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Barker, Don oral history interview

Mariah Pfeiffer

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Interview with Don Barker by Mariah Pfeiffer

Interviewee

Barker, Don

Interviewer

Pfeiffer, Mariah

Date

July 26, 2006

Place

Rumford, Maine

ID Number

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Format

Audiocassette

Biographical Note

Don Barker grew up on a farm in Rumford, Maine, and worked in Rumford's paper mill for 42 years. At the mill, Barker was a shop steward and, for four years, President of the union. Barker also chaired the Pulp and Paperworkers' Resource Council (PPRC) and lobbied in Washington and Augusta on the organization's behalf. Mrs. Barker grew up in downtown Rumford. The Barkers are raising two girls.

Scope and Content Note

This interview covers the Barkers' biographical details; childhood games; hunting and fishing conditions; Rumford's changing population; car traffic; Rumford's paper mill: jobs, the impact of technology, the union, and lumber supply; paper production politics: the PPRC, Total Maximum Daily Loads, jobs versus the environment, mill-sponsored children's programs, dioxin/Cluster Rules, mill-sponsored environmental interventions, and Gulf Island Pond issues; Rumford's relationship to the Androscoggin: waste disposal, timber transportation, employment, beauty, ice production, recreation, and real estate; Barker's concern for the forest; and potential oral history contacts.

General Notes

The recording quality is good. Mrs. Barker is also present at the interview.

ANDROSCOGGIN RIVER ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Q: So, I mean, I guess if we could start with a little bit of family history, where your family is from, and how you ended up here in Rumford?

DB: Okay I've been right in this area for sixty-three years. I was born in Rumford, and lived about a half a mile from here until I got married, and moved back to this area in, you know, 1965, something like that. And built this house in '76, been here ever since. Two grown children, two girls.

Q: Are they still around, in the area?

DB: One is a school teacher in Rumford, and the other one works at Bath Iron Works, well, did work for Bath Iron Works. I think it's government now, between the government and the Bath Iron Works.

Q: And your mother and your father were both from the area as well?

DB: Yes.

Q: What sort of things did they do?

DB: My father worked in a mill, and my mother was a homemaker.

Q: Now, when you were growing up, did you follow immediately in your father's footsteps with the millwork?

DB: Yeah, I went to work a couple, three times, and quit once, and got laid off once, and finally went back and worked, worked there for forty-two years. And active in the union for about thirty-five, and then forty years, and worked inside the mill in the stock prep area.

Q: So both union work and inside the mill. You said you didn't grow up right in this area, is it a little further towards Rumford Center?

DB: Yeah, just around that sharp corner.

Q: And what sort of things do you remember about growing up right around here, what was it like in comparison to today?

DB: Well, growing up we had to create our own amusement, like picking up our own

baseball teams, unlike today where everything is organized. And it was a lot of fishing and a lot of hunting, so, in early, earlier years. I still do a lot of fishing, a lot of hunting.

Q: Fishing and hunting right down on, fishing on the river, and hunting right around here?

DB: Yeah, I fish the river and I fish the lakes. I've fished everywhere, and hunting, ninety percent of the time right around this area, within walking distance, or a few miles.

Q: How has the fishing and hunting changed?

DB: Good. Well, the fishing, I just got a boat and I've been fishing on the lake.

Mrs. Barker How has it changed?

DB: Oh, how has the fishing changed. The laws have changed. When I was a kid you used to be able to keep fifteen trout, and you could go and catch fifteen trout in these brooks and streams. Now if you go, if you catch one or two, where the limit is five. That has changed.

Q: Why did they change the limit?

DB: You know, it was just, the fisheries couldn't keep up with it. Increase in people, and the fishing pressure. The hunting was very good until 1969-70 when we had a lot of snow, I mean probably that snow was halfway up to the eaves of this house. Well over a hundred and seventy inches or something that winter, '69, '70. And that killed off the deer herd, and at the same time the coy dogs moved into the area and made a difference in hunting. So the hunting really went downhill in 1969-70's winter. And then they had to change the laws for doe permits and lotteries and all that stuff.

Q: Did you go hunting with your father as well, was he into that?

DB: Yes.

Q: That's cool.

DB: And I taught my grandchildren how to hunt, so.

Q: Are they active in that as well?

DB: Not, not as much as I would have hoped. It's different, because they got so much going on, I think.

Q: Yeah, right. Different activities.

DB: Computers.

Mrs. Barker Computers, football, basketball.

Q: Has the town of Rumford, or Rumford Center changed?

DB: Not really. You mean the size and the people?

Q: Yeah, I guess anything, industry.

Mrs. Barker Well, traffic.

DB: Yeah, increased traffic on Route 2, you know. But otherwise than that, the town, Rumford Center seems to, hasn't changed over the last fifty years, has it? The size and, the people have changed though.

Q: How so?

DB: People died.

Q: Getting older, okay, right. So it's been a pretty stable community?

DB: Yes.

Q: And are most people in Rumford Center working in the mills as well?

