

## Interview with Danner Curtis, Lobsterman

**Date:** May 23, 2004

**Time:** 2:45 pm

**Location of the Interview:** EHS Library

**Student Interviewers:** Anthony Britt **Grade: 10**

Amy Dalrymple **Grade: 10**

Matt Burton **Grade: 10**

Ben Deckers **Grade: 10**

**School:** Ellsworth High School

**School Location:** Ellsworth, Maine

### Teacher or Parent

**Interviewers/Chaperones:** Joyce Whitmore

**Title:** Social Studies Teacher

**Transcribers:** Anthony Britt, Matt Karst, Matt Burton and Amy Dalrymple

---

DC: You tell me what these are. There's quite a bit information on there.

AB: A tag or something?

JW: You know what? I locked it.

DC: They don't come apart either.

JW: Wow! I didn't mean to do that. What if you want to use them again?

DC: That's the idea, you can't. That's part of the reason.

JW: Is that right? Oh, I wish I hadn't done that.

DC: Well I've got another 300 at the house.

JW: I know, but....

DC: I'll give this one to Amy when she comes. I use them for key chains.

JW: Oh they'd make excellent key chains.

DC: Yeah, they show up good. Last year they were pink. So you haven't told me what's the first four numbers for- 1793.

MB: Is it a tag?

DC: Yes, it is a tag. It cost thirty cents.

JW: Do you put them on female lobsters?

DC: No.

JW: Nope. Okay.

DC: Good question, though.

JW: I thought perhaps if it was a mother lobster....

DC: We do do things to mother lobsters, that is part of the process. Matt, any idea? Just guess.

MB: Uh, the number of it, 1793.

JW: We all have 1793. Is that your license number?

DC: Yes it is. Each lobsterman is assigned a four-digit number. That has to be on everything. From somewhere on my boat in the form of a paper. It has to be on a buoy on my boat, which I display. It has to be on every trap, every crate that I have that I put lobsters in has to have it.

JW: And how long has this been in effect?

DC: Forever.

JW: Out of curiosity, are they issuing any new licenses these days or is there still a moratorium?

DC: That's called the Apprentice Program. And that's one of the big new laws. So we've decided that number. What about the other numbers? Who has one?

JW: I have one.

DC: Then two, three, I have four, and he has five. There's a thing called the trap limit now. You just can't fish as many traps as you want. That's because of conservation. Each fisherman buys a tag for thirty cents, and this tag has to be in a trap to fish. And it regulates how many traps we have. And I bought 300 tags so I can have 300 traps. So if I throw in a trap that doesn't have a tag on it, and the control finds out about it, they can fine me, so this is how they regulate me. 800 is the most you can buy in my zone. So that will tell you what ZC means. That's the zone I fish in.

JW: Wow.

AB: I didn't know it was so involved!

DC: Hang on a second. Oh, gee, So, I have to sign up for a zone, I can fish two zones, see, c and d. I fish both sides. But, I have to sign up for a particular zone, because we vote, we vote on different issues. Each zone can regulate its own laws.

JW: Wow, never knew that.

DC: And then we vote for people to represent us, to the lobster association. It's a state board. And, we can do, well, each zone, actually a lot of apprentice programs, are different, some zones have different tribal rights, and, and that's the difference, you know. Um, my zone, I can only increase by two percent per year, excuse me, so I have 300 now, ten percent, I can buy 330 next year, I can't all of a sudden by 800.

JW: So, by giving us these, are we interfering with your...

DC: These are last years. I hurt my shoulder operated on last year so I could not fish.

JW: Oh, so we can keep these.

DC: Well, I gave you, one, two three, four, five. (Laughter)

JW: So, every year, does the color change?

DC: Yes it does, it matches usually the color of the license. The licenses are always different.

JW: Is that right? I never knew that, isn't that funny.

DC: So, I fish Zone C, obviously, Maine state, 03 is the year, and the numbers, so every trap has to have these visible fishing.

JW: Every trap, every boat, every buoy?

DC: And my boat has to display a buoy, every fisherman picks their own colors, if you've ever been on salt water, there's many colors, white to black, purple to greens. Mine are florescent orange, purple, and a dark green. My daughter had a coat; it had those three colors on it. You pick your colors to be different, because you don't want to paint them like the guy beside you. You know, you want them to show up, so white bright colors show up more in the water, green particularly doesn't show up, but the orange does, and purple is just a strange color, because not many people have it.

JW: I'm thinking about that, because it is zoned, in another zone you could have the same colors and that would be fine.

DC: Like someone could fish out of Brooklyn and have the same colors.

JW: And, it wouldn't be a problem?

DC: Right, as long as we don't over lap. And its not, and its not like I'm gonna go up and even if you painted them exactly like mine um, fishermen, its kinda funny, traps are worth 50-55 dollars to put in the water. Trap, rope is called warp on a lobster trap um, and so you have, I gave you 100, 50 dollar bills and you hid them up to the woods at your house and I let them set for two days and I said when you go back there if you can find them you can have them. You'd probably remember where there were a lot of those 50 dollar bills so, lobster fishing is repetitious, we pull the same traps I go to the same areas as every year, so there's a lot of tricks that we do to know where to fish, where they are, but um, there's also electronics today, electronics have uh, sped up twice fold and that's uh, another reason why we've had to go to a trap limit is because of over fishery and the boats are faster and stronger. Now you have these devices called GPS, Global Positioning Satellite and some lobstermen have every trap on a machine and they push go to and it goes to every trap number, so it pulls right up and it's accurate to within sometimes 3-4 feet.

JW: Wow.

DC: Um, I'm old fashion and I use a compass the way I was taught and what I fish is strings and I pick a shore and I might fish 5 to 6 to 10 traps on that shore, um, lobster buoys are made of Styrofoam.

JW: What do you mean by strings, by the way?

DC: Strings just an area. This shore right here they call it strings.

JW: Oh ok.

DC: Um, I'm using lobstermen terminology here just so you can pick up on that. I might fish a string here they call it this 5 to 10 traps. Um, each lobster buoy is made of Styrofoam and each has a spindle on them and that's the part that you hang on to so you got a Styrofoam usually with a handle. The spindle I will put a band that we band lobsters with, I'll put one band on the spindle, that's my first trap, the last trap I will put two bands on there so I know when I get to the first trap it only has one and I may haul in 5 to 10 traps and get to the last one I know that is my last trap. A day like today its not a problem you can see, but I fish days where I can't see that wall from where I am running my boat so you need to know how deep the water is and you need to know the compass readings to find your gear cause just because it is foggy you don't want to stay home because you'll lose a day of pay. So that is the old way. (laughter) The new way is \*laughter\* with global, they just push a button and it tells you where to go it tells you how long its gonna take you to get there, the speed you are going and blah blah blah so things are changing. So I have all these degrees written down on my dash board on my boat and I go from one trap and I can go; my fish finder tells me how far I'd gone so I know that if I have gone 3.5 miles to the next trap at 342 degrees I'll come to that trap and believe it or not I'll come within 20 feet of the trap everyday. Without, you could do it as long as you could put me in a scope and just look at my compass and my, I would need to watch. So, but you do it 3 times a week all summer long it's like the back of your hand.

