

## ALFRED “BUDDY” SIMMONS

Interviewers: Kristy and Suzanne

Date: September 27, 2003

Place: Home of Alfred Simmons

Transcribers: Kristy, Suzanne, and Peggy Simmons



*Alfred “Buddy” Simmons was born on August 6, 1926, and lived in Friendship his entire life. He passed away on February 9, 2004, and is survived by his wife Dorothy, five daughters, and 11 grandchildren. His only son died in a car accident when he was a teenager. Buddy was a lobsterman for 65 years. He also served in the Merchant Marines.*

**Q: Have you always lived in Friendship?**

A: Yes

**Q: How many sisters and brothers do you have?**

A: Two brothers and one sister.

**Q: How many children do you have?**

A: Six.

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**Q: How many grandchildren do you have?**

A: Eleven

**Q: What is your occupation?**

A: Lobster fisherman

**Q: When did you start lobstering?**

A: When I was 12 years old.

**Q: What other jobs have you had?**

A: Not too many.

**Q: What are your hobbies or special interests?**

A: Working.

**Q: Why did you become a lobsterman?**

A: Because is was in the family.

**Q: What is your job on the boat?**

A: All of it.

**Q: Do you have someone who lobsters with you?**

A: No.

**Q: Is lobstering a tradition in your family?**

A: Yes. My grandfather went in a Friendship Sloop with no engine. He towed his dory and hauled his traps out of his dory.

**Q: What is the name of your boat, and why did you name it this?**

A: My boat is named the *Dorothy E*, after my wife.

**Q: What equipment do you carry on board? Electronics, hauling gear, safety equipment?**

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A: All of it.

**Q: Describe how you set your traps, when, and where.**

A: Well, that could be a long story. Years ago when I first started, when I went offshore I used to use a hand-held line. Didn't have any fathometers then.

**Q: Were there wooden traps when you first started?**

A: Yes, there were.

**Q: How did you get the dry wooden traps to sink?**

A: We put ballast rock in between two of the slats in the middle of the trap. When they'd been in the water awhile, we took the loose rock out, and they'd sink by themselves.

**Q: Do you move them during the season? If so, why and where?**

A: Oh, yes. I moved them to where there may be some lobsters after the lobsters were all caught up in one place.

**Q: How often did you haul them?**

A: According to the season. Sometimes every day, sometimes every other day, sometimes every three days.

**Q: How did you tell your traps from someone else's?**

A: The color of my buoys: white, red, and white.

**Q: Did you use toggles? Explain how they work.**

A: I used toggles, yes, to prevent at a certain depth of the water a rope lying on the bottom from catching on rocks.

**Q: What did you use for bait?**

A: Redfish and herring.

**Q: Where did you get it?**

A: It was all herring until O'Hara's in Rockland started cutting redfish. We got a lot of redfish from them.

**Q: Can you tell me how the wooden lobster traps were made?**

A: When do you want to start--way back, or what? Fishermen went in the woods in the winter and cut trees--small trees for the sills, small ones for the slats that went across the bottom, and a small piece on top fastened together. Then they changed from spruce to oak.

**Q: Could you describe what was in the traps?**

A: The heads were made from what they called *snooding*. It was cotton. They were tarred with tar. You'd get the tar hot, then put the heads in. My grandfather used to go out in the woods and get spruce for funnel hoops, about as big as my finger. Heat them and bend them around. Used to have a piece of rubber down on his leg, part of his boot. Bend them around his knee and seize them so they made a ring.

**Q: What exactly are heads?**

A: There's an opening in a trap. We used to knit the heads and set them inside. Easy access for lobsters.

**Q: I heard that you were one of the first fishermen to get one of the first fiberglass boats in Friendship. Is that true?**

A: No. A fellow by the name of George Hayes got one first. His was the first one, and I decided to get one.

**Q: Why did you decide to get a fiberglass boat rather than a wooden one?**

A: Less maintenance--scrubbing, painting, and sanding. That's a job a lot of us don't like.

**Q: Did you like wooden or fiberglass boats the best?**

A: I think it's all in the way they are set up.

**Q: Who did you get your boats from?**

A: My boat came from Leon Forced Plastics, Gouldsboro.

**Q: Describe what you caught in your lobster traps.**

A: Other than lobsters I could sell, I caught fish, conks, crabs. And the short lobsters and the big oversized lobsters that had to be thrown back.

**Q: What is v-notching?**

A: A female egg-bearing lobster. And we did that for conservation. We started that years ago because lobsters were so scarce. My grandfather had to get out of it for that reason. Lobsters were so scarce.

**Q: What would happen if you caught a v-notched lobster and you brought it in, and someone found out that you brought it in? Would you lose your license?**

A: No, I don't think you would, but you would have a fine. I think the only law in the book pertaining to losing your license refers to molesting traps.

