

THEODORA BEAL

History of growing up in a fishing family.

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Location of Interview: Ellsworth Falls, Maine

Student Interviewers:	Evan Beal	Grade 10
	Cassandra Engstrom	Grade 10
	Deanne Daigle	Grade 10
	Zach Cravens	Grade 10

School: Ellsworth High School
School Location: Ellsworth, Maine

Teacher or Parent
Interviewer/Chaperone: None

Transcriber: Zach Cravens.

EB: So, I guess I will start off seeing that you are my grandmother. Where did you grow up?

TB: West Tremont.

EB: Could you give us a little detail about your life in Tremont?

TB: I grew up in a big family. My father was always a fisherman. We lived right on the water. We always grew up with boats. We had a childhood that was absolutely wonderful.

EB: How many brothers and sisters did you have?

TB: Six brothers and six sisters.

CE: Did you ever go out in the boat with your father?

TB: I always went out on the boat with my father. When we were growing up, we couldn't wait for a Saturday so we could go scalloping with him. We had to take turns but, oh, we just couldn't wait to get to go out the whole day scalloping.

CE: What would your favorite seafood be?

TB: Probably scallops.

CE: Did your brothers and sisters go with you, like scalloping?

TB: My oldest brother always worked with my father fishing. But the rest of us, he would take out one at a time. He wouldn't take more than one of his children on the boat with him.

CE: Did you like to fish for anything else besides scallops?

TB: Oh, yes. In the summertime we would hand line. We would get haddock and cod.

EB: Cod, oh yeah, we had to read a book entitled Cod. I think Mrs. Macbeth actually asked us to ask you about that. So you did a lot of cod fishing then?

TB: Oh, yeah.

CE: Did you ever sell the cod or was it for your own personal family use?

TB: Oh, no, he sold everything even the cod and the haddock.

CE: Awesome.

DD: Do you know how much the fish was sold for?

TB: Yes, if you took the fish and dressed them out and then sold them around to different people in the neighborhood, a six-pound haddock would cost a quarter.

CE: Wow.

CE: And, when was this? Like, do you have the dates or years?

TB: I don't hear that good.

CE: Oh, do you know when this year was?

TB: Oh, yes. Probably in nineteen twenty-five, twenty-six and twenty-seven. It was very cheap at that time. If you got a lot of them, you would get two cents but if you dressed them out and sold them, you would get more.

DD: Did the scallops cost more than the fish?

TB: Oh, yes the scallops were a dollar a gallon.

EB: So, Gram, what was the home life like growing up in a big fishing family?

TB: The home life? Well, we lived in a big house. Each of us had to help with the housework and the outside work. My father had a big garden, a huge garden. He had two cows and two pigs. And he had sheep. We also had apple trees so we always had apples in the winter. And he would always have barrels of potatoes in the cellar. We also had carrots and cabbage. The cabbage was hung up on the beams, you know. He also planted corn and we could pop it in the winter. There were so many of us, my mother liked us to stay home instead of going to visit the neighbors although we did occasionally, but not too much. But the other children in the neighborhood were always at our house.

CE: You had a lot of company?

TB: The other children were always at our house. We could always walk down to the store and get clams and have a clambake, you know.

CE: yeah.

TB: We could always do that or cook crabs. Nobody ever saved the crabs in those days but we children sometimes took them and cooked them on the shore.

CE: Did you ever haul traps?

TB: Yes, we use to haul traps. We hauled them sometimes with my older brother so he could go out fishing with my father. I remember sometimes we saved sharks until he found out what we were doing. Then we never hauled traps again. He didn't like the idea that we were saving sharks.

DD: Was there always a good supply of scallops? Like could you always get them?

TB: Oh, yes. They had a big drag that they went out with a boat and then they brought up the drag and you could never tell what was going to be in it.

CE: Now when you went out fishing, could you always see the fish in the water or was it too deep?

TB: Oh, no, it was too deep, too deep. You couldn't see the fish in the water. But we had the nicest beach in town so everyone was at our beach in the summer swimming.