JW: These guys have been asking you questions, but I have lots of them, don't let me get you, you should be the ones that are asking. You said somebody taught you, who taught you?

DC: My next-door neighbor.

JW: Your next-door neighbor?

DC: Yep, uh, when I was in Grammar school, I dug clams for a summer job and I used to go with him and we would haul; he just started fishing, and we'd haul traps on the way home. We climbed out of the boat and then, 19...hmm...lets see if I can get this right, 1990 I think it was '88, '89, '89 or '90, I thought about going fishing, lobster fishing and I thought why don't you try it, so we built a hundred traps in his shop out of old oak, had the uh, porch been and old lady down in Stonington knit us and I had my hand and we made them right from scratch uh, made them all up, made them in winter so I had 33 wooden ones and I bought some modern day wire ones and started fishing.

JW: You still use wooden ones at all?

DC: I want to; I don't if... they are 10 years old it's about the limit on the trap.

AB: Do they work as well?

DC: Wooden ones fish well in shallow water, but in deeper water they don't fish so well. Because they move, lobsters don't like a trap if it moves.

JW: Oh, ok. So the lobstermen are still gonna lay traps right?

DC: Everyone goes to... I don't know if anyone places wooden anymore. I am just old fashion. I like them. They pulls these here that's why they don't, in shallow water they have buoyancy cause they're wood even though ah, when we first put them in the spring they weigh nothing so we have to put rocks in them and you put rocks in them for the first 2 or 3 hauls and that makes them stay on the bottom. There is cement in them, but they still want to float and then uh, you can take your rocks out when you're finishing, but they still have that, they pull easy and they want to move, so in shallow water they don't move too much, but you put them in 200 or 250 feet of water they want to float, so we uh, have a ocean that has tides and the tides run really hard in the different places believe it or not they can pick up the trap and pull it. So if you have a trap setting there and kinda wiggling in anyways, the lobster will not go in it, so I have some modern day traps, there huge. They are 4 feet long, 22 inches high, 18 inches high and they have 4 bricks in them that you do not move and I fish them in 250 feet of water. They fish really well.

AB: Is there a size limit on traps?

DC: On traps, nope, you can build anything you want.

JW: Cause it sounded like you are even getting bigger traps.

DC: Well, you have to remember though we have to take these traps in and out and handle them and the bigger they are the harder they are to handle and you have to pile them on your boat you take an average commercial fisherman making usually about 60-80 lobster traps on your boat so in the spring we have to set all of our gear, you'll see a boat out on the mooring with all them big piles of traps on there, so, some guys like little traps they are called mouse traps, I don't like them, I can't catch lobsters in them, the bigger the better, they fill up better.

AB: So your father didn't fish?

DC: Nope, nope my father never fished at all just uh, um, back when I could, wanted to when I decided to fish I just filled out a Maine state license, now you can't do that, there's uh, block on the licenses and you can't fish unless you get in a permit program.

JW: So Chad couldn't fish if he wanted to or could he?

DC: Well, he could. There's a student program too, there's 2 others and another program. Students can fish 150 traps in the summer time as long as they go to college.

JW: Tell these guys how much money they can make if they did this because they will probably be surprised.

DC: Well, um, I go out to Vinalhaven in the summer time for vacation and we go out there and stay and they have a co-op out there and a co-op is where lobster fishermen sell their lobsters and they buy bait, they buy fuel, they go up to the dock, its like a fast, quick stop where you give them your lobsters and they give you your nozzle and fill your boat up and they give you bait, and if your fishing a lot of traps you don't have a lot of time to fool around, I lug everything back and forth because I'm cheap and economical. I can go in and I'm not big enough, it's not my full time job. I was out there watching high school kids come in with 50,000 dollar boats and they were selling 6-9 hundred pounds of lobster and it was 11:30 in the morning which meant they only worked about 8 hours. They put their boat on the mooring and they'd come up and get in their new extended cab pick-up that was paid for and actually it's a problem out there because they can make probably 30-40 thousand dollars in the summer time why would I go to high school when they have a hard time keeping these kids in school. Even if you are a commercial fisherman it doesn't hurt to go to Maine Maritime and get an education in a lot of different things and then go back and go fishing, but these kids, their own dad makes 125-150 thousand dollars a year and works 8-9 weeks out of the year, goes to Florida for 3 months why would I stay in high school. So it is a problem in these communities out there where Vinalhaven is quite a ways off of, 5 miles off of Stonington, they're out quite a bit deeper and they get the lobsters coming in earlier and then they get them going back out. They get them so they, they catch twice fold of what we do. Much better fishing out there.

JW: But you take all of your lobsters to Vinalhaven?

DC: Do I? Nope, I sell mine mostly to the public, mostly, until I catch so many that I can't do that and I have to sell them to my mom and dad, they have a restaurant so they buy them cause

the sell live lobsters too.

AB: The Fish Net.

DC: Right.

JW: Oh, I always go to The Fish Net when I go to Blue Hill, favorite place to eat. On those little picnic tables outside he's got.

DC: He sells a lot of lobsters.

JW: I bet they do.

DC: Lobsters are a migratory animal; they come in the spring when the tides are high. Once a month we have the moon, a big moon, which controls the tides. An average tide in the state of Maine is 7 to 8 feet when there is a full moon especially in the summer time we get a 13 to a 14 foot tide, which means water comes way up and it also goes way out, uh when they do that the lobsters will come in and they'll grow their hard shell so if you buy a lobster today their shells really hard um, the meat is really full, tight. You can barely get the meat out they are not hungry, they're done feeding, they're gone to their cycle um, they need to shed so they come in and crawl to the real shallow water and they go through a dormant stage they don't feed so they're really hard to catch, that is why lobsters are worth so much right now because we don't get many. A lobster fisherman will haul about 300 traps and catch 10 lobsters, so it's not very economical in this spring to go fishing.

JW: Are you fishing right now?

DC: No, I'll start usually in May, sometime in May.

JW: Do you do something special to catch up?

DC: Special?

JW: I mean, you said tricks. I don't want you to give it away, but can you tell us a couple tricks?

DC: Lobsters really like fresh bait when they're hard, and they not very, they're finicky ok, this is when they're hard and they come in the spring, so fresh bait sometimes works good.

JW: So if you could get alewives in the spring.

DC: Alewives work especially very well and don't put any salt on them don't cure them at all just put them right in the trap and uh, sometimes you will do well. Different baits work well sometimes, later on in the summer everybody's using heron, so there is all kinds of different baits that we use, porgies um, red fish, actually skate is the best fish I ever used for lobstering.

JW: And why was that, do you know?

DC: Something different I guess I don't know I caught one about that big in a trap and I cut it up in strips and put it in my boat and salted it and let it set a day or 2 and it had a smell to it that was incredible and lobsters feed by smell mostly and uh, boy I'll tell ya that fished really well with that skate in it. Shark are really well, shark has a strong smell um, people think lobster bait stinks, to me it does not good lobster bait does not stink they're people the do not know how to take care of it and it does stink, I wouldn't use it or even have it on my boat and that is why a lot of people fish the same traps, the same water and they don't even do so well, but they guy that taught me how to lobster fish taught me how to take care of my bait and is just like if you fish freshwater fish and you wouldn't take a bunch of dead worms and try to catch trout, you'd want to have a nice big fat lively to fish with, so the presentation does help some.

