

Interviewee Name: Bobby Ingalls and Reggie Lee

Project/Collection Title: Voices of the Maine Fishermen's Forum 2019

Interviewer(s) Name(s) and Affiliation: Natalie Springuel (Maine Sea Grant) and Giulia Cardoso (College of the Atlantic)

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Interview Description:

Bobby Ingalls and Reggie Lee, fishermen from Bucks Harbor, ME, and Westport Island, ME, respectively, discuss longlining, lobstering, shrimping, and groundfishing, focusing on how the industries have changed and their experiences in each of these fisheries. Lee closes the interview by telling a story of how his dog saved his life while he was fishing alone.

Collection Description:

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Transcribed By: Giulia Cardoso

Start of BOBBIE_INGALLS_REGGIE_LEE_VMFF2019_AUDIO

[0:22:18.1]

NS: Natalie Springuel

GK: Galen Koch

GC: Giulia Cardoso

BI: Bobbie Ingalls

RL: Reggie Lee

[0:00:00.0]

NS: So, since there's two of you, I'm basically just gonna keep moving this thing around. I'm gonna go like this, uhm, and like this when you guys are each talking.

RL: Okay.

NS: So, uhm, let's have you s—give us your name and your spelling.

BI: (Laughs.) Bobby Ingalls. B-O-B-B-Y I-N-G-A-L-L-S.

NS: Great.

RL: Reggie Lee. R-E-G-G-I-E L-E-E.

NS: Great, and Reggie, tell me what you do?

RL: Uh (laughs), lobstering, dragging, shrimping, eel trapping . . . But right now I'm gonna start longlining.

NS: Oh.

RL: 'Cause there's no future in all that other stuff, except for lobsters and I don't, I'm tired of that.

NS: Uh, so tell me about longlining. What's your plan?

RL: Inshore, within 3 miles, because I probably need a federal permit to fish outside.

NS: And what are you gonna fish for?

RL: Monkfish, dogfish, whatever's legal, I'm not sure what's uh, you know, what's legal right now, uh.

NS: You're looking into the next thing?

[0:01:01.2]

RL: Halibut. I know that's legal. Yeah.

NS: And why do you wanna switch?

RL: 'Cause I've done everything else and there's no future in groundfishing, there's no, the only thing that there's fu—uh, future in is, is, uh lobstering and tuna fish.

NS: Ho—

RL: But I—

NS: How long have you been fishing?

RL: 46 years.

NS: And where do you live?

RL: Westport Island, down by Boothbay Harbor.

NS: Ok. So you've seen a lot, in 40+ years.

RL: I have.

NS: Yeah. And, Bobby, what do you, tell us about what you do. You—where, where, where do you live?

BI: Bucks Harbor, Maine.

NS: And.

BI: 04618. They did away the ZIP code 40, 50, 40 years ago, I still use it (laughs).

BI: Federal permit still come. I'd say 40, 30, I don't know. A long while.

NS: And what do you f—what do you fish for?

BI: Lobster.

NS: And have you fished for other stuff over the years [inaudible]?

BI: Uuh, a little bit of scalloping back in '81. When—

NS: And you've also been fishing for a long time.

BI: Quite a while.

NS: Are you also worried about the future?

BI: Uh, at my age, no. I can get by.

[0:02:02.9]

BI: [Inaudible].

NS: Huh uh.

BI: No, I know the future is scary if you're overextended. Which a lot are, but that's their problem.

NS: Overextended financially?

BI: Yeah, financially, yeah.

NS: Yeah.

BI: Yeah.

NS: Yeah.

BI: Big house, big boat, new truck. Family.

RL: I just met him. So, I was up at Bucks Harbor a week ago.

BI: Yeah, yeah.

RL: I used to scallop out of Bucks Harbor. Yeah, I just met this guy.

BI: Reggie had the very first BHM 31 [inaudible] right?

RL: Yeah.

BI: They come out of [inaudible].

RL: Hull number one.

NS: You guys just met?

BI: Just met.

RL: Yeah, a week ago.

BI: Friend's house.

NS: I figured you guys were friends from a long time ago.

RL: No.

BI: Friends who just didn't know each other.

RL: Right.

NS: Ok, right. Ho—how did you meet?