CE: Oh, yeah. Do you like to swim?

TB: Oh, yes, I loved it.

CE: Wasn't it cold in the ocean though?

TB: We go so we didn't mind it.

EB: No, Grammy is an amazing swimmer. She can read a book while she floats on her back in the water. Grammy could take a nap out in the water if she wanted too.

DD: how often was your Dad home? Like was he fishing a lot when he was home?

TB: no, he would go fishing everyday.

DD: Do you know the hours? Like did he leave really early and come back early?

TB: He would leave real early just as soon as the sun got up. He would get in just at dusk so he couldn't see any longer. At that time we didn't have any electricity, of course. We had to depend on lanterns. But my father was always good-natured. He would let us children and the neighbors that we brought into the house make noise and anything and he would be in bed. I know we must have bothered him but he never would complain. No, he was...

CE: Did they have any regulations on the fishing industry? Like were there certain hours that you could and could not fish; or certain days that you couldn't fish?

TB: Not in those days, no, no. You would start your scalloping the first of November and by the fifteenth of April; it would be over. And then you would have to turn to your trawls and your harvesting.

EB: Wow, that must have been very cold.

TB: Oh, it was cold I want you to know. And sometimes the cold would freeze in so he would have to go out on the boat and keep the boat moving so it wouldn't freeze in, you know.

CE: So, he would in the summer month's fish instead of scalloping?

TB: That's right. Sometimes he would just stay there on the boat for a week or more, maybe.

CE: Yeah.

TB: He would often come home looking like my lamp over there. They always wore oilskins but on the boat it was so cold, he couldn't shave. When he was home, he always shaved. By the way I happened to go by Austin's store and I saw that lamp and I told my husband I saw something I would really love to have. It was that lamp.

CS: And it reminds you of that?

TB: And you know, he went down and bought it or me. He went down and bought that because he liked my father so much.

EB: What was your father's name, Gram?

TB: Alonzo

DD: Did you guys still go fishing with him in the winter when it was cold?

TB: Yes but not when he went out and stayed on the boat overnight. My oldest brother would go out and stay with him on the boat.

CE: Did you guys ever worry about him when he was out on the ocean?

TB: Many times.

EB: Your father must have brought back some really good fishing stories?

TB: Oh, he did.

CE: What is your favorite fishing story from him. Do you have any favorite fishing stories from when you were out with him?

TB: No, we just loved being out on the boat with him.

CE: Did your mother ever go fishing?

TB: no.

CE: Were you ever out on the ocean when the ocean was storming?

TB: No, I wasn't. Of course, the men were at times. The one thing that I always do remember is when one of our neighbors came down. It was storming and they had tried to get different people to go across to another island to get this man and bring him home because his son was dying and he had the flu. It was in 1918 and he had the flu. He wanted to see his father before he died. My mother didn't want my father to go out at all. But my father being the man he was, thought that he had to go because they couldn't find anyone else that would go. He went and I can remember that my mother got right down on her knees in the kitchen and prayed that he would get the man and get home safe because she was so scared. But I was very young at that time. I was probably five or six but that has always etched in my mind, my mother getting down on her knees, right in the kitchen, praying that he would get this man named Percy Thurston. We were so ever pleased when we saw his boat come into sight.

CE: So fishing was a community thing. All your neighbors had people in their family that fished?

TB: Many did.

CE: Can you tell us what type of bait you would use for the fish?

TB: for fishing?

CE: yeah, did they use nets or how did they catch the fish?

TB: They would go and get these fish from the weir and they would get shad fish which were like herring. Sometimes they would also use clams as bait.

CE: did you go clamming often?

TB: Um.

CE: Yeah.

DD: I've done that before but it is not much fun.

EB: So I take it that your Dad brought you home a lot of food from the ocean to eat in the summer and stuff?

TB: Yes, we always had a lot of fish.

TB: There was this couple we had not seen in a long time. They wanted a scallop stew and they were going to stay for lunch. My sister lived down in Bar Harbor so I said, "Well, let's call Dot and see if she wants to come up to because she hadn't seen these two nieces yet. And I called my sister and she said, "What do you have up there." I said, "Scallops". And she said, "Theodora, don't you remember we had to eat those when we were kids."