JW: Is it more and more difficult to get bait?

DC: That is the part that will drive me out of lobstering.

JW: The bait?

DC: Yep. Again we use the herring which is the primary lobster bait and that is being over fished. We get most of it from Canada and now if you know, Stinson's shut down in uh, Belfast. They shut down in Jonesport and the only place they have left is in Prospect Harbor.

JW: His grandfather works at Stinson's at Prospect.

DC: Really?

JW: Yup!

DC: So, you know there's places, which is pretty much gone. When I first started fishing I paid 3 dollars a bushel for bait, now it's 14 dollars, so in 12-14 years it's gone up substantially.

JW: Nothing to do with the subject, but I am getting interested in this fishing and I hope the kids get as interested as me, I went to that meeting about Alewives, trying to bring alewives back to this immediate area. They say that they were dumping in Graham Lake 100,000 alewives last year, tracked them up and they are trying to get a live population at Surry bay.

DC: The Union River has a very good alewife run and there are a lot of alewives there in the spring. What they do is that they trap alewives in there uh, 6 days a week and on Sundays they have a tank truck and they trap, put them in a tank, and lug them to Graham Lake because there is no way for them to get from the river, to Graham Lake. They need to go to a pond and spawn once they go to the pond and spawn they go back down through and go back to the salt water, alewives are excellent bait, they are very close to a herring in many ways. The problem with like Surry is that they had big alewife runs a lot of these brooks is the trouble is and this goes right into another subject is that beavers have dammed up all the brooks around here because people don't trap beavers here anymore because they are not worth anything. So beavers have blocked everything and it's not just the alewives I have a camp Downeast that's by a river that used to



have a fantastic Atlantic salmon run and you couldn't get a salmon up that river because of a beaver dam. So, beavers used to be worth 80 dollars a piece so it was worth being a chisel through a device to set a trap, now they are worth 10 dollars now, so beavers were becoming a big nuisance to people and people don't realize it, but they can really uh, ruin a lot of land and devastation so, but Ellsworth has a wonderful program, those guys have their heart and soul in it and they, some where what 2 years they caught so many that they could not sell them all.

JW: Is that right?

DC: I called up because they have a very funny system down here you take a number there's a mail box and you go get a number in the morning and...

JW: This is in Ellsworth?

DC: ...yup, they call number 1 and if number 1 is there you back up and they fill your tuck up and then they call number 2, if 2 is not there, they go to number 3 so you will have to set there all day. So I call and say I am number 10, they were at number 7 so if they don't get to number 10 that day you go back at 6:00 and he'll hand out new numbers. So you kinda have to baby sit, I kinda had my mother in law go down, I had anyone I know if I am at work, I gotta go down and cash in my number so I can get closer up and sometimes you get like number 25, but bait is that hard its good bait and they're relatively reasonable in the price so, and then I called one day and I said well I'm number 7, what's the chance and he said well, if you get down here right now there is no one here and we got places full of fish and we can't get rid of them so.

JW: So how do you store them? You said fresh alewives make the best bait

DC: So any fresh bait that we get if it's in the spring time and I get alewives I'll bring them home and I can't keep them fresh, if I had a refrigeration, I could do that and it would be fine, but I can't so um, the ones I am gonna fish for right a way I just cut in half and put them in bait bags and I fish with them, but the ones I have to keep I pickle them the call it, we use salt and you put fish in and another layer of salt, fish in; a layer of salt would be like 3 cups and I got these big 55 gallon plastic barrels and I'll put up 30 or 40 bushel you'll salt them and then they set for 24 hours then you drain them off and you salt them again and you get the blood out of the fish and they pickle and they'll stay for 2 months after I use them as long as it stays relatively cool you know, we hit a 90 degree weather it will cook them. I've kept alewives well into July and they were just as hard and firm because if you put a soft fish in a bait bag, the crabs can pick it all out loose when it gets in there in the current it will wash right out, so we like hard bait right in our traps, its what we call hard bait.

AB: Speaking of white crabs, do you ever get any other animal that ventures in the water?

DC: That is why it is one of the reasons why I lobster fish because you never know what you are going to catch. In the spring time baby seal pups will get in my traps and rip my bait bags and they're a nuisance, so when we built our wire traps we leave the top wire, we usually cut a hole in them, we cut it so that there's, well what we do is we leave these spikes so they won't go in. It digs the back of their neck so they won't go in cause they do drag, sometimes they pull a trap

and they can't get out of it.

JW: Right.

DC: Um, you catch probably five or six different types of crabs, and you catch lobsters. You catch skate, flounder, striped bass. I caught a lumpfish, which is a camouflaged fish, and he was about that tall and that wide. So, he was kinda shaped like this. He has a big suction cup on his belly. And he's a camouflage so he happened to be blue. (laughter) Cause he was evidently down there with something blue. I had no idea what it was and it had little spikes sticking out of the sides like fish bones. And I had a bunch of kids out in the boat with me and there like, 'wow!' But I said, 'don't touch it! We don't know what it will do to you.' (laughter) So, we threw it back and I sold lobsters that week and the guy I sold lobsters to had a bright yellow one in his tank. And he told me what it was. That was one of the weirdest things that I have caught. You get scallops that will swim up into your trap. I get live sponges, lots of eels. A cunner is a fish that we catch. Crabs are a nuisance. Let's see what else do I catch that's weird...I guess that's it...we get snails and hermit crabs and all sorts of things.

AB: I remember when you brought in a sponge and things in first grade.

DC: Right. I used to follow my daughter up through the classes and I'd bring in a couple traps to show the kids how they fish. You know, with the terminology. Like what the parlor is and the kitchen. We have the kitchen and the parlor. It was fun.

AB: Do you get to keep everything that goes into your traps?

DC: Pretty much, like periwinkles. People eat those. They're called conks.

JW: Well, I'm trying to think. Anything can be eaten if you find the right buyer.

DC: We catch green crabs, which they are a nuisance cause no one eats them yet. The Japanese haven't figured out a way to process them yet.

JW: They will. (laughter)

DC: Grind them up and make something out of them. But we pretty much catch it's called a rock crab, which is the one with the big claws. And then we catch a sand crab, which, if you've had a crabmeat roll, it is the crabmeat. The females are real small so I give them to people to play with.

BD: How much bait do you use in one day?

DC: On a given day, we go by the bushel, so a 5-gallon bucket that's half a bushel. I usually use three buckets a day and that's fishing 150 traps. And that is about \$14 a bushel.

MB: Is it just you that lobster fishes on your boat?

DC: We have two kinds of licenses. When you apply for a license you can get a class 1 which just allows you to fish and no one else can touch anything on your boat. You can buy class 2 license, which what that does is if I had a big boat and needed a stern man, you could fish under my license. Well I buy a class 2 license so if I take you out fishing with me you can run the boat, pull a trap, band lobsters, and it is more fun that way. It costs twice as much but it's a lot easier on my nerves. And it's a lot more fun because, like I said, it's not my full time job so; I enjoy taking people out and showing them. I let them touch everything and run everything; no one wants to sit and watch.

