

**INTERVIEW WITH GEORGE JAVOR  
WORK IN THE ALASKA FISHERIES  
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[NB: In the summer of 1983 I fell upon a new topic: Italians in Alaska through the fact that Sicilians from Pittsburg, California were some of the Italians involved with Alaska fishing. I had read about their voyages to Bristol Bay in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. When I returned to Marquette I was discussing my summer and my research with Dr. George Javor, professor of modern languages at Northern. All of sudden Dr. Javor began to tell me of his first-hand experiences working at a dining room for the Alaska Packer Company. The result is this wonderful tape of his experiences which parallel the earlier accounts that I encountered at the San Francisco Public Library and the Bancroft Library.]

Russ Magnaghi (RMM): Interview with George Javor, August 17, 1983, Marquette, Michigan. Topic: Italian fishermen in Alaska and his work experience there.  
Ok George, could we start out by you telling us how you got up to Alaska and involved in the Alaskan Fishermen's Union?

George Javor (GJ): Right. We had just arrived to the United States at the end of May in 1951. We were without a penny. The trip across the [Atlantic] ocean cost us nothing because the United States Navy was bringing troops to Europe. They would come back empty so they handed [the ships] over to displaced persons, the DPs. However, the trip from New York to Seattle, Washington, where nearby our sponsors lived cost us money, but we owed money to our sponsors. So I needed to look around for jobs. The only place where I really felt at home in any country and this was a new country is the university. It was sort of a second home for me. So I went up to the university. There were no more classes, that was at the University of Washington, so I sat down in the placement office looking for odd jobs. About every day I was given some odd jobs until about a week afterwards there came in a telegram from Alaska: "Send us somebody who is able to come up right today because it's an emergency placement." So I applied for the job, didn't know really what it was, all I wanted was money. It turned out that somebody had to get away immediately a waiter in cannery, surrounded by Alaska factory. So I took the job. In order to get the job however there was difficulty. You had to be a member of the Alaska Packers Union. Naturally I was not. In order to for the Alaska Packers to employ me, the union gave me a dispensation provided that I was made a member of the union. So I was made retroactively a member of the union. Then I was flown up from Seattle right the same day and this was how I got my job.

When I was up [there] it turned out the job was tremendously difficult. A physical difficult job. Take it from me, until that time I had not been involved in any manual labor except for a short time in the war [World War II]. I had to work from 6 in the morning till 6 in the evening every day, seven days a week. Plus three times a week it was a nighttime job. I had to go back around midnight, 11 o'clock serve what we call a typical Alaska

special “mugup.” Mugup, that was a midnight snack, really a full meal for the fishermen before they would go out or when they would come back from fishing. This was three times a week in addition to the 16 hours a day.

So there I was naturally listening to the conversations. One of the things that was interesting to me, the group that was an Italian group. They came up from San Francisco Bay area. It was easy to find that they were Italians because most of them spoke, almost exclusively Italian, the older ones. What was most surprising, when there were union meetings and they were held quite often the union meeting had to be held always with the aid of an interpreter. If I remember correctly, most of the time it was held in Italian and the interpreter was serving the interests of the younger generation who would not understand the Italian as well as the older ones. A couple of times, I think, it was in English because the older ones did not understand too well. So this was exclusively an Italian group brought up, flown up from San Francisco as a group as a unity, not individual flights.

RMM: Ok, were there, in terms of the fishermen, do you remember anything of them talking about their fishing experiences or anything or they were all talking Italian?

GJ: No they were able to speak English. The lack of communication, as I said, as a whole, it was necessary to make sure that they would understand individually. However, we were not able to speak too much to them because of the scheduling. We were really harassed all the time running back and forth, feeding them but the little that we could talk it was in fact a low rate and yes they could speak English.

Let me see, I remember, coming themselves from the Old Country and in all cases, they said their parents came. Also almost of them were also from in southern Italy or from Sicily. Very few northern Italians were among them. Indeed at that time I thought they were all from southern Italy or Sicily maybe, I think so. I cannot be sure of it but that's what I think.

RMM: Talking a little about the food could you go and elaborate on that, about the union contract and what it said about serving the food?

GJ: Note that this was 1951 and the union contract actually stipulated that for every single person, \$5.00 a day must be granted for food, which was plenty for 200 people or more were fed. That meant in plain language that it was also stipulated that no matter what they asked and how much they asked, how many times they asked, we were obligated to feed them to their heart's content. If they were dissatisfied and that was what some of the meetings were about to listen to their complaints or their suggestions. The steward who was in charge of the whole food; the steward could be fired at the request of the dinners. Obviously the steward was eager to please them. On the other hand, the steward was employed by the Alaska Packers Company and so it was in the interest of the company to do this as inexpensively as they could do that. So obviously it was the steward who was actually between a hard place and a rock. The cooks were given

instructions obviously also why they had to feed the fishermen to their heart's content. They should try to do this in a manner as inexpensively because it was for the company.

