

## KIP YOUNG

Lobster Fisherman, Tuna Fisherman

Date: April 27, 2005

Time: 2:45 p.m.

Location of the Interview: Ellsworth High School Library

Student Interviewers:	Edward Bedard	Grade 10
``	Nicole Austin	Grade 10
	Tiffany Corbett	Grade 10
	Jessica Albee	Grade 10

School: Ellsworth High School

School Location: Ellsworth, Maine

Teacher or Parent

Interviewers/Chaperone: Mr. Korver

Title: Biology Teacher

Transcriber: Joyce Whitmore

NA: How are you?

KY: I'm good, how are you.

TC: When you were fourteen and decided to become a lobsterman, what was the main reason you decided to start?

KY: In the town I lived in , it was the only industry available. There was no other means for making money. It looked like fun. All the older kids had sixteen-foot open skiffs with outboard motors. All the bigger fishermen had bigger boats and you would see them way off shore. I wanted to get my own boat and get out there. I wanted to get my own boat and get out there and do the lobster thing.

EB: What town was it in?

KY: Corea by the sea, Maine. Down by Winter Harbor.

EB: What was the main reason you were working on and off for thirty years?

KY: Well, I didn't have very good instruction to start with. . I pretty much...I had a stepfather who wasn't really very interested in being a stepfather. So, I found an old boat that had washed up on the beach and I fixed it up. I saved some money from digging clams and other things and bought a little out board and I went around town and bought old traps from the older fisherman. Although I really enjoyed it I couldn't make any money at it. By the time I was a senior I got a better car and I couldn't make the payments doing the lobstering so I got a job at the sardine factory in Prospect Harbor. I

got a job at a gas station in Ellsworth. Then I started playing a guitar when I was twenty. I made my living playing guitar most of the time but when things got bad I would go back to Corea and sign up with a fisherman and work for the winter as a stern man. In those years I learned more and more about the lobstering industry and what I learned mostly is that I could make more money at lobstering than anything else. I became a licensed counselor and a few other things but lobstering always seemed to be more peaceful and also a lot more lucrative financially.

NA: What enabled you to work the last ten years consistently?

KY: Owing a lot of money. Basically, I lived in Pennsylvania for a couple of years. I came back and started working on a boat with my father lobstering and tuna fishing. We did really well the second year catching tuna. So, At that point I made a decision I wanted to go full time in that business and I made a lot of money that year, so I bought six hundred brand new lobster traps and all the tuna rigging I needed and then I went to the bank and said, I've got the traps, I've got the rigging, I just need a boat. They said, how much do you need? I borrowed the money and built the boat myself. And, uh, suddenly I had a whole lot of money to pay back so I had the incentive to get up at four o'clock in the morning.

JA: Was it tough starting out on your own?

KY: Yeah, nobody tells you anything. They will give you little small hints. Nobody wants to cut your own throat. Nobody wants you to fish around them. You have to figure out what is going on by yourself. I couldn't afford to hire somebody to work on the boat with me so the first four years, I did it alone. And I typically fished until the second week of December. Then it got too cold to be out there. It was physically demanding and mentally it was tough because I was trying to stay ahead with the bank payments and keep up with the lobsters at the same time.

TC: What is your favorite part of the day?

KY: Uh, favorite part of the day is the morning. When I first start out, I row out to the boat and it is still dark and you can just start to see. I start the boat and get it warmed up and make sure it is working. I have a chart plotter, it is a GPS,, kinda like a map. That shows me where all my traps are. I think about where do I want to work today. When you head out past the islands... The harbor is really sheltered so if there are any rough waves you really don't get any. and you don't really know what it is going to be like until you get outside the island. And all of a sudden you come around you see the buoy and the birds are flying around and it is just a good feeling. It's cool, I worked for people for a long time and it is never fun. I know that I am going to make it or break it that day on my own. Working for yourself even when you are not doing that good is still better than working for somebody else.

EB: When do you start working?

KY: I actually get on the boat around four or five o'clock. And I don't get into my vehicle, I'm done work when I climb up the ladder and get into my truck, which is usually around three in the afternoon.