JW: So, if these guys really wanted to, you would give them a ride?

DC: I would take them out for the day, yep.

JW: And me too?

DC: Yes. (laughter) I've taken several of Chad's teachers out. Mrs. Cullinin goes out every year.

JW: That means getting up at something like four in the morning? (laughter)

DC: Umm, well if I take someone like that I usually take them out a little later so they don't wimp out on me.

JW: We can handle that. I think we can handle that.

DC: Why do lobstermen go so early? Why do fishermen go so early? Why do we start at 4:30 in the morning?

JW: That's a good question.

MB: I don't know.

DC: Well, for one thing in the summer time, it's daylight at 4:30. We can't haul a trap until it's daylight. And the biggest reason is it's calm so it is very easy to work. When you take a choppy day and get beat around on the boat, it's a day's work just staying out. Usually in the morning it's like glass. That's why we're out there. To get an early start and also to lengthen the day out.

Lobstermen are the gentlemen of the fisheries by the way. You watch them. They go out and put around and haul their traps. I work around a few young kids, young men that haven't quite figured out yet and they race by and you have to hang on to your boat. But most guys you fish around, they just go easy. They haul their 300 and they come in. They fish in the summer time when it's nice. So, I've always looked at lobstermen as being the gentleman's fisherman.

BD: What determines the price of the lobster?

DC: Usually it's the demand and the number of catch. So, this time of year the demand is low until Mother's Day. But there's not many lobsters. I just checked on the price today at Shaw's

and they were \$8.99. The fishermen are getting about \$6.50 right now. That price will hold for another month or so. The demand is going to pick up a little bit but there's no one out there fishing. Everyone's just starting to get in. But once they do they'll catch a few, the demand is low so the price will come down. Mother's Day has a big demand. The price will go up a little bit. Then it will plateau off at about \$5.75 to the fishermen, called the boat price. Then we wait for them to shed. When you get a shedder, that's a soft shell, they aren't full of meat so they're worth less. They start out at three dollars a pound for them. The demand goes up but the catch goes way up with it so the price will pretty much fluctuate within 25 cents most of the time over the summer. They might be \$2.75 they might be \$3.25 for shedders. And then your hard ones will pretty much go away by the end of July. They'll be one price. But once we start to catch a lot of lobsters and restaurants and stuff and all that market is full, people will put up pounds. What they will do is put up 30-40 thousand pounds of lobsters and they buy them as shedders at \$3 a pound and sell them in the wintertime when they are \$7 or \$8.

JW: Oh, isn't that interesting! I never thought about that.

DC: Then, we also have a select lobster, which is over 2 pounds, which the summer people from New York come up and love them. They don't taste as good as the small ones but they don't know any better. So they come up here and they want to buy these big lobsters. Well, there's a demand for them and not so many of them so, we get a select price, which is usually around August 1<sup>st</sup>, and we get a dollar more a pound just for big lobsters. So, it's a big incentive to catch big lobsters.

BD: What is about the average size of the lobsters you catch?

DC: Probably the average size I catch is a pound and a quarter, which is the market size. We used to call them chicks, which is a pound lobster. Those are illegal to keep today; we don't catch them. The smallest lobster I am able to keep is a pound and a quarter. The biggest one that I've ever caught that I could keep is around five pounds. And that would be a male because its claws are bigger than a female so it gets the weight up.

JW: Somebody from New York would probably love to eat that five-pounder.

DC: They're terrible to eat.

AB: But they don't know that. (laughter)

JW: And they pay a lot more for the price.

DC: They definitely pay outrageous for them and they're not so good.

JW: We won't tell them. Let them eat them. Save the little ones for us.

BD: How do you feel about regulations on lobster fishing?

DC: Conservation ones I have no problem. The only regulation right now that bothers me is the

Save the Whale program. Where I fish there are no whales but I am forced to put quick release devices on all my traps lessening the amount of pounds per pull; so, if a whale gets caught in my trap it will break that release and he will not get caught.

JW: And that's an additional expense.

DC: There have never been any whales, but I have to pay 90 cents per trap to gear up my traps. I have to have them and that's a federal law. They're trying to change it so that so far off shore, if you can hop in a boat and go from where I fish ten or twelve miles you can start seeing whales.

JW: I would think Frenchmen's Bay; probably there are whales.

DC: There are. I've seen them right off in Swan's Island. I can see Swan's Island when I'm hauling but up in Blue Hill Bay there's never been any whales. (laughter) It's kinda ridiculous. So that regulation I don't like but I like the Apprentice Program and I think that the trap tags are working if people aren't over fishing, you know. Humans are very greedy. Like I said, the boats are much faster and a lot of the fisheries are depleted. The lobster fishery has held its own. We caught 40 million pounds of lobster last year.

JW: Wow!

DC: It was a couple...I think it was down about two and a half to three million.

JW: Is that right! Is that because of the moratorium new thing? Are they not letting license out? Or just becoming more selective about it and the number of traps you can have?

DC: Several theories of why lobsters are so abundant are common. 25 years ago, a guy would fish a hundred traps and if he caught 100 pounds it was very good fishing. When we fish today, we catch two hundred pounds when it's good fishing. My personal theory is that codfish, haddock, and all your ground fisheries have depleted and one of their primary foods is lobster; it's what they feed on a lot of them. And there's no cod- they're coming back, but not what there was back in the 60's. And I believe that that's the big reason why the lobsters have done so well. So maybe when the cod come back, the lobster fisheries will see a drop...and we are starting to scale back down. And cod...there are a lot of four-pound cod off the coast of Maine. They've closed George's Banks. It's been closed but they're picking up a lot of codfish. The scientists are saying that they're coming back and if they do, then...that's my theory because all the other fisheries have depleted except for lobsters; it has kaboomed. And I fish places where I have to pull in, get m trap and back out. (laughter) Because there's that many traps. You can walk on them. There's more every year.

JW: Why are there so many traps in that one little place. What's unique about that spot?

DC: Well remember I told you that lobsters like to go to shallow water. Once they shed, they head for deep water. So if you're in that shallow water while they shed it's first come first serve. Whoever has the freshest bait and the most appealing trap, they might go in it.

JW: And they just bypass. Your traps must do pretty well then cause you have fresh bait.

DC: I do quite well. Fresh bait, I have a small boat so I can get into shallow water. I literally, we call it shedder fishing, we're right in the rocks. At low tide sometimes I beach my boat out on the ledge and get out, walk over and pick the trap up because it's in this much water but it might have two or three lobsters in it. It's kind of fun.

BD: Have you or anyone you know ever sunk one of their boats?

DC: I never have myself but the cove that I'm in I have, ah, two different people I've had to go to their house or workplace to tell them that their boat had sunk on the mooring this morning. We get a heavy rain and most of the time it's neglect. We'll get a heavy rain, pull in the parking lot and say 'gee, my boat looks good' and go to work. What happens is it gets a little rough and takes on water. I have a self-bailing boat. What that means is the deck in it is above the water so I have these open scuppers in the back and the water drains right out. I don't have a bilge pump or anything like that in my boat. It's all fiberglass and it's low maintenance. When I'm fishing, you're always getting water coming in on the ropes, and as long as I'm underway it runs out. That's why I bought that boat. Most of your big boats are all that way but some people still have these enclosed boats with pumps and stuff. They fail and their boat will sink. It costs a lot of money to.... One guy was new at fishing, that's back when you could buy a license, and he was... we call him a flatlander.

