

STEVE ROBBINS

Lobsterman

May 2005 (?)

Time: 2:30 p.m.

Location: Ellsworth High School Library

Interviewers: Caitlin Wood                      Grade 10  
                  Lucy Weed-Eaton Grade 10  
                  Louis Williams      Grade 10

School: Ellsworth High School  
School Location: Ellsworth, Maine

Teacher or Parent  
Interviewer/ Chaperone: Chris Keefe

Transcriber: Chantelle Tate

LWE: This is an interview with Steve Robins. Our first question is what type of fishing do you do?

SR: Lobster fishing.

CW: At what age did you start fishing?

SR: Well, I am now sixty so I guess I was around eight when I went with my father.

LWE: What influenced you to be in the fishing industry?

SR: Poverty. I wanted to make some money where I lived.

CW: How long have you been in the business?

SR: Well for fifty-two years except for two years when I went to the Maritime Academy. Then I went off to the South Pole for six years on

research ships. Then I went to Vietnam, Thailand, and Japan preparing stuff on bomb ships. I also worked in an office in New Jersey where the company was. In between that time while I was at home, I would still go fishing. That is all I wanted to do is to go fishing but I didn't have any way to get money to get a boat. So I had to do other things.

LWE: What do you say is the best weather to go fishing in?

SR: Oh, summer months, course we go year round. We used to go off shore that means a hundred miles or more. And then you have to be very careful but generally speaking during the summer months with light variable winds and sunny weather.

CW: Have you ever been in a dangerous situation while you were on the job?

SR: Yes, about every day. It is a very dangerous job. And, ah, if you are not very careful you will be hurt or worse and I have lost men over board, however, I got them back.

CW: That is good.

SR: I lost two different men over board, both getting caught in the rigging while we were sitting. On one of them I was alone and he was a great big fellow. It was in like February and it was about seven or eight miles away from land. He had a snowmobile suit on and fowl weather gear and hp boots and everything. He weighed about two hundred and thirty to two hundred and forty pounds. He got caught in the rope. I couldn't do anything at first because I was afraid the rope would get caught in the propeller. You know, and I remember it just like it was yesterday. It was in the seventies when it happened. His head was just big anyways but it looked like a washed duck in the water and he was looking at me like for god sakes, aren't you going to do anything. I had to wait for the boatmen to come around a little bit and I got a hold of him finally. But gees, he was heavy. All that stuff on him. But I got him aboard and he was all right.

Then I lost a guy overboard who got caught in a rope. He wasn't watching and he got his foot caught in it. I reminded him about doing that and he forgot. He was far away from the boat so we got turned around cause it was a lot bigger boat that time. Luckily, it was a good day. We went real, real,

slow and went up along side of him and got the life raft without hitting him in the head and got a line down around him and pulled him up over the side.

LWE: What type of boat do you use?

SR: A narrow fiberglass thirty-six foot lobster boat. Well, it is my sons boat. I go out with him.

CW: What different types of equipment do you use?

SR: Well, they have got electronics for navigation now. An idiot could go around the world today if he really wanted too. Well, it is a computer. You could sit right here and say I would like to run up to Stonington and punch that in and bring up a picture of it on a chart and it will tell you where to steer and so on and so forth. You can mark the gear on it, so you can find it. When I first went lobstering, you had to take landmarks where you could see them or you could use the radar a little bit if you could pick up land. But a lot of it was just running a course with a compass. It is a lot different than it used to be.

LWE: What do you enjoy most about your job?

SR: Freedom! I think of it too. Of course, it is just two people. I run the boat and my son owns the boat. We kind of confer as to how we are going to do things. We will always have our differences. But still we have a lot more freedom than most any job I know of. For instance, we went to haul yesterday. I got up at a quarter of two in the morning on the day that we were going to haul and got down there in about twenty minutes to a half hour early because I like to be early. I guess I got home around six o'clock last night. I went to sleep around quarter past seven but I woke up around one twenty five for whatever reason. So I got up and went to the shop because everything I do helps and you know if you are working for someone else you might say well, I don't wanna do that today because I am too tired but in this work it is like everything you do benefits you. That is not bad.

CW: What size traps do you use?

SR: Four-foot traps are the biggest legal ones we use. They are heavy wire traps and when we fished off shore we used a bigger trap than that and the end trap weighed well as much as the average women down in Stonington,

two hundred pounds or more. (Laughter). Either you got to be like a gorilla or you have to be smart enough to find some way to do it. There are women that do it. I mean they are not like weight lifter type women but they are smart enough to do it. I thin for the summer my daughter is going to come home and work with us. She has done that a little bit before.

LWE: Where do you fish?

SR? Stonington, out of Stonington, Maine. We go about thirty eight to forty miles an hour in the winter, late winter. But that is very seldom to do that in the winter especially in that size boat.

CW: Where do you sell your fish?

SR: I belong to the Stonington Lobster Corporation established by fishermen. I have been on the Board of Directors. Years ago, I was the President and I have also been vice president. I don't really know but I think there is about a hundred and some members.

LWE: What kind of creatures do you catch on your travels?

SR: Of course lobsters, crabs, codfish which we release. Once in a while we get sponges There is a fellow that works for the DMR, his wife is studying coral and I couldn't remember where we got it, it was off somewhere about eighty miles and they didn't know it existed in the Gulf of Maine but we found some so some times we get things that are kind of interesting.

CW: Do you use any special gear while you are fishing?

SR: Um. Can you give me an example?

LWE: Like raincoats during rain, stuff like that.

SR: Well I don't because I can't get one big enough (Laughter). Yes, fowl weather gear. Course in the winter real heavy clothes like those snowmobile suits but now we have well, they call them bus suits. We have things like we never used to have, you know.

If that question refers to special gear we use, course there is a big thing about whales right now. We don't see whales where we fish but we still have to abide by those rules. We have breakaway gear. That is a lot of things for conservation for lobsters like great big vents, a lot bigger than they used to be that lets all of the little lobsters out of the traps.

LWE: What do you least enjoy about your job?

SR. (Silence). Um...I guess dealing with banks and insurance companies.

CW: If you could start your life over, would you have gone into the same business?

SR: Yes!

LWE: On the average, how many lobsters do you catch in like a day or a week?

SR: When we fish outside there are four or five men on the boat most of the time. We left one time just before Christmas and we were back at the dock about thirty hours after we were gone. We hauled four hundred and forty traps. Then we had to come in because the weather got terrible. But of those traps, we had ten thousand eight hundred pounds. And then I've seen nothing. We went out yesterday, Steve and I, and hauled in traps from outside. We hauled about two hundred traps and only got around ninety pounds, I think it was. So it is not very good right now. Course, time you pay your fuel and bait there would not be a lot left after that, anyway.

CW: Do you have any other good stories to share?

SR: Which one do you want me to tell? The one about the cook.

LWE: That was interesting.

SR: No (Laughter). I don't know.

LWE: Um....

LWE: I guess we are done then.

CW: Yep,

LWE: Thank you.