DB: The majority of the people used to work in the mill, in this area. Now it's gone so, because they can travel much further, it's gone to, the mill area has increased their people from far away, or come here to work in a mill because it's the last good paying job in the area.

Mrs. Barker Commuting. The forty to fifty people, like he said, many times when he was a child, if three cars went by his house in a day, that was a heavy traffic day. Now it's, you know, three cars a minute. Where there's people, everybody has a car, and everybody makes forty-five trips to the store.

Q: And so, throughout your time in the mill, have you noticed the people in the mill changing?

DB: Not necessarily. The way they live, the better vehicles, the better houses and stuff over the years, yeah.

Q: What was the mill like when you first started working there?

DB: What was there a couple, twenty-five hundred people working there when I first

started, and it was a lot of manual work. And of course that changed with the computer age, and a lot of jobs was eliminated, people got, they'd buy their commodities from different companies that would do, would eliminate some of our jobs in the mill. So over the years, and it's down to around, I would say around nine hundred now but I'm not, nine hundred to eleven hundred people working in there.

Q: Would you say there's been a growth in unemployment then, or has it been replaced by something else?

DB: No, attrition. They, when people would retire or move on, they'd just eliminate that job and there wouldn't be so much hiring. Of course they shut down about ten machines in that mill since I was working in there. Now they've only got ten, eleven and twelve, and fifteen. Before, they had machines right up through to fifteen.

Q: Okay, so ten is a big cut then?

DB: And each machine would be probably, about eighty, fifty to eighty people that worked on that machine. So there was a lot of that.

Q: And then how, you said that you worked in the union for a while. How did you get involved with that?

DB: It was just part of working in a mill. Every department had a shop steward, and two or three shop stewards, probably one on each shift, and you got on a shift, you didn't have a job steward, somebody would ask you to be a shop steward. And then you just progressed right through.

Q: So you progressed up through the mill, or through the union?

DB: Right, from shop steward to president of the union for four terms.

Q: How long is a term?

DB: A year.

Mrs. Barker That was then. Now it's two years, but back in those days, it was every year, one term was one year.

Q: Why did they change it to two years, any idea?

DB: Yeah, it was, a person would get in there for one year, he'd just be getting used to it, and then somebody else would come in for a year. And he never got all his projects done that he wanted to. Following a grievance up through, or even negotiations.

Q: So it's not really an elected position, or is it?

DB: Yeah, it is elected. All union jobs are elected, after shop steward. Even a shop steward, you had to get a petition, but after that it's all elected.

Q: And what kind of work specifically does this union do?

DB: Protect the workers, spokesperson for the workers.

Q: Is it specific to this mill, or is it more of a generic?

DB: No, that's every mill. But just the people in this mill take care of the people in this mill. Like the Bucksport Mill, it's got a different setup with the same kind of people.

Q: And then, after you were union president, you returned back to working inside the mill?

DB: Yeah, I went back inside the mill and worked my regular job shift work. And then I was Pulp and Paper resource Council chairperson for the last eight years. And that was working with the company to protect jobs within the (*unintelligible*) a lot. (*Unintelligible*).

Q: Could you tell me a little bit more about the Resource Council, I'm not really familiar with their work?

DB: Well, it's the paid for by the company, run by the union. That's the only way I'd take the job. And this is a nationwide organization of a lot of different mills around the country. I was chairman of that for two years in row. But that, you know, we did a lot of work in Washington on environmental laws, TMDL, which has to do with water.

Q: What exactly is that?

DB: I was afraid you were going to ask that. TMDL is a law that's related to the water, pollution and water, and what was taking place. It was, oh I can't remember, it has been two years, or more since we worked on that. But we worked on that, a lot of forest reissues on the National Forest. And we worked a lot of issues in the state, also in forestry. We did most of our work on forestry.

Q: And when you say work, do you mean lobbying or what exactly -?

DB: We didn't call it lobbying, we called it educational because that's what we did, we educated the legislature people. And we did, we testified. We went to Washington at least a couple times a year. (*Unintelligible*), and that had to do with paper mills only,

annexing (*sounds like*).

Q: And when you say educating the legislatures, does that mean you were part of a committee to, I guess I'm a little confused about how this works. So informing legislative decisions?

DB: Just educating them on our jobs, and what our job consists of. And once you do away with a paper company job, it never comes back. It's just like the shoe industry. If you shut down a paper mill, you've lost a lot, a lot of good paying jobs, the highest paying jobs in this area. So that's all we was concerned with, anything to protect our jobs.

Mrs. Barker When they went to Washington to talk to the politicians they'd been trying, and hoping just the Rumford (*unintelligible*) nationwide. They were trying to educate the people, the senators and congressmen to how a law they were enacting, or talking about was going to affect the running of a paper mill or a saw mill, or anything to do with the timber industry. Hurt it or help it, and how.

Q: Being aware of conflict?

Mrs. Barker Right

DB: And we didn't limit that to just the senators or representatives, we met with the administration, we met with the vice president. We met, you name it, we've been there. Every office and (*unintelligible*) -.