As an example, it happened like this: the cooks would make up cereal or mush. And we the waiters, I was sort of a waiter. I was given immediately in the morning large bowls of cereal and mush. I had to bring it in and I did. And a few would accept but the majority would not even waiting till I put it down were waving it angrily back. Take it back to the darn cooks. And I took it back. The cooks knew again why they offered mush in order to fill their empty stomachs, they waved me back. They reminded me that the bosses; in their own way they said you better take it back alright. So I took it back. No sooner than they see me they said to me well will bash your head again, if you bring it again. So I did not know what to do between the cooks and the men. Then all of a sudden one of my roommates saw me and immediately saw the difficulty. He whispered to me, "ditch it, ditch it." That would have solved the problem, if had known what "ditch" means. But I had been here only for a week in the states. I knew all of the polysyllabic words inject, reject and that but not what ditch means. I didn't know what to do so in my running back and forth my roommate found me with my two platters of mush, grabbed them and threw it in the garbage can and he said that's what ditch means. And there it was solved. From now on I knew that the cooks would know that I hadn't delivered and certainly I did not have to present them with that hated mush. That problem was solved.

And then they were immediately given what they asked for bacon and even steak.

RMM: What would have been a typical breakfast?

GJ: For breakfast would be immense and incredible amount of mugs of coffee, tea, hot chocolate, milk on the table which was all put in advance. Heaps and loads of bacon, sausages, and ham, eggs in every shape and form: hard, soft eggs, scrambled eggs, fruit juice. Since I just come from Europe, from a fairly hungry Europe, for instance a reservation in Paris and even less in the land [Hungary] where I was, the amount of food seemed to me like utopia. Jam and bread, all kinds of bread. We had our own bakery, a very good one. Pancakes, butter and grapefruits and fruits and all kinds of fruits.

RMM: This would be for one meal?

GJ: Yes just for one meal. The amount was unlimited. And if they asked for more you had to give them more.

RMM: What about lunch? Was that put in bags for them?

GJ: We only fed them. I was the one who was serving them on land. I speak only when they were on land. But there were other ones serving them on land. When they went out on the boats they were fed the about same way but other people. I was not one of those who was ever serving them on the boats as they were fishing. So I speak about the days when they were coming in. It was stipulated that they must spend 24 even 48 hours on land and then go out and fish again. So then they would come back around ten o'clock or

whenever and be done at 11, then there was a light snack. Again we put on the table a lot of pastry, again jam, and bread jam pastry, coffee and juice. They helped themselves.

Then came the noon meal what you could think of as a luncheon meal. There were all kind of things. I can go very quick. The main meal was always roast beef or choice of sometimes veal, sometimes chicken all kinds of meats. Then different kinds of vegetables and pastry, ice cream. Another thing that surprised me was although we were in salmon fishing, salmon was so precious, salmon was not served except on Sundays. The roast beef was less expensive for the company than apparently the price of the salmon that they could sell. Salmon was quite expensive. To show you how expensive it was, once we ran out of potatoes. They had to be flown in from Seattle, the rest came up by boats. They found out that one pound as flown in was more expensive than a pound of roast beef. But we had to get the potatoes too.

The Italian group preferred spaghetti too than anything else, although the roast beef seemed to be the best loved food in all other groups. The Italians would clamber for spaghetti, spaghetti even though they saw the roast beef. First, spaghetti and then only then would they eat [unclear]. Spaghetti was more popular.

RMM: Did you cook special Italian foods for them?

GJ: Not that I know of except the spaghetti. I wasn't really aware of what was going on.

RMM: Were there any Italian cooks in the kitchen?

GJ: The cooks were American cooks and the baker, chief baker was a German who might have had used one other German. There was no special arrangement for Italians

I still think, that one of the most interesting were the mugups when they were coming from fishing late in the evening. They served what was called the mugup which was a full meal around midnight. It differed only from a dinner that more cold meat was served than hot meat and instead of hot meal it was really hot coffee, hot chocolate at this time it was very popular tea and again egg was available and almost sinking on the [unclear] at all times. Plus canned fruit, again pastry and bread of all kinds. They were really hungry those fishermen. They had worked hard all day.

RMM: Did the work seem to be dangerous by the fishermen?

GJ: Not only seemed during the time I was up we had a loss, fishermen who died. There were two fishermen who died apparently lost, one or two were seriously injured and others who were injured slightly. I do remember one night when they only had one physician; by law they had to have one and he had also a full-time nurse and they were working more over twenty-four hours to try to save the life of a fisherman. The danger was that these fishermen had to wear very heavy boots and heavy [unclear] slick. Also heavy heavy gear because it was always raining. Either foggy or rain, you never saw the sunshine. And so they were in the boats, they had put out their nets and bring them in and

it was inevitable that occasionally somebody would fall overboard. The person could not be pulled back, he was weighted down by the heavy equipment. I heard the company would lose fishermen. The fishermen's occupation was truly dangerous. Dangerous simply because once in the water, the water was extremely cold, you people living along Lake Superior know what it means, but it was colder. The man had no change to stay in the water a second time and he had not a change to come out by his own because of the heavy clothes.

RMM: Where were the locations where you were at in Alaska?

GJ: The first one was Fine Point, the other was twice at Egegik. Both of these places are elongated chains that lead to the Aleutian chain.

RMM: Is that on Bristol Bay?