CE: did you ever get sick of eating fish?

TB: Oh, no. We all loved fish. I suppose we grew up on it and we all loved it but we had other things to eat too because my father had two cows and they would have calves ever year so there would be two young stocks to butcher. And then there would be two pigs that would go to the butcher every winter. And then we would make salt port, you know. We lived well; we didn't have any money but we lived well.

CE: Awesome.

DD: Did your neighbors have cows and pigs also?

TB: Some of them did and some of them didn't.

CE: What was the typical meal? Like for dinner, what would you have on the table?

TB: Well, it was according to what season.

CE: yeah. But like for the summer what dishes did you have in the evening?

TB: Well, we often had fish chowder. Then sometimes we would have baked fish. My mother would stuff two big fish and put them in the oven. We would have mashed potatoes and some other vegetable.

DD: What did you guys have usually for lunch?

TB: Usually when my father was out on the boat, we ate fairly light for lunch but we called it dinner. At night it was supper. Supper was the big meal. When Dad got back from working.

EB: hey, Gram, this might be a little off topic but where did you get that lamp in the sunroom?

TB: Oh, that lamp. Well, that was in 1913 in a boat named the Andrew Parker. It was wrecked down in front of the shore and it hit a couple of other boats. One belonged to Ed Marshall and one to Ben Reed. They sunk too. The men on the boat didn't have any place to go so they had to come up to our house and stay. They told my father he could salvage what ever he could find. There was this great big tackle box that he saved and two other smaller tackle boxes. With this one he made a lamp.

CE: Awesome.

TB: he also got enough lumber to build a fish house.

EB: So your dad was pretty crafty when it came to carpentry too, then?

TB: Oh, yes, my father was very crafty. He could do almost everything.

ZC: What kind of boat did he use?

TB: Just a scalloper. A scallop boat.

EB: Did he name it?

TB: Yep.

EB: Do you remember what the name was?

TB: Kitty.

CE: did he end up selling his boat?

TB: No, he wouldn't. When it got so he couldn't go fishing anymore, he made what they call a crib for his boat and it put it up on the bank and kept it. He said that boat had served him so well that he couldn't sell it.

DD: Was there a lighthouse near where you lived? Was there a lot of rocks in the ocean?

TB: There was a lighthouse about two miles away – the Bass Harbor Lighthouse.

CE: did you ever go to any of the surrounding islands?

TB: Oh, yes I have been to Swans Island, Cranberry Island and Bartlett Island.

CE: Did you guys have fishing friends on the islands that you could talk too?

TB: My father did. My father did.

EB: Was the fishing pretty competitive back then. Could you fish wherever you wanted?

TB: You could fish wherever you wanted, dear.

CE: There were no regulations or anything?

TB: There were laws. You could only fish scallops from the first of November through the fifteenth of April. There were some laws about lobstering. When my father didn't get much money for fish in the summer, he would often bring home a load of fish and we would salt them up and dry them for the winter. Have you ever heard of dried fish?

CE: Yeah, we've read about it. We had to read a book about it.

TB: You had these big fish right close to shore. We loved salt fish. We could go down and get fish whenever we wanted too.

CE: That is very different from today. It is very expensive to buy fish and the pollution in the water and stuff makes it limited.

TB: Well, in those days, you never hear of red tide, you know. Never thought about it.

DD: How far did your Dad have to go out to get fish?

TB: Oh, they were way out in the bay.

CE: did you ever collect seashells as a memoir of your trips and stuff?

TB: We always collected seashells. Many of our childhood friends loved to come and do that 'cause they didn't all go fishing.

CE: What other jobs did people have? If they weren't fishing, what other jobs did they do?

TB: There were painters and paperhangers. There were not too many jobs.

CE: Well, thank you for letting us interview you.

EB: Yeah, thank you Gram, it was great.

CE: yeah, it was very nice to hear stories and stuff.

EB: I'll just shut this recorder off real quick.