

Interview with Jane Langley

Co owner of Union River Lobsterpot

Date: April 14, 2005

Time: 2:45 p. m.

Location of the Interview: Ellsworth High School Library

Student Interviewers: Chris Johnston	Grade 10
Felicia Hill	Grade 10
Jessica Carter	Grade 10
Steve Weisman	Grade 10

School: Ellsworth High School

School Location: Ellsworth, Maine

Teacher or Parent

Interviewer/Chaperone: None

Transcriber: Joyce Whitmore

JC: When did you first think of coming up with this restaurant?

JL: Well, my husband and I operated a different restaurant for ten years. We both worked in the restaurant industry before that. We were operating the Oak Point Lobster Pound and we were just leasing it. When our lease was up we wanted to do something new so we came to Ellsworth and we bought the property on South Street and built the Union River Lobster Pot which was about nine years ago.

CJ: Why did you decide on a seafood restaurant? Was this the thought all along?

JL: Well, mostly because of where we live which is on the coast of Maine. We learned a long time ago that the people that go out to dinner here, especially since we are a seasonal restaurant and have a lot of tourists, they expect fish and lobster and seafood. We tried a few other things at our other restaurant. We made some veal dishes and fancy chicken dishes but people did not buy them.

JC: Have you always lived in Maine all your life?

JL: I was born in Michigan. When I was five we moved to southwest harbor and when I was ten we moved back to Michigan and then when I was in the eighth grade we moved to Ellsworth. I have pretty much been here most of my life.

JC: How many people work in your restaurant?

JL: We have a staff of about twenty-four or twenty-five seasonally. We are just open from around June 10 to September 20 usually.

JC: Did you start buying the fish sooner?

JL: Yep, we usually start buying the local scallops and local shrimp right about now. I'm not sure if my husband has bought it yet or not. I think he has. They keep it over at Maine Shellfish in their freezer lockers over there. We just order it to be delivered from there.

SW: What are the work shifts like?

JL: We serve lunch and dinner. The first one that comes in the morning is the baker they open up in the morning and accept deliveries. The lunch cooks come in around nine. Waiters and waitresses usually come in around ten thirty. The dinner shift for the dining room starts around three thirty.

CJ: You said you buy your fish early, what are your best sellers?

JL: The best seller we have is lobster. We buy that throughout the summer; we do not buy that early. The next best seller is fresh haddock. We buy that as we go too. The two we buy ahead is scallop and shrimp. We probably sell more shrimp than scallops simply because we offer shrimp as an appetizer as well as a dinner. The other fish we sell fresh throughout the summer are salmon, swordfish, tuna, and halibut. Brian puts that on a special board and he offers four different ways you can have your fish prepared so you can choose your fish and the preparation so that gives quite a variety to the menu as far as fish goes.

CJ Do you cook the fish?

JL: I don't cook anything, no. Usually Brian, my husband, is the only one who cooks the fish.

CJ: What do you personally do in the business?

JL: I work in the dining room. I seat the people. I do scheduling. I order things for the dining room. I bus a lot of tables and clean up a lot of messes.

JC: Do people leave good tips?

JL: Yeah, generally, People tip pretty well. I think the service we have is pretty decent. It is good service so people tip accordingly.

JC: What other kinds of appetizers do you have?

JL: We have clam chowder, fish chowder, and lobster stew. We have fried calamari. I'm not quite sure what Brian is going to do this year. We have stuffed mushrooms, which have no fish at all So that people can have a choice of a non-fish appetizer. I'm trying to remember what else we have.

JC: Is a scallop the same size as shrimp.

JL: Yeah, they all come in different sizes. You can order shrimp by the size so it is all uniform. Scallops are hard to order by size so sometimes you will get a big one or a small one. So...

SW: Do you serve things like sushi?

JL: We don't serve any raw fish. I think Brian is going to experiment with some sushi rolls and the fish in them will be cooked. I do think we are going to have that this year.

FH: What else do you have on the menu besides seafood?