GJ: Yes, Bristol Bay. I would say that it is about 200 miles from Naknek, the main place where we were taken by regular flights and from there on the Company's smaller planes. Naknek was called, "Concentration Camp Naknek" for the following reason, the Company had hired us in the following manner: they were compelled to pay us from the moment when we either deplaned in Seattle or San Francisco. These were the two places where the company hired people. If you flew in from anywhere else, until you reached Seattle or San Francisco, you were at your own expenses. But certainly not compelled by the company to feed you or watch you from the moment you were in. Now if you were flown ahead, two weeks ahead of the fishermen to arrange lodging for the men and for the kitchen and this time you worked on over-time. Over-time meant that if you they paid you time-and-a-half. During the season however you were given regular pay. However once the season was over you are going to get back on over-time. And we had to stay until again the whole thing was just like it was setting up. The fishermen went but we still had to clean up the kitchen, etc. But since we were on overtime it was best for the company to get us away from the place where they had to pay us this over- overtime. This is what they did: you know to get us away sooner; they had to pay us while we were on the premises, this overtime. So they sent us away as soon as they could and we were sent out to Naknek but they still had to feed us, they had to provide our lodging, but they did not have to pay overtime because we weren't on the premises. This is why they sent us on . . . off to Naknek and they knew at Naknek we could not get a flight to Seattle or San Francisco because all the companies finished at the same time. There was so much limited space to fly out us up but once we were in Naknek they didn't have to pay us overtime. They just had to pay the regular salary which they hired us for. So they couldn't care less what happened at Naknek. They knew we couldn't get back to Seattle or San Francisco. At Naknek there was nothing to be done for days, sometimes. So people started playing cards and some of them lost the whole thing that they earned. Try to imagine what it meant to be after such hectic work to be at a place where there was nothing to do. It seemed that it was nowhere. We were in quonsit tents. Let me repeat, we were fed alright, slept on cots. Interestingly enough it was cold enough that they always had a fire going it was in late ? So in their boredom, people would play for money and even though we were paid in checks they were still able to cash them. In a tragic case,

men by no fault of their own were forced to be idle for days sometimes for a week. And this was with the full knowledge of the Company knowing that it was impossible to get all of your seasonal workers out during the same week from Alaska to the outside.

RMM: Did the fishermen have to wait as well?

GJ: Yes. Indeed. The kitchen personnel had to wait. The Company tried to send everyone back to Naknek but beyond Naknek they couldn't get people on regular flights. We flew out on small planes to Naknek. Then we got stuck in Naknek.

RMM: When you were going up there were they still bringing up supplies by ship?

GJ: Yes, most of the supplies. The supplies were tremendously expensive. The supplies would come as soon as the rivers were flowing again. Most of the supplies were in this little accident with the potatoes was an apparent oversight. They had to be flown in and it was very expensive.

These were the first years that I understand also the people were flown in. Many among the fishermen were remembering the time when they were actually taken up to Alaska by boat. The regular flight was just made shortly after the war.

RMM: When they sailed did they ever have that problem of waiting?

GJ: I don't think so. I think sailing was much easier. Longer.

RMM: But they probably had free time to play cards on the way home.

GJ: I suppose you are right. I would consider that was inevitable, they had to be transported down. However here [Naknek] they knew that they would be stuck.

During the season you were not allowed to do any . . . did not have time to do any salmon fishing on your own. Once the season was over and the canning ceased you were allowed to do your own fishing for salmon. If you did it the company provided you with a smokehouse. You could smoke salmon. I personally did not know how to smoke. I got some salmon from the fishermen and I decided to take it back to Seattle. You know to do that it had been frozen for me and also the brief case which I put it, it was also so that it could not smell. It was probably frozen for me in Naknek. On the plane I got second thoughts I was frightened it would start smelling.

A gruesome sight was the seagulls that come in and get all the salmon and peck their eyes out and seeing the salmon lying on the beach. This was all of the waste.

Another thing that I witnessed up there it shows that a little knowledge . . . I never realized that rivers have tides. But up in Alaska. It happened I was walking in a dry bed of a river. And it was fairly swampy, it was not easy to walk but still I walked. But suddenly the water is rising and I tried to run away from the rising water. My boots were

sticking. The water was coming and coming. I tried to get out of it and climb up. I found that I could not outrun the water. The water was coming back on the tide and finally I managed to get up. Also I spotted this time a beluga or the white fish on the river bank. You could smell it.

RMM: What was the difference between the Italian diners and others?

GJ: I was telling my wife [Clara] when I got home that you tell the groups, what kind of groups were, even if I was outside the dining room or with my eyes closed if there were Italians you could hear a clattering or a chattering of voices. Always a conversation going on. Very cheerful conversation. You could hear the dining room was alive. But when the groups of Scandinavians also Finnish, some people think that they are Scandinavians but ethically they are not, but they think they are. So the Finns and Scandinavians were one group. They were Norwegians, Swedes and Danes. There were more Norwegians than Swedes. Mostly Finns from Astoria, Oregon. Their winter home was Astoria. When the Scandinavians were eating it was just silent. They were eating alright but you could pin a donkey. It's as though they were completely absorbed with eating and they did not spend time to converse. The Italians were very different. The Italians were like all Mediterranean's, more expansive, more given to talk and conversation also more or less giving or exhibiting an air of more counter point [to the Scandinavians who were] a quiet sober people. I never studied the difference between Scandinavians and Italians. By studying I mean I wouldn't have been aware, here in this country, people are surrounded by say, Finnish ethnic people or enclaves they live in. They know that these are Finns and Italians. Back in Hungary, I have never known about the differences. So it came to me as surprising. I never realized that Mediterranean people are different from Provençals [who] are cheerful and friendly and different. It was just observance and not bookish knowledge and that was surprising to me.

RMM: Where you worked there were docks and a cannery. Did they have large fishing boats that went out and took these fishermen? They fished in small boats. Two men to a boat? So then a boat would take them out?