RL: I brought my boat up to Bucks Harbor to go scalloping, uh, a 17-hour steam from Westport Island, alone, to go f—th—because a friend of mine fishes offshore, in Georges Bank.

[0:03:00.2]

And the offshore scallopers were fishing out of Machias Seal Island, which is s—about 17 miles off of Bucks Harbor. So, I brought the boat up there to go scalloping. And, the guy that gave me the mooring to lay on, George, I saw, I was up there a week ago to look at a boat and that's how I met Bob.

BI: Yeah. Reggie stayed at his house overni—I guess you stayed at his house, didn't ya?

RL: Yeah.

BI: Yeah. And George when anybody comes along, he's got a bedroom, whatever.

NS: Great.

BI: Just bunk out and, you know.

NS: That's great.

BI: Yeah. So, Reggie's out [inaudible] a medium hull. The next day, Reggie looked at the boat when he get ready to leave, you know, we all get forgetful. Hi—his camera that he'd left, it's got pictures of a dog that passed away couldn't find his camera, couldn't find it, couldn't find it. We hunted upstairs. I looked all around, we looked out in his car, and I said, "Tell you what, I'm coming to the Forum in 4—5 days, if I find it, I'll bring it down." So, I went to George's cellar next morning and says, "Camera show up yet?" He said it was in the dog food. It was in the dog food bucket (laughs).

[0:04:00.2]

I say, "Well, if I don't forget I'll take it with me when I go," so I brought it down. And then George gave me his number, I put it in my wallet, I took all my loose receipts out yesterday before I come down, well I took the phone number out, I didn't have it. Oh, jeez. So we got on, while I got on Google, we found Reggie Lee, Wiscasset, no phone number. I say, "Well, he's gonna be here, I guess." I'm just walking through and I look, he come out the door, right past, Wow, there you are (laughs).

NS: That's perfect.

BI: Yeah.

RL: Yeah.

NS: So, in all your years of fishing, Reggie, what was, what's been some of your favorite, you fished for a bunch of things, what did you like?

RL: Well I've a lot of very good times, and some very scary times. The scariest was a fire aboard the boat.

NS: Oh! Yeah.

RL: You know, that was pretty scary. The Coast Guard uh, screwed everything up t—tryna haul me in broadside in a storm.

NS: Wow.

RL: That was one of the bad, bad parts.

NS: What happened?

RL: Well, I was about 8 miles so—southeast of Boothbay Harbor.

[0:05:00.1]

RL: That was a, January, I was shrimping and my sternman was on the stern of the boat, and he says, "There's black smoke coming out of the stack," and I figured I don't pay attention, I thought the net was mudding out. And it kept getting, flames started coming out of the stack, so I, we, we laid on the net for a while. I called the Coast Guard and it should've taken 'em f—with a 44-footer about fif—about half an hour to get to us, three hours later, they still couldn't find us. I mean, we were right near the station.

BI: Mmhm.

RL: Oh, it was a complete screw up. They came alongside to tow us, they wanted to tow us broadside.

BI: Oh!

RL: It was 5 to 6-foot seas, they wanted ta—tow us broadside. I'm Portuguese, Portuguese people have a wicked temper. And I says, "Yeah, tow me broadside," I says. A—and I cu—I cut the lines loose and I threw my own line, and they just said they'd better tow me in bow too. So, we got home.

NS: Wow. What were you fishing for that day?

RL: Shrimp.

NS: Wow.

RL: Yeah.

NS: So, you shrimped for a long time, were you shrimping up until they closed the shrimp fishery?

[0:06:04.5]

RL: Yeah.

NS: What, what, what happened for you when they closed the shrimp fishery?

RL: Uhm I, I've been scalloping, I was scalloping after, you know, I've been sca—doing a lot of stuff over the years, so I just go back and forth, but the scalloping is in—inshore they've cut out of, you know, the rules have become so crazy, like anything else in the fishing business.

NS: The inshore scalloping rules?

RL: Well I was fishing offshore too, but.

NS: Huh uh.

RL: I hadn't fished for four years, 'cause I, I had some health problems. So I'm get—I'm just getting back to it now.

NS: Are you excited to get back to it?

RL: Oh yeah.

