

JAMIE PERRY AND MRS. PERRY
Lobsterman and wife.

Date: March 24, 2005

Time: 2:45 p.m.

Location of the Interview: Ellsworth High School Library

Student Interviewers:	Chris Archer	Grade 10
	Emily Edgecomb	Grade 10
	Amy Hodge	Grade 10
	Brian Jordan	Grade 10

School: Ellsworth High School
School Location: Ellsworth, Maine

Teacher or Parent
Interviewer/Chaperone: Rhonda Houston

Title: Science Teacher

Transcriber: Joyce Whitmore

AH: How long have you been lobster fishing?

JP: fourteen or fifteen years.

AH: Do you enjoy it?

JP: Yes.

EE: What are the difficulties?

JP: difficulties. The weather would be a difficulty. Sometimes it is so windy you cannot go out. It makes it hard to haul.

RH: What is the best season to lobster?

JP: The whole fall – mid September through the end of the year- is the best season. November is the best month.

BJ: What is the weirdest thing you have ever caught?

JP: I don't know. I cannot think of any weird things other than what is out in the ocean: wrinkles, cockle, and sea cucumbers...

CA: Where do you sell your lobsters?

JP: there is a place right near the boat – they have a float right there where they buy the lobsters – Prospect Harbor Tree.

CA: How much are lobsters per pound?

JP: right now they are seven forty per pound. It changes a lot especially at this time of the year. When the shedders come on in the summer in July and August the price will be three to four dollars.

EE: What do you dislike about fishing?

JP: I don't know. I guess the only dislike, I think, what is most frustrating is when you go out and do not find anything in your traps. It is also so seasonal; you make money or you don't.

BJ: what type of boat do you have?

JP: I have a forty-foot wing deal, fiberglass caterpillar engine.

AH: What is the name of it?

JP: Me._____and the girls.

RH: Do you know always where is the best place to fish?

JP: No, no, I don't. Uh, it is different every year. They are kind of in the same area. You never know where the hot spot is going to be. Maybe here one year, the next year it won't be here. Some of the fishermen that have more experience than I do will obviously catch more lobsters than I do. They have more experience.

EE: What are the local rules for lobstering?

JP: Well, there is a lot of them. All of them?

BJ: The ones you abide by.

JP: You can only have eight hundred traps. There is a measure where I believe it is three and a half inches on the back shell is the smallest you can have and five inches on the back shell is the biggest you can have. There are sizes for your traps; they have to be a certain size. You cannot haul on Sundays during the summer from Memorial Day to Labor Day. You cannot haul pass four o'clock on Saturdays.

EE: Do you think it is over regulated?

JP: No. Most of the laws are for the good. But we are getting into a lot of stuff now with the whales..break away links and so if a whale gets on to it - it has six hundred pounds break strength and that is costing us more money because that is something else we have to attach to our buoys. They are talking about rope that doesn't float; doesn't sink, it is neutral rope. Float rope, they say, makes waves underwater which whales can get caught into it. It is going to end up costing us money eventually because we have to buy all this other rope and throw away all the rope we use not.

CA: How much has lobster fishing changed since you have been into this business?

JP: Well, when I first got started I was fishing with somebody else. Even when I was on my own there was no trap limit. There were people who fished two thousand traps, maybe even more than that, some people. Anybody could get a lobster license. But now they have changed it to try to reduce the effort on fishing. They made it so you couldn't get a license without going through an apprentice ship program. Now they are even changing that by putting you on a waiting list with three fishermen have to get out before one can get in. And they reduced the trap to a twelve hundred-trap limit; then a thousand and now an eight hundred limit. I wouldn't be surprised if within two or three years they will reduce the limit again to six hundred.

EE: Why did you want to be a lobster fisherman?

JP: Well, most of my family has always done it. They have all fished in some way. I like being around on the water. I got started in it and I just love it..so

RH: Are lobsters cannibalistic? Will they eat each other?