GJ: The larger boats, I think . . . how far again . . . Since I was mostly so busy, now it seems how busy I was, I didn't even see them going out, but my understanding is that definitely there were two men to a boat, that I know for sure. There was a larger boat that took them out and then they got into their own personal boats. I cannot tell you. I thought they were going on their own boats right away, but I do know, and this was because we had a man who was a "monkey boat" operator that there was a larger boat that was actually following them and trying to escort them more or less in case they got in trouble this one had a motor. Theirs of course did not. So the "monkey boat" was there to help them out [when they were] in trouble maybe help them. I didn't really see how they went out, but I do know how they fished. Later on while I was teaching on the coast at Aberdeen, in the state of Washington it so happened that some of my students' parents were fishermen. I talked naturally about them and they told me about the two-man boats. [When] I found out how they earned and I was astonished how much more the fishermen earned than I or the kitchen personnel. We ourselves were, to me, munificently-

RMM: -Do you remember the amounts you made?

GJ: Yes, I remember. A student of mine told me they can look at the date, in 1953 two [of them] a father and a partner, fishermen, earned during a season, each of them \$15,000. This was a six to seven week season in 1953.

RMM: And this was fishing in Alaska?

GJ: Fishing in Alaska.

RMM: This was about what they were getting paid when you were up there a year or so before?

GJ: Yes.

RMM: How much were you making?

GJ: Well, I was making something like \$1000 for the six-seven weeks. But the fishermen on the other hand, they were on "cp catch premium" and they depended on . . . . My salary was steady even of the catch was poor. And if the catch was good, of course, my salary would be higher. But salary would be like if you had the money in the bank you had a lower interest paid, but you only if you took a risk. It was [like] stock, it might go up and down. If it was a poor season the fishermen might make much less. Indeed they would spend the same amount of work for less than say someone who worked on land. In that case it depended very much on the catch. There were good seasons and there were bad seasons. Also there were times when they Fish and Wildlife Service shortened the season. They felt that the fish hunting was poor and in order to save the fish from being fished [out] they would close the season and the fishermen lose a lot. Also the fishermen had to watch out for the Fish and Wildlife Service was flying over them and if they overstepped the limit when they were not suppose to fish, they were fined. So in other words they risked more than the kitchen personnel who had a steady salary plus [perks?].

RMM: There was a cannery there? What was the nationality of the cannery workers?

GJ: The cannery workers, were all, at least during those years that I was there from the Philippine Islands. They were flown in.

RMM: You did not have free time?

GJ: Absolutely no days off. Seven days a week for everybody. As far as the fishermen were concerned when they were free . . . . Oh, let me see, for the kitchen personnel there was none [no days off]. The fishermen on the other hand when they came on land they were completely free. Indeed, they were not supposed to do anything. Absolutely. It had to be assured that they were undisturbed because they needed rest. They were terribly tired and all they did was something like you would do in a sanatorium. That is, we fed



them and the rest when they weren't eating they were resting. If they felt like [it they were] playing cards or sleeping. I would say that they were either sleeping or playing cards in the evening. They were resting. They had a lot of time, but they needed their rest. So, to me it seemed that their being on land was just an intermezzo. An interval between their hard work and they would go out again. So I would say that they were sleeping and resting or sitting around playing cards. But they didn't seem to me that I did not seem to me that was free time in the sense that . . . they were looking to be entertained. They were happy to be in their bunks and sleeping. For us the kitchen personnel there was no free time. We could hardly get enough sleep to do our work. The only free time for us was after the noon-time dinner was served. Then we had a few hours before we started to come back to work.

RMM: Then you could go for a walk?

GJ: Yes. Usually there was time. Also it was considered for us a resting since we had to peel an immense amount of potatoes in the morning or let's say peel things that were in pods like say peas. We had to sit around for two hours in the morning, around two or three hours to peel many potatoes or any kind of preparation. Then it was something like, we would have long conversations but it was work at the same time. It was something like free time, you had to be there and peel potatoes.

Some one mentioned that I might be one of a few persons who really found out that selling ice cream or a refrigerator to the Eskimos is not really just a proverbial description of being a very, very astute businessman because it would have been the last thing in my mind what I thought about Alaska to think that one day my arms would break because I had to crank up our ice cream machine. We served them ice cream and our ice cream machine was hand-cranked and I had to do it. All the while I was doing it I thought who would believe that up in Alaska I wore down my arms by cranking an ice cream machine. We were serving ice cream to them, it was very popular and I had to do it.

So this rest period as I said was nothing. I stayed home. I knew the man who was fixing up had said that he had to finish his work and that he could never . . . sleep . . . Most things you learned indirectly. They [fishermen] were free to talk, they were friendly, but we weren't free. When they came in that was our work. When they were out we were free in a sense. Once they were out, then of course, other personnel went out on the boats. They were working and we were free in a sense. I remember polishing this and that.

RMM: Were the cannery workers on a long schedule?

GJ: The cannery workers were also on an easier, a lighter schedule I would say. They probably had certain hours, but it depended again on the catch. I am sure that since they would not hire too many, I am sure that the catch was unexpectedly high then they had to make more cans. They were busy, not necessarily seven days a week, but they were busy. I know that they were busy, after a time when I went up I saw them easily. One thing I also found out also again from personal experience up there it is true what I have always believed actually it is only the labor that is different but the one thing that is inside the

laborer is absolutely the same. It would not have paid us to assess the different shades of fish. They were all the same, exactly the same catch. Only later, which we didn't do, the labeling was different. So to buy a can of salmon which is \$3.20, another one let's say is \$5.60 it was the same. It was from the same company but different labels.

