing boats; fish were put on ice only upon arrival at the cannery each day. In 1962 Guerin had to choose between fishing or longshoring. He reports that he chose longshore because declining fishing industry, but he obtained a salvaged gillnetter that he used to fish part-time in secret beginning in 1976. Reports that his skills with new mechanized equipment kept him from being fired from longshore.

29:43-37:08

- Travelled a great deal as Chief of Musqueam Band 1973-82 and was also involved with the Union of BC Indian Chiefs. Longshore work allowed the flexibility to travel. Occasionally worked longshore on both sides of the Fraser River if there was no work in Burrard. Unloaded cars at Annacis Island. Coastwise Operation was first to install gantry cranes and first to bring in containers.

37:09-42:10

- Describes crane operation and positioning of checkers. Describes a workplace accident in the late 1970s when one of Guerin's coworkers was crushed to death by the straddle carrier. Yet, notes that serious accidents were infrequent; tells another story of a serious injury in which a lift truck

crushed a man against a pillar and another accident involving a straddle carrier.

42:11-50:13

- Discussion of Aboriginal longshoremen -- Delbert Guerin and his father were the only Musqueam longshoremen for a period, but Delbert's sons and nephews are now longshoremen. Delbert Guerin lied to get his son in at age 15 under the required age, and also his nephew registered underage. He notes that there were many Squamish longshoremen. He did not know of any Aboriginal longshoremen on the river, necessarily, but he did hear of a couple on the river from Tsawwassen and Langley. Guerin discusses a failed effort in the late 1960s or early 1970s amalgamate the Vancouver and New Westminster locals. He discusses the struggle between the two locals over jurisdiction over Port Moody and Deltaport. Guerin worked in Squamish because it meshed well with his Aboriginal political work

50:14-54:45

- Discussion about whether "Indian" or "Native" is the appropriate terminology, Guerin notes that he teases East Indians about the term conflation. He shares an anecdote about an occasion in which he was mistaken for South Asian; he also discusses racial politics in the workplace, including an occasion when a foreman made a joke about Guerin and East Indians being the same people.

54:46-58:33

- Guerin notes that Bows and Arrows gang worked mostly on the North Shore at the wheat pool. Describes how mudflats at Vancouver Wharves became filled in. Spent his last ten years at Vancouver Wharves; notes he worked tax-free during this time because he was working on the dock at Capilano reserve, which made a tremendous difference for his pension. Lists other Aboriginal longshoremen including Dan George (the actor).

58:34-1:05:30

- Longshoring jobs were sometimes passed down from father to son due to a father-son clause that eventually disappeared; no longer can you automatically join the union on your father's word. Delbert alludes to exceptions to this for the sons of corporate boards of directors. He discusses the consumption of alcohol on the job and union efforts to combat it.

1:05:31-1:09:17

- Notes that it is more difficult to become a longshoreman today. Must be 19 and have completed Grade 12. Guerin tells a story about the supposed first woman to have worked on the waterfront in the early 1990s and how she was mistaken for a man until spring, when her wardrobe changed. The union

deregistered her when they discovered she was a woman and she took them to court and won. He reports that many women became enrolled afterwards.

1:09:18-1:16:29

- Notes Musqueam members worked in canneries on the Fraser River, including in Surrey, Annieville/Delta. Describes discovery of archaeological site by Andrew Charles, was declared a historic site. Guerin compares this discovery to struggle to protect burial site at Marpole in 2012-13. Describes his own participation in recent Marpole protests. He reports that many more Squamish than Musqueam worked in longshore. Working longshore facilitated marriage because it offered year-round employment while fishing was seasonal. Guerin retains his commercial fishing license, currently used by his son.

1:16:40-1:20:59

- An anecdote about U.S. prohibition: a fishing boat at BC Packers was said to have traded liquor during Prohibition; one of the breweries, too, might've had tunnels dug much earlier by Aboriginals for protection from northern raiders.

1:21:00-1:31:28

- Guerin offers several anecdotes about Musqueam life on and off the reserve. His father worked in a cannery as a child and then bought a gillnetter. Natives were denied commercial fishing licenses. Tensions between fullblood and "half-breeds". Guerin never learned to speak Musqueam language, a legacy of parents' experience at residential schools. Enumerates family tree. He concludes with reflections on dialects of Salish language, notes that this is not unique to Aboriginals. Describes meeting sailors with great language facility.