JP:: Oh, yeah. They will eat each other. Sometimes you will haul a trap that has been sitting for three days and there will be a lobster in it that is half gone. It has been half eaten. Especially in the summer when they first shed, for example, in July they are really hungry and if there are four or five lobsters in the trap they will pick on the weakest one and eat it to death.

CA: How long do you let your traps set before you bring them up?

JP: right now, I'm letting them set anywhere's from seven nights to fourteen nights. Later on, maybe in a month, it will be only four or five. Then in the summer it will be three nights. Then in September only two. From august on there is a lot more lobsters.

AH: do you ever get any weird looking lobsters?

JP: I had a blue one - one time. It was awful blue on the bottom of it. It had a blue tint until you turned it over on its back and it was all blue, the bottom of it. I've seen them with dots on them, like a light tan color with dark dots on them. I've seen them with two claws.

CA: What is the biggest lobster you have caught?

JP: I've probably caught about seven or eight pounders. They are illegal. About four and a half pounds is legal, as big as you legally can have.

CA: Why can't you keep the big ones?

JP: That is the law. They are no good anyway. The bigger they are, the worse they taste. The bigger females are your egg producers and that is what the future is – is more lobsters in the future. There is a punch tail law. If you get a female and it has eggs on it, you put a punch into the second flipper from the right, you put a notch into it and nobody can take it. Even after the eggs are gone, nobody can take it. And that is just for our future; nobody can take it. The lobster can never be caught nor never be sold. It will produce year after year after year.

EE: I have a question. Can Malcolm's grandson ever get a license?

JP: Nope, he will be able to get one. Right now, anyway, they haven't limited student licenses. If you have a student license, the age is I think eleven or twelve; you have to put in the apprentice time like two hundred days working on the water between whatever age and eighteen years old. At eighteen years old you can get a regular lobster license. But they are talking about maybe doing something with that too. The federal licenses, you actually have to purchase them. The federal license is for outside fishing – out past the three-mile limit.

RH: Do you fish outside the limit right now?

JP: Yes. They used to give them away. If you wanted it, you just made a checkmark on your license. They send you a permit. It was no big deal; you got them for nothing. And when all of this stuff came down about fishing, the federal government decided no more permits. You got one now, that is it. Now people who had one who got them for nothing are selling them for twelve to fifteen thousand dollars.

AH: Is that regulated or is it kind of like the black market?

JP: No, it is legal. The permit goes with the boat. This is the only hard part. The permit goes with the boat not to the person. To give up my permit to him, I almost have to sell him my boat. He had to transfer the permit to his boat and then sell me back my boat. Something like that. It can be done. It has been done many times. A lot of people have bought them.

RH: Is there a culture of fishing? Was it difficult for you, Mrs. Perry, to go from a culture of woodcutting to a culture of fishing? Was that a really hard transition of lifestyles?

Mrs. JP: It is because fishermen make money for only about five or six months of a year. Then they make like nothing. It is almost like they don't have a job. It was hard to adjust to not having a paycheck every week. Yeah it was hard to adjust to the whole lifestyle.

RH: What about the hours? This is not a regular type job?

JP: Well, it isn't too bad at a certain time of the year. There is, back in the fall when I am making money and the weather is bad, I have to go out fishing every day no matter what. That takes its toll, it doesn't matter what is going on with them. I have to go out fishing until five o'clock or whatever it is. This stuff right now, I could take the rest of the week off if they wanted me too. It wouldn't bother me because I am not catching anything anyway.

Mrs. JP: He depends on me with the kids. When the weather permits, he's got to go.

EE: Do (to child) you ever go fishing with Daddy?

Child: Yes, I catch lobsters; it is better than catching crabs.

CA: What is the maximum depth you can set a trap?

JP: The deepest I am in right now is probably three hundred and fifty feet. In the summertime it would be only twenty five to thirty feet to a hundred and a hundred and twenty feet.

CA: do the lobsters move into the deeper water in the wintertime?