RMM: Were there any Indians or Native People living close by or working?

GJ: Yes. But not many. They were the native Aleuts and Haidas were there and the ones that worked for us, for instance were working in the kitchen.

## [SIDE 2]

GJ:[Unclear] I think it was a couple one year. They were running the laundry. Naturally we had to have a lot of bedding and sheets and also the [unclear] They were working in the laundry room. Also in the kitchen, one year they hired, not the first year, but later on they had helpers dishwashing in the kitchen. It was from one of these women, Haida or Aleut and one of the reasons that they had to hire men they felt that they could not put up women workers from the state because it was a dorm type of system. It was long-before they had coed-type dorms in colleges so there would be no space for women.

RMM: How was the set-up there? Did you have dormitories? Were the fishermen separated from the workers like you and from the cannery workers? How did that work?

GJ: The fishermen lived in the other dorms, the bigger ones than ours. The kitchen personnel had dorms of their own. There was not much communication between the fishermen and ourselves because when they were on land they were busy. However there was enmity, hostility between the cooking personnel and the student personnel because ones who were the cooks were usually people badly . . . men who dropped out, whereas the student help were college age and college students. The others [cooks] had inferiority complexes and hated us all. I found out how bad this was. I found out to my great surprise how much concern there was over this. My roommate was a freshman. One day he was working closely with the cooks. He was a third cook; not a third cook but instead of serving the fishermen he was helping the cooks in the kitchen. The season started in June, sometimes the middle of June, and it took the whole month of July for them to find out this profound hatred. These people that they felt toward students that is, what I would consider intellectuals. You were absolutely forbidden to drink. The reason was that many of these persons were actually in their state-side jobs floaters and were drunkards too. And the company just could not afford to lose any of them. If they had drunk during the time and they had been caught, found out and it was easy because they lived in dorms. They were going to be tried. But on July 4<sup>th</sup>, the first time since June they were permitted to drink. They could go to the bar, the only bar. So they got drunk. Early in the morning one of the cooks comes in with a big butcher knife, shouting and saying where is the son-of-a-bitch that college student that thinks he is better than we are. I want to kill him, I want to kill him. [Unclear] put his anger against me and said you son-of-a-bitch I want to kill you too. What happened is that they say there is truth in wine so now he revealed what he thought because he was drunk. He felt a hatred and that was not justified. It was simply because these men were not regular workers but they were

drifters. Their only reason, for instance, that they could be hired because they did not have a year-round job so they were free all summer. The company hired them and getting them. They were all capable of working, some of them, only during the short season. Then they earned enough money to . . . I'm not saying all of them, but some of them were able to be hired, the good ones because they were working in Florida working in the winter and this was their off-season. But unfortunately, some of them were able to be hired in the season, because they were free the rest of the year, not working. They lived on this sum of money, plus unemployment compensation which was due to them during the rest of the season. [unclear].

So this person was really trying to, in this anger, to kill my roommate. As it came out not consciously but apparently feeling that it wouldn't be too good for them, if they knew that I had a college education, I never told them and they didn't suspect, so they didn't hate me. I did have to tell one of my roommates, another one who was interested. He was a Greek, he was in the restaurant business, and he was also a cook. This was normally the same you imagine. The Greek didn't know how to write well in English, and I was his scribe, what they call in Egypt or in other words is a man who makes a living by writing letters. So I was writing the letters for Nicholas, and we never spoke about schooling. I think that Nick probably suspected that I might have gone to high school at most, but not beyond it. And yet, when the season was over we were flown back into Anchorage, and in Anchorage the plane, after taking off, was on fire, so we had a landing. We turned back, and before the fire engulfed the plane, we fortunately landed back in Anchorage. Since our motor was on fire, we needed a new motor. The new motor had to be flown from Minneapolis, and during this time we had to stay in Anchorage. Now, Anchorage was a city that had only one main street, and not every second place, but every first place was a bar. It was full of bars, and speaking of bars, I'm probably whore houses so I didn't know what to do. For a day in Anchorage, what can I do? They told us we won't be able to fly out until the new engine comes in. So I decided to walk around and lo and behold, as I was walking aimlessly I found [a] public library of science.

As I was sitting there in the public library, all of a sudden I hear, "George, George!" I didn't even look up. There was a lot of Georges (unclear – "at Hungary" perhaps). I myself didn't know for an hour before that I would be there. All of a sudden somebody taps on my shoulder and it's Nick, says "George, it's me, Nick!" I said, "Nick! How on earth did you know that I was here?" He looks at me and says, "Man up, where else could you be in a city like this?" [laughter] And he knew it without ever talking about any time. Just by living with me he prized me up and got me right, and I never forget it. I said, "Where on earth could you get this? He came to find me because he discovered, while we were waiting in Anchorage, that a cousin of his, who was working with the airline there, was – was a cousin somehow, he remembered him. And this cousin of his, pulling a wire always helps, told him that, "Nick, I can get all of you comrades out" – you know, we were stuck there – "But I can get you a plane to Seattle." And then Nick remembered me and said, "Could you get two places?" Nick, perhaps being grateful to me, got me out of that city, so I didn't have to wait on the new motor. They got me on another plane, but they couldn't place all of us. [It's] just [that] others had to wait. This

is why Nick came to me. Nick knew that I would be at the library, which I didn't know even existed. [laughter] It's interesting when you live with someone.