TC: Do you do any other jobs on the side?

KY: I have the last several years although it is changing this year. I am also a licensed drug and alcoholic counselor. I work in the wintertime doing that. I am also a guitar player. I play two or three weekends a month. One thing I haven't had when I lobster is a federal permit, which allows me to fish as far out as you want to go. I now have one. That is going to enable me to pretty much fish all year if I want, so I've given my notice at the rehab. And this is my last year working there. I am going to get out of the rock and roll business for a while. I am just going to fish and take care of my daughter and that's about it.

JA: Is the permit thing expensive?

KY: Yeah, They gave the permits away free years ago. When you got your state license you had to pay for that. They gave you a white piece of paper and said do you want a federal permit. You checked yes or no. I never had a big boat so I just decided I didn't need one. About fifteen years ago they stopped giving them out and they became very precious. For those who didn't have them you couldn't fish outside the three-mile limit. So I was stuck inside. In some places I could fish out as far as seven miles because the line is kind of weird. But I had to pay ten thousand dollars for this permit.

JA: Do you have to buy this every so many years?

KY: Just once. But, It's a weird process. You can't buy one. You have to buy someone's boat. Since this person had an area one permit in Massachusetts not in Maine it was too hard for me to buy. So the way this worked, I have a rowboat that I go out to my big boat in. I had to state register my row boat and I made him part owner of my rowboat. So at that point the documentation office switched his federal permit from his forty-five fishing boat to my rowboat. So, Now I have just taken his name off my row boat so they are in the process of switching the federal permit in my name which will be in in about a week. So, right now on my eight-foot rowboat I can fish out to England if I want too.

NA: Sounds confusing.

KY: It is. Although basically it is ten thousand bucks and a bunch of stamps and I will own this documentation I have been talking about. It's just a money game. A bunch of hoops you jump through.

EB: What is the hardest part of the job?

KY: The hardest part. I think there are probably three hardest things. Number One, the work itself is brutal. I haul about four hundred traps a day and they are very heavy. There

is two traps on a line and the first one is the heaviest one. . You have to pick that trap up to this pulley and if you do that four hundred times in a day by the end of the day your back is really screaming. That's one part.

The other part is when it is really rough out and you know the boat can take it. The boat can take more than you can. It will scare you to death before it can hurt you. It is foggy, it is blowing like hell, it is hard to stand up. Everything keeps on falling over and you basically say I'm tired, I just want to go home but I basically have from the first of August until the first of December to make my living for the year. So, It is making yourself stay there even on the really bad days.

The other thing is at the end of the day when you are completely beat, you come in and sell your lobsters and you have to load all your bait on the boat and each bait is in plastic trays and they weigh probably close to two hundred pounds a piece and you have to load about sixteen of those back up on the boat. When you have had enough for the day, it is really hard to do that.

JA: What kind of procedures do you have to go through to become a lobster fisherman?

KY: Way back when, all you had to do was to be a Maine resident. You got an application and sent it out and got your license. Now, you have to go through what is called an apprentice ship program you have to fish on somebody else's boat for three years. Every day has to be documented. You have to accumulate so many hours. At that point you get an initial license, and they will let you have four hundred traps. At the end of the year if you survive, they will let you have another one hundred traps and they keep going until you get to the limit of eight hundred.

KY: And it is also costs a lot.. Boats are so expensive now. I just built a new boat this last year. When I built my thirty-three foot boat back in 1995, that boat cost sixty four thousand. The one I just built this past year cost me two hundred thousand. Traps are about fifty dollars apiece and you need eight hundred of those. A lobster buoy is about six bucks about the time you get it all painted. You usually lose about hundred of those a year. Rope probably costs you forty or fifty dollars per trap. Every time one of these little whale-watching boats goes by it cuts off one of your buoys and you lose about a hundred bucks. I usually lose on the average about fifty traps a year. It is an expensive, expensive job.

EB: When you cut the rope off you usually lose the traps unless you dive down for them.

