

Fishtales, Sunday September 29, 2013
Working Waterfront Festival

Interviewer – Markham Starr
Interviewee – Ariele Baker

MS Alright ok so

AB Can you hear me? Ok

MS First of all, what is your name?

AB My name is Ariele Baker

MS And where are you from?

AB Louisiana. Uh, right now? I live in New Jersey.

MS Ok. And are you from a fishing family at all?

AB No. Well I mean I have a, my papa was a commercial fisherman, but a fresh water catfish fisherman. Yeah for maybe I don't know how long actually. But so no. You know fishing families have a cultural history here. That was a really long...

MS And what are you doing now?

AB I'm getting a PhD at Rutgers and working for NOAA

MS And what do you do for NOAA?

AB Um, I collect data. I collect data.

MA Alright and you have a story you were gonna tell

AB Yeah. So I was an at sea monitor for the Northeast Fisheries Science Center in 20, from 2010 to 2011. And before that I was an observer from two thousand and seven to two thousand and nine. And so I had two hundred sea days before I came to New England and so I thought that I was pretty like aware of like how things go right? And the grand scheme of fishing that's not very many days, but in the grand scheme of being an observer it's quite a few. And so I went back and forth and I spent part of the winter of 2010 in New England and part of the winter of 2010 in Louisiana, right? And so I came back in March and I had a day trip and it was on a gill net boat out of Gloucester and we went down to, I think Jeffries which is around the Situate area. And I wore my non-insulated boots. And I got frostbite. [laughs] The reason I got frostbite is 'cause we were on the water for seventeen hours. And I wasn't prepared. It was really like a calm day and then the wind picked up and it got really rough. And the boat caught a ton of

flounder and so they had to pick them and it took a really long time. Is that right? Anyway... and so the captain at some point, it was just the captain and one mate. And they were like, Ariele, could you please drive the boat? Can you please aim it at Marblehead and drive the boat? And I was like, ok. But it was super, super rough. I just can't even stress how like blowy it was. And it was cold. But it shouldn't have been, right? It should have been, it was only gonna be in the like 30s or 40s. And it was March. And so in Louisiana it was 65 that day and so I was just like not prepared. And we were on the water for 17 hours. And the captain kept being like, steer the boat towards, anyway this lighthouse or whatever it was. And he was like, "Just point at the lighthouse". And so I would think I was pointing at the lighthouse, and then he would be like, very captain-like and he would be like "Why are you turning the boat?" [laughs] And so it's actually really difficult to drive a boat and to keep it like on course. And he was not having it 'cause he was like stuck in the back and we were all trying to get home and the reason he had asked me, 'cause he was like, you know "If you could drive the boat, we can all get home sooner, 'cause then we can pick this fish." And really I should have been picking the fish 'cause I can pick fish. But I can't drive a boat. And so anyway I got some frostbite and then I got to land and I kept being like "So I think I got frostbite yesterday when I was workin'" And I was kind of really hoping that somebody would be like, "No, no you didn't, no that's stupid you didn't." And everybody was like "Yeah you probably did" So like three of four people were like, "Yeah you probably did." And so that's my lasting injury from being an at sea monitor in Massachusetts. That's my story.

MS And so can you describe what an observer does for the people who don't know what an observer is?

AB Oh right so an observer/at sea monitor mostly observers are hired by the government to monitor catch fishing vessels in a biological sense.

MS And so what do you actually do when you're out there?

AB You identify what species of fish are caught and for at sea monitors you identify what species of fish are thrown back. And you try to get an estimate of the pounds, yeah.

MS And how often are boats monitored, or how often do monitors go out?

AB Well I think it varies by fishery. I think when I was doing it there was a 20 percent coverage of groundfish boats.

MS So 20 percent of all trips

AB Yeah, yeah.

MS Huh. And as a female on fishing boats, ever have any problems?

AB Sure. And those are really interesting stories, yeah [laughs]

MS Those are the ones you're not telling, huh?

AB [Laughs] yeah, yeah.

MS Where those bodies are buried, they'll stay, right?

AB Yeah [laughs]

MS Fair enough

AB I mean you know and there's a lot of as a female on board, as a young woman, like as a young person on board that's not from the area, as a person who thinks 200 sea days are a lot, or 300 now, but if you compare me to a fisherman that's not a lot right? Yeah.

MS Great. Well thank you.

AB Yeah.