RMM: Yesterday you were talking about how you got up there. There was the other waiter that you replaced. Could you talk about that – why he was forced to leave?

GJ: Yes. The man was a hulk of a man, as he was described. He was about 300 pounds, and apparently – I say apparently because this was hearsay in a sense, but not hearsay because the end shows why he was corrupt – I was told that he was messing around with the women, the native women, and even being admonished not to do that he still went on doing it. The natives told this to the company steward, who was responsible for running the whole thing, that if the man would be found there in the next 24 hours, he would be found a corpse. He would be killed. This was an ultimatum which could not be ignored. Apparently, earlier there must [have] been trouble with him. The company had not choice to fly him out to save, actually, his life and the scandal and others. So this man was actually kicked out, fired from his job, for a justified cause, and as the man was actually indispensable in that job, they had to find somebody who could perform it within 24 hours. Since I was the only one who could do this, since I was sitting around waiting for jobs, and I wasn't even track, the man had to be ready to pack that same night from Seattle. Since I had arrived only a week ago before, I was telling the man when he asked me, "Can you pack tonight?" I said, "I'm not even unpacked." So I was from this (unclear word), that's how I got here.

RMM: How did you feel, coming from Europe, more toward Europe and so on, all of a sudden being put in the Alaska fishery?

GJ: To me it was fascinating. First of all, it was fascinating to find out, for instance – this was in summer – that Alaska is so hot. To me Alaska was almost synonymous with an iceberg, and it turned – almost like you mentioned the North Pole. I never thought that Alaska had summers. And it was so sweltering and muggy there that, for instance, I who had come from Seattle and was corresponding with my wife found out that Seattle is a much cooler place than Alaska. And again, since I just had come from Europe, and I considered myself, maybe a little conceitedly, that I knew more about the United States than most people, knew because I was reading the Reader's Digest regularly, the New York Herald Tribune, Paris Edition. To think I was justified to think that I could know more about Alaska than most people. I thought that Alaska was ice-covered, cool box, and here I find myself sweltering. I thought, "Who would believe it? Who would believe that this is Alaska?"

That was one surprise about Alaska. The second was that – I had to take out the garbage, and I was doing all the kitchen jobs. In the garbage I took out more food every night and that really bothered me, that food that was more than a poor European country could be fed with. That bothers me a lot, that here we throw away so much food. But I had no choice. That was my task. This man put out the garbage before I took it out to the bigger garbage outside, so that was a great surprise to me. I was actually surprised almost by everything I saw. I was surprised by the work I had to do, because the work was so hard

for me. It was hard for me because, in Europe, if you went through a university education, which just a very small percentage went, you didn't work physical labor, unlike here. Most of my college students – I was old already, but I still (unclear words) – rather, belonging to them rather than the ones who were cooks or had family lives, so considered myself. . . . Here, these other people had been busboys, just as I was later, and after I was in the United States, I was a busboy, and gladly after Alaska, but until that time I hadn't done much physical labor at all. To me it was brand new and very interesting, and all the time I was thinking, "Gosh, what am I doing and how did I get in the job?" But I was very, very happy every day, and I was tired, I was tired in a happy way. But I must tell you that I was so tired, that when the fish and wildlife service cut down, the very first one I mean, the season to five and a half weeks instead of seven weeks, I thought that they saved not only the fish lives but George Javors' life equally.. And I was still doubting if I had started the season. I was hired late in the season, and the season was shortened, and that actually, I think, saved me from physical exhaustion. But then the next year all the difference mattered, because I had the, quote, "experience."

RMM: You went up there in what years?

GJ: The very first year when I can say [is] '51, summer of '51, then '52 and '53. After '53 I lost my seniority. In '54 I couldn't go because my first son was born, and I did not leave my, my, my . . . . Actually, I could have probably have gotten back, maybe by seniority, but by that time I found that, now that I was already having a regular job, not a temporary job, maybe I shouldn't really just do such hard work. Also, I forgot to tell you that after the last time, I had what looked like an ulcer or something, a stomach ailment, because of all the nervousness. I was under constant strain. All this running, all this on-time and many things that I hadn't done before.

Also, I was very much interested – because (unclear word) in Alaska was almost a magic word, and these were the native Indians – I wanted to see them during the days we were off. I'll tell you what certain days we were off, how it was. Once I tried to talk to, particularly this native woman who came to the laundry, and I offered to carry her load from our laundry. Maybe she was just using our laundry – that was only, not really necessarily. And she wouldn't permit me to, quote, "See where they lived." The reason was, I found out, that they were told not to ever talk to a white man. Avoid them. They were really afraid of people who were not native Indians. Later, my colleagues told me that, if I had been invited to go [to] their home, I could have been even in danger, I could have been threatened why I went, because there was no harm in (unclear word) and seasonal workers. Apparently, this case that I was just this white man, this man who was a cook or was fired, apparently. Even worse than the relations of the white man's mix. So I couldn't get an insight into their lives, which I would have liked, or something of their languages, because they were told . . . . I always loved children, and I was trying to talk to their children, and the children were definitely, I found out, don't, don't talk to them. So we were "they" I suppose.