Mrs. Barker And previously it was always whenever any issue this came about in Washington or Augusta it was always the environmentalists that would go and say, you know, what they wanted and why, and when, and how. And the industry didn't until they sent these people to do so.

Q: Okay. That's kind of a counterpoint to environmental concern?

Mrs. Barker Right.

Q: So, for example when people talk about cleaning up the Androscoggin, what kind of things does the Resource Council use to educate?

DB: What we do, we tell them what has changed on the river over the years and what the mills have done. And talk about things that the environmentalists went too far that's going to cost us our jobs. So we had to meet middle ground, that's all we looked for.

Q: Okay, the middle ground?

DB: Yeah.

Q: How did the legislature's respond to that?

DB: They love to talk to workers. It's amazing.

Q: Why do you think that is exactly?

DB: I really don't know. It's just a jobs issue, and of course they're looking for your vote too.

Mrs. Barker And these people were all mill workers that go there, all mill workers.

DB: There was no, nobody from management went with us. They were just paper workers.

Mrs. Barker Blue collar people living paycheck to paycheck. And the politician is risking nothing to talk to them. When a politician talks to a head of a company, he's risking a lot. Accusations of, you know, this or that. But to talk to the regular blue collar, lunch bucket type people.

DB: It was real easy getting an appointment. You just call up, say we're interested in jobs for mill workers, and we'd like to talk to you. We go down there with eighty to a hundred people every year, and set up our own appointments. And we make anywhere from two to three hundred visits on the hill, every office that we could get into. Talked to Hillary, talked to Olympia Snowe, Susan Collins.

Q: Wow, that's quite a campaign.

DB: And I've even had Baldacci and Collins call me at the Rumford mill to find our position on imports from Canada on the Softwood coalition. So it worked both ways, they had a contact person, we had a contact person. Mike Michaud is another one, he's a mill worker.

Q: Yeah, right down in Lewiston.

Mrs. Barker That covered their butts, in terms of, you know, if they were being coerced by management toward the environment, or whatever, to vote this way or that way. Because by talking to these regular people, you know, they covered their butt when it came time for reelections.

Q: Okay, right. And it's talking to constituents?

Mrs. Barker Yes.

Q: What other things besides going into the legislature and educating does the council do?

DB: That was most of what we do. Oh yeah, of course we always had our school programs, to get into schools. A Rumford group had a puppet show that they did.

Q: What kind of puppet show?

DB: We just, we just, we had, the company spent a lot of money on this. A real puppet sent, and we had a background of forestry. And we talked about, we had a wood cutter, we had a forester, we had an owl that talked. You should probably try to get a film of that.

Q: Yeah, I'd love a film of that.

DB: You'll get that from Deeno. And he was one of the puppeteers.

Mrs. Barker It was something they did for the grammar school students, and they would travel wherever to do it. And it got to be so the word got out, you know, it got to be so popular that teachers from all over would call and try to get them to come to their school and do it for their students, five to ten year olds, and older even. But, interestingly the places like Cape Elizabeth, places like where they don't want another tree ever cut down anywhere for any reason, ever again. The school teachers there were very leery of having them come in.

Q: But they still had it come in?

DB: Yes, they still do it.

Mrs. Barker They did, but they were a little more non receptive to this. You could see when he come home, you know, the kid said this and the kids are saying, they mimic their parents. Five, six, seven year olds. And since the puppet show was The Forest Grows Back, or something like that, and you could see the influence that they had gotten at home already.

Q: What kinds of things were they saying that showed that influence, do you remember?

DB: Just the forester was educating Lucien a lot on how to, you know, cut trees, to look out for the animals, the wildlife, clear cut. And talk about what birds, and whatever, animals, the moose like clear cuts, and stuff like that. It's probably a twenty five, thirty minute tape. You got to get hold of that, that's cute.

Q: Yeah, I would love to see that.

Mrs. Barker They still do go, they still do (*unintelligible*) schools from time to time.

DB: But Deeno is the one to talk to that about, he's also got a game show like *Jeopardy*. And they put a lot of time and money, and they got stands and stuff to get behind. They got the buttons if you're right and wrong, but Deeno will show you all that.

Q: Does it bring up the issues of jobs, or is more about how the forestry industry, paper making works?

DB: It's a mixture. Mostly, sustainable forestry, you know, make sure that the forest is there for the next generation.

Mrs. Barker And which is interesting as years go by to see how, in places like Rangeley and, you know, the places where the forest industry is, you know, really belongs. And then you go to someplace like South Portland or Falmouth, or Freeport, or Cape Elizabeth or whatever, and where more white collar, you know, tree hugging types. You could see the kids acting just way different.

DB: And after they did the puppet show, they had paper making, let the kids make a piece of paper. And the kids just loved that, they (*unintelligible*). I don't know how many schools they went in to, a hundred, thousands. It was twice a week most of the time, then the company had to cut back on that because it was costing too much, so we didn't go quite so often. And we made sure when we went, we was getting the bang for the buck. In other words, instead of twenty people we'd get eighty people.

Q: To see it, okay. What was the initial idea behind that puppet show?

DB: Sustainable forestry.