KY: Well, the water is way too deep and usually there is too much current. Usually what happens, you will get back about two thirds of what you have lost. You are fishing around other people. Every time there is a bad storm the rope that is lying on the bottom is moving around. If somebody lays a trap there, for example, I'll be hauling a trap and all of a sudden a bunch of rope comes up. I'll tie it off; get mine out of the way. I'll haul it up and there is an identification tag on it and you can tell whose it is. Once a week somebody will call me up on the radio and say they fished up a bunch of rope which is always good.

EB: What kind of equipment do you use?

KY: I have a hydraulic hauler that works off my engine. It kind of works off the rpm's of my engine. And you have a boat hook you grab a buoy with. You put it up to a block which is a pulley. You pull it on to this big cylinder that is going around and pretty much hauls a trap by itself until it gets way up there.

Tuna fishing is very different. You have these big rods and reels. Have you ever seen the movie Jaws. You know when he is fishing for the shark, that is a small reel compared with the ones I have. Tuna fishing is a lot of fun. You catch a fish that weighs around five hundred pounds with a rod and reel. You fight him for an hour and then try to get him into the boat. It is pretty wild. If you hook up it is a good payday. Tuna fishing is mostly boredom; mainly it is just watching whales. After awhile you've seen a thousand whales. You say, Ok, there is a whale. Every once in awhile you watch a school of birds get swallowed by a whale. That's kinda neat.

TC: What kind of technology do you work with?

KY: Yeah, I work with navigation equipment. I have a track plotter. It is basically a screen that shows me where all the above ground objects are. Islands and things like that. It marks ledges, where they are. It is hooked to a GPS. In the middle of the screen is a little white dot blinking on and off and that is me. It will show me where the ledges are and every time I set traps, I set traps in strings of twenty. I'll mark so when you expand the screen you can see all eight hundred traps across the ocean. I kinda have a little line I follow. Last year it was so foggy, I think out of two months especially in July and August I was only able to see land about four times. I have radar and I have an alarm on the radar so if anything comes within a quarter of a mile of my boat, it gets my attention so I do not have to have my face stuck in the radar all day. Because there are lobster boats, whale boats and sailboats. Every once in a while I will forget to set the alarm radar and all of a sudden a sail boat out of nowhere appears and I will have to get out of the way. I get the radar going, the track plotter, and a machine that constantly draws the bottom of the ocean. Why walk over something if you can walk around it. There are all of these underwater mountain ranges and hills. What I will do is I will set my traps right on the edges of these. That is pretty much as far as navigation stops.

EB: Is that expensive?

KY: Yeah, it is expensive. . It is crazy. A good bottom machine that draws out the bottom was twenty six hundred, my track plotter was thirty six hundred, and the GPS was around a thousand, the radar around twenty five hundred bucks.

NA: Has technology affected fishing in a good or a bad way?

KY: I would say it has affected it kinda both, really. What is good about it is someone who has not spent their life out there with bad technology can go out and find out any

bottom that they want. It is good if you want to hunt out good pieces of bottom of water. What is bad is that it takes away some of the edge of the fishermen who have been out there for a long time. What is really good about it is a lot of people are not getting lost out there. If you cannot find your way home with all that stuff, you had better stay home. But still we had two collisions outside Corea, one almost got himself killed. There are a lot of ways to get killed out there. So it is nice to have good navigation equipment about three years ago one of my friends was sinking and called me on the radio and gave me his quadrants. In fifteen minutes I was able to get to him and kept him from sinking.

NA: When does the fishing industry end?

KY: Usually ends around Christmas time. The water has got really cold and the lobsters are moving way off shore. You can only chase them so far. Some guys will fish out to the ridges which are about twenty miles and they will fish there all winter. Probably about fifteen miles out is as far away as I want to go. You have to judge the ice. As the ice starts to build in the harbor, you have to figure how long it will take to get everything in. And usually people get most of it in and if not you have to leave it...nobody likes to do that. It is just an ocean hazard out there. And you don't need to do anything stupid like that. So.

TC: How deep is it?