JL: We have sirloin steak, teriyaki chicken, baby back ribs with barbecue sauce and you can order those with a lobster tail and that is really good. We have hamburgers and hot dogs. We have a pasta dish that is vegetarian so people who are vegetarian have something to choose.

JC: Do you serve salads with them?

JL: Yep. Every dinner can come with tossed salad or coleslaw. We also have a Caesar salad. We have a seafood Caesar salad which has shrimp, lobster and crabmeat on it. We serve a chicken salad at lunchtime.

JC: Do you have potato salad?

JL: Nope. We don't have potato salad.

CJ: What kind of equipment do you have at the Lobster Pot?

JL: Yes, we do. We cook all of our lobsters outside in a lobster cooker which is kinda of our own design. It is an oil-fired burner. It has four big pots, I guess, so you can cook a lot of lobsters at once if you want too. We have a big tank out there that is refrigerated and aerated that will hold up to six hundred pounds of lobster. The lobsters are all graded by size. The lobster cook spends a good part of his day grading the lobsters that come in. Because of the delicateness of holding a live animal we installed a generator because if the power goes out you will start losing the lobsters. We have a generator that we have used more than once. We have an eight-burner gas stove, two fry- o- laters, a grill, a convection oven, two baking ovens, and two walk ins. One is for fish and bottled beer and wine. The other walk in is for the produce. We have three stand up freezers and a dishwasher. We have a lot of equipment. It takes a lot of equipment.

SW: Do you sell live lobsters?

JL: Yep. If you want to buy a lobster and take it home and cook it, we will sell it. As long as we have enough lobsters in the tank for the customers who come to the restaurant. Once in a while in the middle of August we will not have enough, so we will tell them to go to the fish truck, or to the Shop and Save or to the Trenton Lobster Pound if they are headed that way.

JC: Is July your busiest month?

JL: July is pretty busy but August is busier. August is the busiest month all the way through. The beginning of July is pretty slow. Usually around July 17<sup>th</sup> when you get slammed and you are busy for the next six weeks and you cannot even look up.

CG: Do you purchase your fish and lobster from the big companies or the local fishermen?

JL: Both. Most of our fish comes from Maine Shellfish or Young's Shellfish out of Belfast. We get the lobsters from a local dealer who gets them from a local fisherman. Back in the day when we had the other restaurant, we would drive down to Corea and buy the lobsters directly from the fisherman but now we have got so we couldn't do that extra step so now we get the lobsters delivered.

FH: Does your Mom or Dad help work?

JL: My Dad sometimes comes over and tries to do some things. He was trimming trees one day. He will help do things like that. My Mom offers moral support. My daughter Sarah and my son David work there. I have had two nieces that work there and a brother in law. My sister and brother have worked at the restaurant too.

FH: How about Brian's family?

JL: Brian's father lives in Florida. He has worked in restaurants and he will come up and help out. He did my window boxes one year.

CJ: Do you serve codfish?

JL: We serve haddock which is similar to codfish; we do not serve cod. Cod is more a Boston area fish and haddock is more of a Maine version of it. Sometimes I think it is like the same fish but don't tell anybody. Haddock is much better.

CJ: Do you eat a lot of seafood yourself?

JL: In the summer I eat a lot of seafood, probably everyday. In the winter I eat it about every week or two because I cook it myself.

FH: What is your favorite seafood?

JL: That is a good question. I think swordfish and salmon the best. I had some shrimp for lunch today and lobster.

CJ: Do you ever get blue lobsters?

JL: We have had blue lobsters before in our deliveries and sometimes we have. When we get those rare lobsters we call the oceanarium down on the island and they will come and pick them up and take them to the island so people can see them. We also have had lobsters that shed in the tank and that is interesting too. We'll segregate them just so we can watch it.

CJ: Does David and Sarah have any plans for the fishing industry?

JL: No, none what so ever.

CJ: What were your plans when you were in high school?

JL: I didn't have any plans. I went to Bar Harbor and worked in restaurants and that is how I got into this profession. I did go to college when I was twenty-two and I am glad that I did. I was successful in college when I went which surprises me. My husband didn't go to college either until he was older. I think he was twenty-six. So, we sort of did it backwards but we got it done.