Q: Okay.

DB: Just to educate the children that the wood cutters and the paper mills are not endangering the forest.

Q: Do you think they're getting an equal amount of environmental, you know, strictly environmental education as well, or do you think that?

DB: We balanced it out, that's what we did. Before they was only hearing the environmentalist's side of the issues.

Q: To hear the other side -

DB: And the environmentalists didn't like the Pulp and Paper Workers Resource

Council. That's the first time that these kids have ever heard our side of the story now. It worked out good.

Q: Yeah, it sounds like it.

Mrs. Barker And they also did this at fairs and festivals, and that sort of thing. They'd go put on a play, a puppet show or whatever.

Q: Yeah, that's really cool

DB: We passed out pencils, I don't know how many thousands. Hundreds of thousands of pencils we bought like that, this ones from Buxport. And of course we got the other groups doing this too up in Bangor area, Millinocket area they had a puppet show and doing it in that area. But we covered almost the whole state.

Q: Wow, that's a nice outreach program. Is, I guess, is part of that, preparing the way for the future generation to continue this work, is that part of the (*unintelligible*)?

DB: To get them, to get the kids thinking, I guess. So, you know, just educate them through.

Mrs. Barker People who cut tree's down, they're not criminals.

DB: Like this guy with the skidder out here. That's what I do in the winter, I got a few hundred acres of Timberland Pine. I cut Pine during the winter, during the summer I do my garden. You would have liked the t-shirt I had on this morning.

Q: What did it say?

DB: Earth first, on the front a guy with a chain saw. And on the back it said, we'll log the other planets later. That comes from the west coast, because the environmental group was after a certain guy out there.

Q: That's funny. Where do you see the future of the logging and pulp and paper industry here in Rumford?

DB: I think that it'll be here for a long time. It might look different ten years from now, but there's been a lot of mills shut down across the country because of the environmental laws that the people just, they just couldn't afford to do all the stuff that was required like the Berlin Mill, they just couldn't make any money out of that mill. But I don't think you'll ever see another pulp mill built in the United States because there's so many laws that you just couldn't build another pulp mill to make paper. So when you lose a paper mill, you lose all them jobs, they never come back. They change hands like twelve towns, Millinocket. Every mill has had a different owner in the last five, ten years in the state of Maine. Madawaska Fraser I guess, is the only one that hasn't

changed hands.

Q: And you said that things might look different. How would it look different do you think?

DB: Fewer people. The same thing, fewer people like the Rumford Mill took the wood from out of this area and now they make all their chips over to west Paris. Up to Shelbourne (*sounds like*), you been by that chip mill. All them chips come through Rumford. There's another one in Farmington. So instead of processing it here, they got these satellite wood chip mills which probably cost them more money, but they've got a reliable source of wood that cutting down, it's leveling out the cost. There's a fixed cost instead of an unpredictable cost (*unintelligible*).

Q: What kind of things is the mill doing to keep up with that environmental standard, or how is that playing out within the mill?

DB: Well, I can't say what's going on right now. But, two, four, six years ago when I was involved with the Pulp and papers Resource Council in Augusta, we got educated on, you know, how the treatment plant works, where the water comes in and where the water goes out. And the dioxin, the biggest thing that's happened over the years are the dioxin levels. They've just about disappeared as far as I know. And that's where cluster rules come in, that was what we talked about in Washington. We must have made ten trips down there to Washington about the cluster rules. And that was to do away with chlorine. And we used chlorine, chlorine dioxide, which is not chlorine based. So this did away with the dioxin in the river, there's still probably some there but, you know, they eliminated it in almost every paper mill in the area.

Q: The cluster rules?

DB: Yes.

Q: I don't know what that is, I'm not going to lie.

DB: You probably should talk to somebody like what's the guys name at the mill. Reed, he's the environmental person at the Rumford Mill.

Q: Okay, so he'd be able to explain a little more about that?

DB: Yes. And he'll talk about phosphorus, which the big thing right now. They're called algae blooms and stuff. But the cluster rules are what made different paper mills do, set rules so that it can get rid of the dioxin, and they finally thought of that. And we saved thousands of jobs. The Pulp and Paper Resource Council educated people in Washington, and it saved hundreds of mills. It was thirty six jobs, thirty six mills that did not meet the cluster rules, but they had a given time to meet them and they could afford

to do that. So we saved thousands of jobs here.

Q: Like extending the time a little bit to meet the standards?

DB: Yes. And but, they do a lot of testing and readings, Steve I think. A couple years I've dealt with the guy.

Q: How would you describe the role of the mill in Rumford?

DB: As far as trying to keep the water clean and all that?

Q: Sure, we'll start with that.

DB: The mill has made a lot of improvements, and not just because the law changed, they made a lot of improvements on their own that was cost effective, and that made sure that the river wasn't polluted. So there was a lot of stuff over the years. I worked in a beater room and of course I worked with dyes and stuff, and all this stuff went directly into the river. You'd walk by the river, you'd see what color paper they were making that day, whether it be goldenrod or canary, blue, green, whatever. But once the order was done, they'd ship that right out and it'd go right down the river. Now it goes all through the different stages through the mill and you don't see all that. And the same with oil, they make sure there's no oil that gets in the river, it's all contained before it gets there. And rightfully so, they spent a lot of money to clean that up because if they didn't they wouldn't exist today.