KY: I usually fish in about one hundred and eighty feet.

TC: Is lobstering and tuna in the same season.

KY: Yeah, unfortunately.

TC: How big is a good size lobster?

KY: the biggest one you can keep is probably about four and a half pounds.

NA: Do you get to keep the females?

KY: Yeah, if you catch a female with eggs under the tail you take a knife and you give the lobster a v'cut in the tail and she will be protected forever. In the course of a day, probably each guys catches fifty to two hundred pounds of female lobsters a day. They have to throw them back. That is one of the reasons lobster fishing is so healthy here in Maine. They started doing that in the thirties and now they are trying to make it a law along the whole coast. The other New England states did not do that; they destroyed their own fishing. They wanted to be able to keep everything that came up in the trap. They were not thinking about, you know, I still would like to be able to make a living twenty years from now. Look what happened to ground fishing. They didn't regulate it. The guys ruined it. Luckily, the original lobster fishermen had enough foresight. What they really cared about was would their grandchildren be able to lobster fish.

JA: Why are lobsters different colors? I

KY: Just like people. (Laughter). Basically you catch them like a black color. I have caught them yellow with black spots and black with yellow spots. You will catch them and they will be green or blue. I think it is just pigmentation in the shells. I'm not really sure about that.

NA: How many lobsters are caught in an average day?

KY: Depends on the fishermen. I usually catch around six hundred pounds a day. Some of the guys in town get around a thousand pounds. The most I have seen someone come in with one day was forty two hundred.

TC: What is the lobster management council?

KY: The management council basically spends a lot of the fishermen's money. Originally all these lobster pounds, they save the lobsters there until the price goes up. There are thousands of lobsters in these pounds and you have male and female lobsters. After a while some lobsters in the pens had eggs on them we ask for a special fund to come out of the lobster license fee to buy the lobster seed from these lobster pounds. It worked out for a while but after awhile they started doing other things. They do some good things. I wish I could see more signs – Eat more lobsters. They do some marketing with some of the restaurants but they could do more for the fishing industry itself.

There are seven thousand licensed fishermen in the state. And there is probably only around four thousand that are full time fishermen. When you have a group of people that small, you will never have a major lobbying source. We kicked around by the State all the time.

EB: Will you explain what you mean by limited entry?

KY: Yeah, The apprentice ship program. To be in this program you have to find a captain that will do that. Most captains in my town will not take people for an apprenticeship program. They will take someone to work but not on the apprenticeship program. In a few years, these people will be competing. My stern man is from Thailand. And he is also a family member so I don't have to worry. If they continued to let people into it, it will be an open gate and no one can make any money.

NA: How old were you when you got involved with tuna fishing?

KY: I was an old man. I was thirty-four. I caught my first tuna, I loved fishing anyway. That ruined any other type of fishing because it is so intense. Uh, we fished the first year and did not catch anything. We went all the way down to Cape Cod and were about ready to throw each other off the boat. The next year I spent some time on Cape Cod with some friends and they dragged with artificial lures on top of the water. I learned a lot from them. We went down to a place called West Point which is near Brunswick. We

went fishing to a place about twenty miles off shore called the Kettle...and our first day out there nothing happened. The second day we caught a fish. It was July 3. It wasn't a big one. It was about three hundred pounds and it got away. We were so bummed. So I threw this big rig over the boat and it was just sitting there about a hundred feet behind the boat. And then it looked like a Volkswagen was coming out of the water. Boom, a fish hit this thing. It was again about three hundred pounds. We got forty-two dollars a pound. We made a lot of money that day. The next month we caught ten more fish. We averaged about six thousand fish. That one, I think, we got about twelve or thirteen thousand. What a slimy little fish.

JA: Wow. Which one do you prefer? Tuna or Lobster?

KY: I like tuna fishing better. It is a lot more fun. You go out in your sneakers and the boat is dry. On a nice day you go off shore you sit back and kinda wait to see what is happening. You kinda wait for lighting to strike. Lobstering is a lot harder. You make a lot more money lobstering but you are wet all day. It is a lot smellier and stinky.