CJ: Was the fishing industry a part of your life when you were growing up?

JL: Yes. My grandfather owned several sardine factories and so that is a big part of my family's history. My great grandfathers were sailing captains and always worked on the ocean. I have a very marine personal history.

FH: How long has the restaurant been open?

JL: This restaurant has been open for nine years. Before that, our restaurant we had for ten years. And then before that Brian and I met in Bar Harbor at the Quarter Deck Restaurant which is right down by the pier. My first restaurant I worked at was the Hilltop and I washed dishes there and made the coleslaw mostly.

FH: Most places around here are called lobster pounds why did you decide on the name Lobster Pot.

JL: We were looking for something a little bit different. We went to Florida and we went to this place called JC's Lobster Pot so we thought of that.

SW: Are you guys doing something to celebrate your tenth anniversary?

JL: I don't know. It is a good idea. I will have to run that idea by Brian and see what he thinks about it. He may squash it.

CJ: How was it money wise trying to open up a restaurant?

JL: We ran out and had to get some more from the bank and luckily they gave us some more.

FH: It must have been stressful.

JL: Yes, it was. Stressful. Because once we got into it we realized we had to do this and we had to do that. Cause we didn't know until you do it. We thought we knew quite a bit about running a restaurant but until you actually build one you realize you really don't know anything. It was quite an interesting experience. We did run out of money though. We had to work with the bank and they have to trust you. We have been with the bank for ten years so they have been good to us.

CJ: Have you ever felt you would just like to close the restaurant?

JL: Yeah, just about every fall. Yeah. (Laughter). In the spring again we are ready to go and we get excited about doing it. But yeah, sometimes you get really discouraged and you are tired and all of that stuff. Something always happens. You know, there will be one night when the freezer will break and the fry a later won't light and the toilets overflow and it all happens at the same time. So you just go.....

SW: How much do you usually spend on fish?

JL: A lot. Fish is a huge amount of what we spend. It is a big proportion. Probably around fifty per cent but I don't know what that figure is.

SW: Perhaps you wouldn't want to know.

JL: You are right; I probably wouldn't want to know. But, you know, the fish is why we are there and that is what we buy the most of too and that is what they want.

JC: What is the best part of having this Lobster Pot?

JL: Meeting the people, for me, anyway because I work in the dining room. And so I have a chance to know customers for the past nineteen years, even. Some customers have come to both restaurants and so you have seen their families grow up. You know, I have even gone to like funerals for customer's. You know and stuff. It is pretty neat. They are always interested in my family. The very first year when we had the Oak Point

Lobster Pound I was pregnant with David. So those customers have seen the very beginning of my family as well. That's fun.

JC: Do you have any strong regrets for starting the restaurant?

JL: Uh, not yet. I have a feeling that when we are really ready to get out of it, it won't be that easy. Sometimes people say that when you buy a restaurant you are buying a job that you can never quit. Not yet, though.

FH: When that time comes, do you think you will give it to another member of the family?

JL: I have so many ideas I couldn't even tell you all of them I have no idea what we will do but we will come up with something. Hopefully, it will treat us well financially. You know, it is an investment in the long run, hopefully.

CJ: Does it affect you financially? Does it place stress?

JL: Yeah. If you have a bad year you don't have much money. I work part time in the winter and if we had a bad year I would work full time. I have had to do that before. The first winter we were in Ellsworth we were pretty strapped. Yeah, it makes a big difference in our quality of life. This year coming up we have two kids in college so I don't know how that is going to work out.

CJ: How are the tourists?

JL: They are fine. They do ask their share of some dumb questions. They will say "where does that water go..." they are looking at the river. But they are always curious; they always want to know the restaurant's story and the story of Ellsworth. Some of them are really nice and generous. I have gotten so I can tell where they are from by the way they speak or by their clothing.

CJ: Well, thank you for coming in. Thank you for your time.

JL: You are welcome. Sorry I was late.

CJ: It is all right.