Q: What do you mean by that exactly?

DB: Well, if they kept on doing what they were doing twenty years ago, people just wouldn't put up with it.

Q: Okay, because of the smell issue?

DB: Yes.

Mrs. Barker Well, fifty years or eighty years ago.

DB: But what you got to realize about the river, when I was a kid, I lived on a farm. Everybody had their own little dump. And the people that didn't have their dump on their property, they'd come to, right down here where that brook comes close to the road, people would come from five, ten miles, there used to be a dump there, and they'd just dump it into the water, over the Ellis River, and they had a big dump over there. And I mean it was a big dump, and if you had a wrecked car or a car that rusted out, they'd throw it down over the riverbank. Everything went into the river.

Mrs. Barker You know, you're talking fifty, sixty years ago.

DB: No, forty years ago.

Mrs. Barker The town of Rumford had a dump, you know, a dump where the town garbage was dumped and burned.

Q: But people weren't using it?

Mrs. Barker Oh yeah, the garbage truck would go around and pick up everybody's garbage, and then they would go over there and it was burned.

DB: You know where all the poplar is stacked down to the mill down there, you just come by it? Where all that was stacked, that was just five, ten acres of dump. People would just dump their stuff there. But if they didn't go there, they'd go to the rivers.

Mrs. Barker It was a big deal when we were kids in the forties to have, your parents had to go to the dump for something. They raked the lawn, or they had cleaned out the cellar or whatever, Dad was going to the dump and all the kids would want to go because there was just mountains of garbage on fire. And there was a caretaker there, and it was just constantly going, and it burned down, burned down, and then put more on it, burn down. But everybody did that all across the United States, you know, that's the way life was.

DB: And after they burned that, they'd bulldoze that stuff over to, all the ashes over towards the riverbank. Thousands of rats, rats everywhere.

Mrs. Barker But that's the way life was in America. Every town in America handled their garbage like that. This was the days before landfills existed.

DB: And the town of Rumford built the teepee where they built all the trash, and they put more smoke and dioxin and whatever into the air, that they outlawed that eventually. So they have to haul all the stuff to landfills all over.

Q: Did that begin to change after Clean Water, Clean Air Act time?

DB: Right about the same time.

Mrs. Barker But before the days of vehicles and pulp trucks, that's the way the logs got to paper mills, by the river, to make paper out of the logs, they got the logs to the paper mills with the river.

Q: Yeah, I learned a little bit about that up in Berlin. It was a similar process here?

Mrs. Barker I can remember that canal being packed with logs. And the guy in

charge would be out there with a stick with a hook on the end, you know, manipulating them and doing whatever they did. They'd walk right out on the logs, on the water.

DB: When I was younger, we used to haul wood to the mill beyond the riverbank, throw the wood into the river.

Mrs. Barker That's what the canal is for.

Q: Channel that wood right to the mill?

DB: Yes, right to the (*unintelligible*) mill.

Q: And was that a specific job, or did mill workers kind of take that upon themselves?

DB: Each department had people working, if you had a job in the wood department you'd stay there until you got a bid on a paper machine job. That's how they'd move through the system, through the bidding system. If you got in a department you didn't want, then you could try get out and bid on something else.

Q: What else do you remember about the river, growing up, is there any other specific memories?

DB: The foam.

Mrs. Barker I can remember when I was a toddler, being fascinating to go down and see the guys out there on the canal, pushing the logs around. That was real exciting. I can remember my parents taking us to a ferry to cross the river, before the bridges were built. There was a ferry with a rope, you drove your car onto it, about the late forties.

DB: Late forties, late fifties.

Mrs. Barker They pulled you across the river.

DB: Later on at one the (*Unintelligible*) Bridges, they had another ferry there. They had another ferry down at Rumford Center, I'd never seen that one, that was before my, but the one on Rumford Point, that was working when we were playing baseball '57, '58 and we'd travel to South Paris. It was that late.

Mrs. Barker That late really, I don't think so, I was little.

DB: Fifty-five anyways.

Mrs. Barker I remember my parents taking us, all us kids to that one because they said it was going to close that year, the new bridge was coming in. It was exciting. He grew up in the country, I grew up downtown, so we have different perspectives on it.

Q: How is that different?

Mrs. Barker Well, the garbage thing for one thing, you know, dumping your garbage out in the bushes is foreign to me. I grew up downtown, they had garbage trucks that came to pick up your garbage.

Q: Yeah, that's really different.

Mrs. Barker Farm life, that's the way it was. And not just Rumford, everywhere in America, that was farm life. Little House on the Prairie type thing, you know, they didn't have a garbage truck coming by to pick it up.

Q: How else did the downtown area and the outskirts differ in terms of, I don't know, population, people, job wise?