JW: (laughter) A new person is called a flatlander?

DC: Yep. He had no clue about lobster fishing but he had enough money to get into it. He bought a 25 thousand dollar boat and 5 or 6 thousand dollars worth of traps. So, he went out and we loaded his boat up and he didn't plug the scuppers. If you put 60 traps in the back of the boat, you can't keep the scuppers out. And he put his boat on the mooring and went home. When he came back the next morning, the antennas were sticking out. So, he had to hire a barge to pick the boat up and it cost him \$3000 just to get the boat to shore. It can be costly, yes.

JW: How about during really bad weather, do you have to worry? Have you ever been out there?

DC: I take my boat out if it gets bad.

JW: But have you been out on the water when it's been bad?

DC: Myself, I do not. But I gillnetted in High School for a summer job back in 1980. We were in a 35-foot boat and I went out one day and there were 16-foot seas. We hauled a few nets and came back in. That was the roughest I've ever been out on the water. And that was dangerous.

Where I fish, we call it The Pond because it's all closed in; you are pretty safe so, a four-foot seas is pretty big where I fish. And normally I don't go out of there. Once in a while if they're really running well and I haven't been out for a few days, I might go out and get beat around a little bit. Usually I just stay on the shore.

JW: Do you have to go out in so many days? Can you just leave the traps and not go?

DC: The law reads that you have to pull your traps in a timely manner. That's how it reads exactly. Pretty much lobster fishing is what you put into it. You can haul once a week and the baits gone, and you're gonna catch what you catch.

...And they lock so before you put them together you want to watch where you put it.

JW: Before you can leave you have to tell us what all these things mean. It's a quiz. If you know, you can ride in his lobster boat. (laughter) I'm teasing.

AD: Really!?

BD: Has the lobster business gone up or down in the past few years?

DC: The lobster fisheries, like I said, dropped about 2 ½ to 3 million but it spiked two years ago; the most we ever caught was 44 million pounds. They say that the drop wasn't very much. In my area it didn't affect us. I don't know who caught less lobsters but we caught the same amount. Since I've been fishing I can't say that it's gotten any better or gotten any worse. So, I'd say that it stayed about the same where I fish.

AB: It sounds like you lobster fish for fun-

DC: Sort of.

AB: But, like you said, you have a lot of people, like, younger kids-

DC: Or even older people like to go. Mr. Higgins likes to go with me. He enjoys it very much.

JW: Oh, does he? I bet he does. Well it's lovely being out on the ocean anyway.

AB: Do you have a lot of cutthroat people who come out in big boats, etc.?

DC: Let's see, there's a thing called Lobster Etiquette: you fish certain areas and then there are areas you are not allowed to fish. If you fish them, they will hitch you and what they'll do is tie a knot in your rope that goes to the buoy and that's a warning.

JW: Who are they?

DC: The people that fish that area.

JW: How do you know?

DC: It's Lobster Etiquette. You just know! Back when this guy went fishing, and had all kinds of money invested, he lost a lot of gear that summer. (laughter) He didn't know what a hitch meant.

JW: Okay! (laughter)

DC: Now, guys that fish Brooksville, for example, the Cape, they fish up to Long Island Bridge they don't go any further. And that's not a state law or anything. It is just an imaginary line. But if you go underneath that bridge, you'll get hitched once and if you don't pull them out, you'll lose 25 to 30 traps real quick. So, it's a gentlemen's thing and it's just...it's all very calmly done. Most of the time it is not a problem. I lose more traps t sailboats than anything at all. They think they own the ocean and they ride around not paying any attention to buoys. It's really ironic because where we fish is where the rocks are cause that's where the lobsters are. I was coming out of Blue Hill one day in the summer and this lobster boat was pulling one of my traps caught in his rudder. (laughter) He didn't even know it. I pulled up beside him and knocked on the boat and said, 'do you know that you have my trap?' And I gaped it. I had to cut the line but I saved it. He was nice he had said that he got caught in it and couldn't get it out. He was scared to death because he thought we were a bunch of cutthroat fishermen. (laughter) So, it's kind of funny. There are some ignorant people out there. I had a gentleman that accused me of hauling his traps and bad mouthed me around town. But we had a little talk and he understood where I was coming from and he doesn't fish anymore and I'm still fishing so if that tells you something.

JW: It definitely does. (laughter)

BD: What would usually happen if someone was pulling someone else's traps?

DC: The state is very strict about this. If I was to see another person haul my traps, I could go get Marine Patrol and we could go to his house and I think the fine is a thousand dollars and he would lose his license for a year. So, if you take the average lobsterman who's got \$120,000 tied up in their boat and \$10,000 worth of gear, do you think he's gonna haul someone else's trap? He's not going to. It doesn't happen; he doesn't touch them. It's these guys riding around in a pleasure boat, you know, people that go out in a motor boat, they say: 'oh, these guys have got so many traps. They'll never know.' Well, I'll go and pull my traps in the morning and the door isn't hooked the way I leave it. If I think I a being hauled, I will put wire ties on my traps and those'll cut. So, it's kind of the things you can do, but they'll just pull them and take the lobsters and throw them back and they don't think that they're hurting anybody. But lobstermen themselves do not pull, I don't believe. I just can't imagine because if you get caught a second time, you lose your license forever. So it is very strict and they have too much money tied up. People come in in the afternoon saying: 'Such and Such is hauling me' and I'm thinking: 'no, they're not either; it's the way you fish.' Just because you caught a lobster here the other day; you can only catch it once. (laughter) So you have to move. Remember, they are a migratory animal. And when they shed they head for deep water so, if you catch a lobster here, it's a pretty good idea to pick it up and set it out a little farther. They go in a wave. I would love to watch the bottom with a camera. Because they'll she and you'll catch in close to shore, shedding fish you might get six or seven in your trap. Well, you can put your trap right back there and haul it two days later it will be empty. The wave went through. But if you keep going like this and like this out to 50 feet of water, you will follow them and stay right in them. That's another trick. (laughter)

MB: Have you ever seen or caught blue lobsters?



DC: I have caught some that are very blue but not blue like you hear. And why is a lobster blue and why is a lobster red? Does anybody know this?

JW: You can even have white lobsters, can't you?

DC: Albinos. But blue is a very common color. They're quite rare to catch one. Does anyone know anything about it? No one's been to Disney? (laughter)

JW: I've been to a local museum on the Island but I can't remember. Do you know?

DC: All lobsters are born blue. There's just a few percentage that stay blue. The rest turn red.

JW: Wow! I didn't know that.

AD: I didn't either.

DC: I learned that in Disneyland! (laughter) They had blue lobsters down there.

JW: Good reason for going down to Florida, huh?

DC: I catch yellow ones too, which are very rare.

JW: People probably don't think about that because when you cook them they all turn red.

DC: They all turn red in the pot. But I'm always watching for blue lobsters and odd things. Of course, lobsters when they are born are real small. It takes seven years from the day it hatches to the day when it is big enough to be market size. Which is how big? What was market size? Do you remember?

