

PHILIP BRAMHALL

Interviewer: Brandon
Date: October 26, 2003
Place: Poli Home
Transcriber: Brandon



Phil Bramhall was born on November 6, 1959, and has lived in Friendship all of his life. His family has lived here for four generations. He has two children. Phil has been a lobsterman for 34 years and a fire fighter for 28 years. He is the Fire Chief at the present time. He does carpentry and enjoys hunting, camping, and traveling.

Q: When did you start lobstering, and how long have you been lobstering?

A: I started lobstering when I was 10 years old, so I have been lobstering for 34 years.

Q: Why did you become a lobsterman?

A: To make money, and it was a family trait; my father did it, and I grew up lobstering with my father, and my grandfather. They were both lobster fishermen, so that encouraged me to go lobstering. I liked watching them make money, so I knew if I went lobstering, I would make money also.

Q: What is your job on the boat?

A: I'm the owner and captain of the boat; I set all the traps and haul all the traps.

Q: Do you have someone who lobsters with you? Who? What do they do?

A: Yes. I have a sternman; his name is Danny Robinson. He's been going with me for about a month now, since my last sternman got done. He fills the bait bags, helps me bait up the traps, set the traps, paint my buoys and rig my traps, and get ready for the lobstering the next day. So we work well together.

Q: Is lobstering a tradition in your family?

A: I explained that. That's why I started lobstering, because it was a traditional then. My grandfather and his father lobstered, so my father lobstered, so now I'm lobstering!

Q: Describe your boat.

A: My boat, is a 32-foot fiberglass boat; it's powered with a 260-horse Cummins diesel engine.

Q: What is the name of your boat? Why did you name it that?

A: The name of my boat is *Amanda Kate*, and when I was building my boat, my wife was pregnant, and we had no idea what we were going to have, and we had a little girl. And we named her Amanda Kate Bramhall, so I named my boat *Amanda Kate*.

Q: Describe your lobster traps, size and weight.

A: The traps I use are wire traps. They are 21 inches high, and they weigh about 40 pounds.

Q: Describe how you set your traps, when, where.

A: Well, I set my traps around a ledge or certain type of bottom; it may be mud bottom or sandy bottom or a harder type bottom. It all depends on where the lobsters are. What time of year it is determines where and when you set your traps.

Q: Do you move them during the season? If so, why and where?

A: In the summer time when the lobsters are molting their shells or shedding their shells, we put our traps in shallow water. As the summer moves on, the lobsters migrate into deeper water, so you have to take your traps up and put longer ropes on them because in the summer you may use a 5-fathom rope, and in the fall you may use a 60-

fathom rope. So you have to put the rope on according to the depth of the water that they are in.

Q: How often do you pull your traps?

A: I pull them at least Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday. On Thursday I repair traps and do my work. Then I go out again on Friday and Saturday. I don't go on Sunday because that's the day I stay in, go to church, and spend time with my family.

Q: How do you tell your traps from someone else's?

A: Our traps are all marked with our color buoys. We all have a license number on our buoys and traps. Mine is 1081. If I have that identification on my pot buoys and traps, I know they are mine.

Q: Do you use toggles? Explain how they work.

A: I do use toggles in shallow water and also in deep water. The toggle floats are placed half way down the rope, and it keeps the rope from tangling. It keeps the line nice and tight.

Q: What do you use for bait?

A: I use pogies and herring and redfish and flatfish.

Q: Where do you get it?

A: I get it at the wharf where I sell my lobsters out of the bait house.

Q: Describe a typical day.

A: Well, I get up at 4:30 in the morning. I leave the house by 5:00. I'm usually back at the house by 3:30 or 4:00, depending on how far I go out. It all depends on where you have your traps. In the summer I don't have them too far away. I may just take my boat off the mooring and go down in the bay maybe a quarter of a mile and just start hauling there. In the fall of the year I have to run probably 10 to 12 miles at times. I usually haul around 275 traps a day.

Q: Describe what you do when you catch a lobster.

A: When I catch a lobster, I have to open the trap up, take the lobster out of the trap, and measure the lobster. If the lobster is a keeper, then I throw it in a plug box, which is what we call it, but we actually use bands now instead of wooden plugs that go in the claws. We put a rubber band around them. The lobsters that I throw back are usually

short lobsters, or they have a v-notch or a flipper missing. We do notch lobsters. When I say "notch a lobster," it's a female lobster that may have eggs on it or may already have a mutilated tail, mutilated by making a notch. The notch indicates that the lobster is used solely for breeding purposes. So we have to throw that lobster back. State law tells us that we cannot keep those lobsters because they are breeding lobsters.

Q: What other kinds of fish get caught in your traps?

A: We catch crabs in our traps. We catch codfish, horn pout, a numerous variety of different fish: mackerel, ocean perch, redfish. Sometimes we put some of these fish on for bait, and sometimes we bring the crabs home to cook for crab meat. The majority of the time we usually throw them back.