NS: What, what, what are you looking forward to getting back into?

RL: Wha—uh, longlining.

NS: Mmhm.

RL: Tha—that was my first fishery when I first started when I was 30. I'm 71 now. It was just a part time, you know, I just didn't know what I was doing, but that was my first, first attempt, you know and then I went scalloping after that, but now, so now I'm gonna go back to longlining because multispecies, uh, I, I had to give up my permit.

[0:07:04.1]

NS: Because you weren't able to fish?

RL: No, I want—I wanted to sell my federal lobster permit, and then they, the National Marine Fisheries Service says, "You have multispecies permit that has to go with it," which was not true. No, because a month later I saw a whole bunch of uh, multispecies permits for sale. 25, 50, 60 thousands.

BI: Yeah, right.

RL: So they literally sh—shafted me.

NS: Aw.

BI: Mmh.

RL: But you can't sue the government.

NS: So, you ended up without your groundfish permit.

RL: That's right. That's why I'm going to go longlining.

NS: That's terrible.

RL: Just for dogfish and monkfish and halibut.

NS: Yeah. Wow. What are the changes you've seen over the years? What are some of the—

RL: Lobstering?

NS: Mmhm.

RL: In my opinion, lobstering has been prostituted. Where I live, is near Bath Iron Works. And these guys get these big pensions at 40 years old.

[0:08:01.2]

They don't know a fish from a, from a pair of shoes, th—they go out with their pension and buy a \$40,000 lobster boat, 50, 60,000 with 40,000 dollars' worth of electronics. They don't know what they're doing, the—the—they'll set one buoy out and everybody else, you know, set their buoy out on a big row. So, I just couldn't do them, I, I, I got a torn, rotated calf from m—you know, straightening out their messes, they just wave on their way by, you know? So, I, I quit doing that, I, I, I fished for 30 years for lobster.

NS: So people with different, uhm, almost different ethics fishing like that.

RL: No, like Bob, he's a, he's a regular fisherman, you know? He knows what he's doing.

NS: Mmhm.

RL: You know, but these guys is, there's a lot of newcomers in it that are ruining the fishery. They're ruining it, it's not, it's not just the, the practice of lobstering, they don't have a clue as to what what's legal.

BI: Right.

RL: They'll take egg-bearing females and scrub 'me, scrub the eggs off.

BI: I think years ago.

[0:09:00.1]

Uh, there's no money in it and if, somebody broke down, if it's your neighbor, if you didn't like him, you'd tow him in. It's like a father and son towed somebody in, and when they get in, son says, "Father, I thought you didn't like him." He said, "That tow rope works both ways." Which is true. But what's so good about the Forum is Reggie was here, I saw Edwin

McKie from Prince Edward Island, and Reggie's looking for Canadian boats, I went and talked to him, and Edwin knew whether it's a 32-foot boat down there with a Mitsubishi motor in it, which was quite a bit cheaper than buying an outboard motor's expensive, but. Going back to what he said about fishing (sighs), I'm jumping around like I always do, but.

NS: That's okay.

BI: Uh, people had to help each other. When they got us all these big money it's like, "All for me, the hell with you. 'Cause I don't need you now, 'cause I'm self sustaining." You know before, somebody broke a leg, they'd go and saw your firewood, if you break a leg now they probably would go steal your firewood. You know that is, the whole dynamics have changed.

[0:10:00.1]

NS: It's interesting.

RL: You know, the National Marine Fisheries Service want to cut out the little guy. 90-foot and smaller, they wanna cut 'em right out of the fishery. They wanna have like shaft [inaudible] these big offshore boats, 90 feet to 140 feet, so that way they can manage a small number of boats.

BI: Your trawlers.

RL: Not thousands and thousands of like, lobster boats and small draggers. That's why they're coming up with all these crazy rules. And most of the guys in the National marine Fisheries Service can't even spell the word fish.

BI: They probably have never been on a boat.

RL: That's right.

NS: Yeah.

BI: Now when I went down to the New England Aquarium, I was picking on him, but it, that's the Right Whale Consortium, they said, "The board of directors, put your hands up." Well they did, so I took notice. That night I was having a tea, and wine and crackers, whatever, I saw that woman, I go talk to her and I said, "Have you ever been on a lobster boat? Ever been on a boat?" she said, "No," I said, "You don't have a clue what you're talking about." But I said, "Here's my card," 'cause they come up to Lubec to do Suffolk University, or something.

