

RONALD SIMMONS

Interviewer: Carl

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Place: Simmons Lobster Wharf

Transcriber: Priscilla Simmons



Ronnie Simmons was born on August 19, 1948, and has always lived in Friendship. His special interests include hunting, riding his Harley, and seeing his three grandchildren.

Q: What is the name of your business?

A: The name of my business is Simmons Lobster Wharf.

Q: Where are you located?

A: I'm located in Friendship.

Q: How long have you been in business?

A: I've been in business since 1971.

Q: What do you do?

A: Buy lobsters from the fishermen, and then I resell them.

Q: Why did you choose this occupation?

A: I was raised in the lobster business. That's why I chose it.

Q: Why did you choose to locate your business in Friendship?

A: Because this is where I was born and brought up. I've always stayed here.

Q: How many employees are there in your business?

A: I only have one.

Q: What do they do?

A: They pick out lobsters from the boats. They handle bait. They do anything having to do with helping the fishermen put their supplies aboard the boat.

Q: What kind of training or skills are necessary?

A: There is no training or skills, just on-the-job training. It all comes natural what you're supposed to do.

Q: Do you have any special licenses? If so, explain.

A: You have to have a seafood buyer's license. This costs me like \$450.

Q: What kind of equipment and tools do you use?

A: Actually, there's not too much equipment. We have barrels to put the bait in.

Q: How many people, customers do you serve?

A: I generally sell my day's catch to one person. Like today I've got a truck coming. He'll get about 9,000 pounds. He'll sell them to whomever he sells them to.

Q: How many hours do you work a day?

A: It varies according to how many boats are out fishing that day, the weather conditions. Usually we work 8 to 10 hours.

Q: What days do you have off?

A: The days I have off are the days the fishermen do not go to haul. Plus Christmas--we don't work on Christmas.

Q: Describe a typical work day from beginning to end.

A: A typical work day is . . . we might have a lobster truck come to pick up lobsters at 8:00 in the morning. We might have a bait truck come with bait on it that we have to unload. We have boats coming in we have to help unload their catch and help them put their bait aboard. Usually we get done around 4:00 or 5:00 in the afternoon.



Q: What is the busiest time of day or year for you?

A: Actually, the busiest time of the day is when the boats all start coming in. It doesn't make any difference what day of the year it is. They're all the same. You have that one busy time of the day when they all start coming in. Most generally they'll start coming about 11:30 a.m., depending on the time of the year. If it's in the summertime, they'll start coming at 10:30 or 11 a.m. In the fall or winter they might not start coming in until 3 or 4 p.m. because they are going further to get their lobsters.

Q: What do you like most about your job?

A: Being independent. I'm my own boss, and I don't have someone telling me what to do.

Q: What do you like the least?

A: I don't like a bunch of out-of-state people down here asking a lot of foolish questions.

Q: If you could change anything about your business, what would it be?

A: Well, I don't know. That's a question I'd have to think about for awhile to see what I want to change. Actually, I can't change anything. What happens has to happen the way it happens. Trucks come when they come. Boats come when they come in. I can't change that.

Q: What are the advantages and/or disadvantages of working in Friendship?

A: The advantage is that it's a small, quiet little town. Disadvantages, I don't think there

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are any.

Q: Describe some memorable experiences related to your work.

A: I don't know if I can think of one memorable one. I don't know how I'd answer that question.

Q: How has your business changed over the years? Give specific examples.

A: A lot of things have changed over the last 34 years. The construction of the lobster trap has changed. The breed of fishermen has changed. The lobster boats have changed. Fiberglass: the boats have gone to fiberglass; the crates we put the lobsters in are plastic. The bait barrels have gone from metal to plastic. The newer generation of younger fishermen get into the business. Their attitudes are different than the old fishermen. A lot of them got into the business thinking they know everything there is to know about lobstering. That kind of irks me. For example, a couple of them last year, there was an article in the *Courier Gazette*, and there were two fishermen interviewed, and the subject was lobster decline and why that was. So the person interviewed, the fishermen, said "I'm a fifth generation lobsterman." But he only goes lobstering on the weekends. The other guy was someone's stern person. A stern person is someone that goes with a fisherman and helps him. So someone's going to pick up the *Courier Gazette* and read this article thinking, "Here we go--we've got two experts they're interviewing." I really wish they would have interviewed a full-time lobsterman. That's kind of aggravating.

Once I get rambling, I'm apt to go on for a long time. If you came back tomorrow you might not get the same answers.

Q: How many lobstermen do you buy lobsters from?

A: Right now I buy from probably 20 different fishermen. Over the years I've bought from as many as 40 or 50. At one time I owned another lobster wharf on Spruce Head Island. At one time I probably had 12 employees. I decided to downsize and give up my other business, which was Friendship Seafood, because I couldn't be in two places at once running two stations. I sold the other business. There were other things involved, I'll say.

Q: What determines the price of the lobsters?

A: Supply and demand determines the price of lobsters. If there are not very many lobsters, people will pay a lot of money to get them. If there are a lot of lobsters being caught and there's no demand for them, the price decreases. Right now I'm selling the majority of my lobsters to processors in Canada. Years ago before they

started processing--let's say that was in the early 80's, middle 80's, or maybe later--
every
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year there would be what they call a glut: too many lobsters and nobody to buy them and no place to put them. At times I've had 200 crates floating in the water, 90 pounds to a crate, nobody to buy them. Then the processors started buying them in Canada. They developed a new market. They needed lobsters. These processors saved the whole Maine industry. Now I have a lobster truck that I have to load. . . .