Q: What is a normal haul for a day?

A: A normal haul is around 350 to 400 pounds. A really bad day may be 100 pounds; a really good day may be as high as 1000 pounds.

Q: Where do you take your lobsters at the end of the day?

A: At the end of the day, I sell my lobsters to my father; he's a lobster dealer at Bramhall's Lobster Wharf down on the end of Bradford's Point. The price is preset by the market that he sells them to. They call around, and they all agree on a price. That's what the lobster fisherman gets for his price.

Q: How does the weather affect your fishing?

A: The weather affects it. If it's foggy, we can go out. We have a lot of electronic equipment that we can go out and find our way with. We don't always find our gear, but we can find our way anyway. If it's snowing, it makes it a little more difficult. Wind is a real deterrent. It makes your boat rock around, and everything on the boat slides around. So when it's really windy and nasty, the conditions aren't that safe, so we don't usually go out .

Q. How has lobstering changed since you began fishing?

A: Lobstering has changed by the fact that when I started, I started hauling in a skiff and outboard. I was 10 years old. I had a skiff with an outboard on it. We'd have to haul our traps by hand. We would pull the traps up hand over hand, pulling the rope aboard. These traps were wooden traps. The wooden traps, you had to put rocks in to hold them on the bottom. Wood floats, so you had to put rocks in them until they soaked up the water and got heavy enough to stay on the bottom themselves. As the years progressed, we got some wire traps. The wire was not coated; it was galvanized. After

that, we got coated wire traps, which we've been using every since. The coating helps preserve the wire and keeps them from rusting out as quickly.

Q: What do you like most about lobstering?

A: I like that every day is different. No day is really ever the same. When you're out lobstering, you look around, and the view is totally different every day. Things seem to change every day because of weather conditions, the clouds, the sun, and it's a really neat thing to go out every day and not see the same thing. It's not as repetitive as an office job, where I'd be doing the same thing day in and day out. I like the money.

Q: What do you like least about it?

Having to get up so early to go. The weather when it gets really nasty and rough and you bounce around a lot. Some days it's cold and snowing, raining, and nasty. That's when I don't really care for it that much.

Q: What happens when it's foggy?

A: When it's foggy, I get in my boat and turn on my radar so I know where I am and where I'm going to be. I look at my compass, and I run a direction. I look at my plotter. I have all kinds of equipment to help me get around, which is a real big asset in lobstering.

Q: What kinds of problems have you experienced at sea?

A: I've experienced my boat breaking down. Just yesterday I was out hauling, and it was really windy. I couldn't steer my boat, and so I went back to the stern of my boat, and I took up a hatch, and a pin had come out of my steering. So I had to go up forward, all the while I'm side to it, and the waves are rolling my boat. I'm sliding around, but I finally was able to fix it. That's not much fun. Or your engine breaks down and you have to get towed in by another boat. I have run aground. That's pretty interesting when that happens. You're on top of a ledge and rocking back and forth. As the tide is leaving you, it's hard to get off the ledge without having someone pull you off the ledge. I have lost gear before, but that's a norm for lobstering. I guess there have been other things happen to me that I can't recall right now. Other things have taken place.

Q: What is the worst thing that has ever happened to you while you were lobstering?

A: I was shrimping at the time. It has to do with my boat, and it could have happened while I was lobstering. My rudder stuffing box is the thing that your rudder goes up through, and it's on the inside of your boat; it helps keep the water out of your boat, where your rudder comes up through where your steering attaches to. That had let go

and broken free from the bottom of my boat. Water was coming in. I was steering my boat. All of a sudden, my boat wouldn't steer. It acted like it was getting heavy, and I looked down in the hatch, and my boat was full of water. I was sinking. So I got on the radio and hollered for some help. People came over with pumps. We got the box back down in place and held it there by bracing it off and got the water pumped out of the boat. I got a tow in. I had to haul my boat out to get it fixed.

Q: Describe your most memorable time fishing.

A: I doubt if there is any one time that is most memorable. I guess the first time I got a lot of lobsters was the most memorable. That was my first year of fishing after I graduated in 1978. I caught a lot of lobsters for my first time ever, and I was pretty excited to make so much money all at once. I guess that was probably the most memorable time fishing.

Q: Do you lobster in the winter?

A: I used to lobster in the winter, but it didn't seem like it was that lucrative, so I stopped fishing in the winter. You'd go out and haul one day, and then you'd have to wait a week or a month before you could get out again. I tried shrimping in the winters. I started going carpentering in the winter, which is a change that I really enjoy. It's a change of pace.

Q: How often do you eat lobster?

A: We eat lobster not a whole lot. Whenever my wife or my daughters tell me they want some, I bring them in. I like them boiled. Lobster Newburg, I think, is my favorite way. Lobster Newburg over toast is really good. I think that's my favorite way.