[0:11:02.0]

I said, "Any time you're up there, I said, "There's people in Massachusetts, Dave [inaudible] would take you out. You should at least go one day. Have a, something, a clue what you're talking about." But, that's what's driving the industry now. You can call them tree huggers, or pencil pushers, or whatever you wanna, but they just have no experience what they're doing.

RL: Just like the Coast Guard. The Coast Guard in the Bering Sea, that's a whole different pro—you know, they know what they're doing. You know, they're flying th—\$10 million

helicopters, but coastal United States, the Coast Guard, these guys grew up in Ohio, driving a tractor before they became a Co—a Coast Guard guy, see? So when they wanted to tow me broadside, that was protocol for the day.

BI: Right.

RL: They didn't have a clue what they were gonna get into, see?

BI: To quote the guy from Cutler, "Colorado Sheep Ranchers."

NS: Say that again?

BI: To quote the guy Jasper Keith from Cutler, the Colorado Sheep Ranchers (laughs) Ah, Jesus.

NS: So, it's interesting to hear you guys both talk about the changes, because you're, you're in pretty far apart portions of the coast.

[0:12:05.5]

BI: Right.

NS: You're way Downeast.

BI: Right.

RL: Five hours apart.

BI: Yeah.

NS: And you're pretty far down the coast, yeah.

RL: Midcoast.

BI: Yeah.

NS: So, it's.

BI: But I mean, we started with wooden traps, just like I've [inaudible] trap nails, they won't know what you're talking about. There's the 3-penny galvanized nail, you know, with a big head, but . . . it's like, you built your own traps, you picked up your rocks on the shore, you knit your heads. Now, they go to the local place, they put it all on the credit card, the traps are there and everything. Buoys, rope, everything, put it on the credit card, buy a boat, they fish. Hopefully they can make the payment scheme. There's no working on your own stuff now, it's all, you know, ay somebody to do it.

NS: So, when uh, a younger person talks to you about wanting to get into fishing, what do you say to them?

BI: Everybody's different. Depends if they really want to, you know, if they wanna work their way up through, you know, they'll do okay. But.

RL: If you wanna work, period.

BI: If they wanna work, yeah. If you wanna just jump in, [inaudible]. I don't know if they'll make it or not.

[0:13:06.7]

NS: Yeah.

BI: And the whale rules are gonna cut us back, it's like, Pat Keliher said in the meeting a little while ago. If you cut back 400 traps it won't make any difference. They just do not want you out there.

RL: There you go.

BI: It's like, somebody said they just like taking the towel, and wringing it, wringing it, and wringing it till there's nothing left. If they ain't, you know, if it isn't the traps, the end lines, the whales, it's the bait. We're being squeezed.

RL Wh—when I was halfway through lobstering, 20, 30, years ago, I had 2,200 traps. Then they cut the limit back to 600, you know, about 15, 20 years ago.

BI: Yeah.

RL: And 600 traps is, you know, I ca—I can haul that many in three, in two or three days.

NS: When you had 2,200 traps, how many, how long did it take you to cycle back to the first one?

RL: Uh, back, we'd haul about four or five, between 2 and 400 a day in trawls.

[0:14:00.3]

NS: And how many on a trawl?

RL: Five, about five.

NS: Yeah. Right, versus now it's 6 or 800, right? In total?

RL: No, the limit is 6—is 6—is s—

BI: Yeah, yeah six.

RL: You know, 600.

BI: 800 in places.

RL: Yeah.

NS: Yeah. What are your hopes for the future of the fishery?

RL: I don't know, whatever it is I'm gonna stay around, I'm a stubborn Portuguese guy.

(Laughing in background.)

RL: You know, and I love it. I, you, you know, I worked for Polaroid before I became a fisherman, making big, big money. They wanted to promote me to International Marketing Manager to open up Europe to Polaroid products. I backed away from that, went fishing. My first year, I netted uh, \$10,000 fishing.

NS: How old were you?

RL: I was 32.

NS: And you loved it?