JP: They do in the fall. They have been inside; they are shedding. In the fall when the cold water comes it drives them out of the rocks and it drives them right out of the rivers and the bays into deep water that is why I do so good, they are traveling. You just follow them right. Where they were not out here two weeks ago now they are here and in two weeks they are going to be out deeper. They will end up migrating back in when the weather gets warmer. I'm about twenty miles out right now.

CA: That is a long boat ride.

JP: Oh, it is about an hour.

Mrs. JP: He is fishing trawls right now, twenty traps on one rope.

JP: I usually fish pairs. It is kind of the same thing except it has twenty traps on them. You set them on one string; one line, they are all hooked together. That deeper water is a lot more efficient. You have to have a one hundred fathom rope, which is six hundred feet. You have to allow for... You just cannot put three hundred and fifty feet of rope on your traps when they are all hooked. You have to put extra rope in.

RH: What type of characteristics do you have to have to be a lobsterman?

JP: Well, definitely you have to have some sort of drive. You work for yourself and it is all about what you put into it. You are not going to sit back in your boat and do nothing. At the end of the week your paycheck is not going to look like anything. You have got to have some drive. You have also got to be strong.

Mrs.JP: I couldn't do it.

JP: No, there is some women who can do it but I don't think she can do it.

Mrs. JP: It is a lot of work. How much does a trap weigh?

JP: Without any rope in it, it will weigh about forty to fifty pounds. With a rope in it, it will get up to around sixty pounds. You are working with traps all day. Some are up over your head. It is quite a lot of work you are doing any day. The stern man who has been doing it for a long time will get tired of doing that after awhile.

Mrs.JP: I have met very few lobster fishermen who do not love what they do.

RH: My next question is going to be if you couldn't do that and you had to do something else what do you picture yourself doing.

Mrs. JP: Getting a divorce.

JP: I don't know what that would be. I really...I don't know what else I would do. I have never thought of that. If I wasn't a fisherman, I don't know what I would do.

RH: When you were pondering careers you weren't pondering, you knew what you wanted to do.

JP: Well, no, I actually didn't. When I was in high school I was preparing gill nets which is a net about three hundred feet long. They go down, they have a lead line on the bottom to hold them down and they have a float line that holds them up. They may be ten feet like a fence. They go down and sit on bottom and the fish swim into them and they get caught. I was repairing them and it was extra money when I was in high school and I thought it was fun doing that. There was another fishery that got fished out. They stopped doing them and that is when I got into lobster fishing. So I pretty much knew I was going to do something along those lines. I didn't know it was going to be lobster fishing but I'm glad it turned out to be that.

RH: If you were going on a vacation, would you go to the ocean?

JP: It wouldn't matter to me. I don't get tired of the ocean; it wouldn't matter. I would go to the ocean, wherever she wanted to go.

Mrs. JP: I find it interesting to go to like Florida, to go to the ocean with him. I never thought about the fact that the tides are a lot smaller, like a foot. It is interesting to go somewhere else.

JP: Actually, I do like to go to places like Florida where they do fishing. I like to see other boats, other fisheries. I like to see what kind of fishing they are doing. I read about it in some of the magazines but I like to see it for myself.

CA: I have a final question, how much does a trap cost?

JP: Including rope and buoys? Last year I bought traps and they were sixty four dollars a trap and your rope is probably going to cost you another five dollars and ten, twelve, thirteen, fourteen. Probably about eighty bucks per trap with everything on it. That would be a main trap. Then you also have a tailor and that would be a little cheaper because you wouldn't have a buoy on it.

EE: How many traps do you have?

JP: I can only fish with eight hundred. I got a few extras but you are only allowed to fish eight hundred. I have eight hundred and fifty. You are always buying traps. Every year you buy a few just to keep up with it. You lose traps to boat traffic and sometimes you just pull a part of. Newer traps fish better than old ones. If you don't buy new ones, eventually you will end up with a bunch of junk.

EE: Any one have more questions?

RH: No

EE: Well, all right. I guess we are done. Thank you.