BD: A little more than a pound.

DC: A pound and a quarter. Yes, so it takes 7 years for a lobster to get to that size. A female lobster at a pound and a quarter lays 10,000 eggs. Under her tail. One percent of that will live to be a pound and a quarter.

JW: Isn't that amazing!?

DC: So, they're very susceptible to predators when they are small and they're all blue, they may turn to red. I can't remember what the size is they'll all turn. It has to do with survival turning back to red. And the blue ones show up more so that's why there are now so few of them that we do find.

JW: You keep them if you catch them?

DC: Blue ones? I would give it to a museum if I caught one. The guy that taught me how to fish caught a blue one and he gave it to the museum in Southwest Harbor.

AB: So, let's say that I wanted to go and catch some lobster. What would I have to do?

DC: What would you have to do?

JW: Go with him (laughter).

DC: Well, you can buy a recreational license. Anybody in the state of Maine can buy a recreational license for \$45 and you can fish five traps. They'd give you five tags.

JW: Is that right?

DC: Anybody can do this. They'll give you five tags and then you'll get a number and have to put it on the traps and blah, blah, blah. There's a lot of people I fish around that do that. There's one guy that hauls them in a canoe. (laughter)

JW: So I could do that if I wanted to?

DC: Right. And then we have the Apprentice Program. You could come to me and I would sponsor you. You would have a daily log.

JW: No age requirement?

DC: Twelve. You would come to me and say: 'I would like to be an apprentice' and I would have to like you to do this. So, it's kind of a popularity and a 'okay, I'm going to let you in on these fisheries deal. But I also trust you because we don't want people in who are going to keep illegal lobsters and you know. So it is kind of good. That's what I like about it. So that if you were my son you would come under the Apprentice Program than if you were a stranger. So it's kinda hard for people to get into. You'd have to keep a daily log and be in the program for three years.

JW: A daily log? What does a daily log require?

DC: What time you fished, how many traps you fished, how many lobsters you caught, how many female lobsters you caught, how many v-notched lobsters you caught, and what time you got done. You'd have to do that every day and at the end of the month the Marine Patrol would go through your log and initial it. I would initial it and we'd do that all summer. And if a person was to neglect that-

JW: Do you have to pay him?

DC: Nope. There's no money that takes hands.

JW: He's just learning the trade.

DC: He would have to go fishing with me first to learn but I think that once he starts the

Apprentice Program, you have your own boat, you keep your own log, and you fish. If you get caught for short lobsters or something you're done. There's zero tolerance. (laughter) It's good. I've seen a lot of people that fish get into fisheries they have a lot of money, and they come in and they set traps on one another. That's the other thing. There's a way to set a trap so that it doesn't get tangled up with everybody. You set a trap here but the buoy rides here. So if there's a buoy here that means there's a trap here so there's a way that you learn to fish so that you don't set traps on top. Cause if a guy's got 400 traps to pull for the day and he comes along and Anthony Britt's tangled up in three of his, that's a pain in his butt. So you're gonna get a hitch. (laughter) If it happens two or three days in a row he's probably gonna pull up and speak to you. And that goes back to the etiquette.

JW: Are there many people out there that are flatlanders?

DC: No, there's only one that fishes around us. (laughter)

JW: Cause the rest have been hitched so much they know better.

DC: Right and he can't swim so he wears a life jacket all the time. Which is so cumbersome. If it's foggy, he never goes out because he's scared to death of the fog. It's really quite funny actually.

JW: Sounds funny. (laughter)

DC: But for 5 years he's done well. He's learned his way. It's fun to watch.

JW: So, he's beginning to develop respect among the others?

DC: He does it awfully hard though. There's a lot of things he does that are fun to watch. (laughter) He's done a lot better.

JW: What do you love about lobster fishing? Cause you said that it's not the only thing you do but what draws you to it?

DC: The smell of the salt water and the ocean. That's part of it. Every spring if you get up near the ocean at all, Maine offers wonderful things. We're lucky enough to have inland and mountains and we're lucky enough to have an ocean that not everybody has and the smell of it is incredible. The interesting part, I catch everything and you never know what you are going to drag up in those traps and the money. But mostly it's therapy to be out there on the water. I don't lug a cell phone. I have a VHF radio in a watertight box and I never turn it on unless it's an emergency. So it's a getaway and very quiet and pleasant. I see so many different things. I watch the baby seals grow up in the spring. Bald eagles feed on baby seals in the spring so there are 7 or 8 bald eagles flying around all the time. It's just the migration of different animals. There's an island that I fish around that has the common turn on it. They only nest on two islands in our area on the coast of Maine. Birdwatchers come and watch them all the time and they're very rare. July 4<sup>th</sup> they hatch. Usually you can set your watch to them. They'll be these little cotton puffs of balls that stand out there and the turns go out and catch little herring and

feed them. It's just one of the interesting things that I see everyday. To me, I don't take it for granted whatsoever. It's very precious.

JW: What haven't we asked you that we should?

DC: Well, what about oversized lobsters? We have a size that we can't keep. Why do we do that? Why don't we keep the males? Cause they don't lay eggs, you know, ten thousand eggs. You can see why we'd protect the female. If a pound and a quarter lays 10,000 eggs, how much does a ten pound lobster lay cause her tail is this long instead of this long. It builds right up so she lays a lot more. So she's a Big Seeder is what we call her.

JW: Is the v-notched the female?

DC: Yep. Getting back to the oversized, they are tough and don't taste good but there's this novelty. Massachusetts and New Hampshire keeps them. They don't protect them; they are allowed to keep oversized lobsters. A nine or ten pound female needs a ten pound male to breed her.

AD: Wow!

DC: What happens is the male sits in his hole and the female will seek him out. They'll breed and then she'll have to get away or he'll eat her. They are very carnivorous. So, a five pound female coming into a ten pound male would be done. So we need the size to be equal within a pound or two to breed. So that's why we protect the oversized lobsters. I've caught them at 15 pounds and I had to take my trap apart to get them out. I don't know how they get in there. I caught a ten pound female- I fish a trap that where I put the bait is called the kitchen and it has the parlor head. And 4 foot traps have double parlor heads, which keeps them in there. She got through the first one but couldn't get through the second one. When I pulled the trap she had her crusher claw reaching to the second one and had a hold of a two-pound male and was cutting him in half. She went in the trap to eat. (laughter)

AD: Wow!

DC: She was full of eggs and ugly. Oh boy, they're awful. She was hard to handle. The males are usually just like this; you pick them up and throw back in the water. So that's why we protect the oversize.

We catch female lobsters in the spring mostly, and we catch them in the summer. If they have eggs. A lobster has five things on their tail. They have a wide one here and they have two ones here, if you look at a lobster. This fin here and only this one, I will tell you a trick that I learned. We v-notch this lobster. We usually cut it with a knife about a quarter of an inch deep. You don't want to cut it too deep. We just cut a little notch out and we throw it back. If you come along and catch her and she's dropped her eggs, you can't keep her because she has that v notch and produces and bears eggs. So, we protect her. But she sheds, so a lobster sheds and she'll lose a little bit of that notch. Not all of it, but a little bit of it. The law reads that if there's anything wrong with that tail, we have to throw it back. Now, I'm a new fisherman and I don't know much about lobsters so I catch this lobster- I fished with a guy who that couldn't tell a

male from a female, didn't know the difference. Well in the spring time when the fishing's slow and nothing to do, a lot of the old timers will notch the male lobsters that are a little small. So, when they shed they've got the notch in them but they're males. (laughter) So the new guy will throw it away.