RL: Yeah. I grew up on the wa—on the salt water. I grew up in New Bedford, the—you know, biggest scallop port in the cou—in the world. And I love it.

BI: Reggie was telling me about photography, he was down all hauling, down Georges and he had his travel bag and he said, "That bag right there is worth money". Super Bowl tan. 'Cause he was, he was doing photography, right?

[0:15:02.2]

RL: No, I'd get it at a meeting.

BI: At a meeting? Yeah.

RL: A sales, a Polaroid sales meeting.

BI: Yeah (laughs).

NS: What's been some of your favorite things over the years? About fishing.

BI: Uh.

NS: What have you loved?

BI: Every day. I love every day. You know?

RL: Well, you can look at him, he's, he looks young, his eyes twinkle when he's talking about it (laughing in background). You know, how many, how many people love their job like that?

BI: A day out there, other than, like, the last two cold ones, any day out there's better than a day in here. And it's just like, I go out at 8 o'clock in the morning, back at 3:00 in the afternoon. I probably got 5 or 6 hours I can work now, so why go at daylight, get back at 12

o'clock when it's hotter than hinges of hell, so . . . I'm just quoting ad ju—and I'd rather be out there than in here. And way was set up, we usually ship all around 3 in the afternoon, so it's perfect for me. No, I like it. And it's like, young guy down home, Jonathan [inaudible], passed away. Hauled overboard and drowned. And Rick [inaudible] wrote a editorial in the Quoddy Tides, in the paper.

[0:16:05.5]

He said, "He can, he died doing what he loved to do." How many people can say that? Most people hate their job, they go to work.

RL: You know, the, the biggest killer isn't cancer. The biggest killer is stress and these people have 9-5 jobs, they hate it.

BI: Mmhm.

RL: They don't live that long. Him and me, we're gonna live to be over 100.

(Laughter in background.)

BI: I'm trying.

NS: And what are your hopes for the future of the fishery?

BI: Ah. Sustainable. Which I think it is right now, there's a lot of small lobsters out there. Just come to regulations and the bait, you know. But, you know, people, fishermen are ingen—they'll find a way around it. Are there, a way to exist, we always have. Might have to work at it, you might not takes much, you know? Depends whether you want material things or not. If you got heat, lights, food, the rest of it is just window dressing. Really. What does it really amount to? These big see-me vehicles, riding around in 'em.

[0:17:07.9]

RL: There's a young lady out there looking for you.

NS: Wanna check what, if she needs anything?

(Noise in background.)

BI: Oh, probably supper time.

GK: I'm sneaking in, I'm sorry!

BI: Oh no.

NS: No problem!

(Noise in background.)

GK: I'll be quiet.

BI: It is almost supper time

NS: It is almost supper time. (Boise in background.) Anything else that you . . .

RL: Yeah, I have a fishing story.

NS: Yeah, let's hear a fishing story!

RL: In 1998, I had a Chesapeake Bay retriever. I've had 3 generations of them. This guy weighed 120 pounds. I was, uh, wintertime, was December 7th and my, I always fished alone, with my dog, and I'm shifting traps, 7 miles north, north-west of Monhegan Island. That's off of New Harbor. And the wind came around, uh, southeasterly. I was up on the, on the rail t—t—tightening, I was shifting 'em, so I had a lot of traps aboard the boat.

NS: And you had your dog with you?

RL: I always had my dog with me.

NS: Yeah.

RL: And it was icy, and I slipped overboard.

NS: Oh my goodness.

0:18:05.4

RL: And I had the orange suit on, you know, little orange suit. Right? And it filled up with water, and I just couldn't get my leg up over the rail, 'cause, 'cause the rail's from here to that high. But I could get within four or five inches from the rail, my boot. And that dog grabbed my cuff and, and just brought me the extra four inches so I could get aboard the boat. And when we got in that night, I went to Shaw's in Wiscasset and bought him the biggest Porterhouse steak they had.

NS: He grabbed your cuff like your, whe—whe—what?

RL: My cuff, my cuff.

NS: On your pants.

BI: Right.

RL: Yeah, on the, on the foul weather gear. 'Cause I just couldn't, you know, get it up that high.

NS: And the water was and . . .

RL: Oh yeah.

BI: Yeah.