**Q: What is molesting gear?**

A: Hauling other people's traps. Damaging, staving up other people's traps.

**Q: Where did you take the lobsters at the end of the day? Who determines the price you get for the lobsters?**

A: At the end of the day, when I lived on the island, we kept them in crates until the lobster smack came. The price is determined by the law of supply and demand.

**Q: So if people wanted more lobsters, would the price go up or down?**

A: If people wanted more, the demand was good, and the price would go up.

**Q: How did the weather affect your fishing?**

A: It had to be quite a blow before I didn't go to haul. As most people know, I generally went. Rain, snow, fog, anything.

**Q: What kind of gear helped you during that weather?**

A: Oil pants, oil coat, sou'wester. I went outside of Monhegan and never had a radar. Not even a fathometer.

**Q: What was your first boat?**

A: A 26-foot Clifford-built boat. Seven feet wide. No windshield, just a spray hood over my steering wheel. You were out in the open all day. If it started to rain, I'd get rained on, that is right.

**Q: How much has lobstering changed since you began fishing?**

A: It has changed dramatically. Nowadays the traps come hog-ringed and everything. We used to spend all winter building our gear. Now it's all done for you. It costs a lot more money, too. When I first started getting wooden traps, I can't exactly remember just the price of wood, but somewhere around \$10 a trap. Then we had to put it all together. A trap now costs \$55 or \$60.

**Q: What did you like most about lobstering?**

A: I was independent. I didn't have to worry about anybody behind me telling me what to do and what not to do. I could take my time and do what I wanted to do.

**Q: What did you like least about it?**

A: I guess if I had to fill bags, that would be the worst thing. I just don't care about filling bait bags.

**Q: What happens when it's foggy?**

A: Go to haul just the same.

**Q: What kind of problems have you experienced at sea?**

A: I've had my boat break down a couple of times. My 26-foot boat broke down once on the east side of Allen Island. It was getting on dark. I had a flashlight on board, and I figured I'd flash an SOS to the Coast Guard on Burnt Island, the one with the tower. They happened to see it and came and got me.

**Q: Can you remember what the price was for lobsters when you first started lobstering?**

A: Twelve cents a pound. Back then money was scarce. There wasn't any money around. People just couldn't afford to buy them for any more money. Right now they are \$3.25.

**Q: What's the worst thing that's ever happened to you while lobstering?**

A: Nothing while actually lobstering. I don't know as I ever had an accident out there hauling.

**Q: What would happen if you had a breakdown back when money was scarce?**

A: We did our own engine work. I needed a new engine block. All I needed was \$125. I went to the bank. I could not get it. The only way I could get it was to have my mother and father go sign for me. They did it, and I got it. I tore the engine apart myself and put

it together. Just had to be patient, careful, and do it right. Once in awhile I did get frustrated.

**Q: How many traps did you used to have?**

A: When I first started out, I had 25 traps. Then I gradually built it up. There was no limit back then. To build wooden traps and with storms coming, you couldn't fish too many. You had so much work to do on all your gear. There is a limit now: 800. Plus 80 extra ones. In case of a storm, that's what they can have on hand. At one time I had 800 traps, but I didn't set them all. I kept 150 traps ready to set in the fall off shore. Six hundred is about all I ever had out.

**Q: When you took your traps up, did you take your boat up?**

A: No, I fished year 'round.

**Q: Did you do the same thing in the winter as you did in the summer?**

A: Just went off shore in deeper water.

**Q: How often do you eat lobster?**

A: Right now it isn't very often. When I was lobstering, probably once a week.

**Q: Do you have a favorite way of preparing it to eat?**

A: Any way. It doesn't make any difference to me. I don't care for meat.

**Q: Did you always use toggles, or were they called something else?**

A: We used bottles with rubber stoppers. You had to be careful with the bottle coming around the winch. I knew a man whose bottle busted on him, and it went right through his oil pants and cut his leg.

**Q: Do you still lobster now?**

A: No. I retired last fall. Yes, I miss it. I go down to the shore and paint pot buoys for Jeremy and Scotty [grandsons] and do things for them. I put a new flap on his snatch box yesterday.

**Q: Do you have any stories that you want to tell about lobstering?**

A: One time I was hauling close to the Shark Rock and a big sea came, rolled in towards me. I saw it coming and put my boat into the sea, wide open; the water took

out my side window and left lots of water on the platform. You can't get shook up or worked up. You stay calm, cool, and collected. That way you can get out of a mess easier and quicker.

**Q: How many boats have you owned?**

A: I had five. The first three were wooden boats; the last two were fiberglass. The first two didn't have any name. The one Sid Carter built me was the *Wanda M*, named for my oldest daughter, who was born in 1951, and I put the boat overboard in February of 1952. Then the *Dorothy E*.

**Q: Did you have any more children?**

A: Four more girls and a boy. They went lobstering with me a lot, especially the boy. The girls, they went, too.