RMM: Is there anything else that you remember, that I have forgotten to ask?

GJ: There are probably some things, but they [do] not really pertain to the Italian fishermen.

RMM: Or just anything dealing with life there.

GJ: Yes. For instance, as I said, some of them who were hired for the seasonal job were really drifters in life. During one year, my roommate was a man who was in his early 40s, and he was scheduled there, more or less. This was his only “steady,” quotation, job, which he could really endure for six, seven weeks. He was a man who was really incredible and of an incredible low character. He could not believe, for instance, that there existed people who were not drunkards. I told you that drinking was forbidden, and he knew he would lose his job. But I didn’t realize, in the beginning, why he was erecting, in the room, a circular wall by shelf between his place and mine. Within the room there was a partition. Then I found out that he was sipping stealth little, he was still getting, somehow getting some drink. One day he asked me, “Don’t you drink?” I said, “No, I don’t.” Then he asked me, in utter surprise, “Doesn’t even your wife drink?” This was soon expected that this began a (unclear word) in my family. When some surprised happens, I say, “Doesn’t even your wife drink?” Apparently, if he found such an oddball that doesn’t drink, somebody must drink in their family. So that question revealed so much about him. “Doesn’t even your wife drink?” This character was selling what I think they call dildos, artificial penises and other stuff, in San Francisco. That was his occupation. He was a pimp, or something. Incredible.

And also was a congenital liar. For instance, he bought up anatomy books with credit cards, and he professed to have been a medical student whose education was interrupted by the Depression. The reason I made a quick computation and found that was a liar, that that was true. His college age wasn’t during the Depression. I did this computation because I found out that nothing he ever said was – he was a liar. Also, he was a racist. First when our doctor was a Jew. He tried to find out, you know if I would go over with him being an anti-Semetic. Then he was a racist, he was against Negroes, and all that. When he found out that all that would sit well with me, then he changed his tune. He was against everybody. And he was so much of a liar that, for instance, - [he] also was a malingerer. He tried to get out of work through the physician. And being an anti-Semite, when he found out that the doctor was a Jew, wouldn’t give him a medical certificate. Also, I think, through the doctor he wanted to get something to drink, or something, anyway. Ah, that person.

He was a coward, too. That I discovered, and I like to take sort of a sweet revenge on a coward who pretends to be a hero. So, Monday, we’re walking, taking our walk in the evening. He’d led me to understand that, on the days when the fishermen were fishing, we had the day off, usually in the afternoon, at least. Usually, they were polishing this and that, but that day was fairly free until we had to go back. So, we were walking towards the north. There was nothing there, nothing but trees. I was talking to him, and I said, “Hey, that’s where maybe we can see the bears.” I heard that there were bears walking up and down. I certainly don’t pretend to be a brave man, but I heard from these people that the bears were, first of all, tame, and that they would walk by, and also



because, when I said, “Hey there’s where are the bears,” I didn’t really believe it. It was just an idea. And all of a sudden, this man tells me that, “Hey, George, we’ve got to go back to serve dinner.” I said, “Come on, we don’t have to serve dinner. The fishermen are not on land.” I knew why he wouldn’t. After a few minutes, he said, “Well, I got to go back, because . . .” I don’t know what he said, “Because, I have an appointment,” maybe. I knew he was telling a lie, he was just afraid of the bear. I knew it. He said, “It’s six o’clock.” And I said, “No, it’s not six o’clock.” I had my watch. He said, “Your watch stopped or something.” In other words, he wanted definitely to go back. Anyway, I must have (section unclear) been real afraid of the bears, I would have been. But I knew that [in] that part there were no bears. They told me. So I found it immensely enjoyable to make him afraid. Finally he said, “No, we must go back, because the steward said, tonight he has work for us.” Which I knew was a certain lie. The man was a coward, a liar, and all that. That was frightening. That was my next feeling I found out. I got together with men I would have never known in my regular life.

Another one to show you was also one of those drifters. One day, around this potato peeler, which you sit around, almost like what they call, when people sit and [have a] bull session, you know, were talking. Somehow it came up that Rudolph Valentino – he was very famous as the (unclear) – somehow, either I or somebody else mentioned that Valentino had a wig, a false piece of hair. This man became so enraged that he almost threatened to beat anybody who wouldn’t believe that Rudolph Valentino had either a wig, or he believed it, or maybe the opposite. But I couldn’t believe that people could be, again, so outraged at something that had no relevance. These people, apparently, were [a] different kind of people. Again, I felt that it’s a good school for me, to find out what kind of people really lived if you leave your own sheltered university life, or something. That was also a revelation to me. The type of people I met. There were other things also. Let me see.