Mrs. Barker Oh, I don't know. See, we grew up without television, you know. That's the big thing there, we were outdoors constantly. Kids today they don't do that.

DB: Her mother went to school with Muskie, same class.

Mrs. Barker Senator Ed Muskie, yeah, graduated in '32, I guess.

Q: Yeah, he's got quite a legacy.

Mrs. Barker At Bates, yeah. He was born and raised in Rumford, he was an environmentalist.

Q: Right. His family didn't work in the mills, did they?

Mrs. Barker His father was a tailor, or a cop, or something like that. I can't remember, I think it was a tailor. But, you know, I'm sure he had relatives working in the mill, everybody did.

Q: Was your family working in the mill as well?

Mrs. Barker Just my uncle, yeah.

Q: *(Unintelligible)*?

Mrs. Barker Yes, in the summertime, teenage boys would go in there to work for the

summer, (*unintelligible*) start school. If they were eighteen, you had to be eighteen

DB: My daughter was lucky enough to get in a couple of summers, helped pay for her college education.

Q: What kind of work was she doing there?

DB: Regular work on one of the machines. One year they were doing some testing, but most, one year was running some machine.

Q: That must be a good summer job.

DB: Yeah, and of course they made good money, because they made entrance level jobs and that was ten, twelve bucks at that time, that was twenty years ago.

Mrs. Barker Early eighties.

Q: And has the union been involved in keeping up those good wages?

DB: Oh yeah, definitely. We had good pensions with good wages back then.

Q: I guess what I would ask of a more broad question is, if you had to describe the role of the river in the formation of the area, and your life as well, how would you describe that? Kind of a free form question, but, if it has a role at all.

DB: Well the river, because of the mill, gave me a living for my working career. It changed my standard of living.

Mrs. Barker The river kept the mill going, back before they had vehicles. And my grandfather worked there. You certainly couldn't play in it and swim in it when you were a child, because it was too polluted.

Q: Did you give much thought to it, I mean have you given much thought to it?

Mrs. Barker To the cleanliness of it?

Q: No, just to the river in general. Is it just kind of a, you know, something that's there, or?

Mrs. Barker It's pretty, yeah. It's picturesque.

DB: You take from Rumford to Bethel and that river is just, you know, of course I see it all the time but people that come through here and they see that river and the falls, and all the way to Bethel, and it's a nice place.

Q: Yeah.

Mrs. Barker Especially when the leaves are colored.

DB: And now I go canoeing in it, you know, until 1980 you wouldn't even think of putting your canoe in it because it'd be all mud, or that's where the treatment plants put in the river. It was a sore, it was one of the ten worst rivers in the world.

Mrs. Barker In '33, in the winter they chipped ice out of it, in the winter. You know, back in the days of yore they, you know, before refrigerators, they got ice from that river.

Q: What did they do with the ice?

Mrs. Barker They had an ice house in Virginia Section, and I can remember the people across the street from us, they were the last ones to get a refrigerator. My parents always had one, but Dr. Dyer had an ice box, and the ice truck would come to deliver to people who still had those, the old fashioned ice boxes. And there'd be big chunks of ice in the back of that truck, and all the kids would go over and watch, watch him load it in, you know. That was fascinating.

DB: And before the, you know, Muskie and all the changes over the river, there was no fish. The fish were chubs, or suckers or whatever, they used to run up the brooks when I was a kid. Now that has changed because the river's cleaned up and there's been different fish taking over the river. I go fishing in the Androscoggin, and canoeing. I don't know how many times I've been in a canoe going down river with different people and fishing.

Mrs. Barker You don't fish that that much. You go canoeing in it. But people do fish in it, I don't know if they eat the fish.

DB: Yeah, they do.

Mrs. Barker Really? I don't think I would, I don't know.

Q: When did you start canoeing and fishing in the Androscoggin?

DB: Maybe ten years ago, I've had canoe about ten years.

Q: How did you decide, all of the sudden one day?

DB: Well, I just wanted to canoe to fish down in this brook, and just another, something else to do, you know, like mountain climbing and stuff like that.

Q: Do you see more recreation going on nowadays?

DB: Oh, definitely. You'd never see anybody, years ago, you'd never see anybody on the river. Of course they used it for irrigation for the potato fields over here, and in Bethel. They've always done that since back into the early sixties, I think.

Q: Up until today they still do that?

DB: They still do that, yes.

Mrs. Barker As the years go by, though, and the river is getting cleaner and cleaner through each decade, the value of the house lots along the river, that actually front the river, have gone sky high. In the thirties and forties you didn't want to live on the river, because it was so dirty and yucky. Now it's a big status symbol, I think.

DB: It was not only dirty, it stunk. There was a definite odor every year.

Mrs. Barker With the changing of time, water frontage is a big thing for Americans now, you know. So to have it on the river, if you're going to live in the town, to have your backyard front that, you know.

Q: Has there been a lot of development right along the river here?

DB: Not a lot, but if you go down the river in a canoe now you see houses built with a view of the river now. And that just started ten years ago.

Q: Is Rumford advertising that to businesses? I know in Lewiston they're starting to do that a little bit.