AB: So, they put the notch on a different fin?

DC: Oh, it's just a trick. (laughter) So, the green guy will come along thinking it's a v-notched lobster, but it is a male. You can keep the male. (laughter)

AB: Oh, yeah.

JW: There are some out there who are pretty green?

DC: Well, there's things you learn. So we v-notch that lobster. A pound and a quarter lobster sheds 2 to 3 times a year. A ten pound lobster sheds one every 2 or 3 years. They come into the shore, pull their meat in the spring. They go into this dormant stage. There's a line in the back of their body that splits open and their new shell has already grown inside the old one. They'll back out and leave their claws right there in the body, then they crawl ahead and they'll leave the tail where it is and they're just as soft as that right there. Like a sponge, when they're in that state. So that's why they come to shallow water; they don't crush and they hide in the rocks so nothing will eat them. They're very susceptible. They'll set in there and if you ever snorkel where there's lobsters you'll see these claws sitting there. They'll eat them. They'll get that calcium back into them to get their shells- to harden it up. Then they come out and they've got this brand new house and they need to fill it up. They're really hungry cause they've been in that dormant stage and that's why we catch them so easy when they shed.

JW: Right. Why do you think that the other states allow people to keep the big ones? Don't they understand the principle?

DC: The state of Maine is the only one that throws them back. That is the part that I don't understand. Unfortunately, money controls a lot of legislature and decision making in fisheries. There's a ton of money to be made. I read an article last year and there was a dragger that was dragging off the coast of Maine and they were dragging for bottom feed fish: cod, haddock, and flounder. But their by catch was lobster. They're allowed to keep so many lobsters. They fish three days and caught nine thousand pounds of lobsters. That was their by catch. At \$6 a pound, that's a lot of money. But also, you are talking about a million dollar boat.

One guy owned three boats that was fishing like that. And he has enough money to send his lawyers or what not, political people to Massachusetts or to Augusta or to Washington to fight saying, 'us draggers need that by catch.' Well I don't think they should. You catch a lobster with a trap and that's it. Um, gillnetting is another form of fishing that I think, I did it myself, and I think it is the most barbaric way to fish. Let's go back to the hook and line and catch one fish on one hook. And it's very simple. The reason that we've over-fished is because of nets. And we also kill a lot of unnecessary fish because of the nets.

JW: And are there laws regulating gill-fishing these days?

DC: There's very few gill-netters; I am a dying breed. When I fished off Stonington there was probably 40 boats that gill netted and I don't think there's a one this year or last year. Money controls lots of things. The money right now in Massachusetts and Cape Cod, there's a lot of money there and they put the people in the right places to keep this- so that they can keep their oversize. Lobsters in the wintertime go to the mud and I don't know why. They have 1600 feet of water and they go and hide in the mud. There's a lobster fisherman off in Stonington that goes out to the Canadian American border up by... actually it's north of here. About 13 hours of steaming, they call it the Hake line. Which is an imaginary line, the U.S. border. You fish on that. It's about 1600 feet of water. During Christmas, they usually catch about nine or ten thousand pounds out of the traps and they haul.

JW: Do you every consider doing that?

DC: No, it's too far off of the shore. (laughter) Too far for me, they don't see land for three days.

JW: Do you belong to the lobstermen association?

DC: Yes, I do. That's just a... that's kind of nice because lobstermen are self-employed and there's health insurance deals you can get and incentives. It's a good organization.

AB: You may have said this already, but how do you tell the difference between a male and female?

JW: [laughter] I don't think he did.

DC: When you learn to look at a lobster, the male's tail is narrower. The female's is wider because she lays eggs. His claws are usually bigger. So when I haul a trap I can generally tell by looking at them without flip them over and where the body

DC: So you flip them over and right where the body and tail meets there's two little flippers. The male's is made up of shell and a female's are kind of dainty and feathery-like. They are totally different looking. And that's how you tell the difference. So, that's the first thing I do when I pull a lobster out of a trap, I check to see if it is a male or female. If it's a male I measure it. If it's big enough, I band it. If it's a female I flip it over and see if it has the notch. Then you have to check if she has any eggs. If she has one egg I have to throw her back. If it doesn't have an egg, then you band it and you keep it.

JW: Do you like lobster?

DC: It's kind of funny [laughter]. I've always cared for it. I love it in stew in the fall. I will only eat a lobster cooked on an open fire, a wood fire, with salt water and seaweed as a cover and cooked on the beach. It's boiled. I'll only eat a shedder. I won't eat a hard one because I don't think they're any good. Sheddens are more tender. They have less meat in them but you can just eat more.

JW: But most people don't think that way.

DC: Well, a lot of people have this... got to have large lobsters. The man that builds my traps... the biggest lobster caught in the state was 38 pounds and there's a display in the science museum in Boston. The guy fished off Vinalhaven for 30 years and he said that he hauled a trap that was a four-foot trap and the lobster was as long as the trap. And it was cutting the wire open with its claws. Estimated at 31 pounds and it fell off before he could take a picture.

JW: Have you ever gotten bitten by a lobster, or do flatlanders get bitten by lobsters?

DC: Right there. And it was a little, tiny one but it was quick. It got underneath my glove and tore me open. It was the first trap I hauled and it was real early. It's really fun every year when I first start hauling. We catch a lot of crabs in the spring cause they're shedding. And it takes me 10 minutes to pick a trap cause I handle them real careful but by the middle of June I can do it three times as fast because I lose that fear. I don't like crawly things. You get used to it after a while.

Another thing is how do we now when to haul out in the fall. Some guys like to go deer hunting. Some guys, it gets too cold. About the second week of October you'll be catching about a pound a trap and you'll haul and have half by the time you're done. Just bang like that and that's when I haul out.

JW: So that means they are going out to deep water.

DC: Yep. Lobsters are migratory animals. Where I fish you've got Long Island, Bartlett's Island and Newberry Neck. Up through there is a big channel that is 230 feet deep out at the end of Long Island. The lobsters all shed under this channel and then go out through. So I call them "thorough fairs" where they do this. And it's really good fishing in the end of August into September. The most I've caught is 21 lobsters in a trap and I kept 19. They fill up. Cause you can figure it that a lobster is almost a five-dollar bill.

JW: Oh, that's a good way of looking at it.

DC: Years ago when you built wooden traps. You made them out of oak and oak is very rugged. You had to put a biodegradable lave in that trap. So we used poplar and poplar would rot really quick. Let's say a boat runs over my line, my warp, and cuts me off. That traps sits on the bottom but it still fishes. Stuff crawls in it; it might be a fish or something that goes in there and dies. Then a lobster will go in there and another will go in to eat him so we call them ghost traps and they still fish. Eventually, the biodegradable lave would rot out and the trap would stop fishing. When we went to the metal trap, you know, we can't put the biodegradable lave on it so they came out with...they used rings called hog rings and they are like a heavy-duty staple. They are high carbon so they rust out. Sometimes, you have to replace them throughout the year. They won't even last like three or four months. And what we have is a vent in the back of the trap and because of conservation and lobsters are carnivorous, we have a vent that allows short lobsters to crawl through. So they come in the trap and go out through because if they didn't they'd stay in there and get eaten cause they're the smallest guy in the trap.