Also, to me, I remember, this was my first or second day home in the States, when I was flown out. Everything was new and, for instance, I remember still, how, on the other hand, the good side of people, how little conceited or how little bragging was one of my student companion[s]. The season was over, and I mentioned that they tried to get rid of us, and fly us out. One day, as we were having this free time in the afternoon, one of my student colleges – as I mentioned, all the other personnel who were in their late teens or early twenties, none of them were more than 22 or 23 – I said, “Okay, how do we fly out?” And he says, “Well, at least I’ll go sooner than you guys.” I say, “How can you so soon?” He says, “Well, my daddy flies up to pick me up.” That’s the only time I ever heard that his daddy has an airplane. He was working hard, working as all of us. He never mentioned that his daddy has his own airplane. He said his daddy would fly up, “because I told him to fly up.” His daddy has his own private plane, but he was just harboring it. I knew that, in Europe, I still was always comparing. In Europe, the daddy’s son who had an airplane, first of all would never come up. But if, for any reason would come up, you would hear daily about what the servant, what the . . . But you never did say. But now he had to because his daddy would come up, and you would see his daddy. That was the other aspect of it. How, in America, working up is not shameful, but rather pride. This was more impress[ive] than anything to me. And he said

that, “My daddy would fly here,” I almost fainted. This was really something that would have never happened in my experience. The rich man’s son wouldn’t have come up. Once, in Europe, you’re working hard, there was nothing (the rest is too quiet).

RMM: I have another question I was going to ask you earlier. Was there any provision made with the, especially with the Italian fishermen, for church services of any sort?

GJ: No. There was not. There was no chaplain, for instance. There was no church, either, in the village. The only church, for instance, up there that I saw personally, was an old Greek church, because it was Alaska, part of Russia. I found in one of the churches that I can remember, interestingly, a prayer book. In which the prayer was still said for the czar, the czarvovitch, and the czarina. How old was it, that the prayer books were still in Russian, and prayed (unclear). There was no church service, as far as I know, because I know that there was no church. That, somehow, they had a chaplain, I don’t know – a priest, there was not. What they did during the season, I don’t know, if they got dispensation, or . . . . No, there was not.

RMM: I was just wondering if, maybe, they had something in the union contract that said they would have to, or something like that.

GJ: I don’t know. I’m not saying there wasn’t.

RMM: But you didn’t see any? There wasn’t a priest, there wasn’t a chapel?

GJ: No. Again, I saw them on Sundays at the same time as, remember, we were working regular on Sundays. So, I just saw them during the regular time. They arranged some kind of services. That is, again, beyond a kind of knowledge.

RMM: Okay, I think that does it. Thank you.

#### TAPE CUTS, BUT RESUMES SHORTLY THEREAFTER

GJ: Around me, everybody was swearing day and night. One day, while we were sorting oranges, and they were throwing all the oranges to me to put into different types of boxes, I thought that I had lost grip on the oranges. Finally, I grabbed them and I shouted, “I got them!” And somebody shouted, “You too!” What she meant, she thought that I said, “God damn!” And they were surprised, or maybe already gratified, that even I started to swear, “God damn!”

The steward who was the cook and steward together – we had another steward who was starting – my steward, for whom I was working. He was a strong believer of Jehovah’s Witnesses, he was a Jehovah’s Witness, and he tried to convert everybody around him. And he had a good chance, because the Indian children would come with pots and pans, and would get the leftover food from him. We had plenty of leftover food. But in order to get the food, he would first preach to them. They had to listen to his preaching, and I couldn’t help laughing inwardly, that I felt this is the modern version of what we used to



call the “Rice Christians” in China. The Rice Christians were called [such] because the missionaries would give food, rice to them, if they came first [and] listened. So, I thought, here I see the modern version of the Rice Christian, with this steward making the kids to listen to Jehovah’s Witnesses’ preachment, and only then would they get their food.

The same man, one day, as we were sitting around the table, we had this. The few women we had work from either Aleutian women, or, this year, we were able to get a woman from the States, because she had a relative who could place her in her home, the “manca.” (?) The difficulties were that we couldn’t place them in the dorms. But this woman had one of the white men as a relative up here, so she was hired gladly, because we liked to have the kitchen run. This woman was sitting next to me, and was muggy, muggy. She sighs and she says, “Oh, I wish a storm came.” The steward speaks up and says, “Do you want a storm? The storm *is* coming!” And all of us: “Is it?” We were really relieved. And he says, “Yes! I see the storm coming. I see the wrath of God, the storm is coming!” And he started preaching to us. Jehovah’s Witness, it’s the end of the world. We had all these kinds of things. So, the storm was coming. And then he went on saying, a storm that will end in brimstone and fire.

The same steward, when he saw me sleeping, he would just stood there, and shaking with laughter. He said, and I’m quoting, “Ever since I saw Charlie Chaplin, I haven’t seen anybody as clumsy as you.” This was the first time I really handled a broom. I tried to do my work, because he really liked me. I mean, he laughed. He didn’t really flatter me, but then he just laughed and said he couldn’t believe that anybody could work like me. So inefficient like that.

One episode that I wanted to mention to you. When I was hired and I had no idea what a (unclear word “Flunky”) is. I knew that I wanted the job desperately. So, the man who was hiring me, he said, “Well, you have two hands, I can see them. You walked in my office, I suppose you have two legs. So you can do the job.” You want to do it, you will do it. So then, more or less I had an idea that I would be, but . . . A busboy’s job, which at that time I didn’t really know – later, I was a busboy. I knew it was general help, so I did it gladly, because it took me up to a good paying position, and at that time any job was better for me than the odd jobs that would come in. The few jobs that came in during the first week of my stay – one of them, for instance, was mowing the lawn. But you have to realize that I hadn’t even seen a lawnmower before I accepted the job. I accepted it because I needed the money. Fortunately, the lawnmower was a hand-propelled one, not a machine. I wouldn’t have even tried, because I wouldn’t have known how to start it. But, it was one of those. I did all kinds of odd jobs like, before the Alaska job.

Okay, (rest is unclear)

TAPE ENDS