RL: Probably 39, 40 degrees.

BI: Yeah.

NS: Your dog saved your life.

RL: He did. He did.

NS: That's amazing.

RL: Oh, I thought it was.

NS: It was.

BI: Yeah, you're right. It is.

NS: Wow.

RL: But see, Chesapeakes are a cold-water dog, and they're very, very loyal to their, to their master.

[0:19:03.9]

Uh, better than a sternman. If I had a sternman with me, he'd, he'd have cried. Just lay down.

BI: If it was Val, he'd be doing this on the front (coughing in background). [Inaudible.]

RL: Yeah, he'd just lay down and cramp, you know, and cry or something.

BI: Yeah.

NS: Wow.

RL: Yeah.

NS: Any parting fishing stories from you, Bobby?

BI: I've had a couple real narrow experiences. And one of 'em I was fishing alone, fishing trawls. I was using a [inaudible] for an anchor, I was out on the stern. Nine traps out, whatever I was thinking, I don't know, but my feet, my legs get on the wrong side of the rope. She snapped up, I went on the floor and it was uh, it was a piece of wood for riding sail, about this big. Uh, it was, felt like this, with the hole through the center for the riding sail. Well my knee was up underneath of that. There was no way I was gonna get out. So, I tried reaching around, see if I had a knife on board, she start slicking, I like, "Shit," I'm going if I try, and I say, I ain't get a knife, I know I don't.

[0:20:00.4]

So uh, had a rubber gasket, [inaudible], there was a rubber gasket up around the side. So, I gotta hold that hose, well you know, it's made like a, you know how they go on over? Like a fish hook? I pulled, you couldn't pull it off. So, one thing I could do, I squeeze it in my hand like that. Like I can layer it down, sun was shining, I hear people talking on the VHF radio [inaudible]. No I held on, held on, finally she spotted and died. My god, I, you know, my leg was numb, [inaudible]. You should just idle in, but, you know, go on with the tide, nine traps out and an anchor, he he, so I get out. Then the other time was really close, I had a cockpit full of traps going out and I saw one tangle off with me, a trawl. So, I hauled it up, trying to untangle it, tide running. Slipped out of the hauler, caught me on the leg like that, took it, took it right up, right up to the wall. Luckily I had an old pair of boots on, it was leaking, it was wet. Well I've pulled and yanked and tugged it off. First thing I thought, "My life ends right here today. This is it. I'm gone."

[0:21:05.0]

I yanked around, finally I get my boot, I got my foot out through the boot. That thing shot to the bottom (laughs). So I hauled it back up, started to go like that, getting that thing going around like it, zoom! gone, I said, "Good enough," I just dumped the whole mess overboard, went home. Grabbed the dog, took a ride (laughs). Piss on everything.

RL: Uh.

BI: That was a couple of close ones.

NS: Wow.

BI: Too close.

(Mumbling in background.)

BI: But I've been up to the Forum, told Robert Joyce. He says, "You fish alone?" I say, "Yeah." He says, "You fish trawls?" I say, "Yes." He says, "Just a matter of time." How many times, I say.

RL: You're lucky.

BI: You're right, yeah.

RL: You're lucky.

BI: I've been really lucky.

RL: So was I.

BI: Yeah.

RL: When I fished alone.

BI: Yeah. Everybody's fished alone, you bet some way or another had some close, close one.

RL: I have a DVD of my dog fishing with me.

BI: Yeah, yeah.

RL: Yeah.

NS: That's great.

BI: Yeah.

NS: Well thank you so much guys, really appreciate the time.

BI: Oh, it's been a good day.

NS: And the stories. Yeah.

BI: I'm glad you had Reggie here.

NS: Yeah. Thanks for coming in.

[0:22:02.9]

BI: Worked out good. Talking.

NS: And I'm glad your dog saved your life.

GK: That's an amazing story.

NS: And that you got rid of your boot.

BI: I did, yeah (laughs).

GK: What an amazing story!

RL: Yeah.

BI: Yeah, it was coming out my arm.

(Noise in background.)

GC: Do you mind If I get a picture of both of you for the website?

BI: Sure!

GC: Awesome.

GK: Men's best friend, uh?

BI: You're damn right.

[0:22:18.1]