DB: Not really. You might see a waterfront property for sale, with waterfront. But years ago, you would see even land for sale, it would be right next to the river.

End of Side A

Side B

Mrs. Barker . . . built up different things, but not industry type things.

Q: I know in Berlin, because the mill just shut down, they were looking for other avenues of industry, or anything. So there hasn't been much of a push for that here at this point?

Mrs. Barker The paper industry in general is (*unintelligible*) by computers. You know, that's a big dent in it's demand. But there are a lot of other things that are made

of paper, so it will always exist, you know. And every automated thing that comes along does away with some jobs. You know, that's life.

Q: Do you see a lot more importing of logs and timber from Canada or wherever else it may be coming from now?

DB: There's quite a bit of softwood timber that was coming in from Canada, it's the Softwood Coalition. They just passed a, they finally got an agreement on that. And we worked on that, (*unintelligible*) pulp paper workers for years. But there is a lot of softwood dimensional stuff, 2x4's, 2x6's coming into the United States from Canada. And that hurts the sawmills down south, and it's caused a lot of (*unintelligible*). But as far as this, the wood coming in from these other places, you know, you might get some crap. Like this mill right down here, the Rumford Mill exports their pulp, a lot of their pulp, they got a pulp machine, and that goes to China and wherever. And they ship over there in bales and it comes back, and they make paper there and then it comes back and hurts the industry here. But they get a lot of pulp from this mill and the Buxport mill, and Old Town. And that went through the Portland terminal, on big boats, tons and tons of pulp went out of there every month. But there's a lot of low value timber in the woods that, the only thing it's good for is to make paper or burn. But the good timber, there's a good market for it now. Take that tree right out there, that's a good valuable tree, that wouldn't go for paper. One's a rock maple, the other one's pine. They are worth a lot of money.

Q: You're sitting on a goldmine right here.

DB: That pine tree right there, without bragging or anything, that's a two hundred dollar tree. I can cut that in twenty minutes and have it onto a truck.

Mrs. Barker When the kids were growing up he had a big fetish about, because he grew up in the country outdoors, as I said, our generation there was no TV, you played outside. And so he knows the trees, and he had a big hang up about his kids growing up and learning to identify every tree, what they were by bark, leaf, etcetera. And he would take them out every so often and run them through it, what's this, what's that, until they got it, until they knew every tree, by the time they were in seventh grade they could identify every tree by the bark. And then by the time he reached that accomplishment, then and he was happy and he let it go. So immediately of course, they just memorized it to pacify him, so then it just *pffft*, why would they care. They couldn't identify anything today, immediately.

DB: That's not true, because we just went on Whitecap yesterday, my daughter, and went on Whitecap blueberrying and come back down through and she was naming trees on the way down through.

Mrs. Barker She was, really? I thought they just washed it out of their minds. Well, I bet they did, most of it.

Q: It stuck with them. Pass on that love of the forest.

Mrs. Barker Just one of those stupid little quirks, you know.

Q: No, but I mean I can tell you really care about the forest, which is good to hear. Well, I think that's pretty much what I had for questions. Is there anything that I may have skipped over that you feel is an important piece to this?

Mrs. Barker No, but Bill Westing would be treasure chest, you know, and he's got, the historical society would have pictures. You know, I mean in my grandparents' day and my parents' day, people would skate on that river in the winter. And they used to have just, you know, town gatherings along the edge. And it was, it was a way different lifestyle, you know, back then. Before the days of indoor plumbing kind of, you know. So he would have records and pictures and stuff to back that up. Oh, it would be fascinating, I'm sure.

Q: Yeah, I'll definitely talk to him.

DB: One thing that's kind of interesting is, we did a lot of work, our group did a lot of work on Gulf Island Pond, you know. You probably heard about that.

Q: Well, I've heard about some of the debate over Gulf Island Pond, but I don't know what exactly.

DB: And the paper mills and CMP, well, Florida Power, put oxygen in the water to keep the fish, the river from dying in that section because it is backed up by a dam there. But when we was working on it back then, environmentalists and some of the Democrats were real strong there, and I'm a strong Democrat myself, because of jobs and stuff, but we was fighting on Gulf Island Pond to keep that at a reasonable cost and keep the river clean. We want a clean river, all the workers want a clean river. But some of the people, the legislative people from Lewiston-Auburn were really fighting us, and they're still fighting hard on it, about Gulf Island Pond. But there's more pollution that come out of Lewiston-Auburn going into the river than Gulf Island Pond. The problem is, they got fishing, and you definitely don't want to eat a fish below Lewiston-Auburn because of the pollution. It's kind of, it was kind of ironic I guess, you know, they were worried about what's coming to them, but they wasn't too concerned what was going into the river from their (*unintelligible*). They've done a lot since that, two years ago.

Q: Is this the nonpoint source pollution? I've heard that term going around a bunch.

DB: Yes.

Q: Okay, from Lewiston, going out?