JW: Do they eat the bait before they go all the way through?

DC: Well, I tie the bait in the “kitchen” towards that parlor and lobsters are lazy. They don’t like to crawl uphill very much. They like to stay on flat ground. So, that parlor has to be so flat because it invites them in there. They can even go in the first parlor, then come back, and still get at my bait bag. But they get...I don’t know how much traffic there is. So we have this vent that allows short lobsters to go through. Supposedly, if it’s a keeper, it can’t go through there. They hinge and we fasten them with those biodegradable hog rings. We have to have them on there. If my trap gets cut off, within three or four months that will flip open and the lobsters can come and go. If we lose a trap it is state property. If you were to find a trap on the bottom that you didn’t know whose it was, you couldn’t keep it and fish it yourself. If there’s a number in that trap, you can’t use it. The ocean bottom is littered with them. If people could only see how many traps are down there.

JW: Do the lobster traps hurt anything?

DC: After awhile they become a home for something I guess, the ocean claims everything. They get barnacled up and slimed up. I’ve found a trap the next year and it had three or four lobsters in it, great big ones. Usually you get a huge lobster. I think it’s because a little one goes in, then a bigger one, and then an even bigger one and you end up getting these huge lobsters.

The traps have changed a lot. We’ve gone from oak to wire. Oak runners that they sat on to... a lot of people have tried PVC and a lot of different things. They’re revolving all the time. I don’t know what the next thing on the horizon is. They’ve gone from a nylon head to what they call a shrimp mesh head, so it’s a pretty interesting thing. Trap building has become a big industry on the coast here.

JW: Do you get yours locally?

DC: Yes, Downeast Gear on the Trenton Road is where I get my traps.

JW: Do you see Ellsworth as being a fishing community?

DC: No, I think there are only about three commercial lobstermen in this town.

JW: But we have Maine Shellfish....

DC: That buys. Trenton Bridge that buys. The Island that buys and everything down in Stonington.

AB: Do you ever see yourself stopping lobster fishing?

DC: The lack of availability for bait will probably drive me out of it. I like it. It’s great exercise, fun, a good way to make money, and it lets me have a free boat. [laughter] Everything’s paid for. When you go boating, everything is paid for. It’s kind of nice. My kids hate it. I used to make them go when mom was working and I had to go take care of my traps. It drives me crazy! When we’re out in the water that is all I can think about ‘I’ve got to go out and



haul those things.' Like when I first started I used to haul them up on Monday, cause you haul them up every other day usually. But I couldn't stand it. I'd go out there on Tuesday and haul a trap just to see if there was anything it [laughter].

They did close...from January 1 to September 1 you can't fish on Sundays. And in the fall they let us fish Sundays because of the weather. And you can't fish past 4:30 on Saturday afternoon till six o'clock Monday morning.

JW: Do the Cruise ships coming into Bar Harbor during the summer cause dismay with the lobster community?

DC: Yes! About any big ship that does, unfortunately. I was down in Prospect one day getting bait and I saw a carrier come in and they had about nine lobster buoys dragging behind them. But you can look at too that they have the right to the ocean just as much as anybody else and there's so much gear in the water that they just push people.

You've got that and the Agricultural fund...they take up a huge amount of acreage.

JW: Is it still right in Bar Harbor or Bartlett?

DC: It's right out there by Long Island.

JW: Outside of just having the passion of being in the ocean that is such a beautiful area.

DC: Yes, we are very fortunate. It's really fun because shedder fishing, if you are in shallow water, and I have my nose over the boat looking all the time, there are scallop beds, sand dollars, and all kinds of different stuff. You can catch a moon snail. Have you ever seen one of them? They're great big. They're slow, but what they do is crawl over a clam, and they can spit a pinpoint of acid on that clam which will actually eat a hole into the shell. Then they spit the acid inside to liquefy the clam, then suck it out through that little tiny pinhole. I've seen a few of those, which are interesting. We see a lot of porpoise in the summer time. They all swim up beside your boat and play. You got jellyfish. When I was younger we had squid, but I haven't seen them for quite a while.

JW: Do you think the fish population is coming back?

DC: Yes, cause I'm catching more fish in my traps. Lobstermen used to catch flounder quite daily but the first few years I fished I never caught one. Now I am starting to catch them once a month or twice a month. I'm getting strippers in my traps and rock bass.

JW: Have you ever caught anything man made?

DC: Man made... let's see... I have not.

JW: You now how you hear about whales having sneakers in them.

DC: I've caught bottles before in my wooden ones. It's really interesting; I always see cool things when I'm alone. It never fails. I'll catch this huge lobster or something really cool a lot of

times when I am alone.

JW: How are we doing?

DC: What are the numbers for? The first four?

AD: Ah, do you guys know?

JW: Yes, but we are not going to tell.

AD: It's your little code that tells whose trap it is.

DC: That's right. It is my personal fishing number. What's the next number?

AD: Oh, boy! Is it the region where you fish?

DC: Look at the end. That's the region number: 'East Zone C'. So, what's that other number?

AD: I don't know.

DC: These are trap tags and we have a trap limit now. We can only fish so many traps. What number do you have?

AD: Four.

DC: I have 300 traps that I pay for. All my traps have to have those in there, so if I buy 300 tags I can only fish 300 traps. And the limit in my zone is 800 traps. So when we did this, we went to tags, the fishermen, being the way they are, would hire on a man so he could have up to 800 traps. Now it is one buoy per boat. One color, so you can only fish 800 traps.

JW: Wow, they've really restricted that. What if you find a buoy, whose property is that?

DC: Well, it's funny. On the Turkey Farm Road in Blue Hill, I was driving one day and one of my buoys was hanging on a tree. Their kids had picked them up walking. And I drove by and just laughed. Actually, buoys get worn out after awhile, and I've got buoys all over the place. I give them to young kids.

JW: Is it expensive to be a lobster fisherman?

DC: You handle a lot of money. You know, a boat today is 125 thousand dollars for a 35-foot boat. An engine costs 25 grand. 10 thousand dollars worth of gear is nothing. Bait is expensive. Fuel is expensive. It costs a lot of money.

JW: So, has the price of lobster risen according to the price of gas?

DC: Lobsters have gone up about 25 cents since I started. But they haven't gone up from that

point for 20 years. It was the same amount when I was a kid.

JW: Wow!

DC: We have got select prices and there is showing of prices going up a little. Also, you've got all these co-ops and barges like in Blue Hill where you can pull up and buy your bait and sell your lobsters so it's very convenient. You put your boat on the hook and you go home. A lot of it is going to that so the prices won't go up anyway.

If you would like to go you are welcome to come on my boat. It is interesting. Just pack a lunch. I take my Lab with me, she usually goes. She lays over on her side and chases the sea gulls.