TC: Can you live off that salary of lobster or tuna fishing alone?

KY: Yeah. Yeah. I know people who go lobstering fresh out of high school who make more by the time they are twenty five than if they went to get a masters degree in some big city. I know some young men that make two hundred thousand dollars a year. And are only twenty-two or twenty three years old.

EB: Do you think Cod is a big part of the industry?

KY: For people who do ground fishing. Yeah. They pretty much had to restrict because they pretty much wiped the codfish out. This helped the lobster fishermen. Now they are making a come back. I like them because I like to dry them myself. You are not really supposed to do that but I am a rebel.

NA: do you think it would be a big loss if Cod became endangered?

KY: Yeah, The whole ecosystem of the ocean. Everything is dependent on something else in some way. When you take one thing out of the picture, something else is going to be effected down the line. Some things like sea urchins are such a pain. These little tiny ones get on the ropes you pull on the rope and you get those spines. I hate those things but I hate to see them go away because they have a job to do down there. You have to be careful to not take anything for granted. You never know what it is that is going to upset the whole thing. Right now. I'm thinking in probably in four or five hundred years they are going to have some major problems in California because People like Mary Tyler Moore keeps on buying Maine lobsters and setting them free over in California. The thing is, in California lobsters are these wimpy little things that have no claws. You get a Maine lobster started over there and they will destroy that ecosystem. Every once in awhile someone catches a Maine lobster and they do survive. If they let go enough to mate, you know, the California ecosystem is going to change dramatically. Lobsters are



vicious scavengers. They are a giant bug with great big claws and they can eat anything they want down there. You have to be very careful with all of it. So my question, Yeah, I think it would be a really bad thing if it became endangered. The other bad thing is the government in a broad, heavy handed clumsy way would try to fix the process which in never a good thing.

Right now, we have to do all this stuff to protect the whales from getting caught in our gear. Where we fish there are no whales. The whales are out on the ridges. If you are going to catch lobsters out there, yeah, you had better take extra precaution. Because you could get wrapped up in a whale. I have never seen a whale the whole time I have been fishing in where most of the fishing gear is. We have this joke now since we are in area one, you have to take part of your rope and dip it in red paint. So if a whale gets caught and they can get the rope off they can tell from the color of the rope where the whale came from. We call this stuff whale repellent

NA: what do you do to prepare the lobsters to be sold?

KY: Basically, when we catch them we are going really fast. So as my first trap comes up I pass it to the stern man and I get the next one. You get to tell pretty quickly which ones are bigger and which ones are too small. The little ones you throw over and the big ones we throw into a tray. As I am sitting the traps back out, he baits the bait bags and he starts measuring the lobsters. If they are big enough he puts rubber bands on their claws and puts them into a big lobster tank which is full of water. Basically you have to keep them wet all day and keep fresh water circulating. As long as you do that, they are pretty happy. You cannot let them get too hot. You can let them set out of the water and they will be fine, but you cannot let any wind get on them because it will kill them. There is a lot of wind around so basically you keep them wet. If you don't they will rip each other a part.

TC: Have you ever gotten bitten with the claws?

KY: Yeah, the worse one is when they get you on the knuckle. They have these little sharp things and if they get you there, they will pinch you so hard that once you get them off you will have two little bruises right there. A real big lobster can break your hand easy. The crabs are worse because they are quick. You get used to them. The big stone crabs, you just don't get bit by those. You find your mouth is attached to your hand real quick.

JA: What is your favorite kind of fish and why?

KY: Favorite kind of fish. I like the puff bellies. I don't eat them. I'm like a real softie. Most of the lobstermen when they catch fish in their traps they cut them up and use them for bait. I like to throw them back over so they will live. They are the ugliest things in the world. They start sucking air and their stomachs get real big and if you don't throw them over quick enough they are sitting there upside down and the gulls come after them.

So, as one comes up number one priority is to get that fish back in the water so he can swim down. I kinda like them because they are kinda ugly and they are vulnerable.