DB: It's like runoff, the sewage system in Lewiston wasn't good, and they've a lot of work. And runoff in the forest, or a garden or a pasture, you know, that's nonpolluting. And it's kind of hard to control that, but anything that you can control, you know, we should be doing it.

Q: So, I guess, what exactly was the position of the Pulp and Paper Workers Resource Council?

DB: On Gulf Island Pond? Our position was jobs and make sure the river was clean, to a certain standard. The environmentalists wanted it to be a trout habitat, which it never was. And it's ideal bass fishing. You see boats down there on that river now that cost ten, twenty thousand dollars. Every weekend they have bass tournaments, and that's the good fishing, is right there by Gulf Island Pond.

Q: How exactly does the council balance the clean river and jobs thing, how does that play out on a policy level? Does it just mean more time for standards?

DB: Not necessarily more time, it's just that the river is clean, they did away with the foam, and they got an algae problem they're working on now, and that's because of phosphorus. And the mills are working on that, and this is after I left, I keep reading all this stuff, where they are trying to control the phosphorus for algae rules and stuff like that.

Q: So you stayed pretty involved even though you're out of the mill and the council?

DB: I read it. I read it and smile.

Q: Keep have a vested interest.

DB: I keep saying, they'd never get away with that if I was still there.

Mrs. Barker The Pulp and Paper Workers Resource Council started in the west from the spotted owl issue, and it's evolved from there. And it spread across the country on all levels of, you know, saw mills, pulp mills, paper mills, everything. And what they want is, they want to harness the pollution thing, but they also, these people need to have food on the table and a roof over their head, so there has to be a balance. Instead of just, you know, a blanket, you know, no more this, no more that, you know, which would make everybody's job history. They go down to Washington and Augusta or wherever, Albany and so on, to try to talk to the politicians, explain to them what any new law might have for effect on their jobs. They have kids to raise and feed and clothe.

Q: How are the possible consequences sort of assessed? You know, if you see a law, how do you figure out what exactly that might do to the mill and jobs? Do you know what I'm asking?

DB: No, I didn't understand.

Q: When a law, say an environmental law comes out, then how exactly does the council look at that law and say, we think this is what this law is going to do to our jobs. How does that work?

DB: The council, when something would come out like that, like the Cluster Rules, the council will get together, they have what they call a steering committee and that was made up of about fifteen, twenty people all over the United States, workers in the mill. And they'd make a position paper, a fact sheet position paper, and talking points. And that's, we would all have to agree to that. And there wouldn't be any company influencing that group, or any outside influence, it would be just the workers coming up with these talking points and position papers. We have position papers on global warming, clearcuts, TMDLs, everything. They put a lot of work into it, they meet four times a year, someplace in the United States.

Mrs. Barker It was paid, funded by corporations, but they had no say over what the Pulp and Paper Workers Resource Council said or did. They acted and spoke on their own, but the companies paid the bill.

DB: It was kind of funny one time, I got a call from the environmental person who, (*unintelligible*). I get a call from him and he says you guys should be looking into TMDLs. We'd been working on it for three years. So that, they didn't even know what we was working on, they should have, but they didn't. And they got a copy of everything that we put out for fact sheets and position papers.

Q: Now, when these laws are, are these for national laws that you have a national steering committee, or what happens if it's just a Maine-specific law?

DB: Yeah, we divided that up. We did it mostly, position papers for the national level, but if we had something in the state of Maine that we worked on, we'd have just talking points and we'd just take care of that in this area.

Mrs. Barker So you can see, if you were a senator from Minnesota in Washington, you can see how if you met with the CEO of a corporation it would look shady, because you're being influenced by this guy who runs this company and, you know, whether it's GE or -

Q: Maybe they're putting pressure.

Mrs. Barker Right, or buying you out, or, here's a new car for you, whatever. But when you meet with a blue collar paper worker, there's nothing that they can give you, and you're not risking your integrity and reputation by meeting with these people. So when they would go to Washington, politicians would seek to meet with them. So it really helped, it really helped. They're just a bunch of Joe Shmo's coming down to talk about what might influence their jobs.

DB: And of course, you know, when something comes down in Washington, you get a person like Ted Kennedy, he's not going to sit down and talk to Gary Curtis, who was the head of the Rumford mill, but he will sit down and talk to the working people.

Mrs. Barker Exactly. And you can understand why.

Q: Yeah, it makes a lot of sense. And are these talking points generally technical talking points, or, I mean I guess I don't understand.

DB: They're just, what we used the talking points for when we met with somebody, we'd have something to look at to remind us what to say. But position papers, we'd always hand them our position paper on pulp and paper. Now, Dino should be able to get you all that, all the position papers that we had over the years.

Mrs. Barker You would just laugh at the puppet show film. It's so cute.

DB: You're going to love Dino. He stutters and he's funny and he's sharp, and he's real smart.

Mrs. Barker He's a comedian. He does stutter, but he is not stupid by stretch of the imagination, he's very intelligent and he's a nice person, a good hearted person.

Q: Are there any last final comments.

Mrs. Barker No, but I do think you should speak to the historical people.

Q: Yes, tomorrow morning I'm there.

End of Interview
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