EB: Do you think there are too many fishermen in the area?

KY: No, It is a little bit crowded but it is a lot worse in southern Maine so I am not going to complain. There is more than I would like to have, however, comparatively I am a new guy too, so I am not going to complain too much.

JA: What do you think the citizens can do to help the industry?

KY: I think just to understand that one of the biggest problems we have is that the federal government and the biologists who sit in the offices and work with their computer models and think they know a whole hell of a lot more about the fishing industry and the condition of it than the guys that are working out in the middle of it every day. Some bonehead, a biologist, sitting at a computer said he knew by every square mile how many seeded lobsters there were sitting on the bottom of the ocean. This guy was so whacked. They come out with these numbers that are so crazy. They keep on telling us the lobsters are going to be gone and every year we keep on breaking records. There are a couple of reasons for that. Number One, we have the v-notched law that has really saved the species, I really believe it has, and number two the trap have this big revolving door that if a lobster is not big enough they can get out. So that way we are not handling these things, their claws are not getting broke and things like that. We have taken care of them very well to the point where there are so many seeded lobsters they are really a nuisance but we are not going to complain about that.

The biologists and the federal government said that the lobster is on the verge of collapse. There is not enough seeded lobsters out there. WE have given them data and they think it is suspect because we are biased and of course we are. If you put on any given day in every lobster town up the coast a government official and a biologist and have them actually count what comes up in a trap as far as seeded lobsters go at the end of the day you will be absolutely amazed at the sum. They gave some number that are on the ocean floor and I bet the guys in Corea probably catch that many in a week. They just, for some reason, have a real lack of common sense. If anything can help is that for people to understand that fishermen are not just stupid, ignorant, people that have been on boats all their lives and can only say, Hey, Yeah. It isn't that way. There are some very good people out there who are very interested in their grandkids being able to do this for a job if they want too. Be less inclined to believe the officials who don't have the balls to go stand out in a boat some day and see what really comes over the side.

TC: Would you encourage young people to go into the fishing industry and why?

KY: You know, that is a good question, Like I said to my stepson who would like to go fishing, I say, " Good, go to college first and then go fishing" That way some day if I wake up in the morning and there is a big oil tanker wrecked in my front yard, you know, there on the ocean and we can not lobster fish for a couple of years he will have

something else to do. There are a lot of young men who are very capable and hard working people who do not know how to do anything else. If something happens in the fishing industry, I fear for what they can do. I have several skills and I could go to work, not that I want too, but I could survive to pay my bills. I think if a young person wants a real sense of adventure and get the scrap scared out of him at least once a month. Sometimes you get caught on stuff and you don't know if you are going to get home. That has happened to me about five times in the last ten years. Yeah, It's a great job but have some back up. All it would take is some federal bureaucrat to say you know what I really don't want those guys out there any more. Or like that idiot down there in Boston who always preaching how the fishermen destroyed the white whale. By the way it was their grandparents too that used whale lamps that destroyed the white whale. I had to throw that in there.

JA: What type of knowledge do you need to know to enter the fishing industry?

KY: What should you know? You should know about the tides. You should be able to look at the clouds and have an understanding when the weather is changing. A lot is just knowing about the atmospheric conditions that affect the sea conditions. If the tide is coming in (which is called a flood tide) and you have a southerly wind at twenty knots, then it is going to be a little choppy out and that will be o.k. But what happens when the tide turns. When the tide goes out you have the tide running against the wind and instantly boom, the chops stand up probably another ten feet. Usually the wind picks up in the afternoon. By two o'clock you are asking to be in the harbor, which is really a hard day. I have had days literally when I was really scared to death. The stern man said are we going to make it in. I said what are you going to do, jump overboard. I tried to act like everything was o.k. I said, yeah. The worse thing was when I came down over a big chop and the boat was nose first and the boat stood up and when it was done it was facing the other way. I was scared. I learned a lesson which is to stay home when it is like that.

JA: Well, I think we are done. Thank you a lot. We really appreciate it.

KY: Well, I hope you get an A.

TC: Us, too.

