

PHILIP GENTHNER, SR

Interviewer: Steven

Date: October 2003

Place: Philip Genthner's home

Transcriber: Peggy Simmons



Philip Genthner, Sr., was born on July 1, 1961, and has lived in Friendship all of his life, His two sons, ages 12 and 16, are both active lobstermen. He has two brothers and two sisters, and his family has lived in Friendship for two generations. Philip has been a lobsterman for 30 years. He is a wrestling coach and enjoys watching NASCAR racing. His younger son Steven conducted the interview.

Q: When did you start lobstering?

A: I've been lobstering since I was a kid; I used to go with my brothers, uncles, and all that.

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Q: How long have you been lobstering?

A: I was eight, nine, or ten, something like that.

Q: Why did you become a lobsterman?

A: I loved doing it. I went with my brothers and uncles and stuff, and I liked it. I took up the occupation.

Q: What is your job on the boat?

A: I'm the captain, and I own the boat.

Q: Do you have someone who lobsters with you?

A: I have a sternman; my sister goes with me.

Q: What does she do?

A: She fills bait bags, bands lobsters, measures lobsters, coils rope, sets traps.

Q: Is lobstering a tradition in your family?

A: Yes, my uncles did it; my brothers do it, I don't know how many generations.

Q: Describe your boat.

A: It's 38-foot, fiberglass, orange, with a 430-Cummins diesel.

Q: What is the name of your boat, and why did you name it this?

A: *Melinda Kay*. I named it after my wife.

Q: What equipment do you carry on board?

A: Color machine, throttle, fathometer, radios--VHF, music radio. For safety equipment I have a life raft, life jackets, survival suits, life ring, flare kit, and all that stuff. Cage around my propeller.

Q: Describe your lobster traps, size and weight.

A: Two foot wide by 4 foot. Weigh around 25 to 30 pounds.

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

A: You watch the fathometer, pick where you want to set, look for rocky bottom in shedder season; later, move them off in the mud. You have to watch the fathometer; the color machine shows you the hard and soft bottom by colors.

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

A: Yes, I do; I move them. I start out in shallow water because of the shedding. They crawl in the rocks to shed. Then in deeper water because the lobsters are in deeper water. In the summertime I haul them every three days. Buoy color tells my traps from others.

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

A: No, I do not use toggles. A lot of guys do, but I don't. They keep the rope from going to the bottom and hanging down on rocks.

Q: What do you use for bait?

A: I use a lot of herring, some pogies, some redfish, and flatfish.

Q: Where do you get it?

A: The bait truck comes right to our wharf with herring. Redfish and flatfish will come by truck to the wharf. We usually go to Rockland to get pogies if we want them.

Q: Describe a typical day.

A: I get up at 3:00 and leave at 3:30. I leave the wharf about 4:00. I come back by 2:00 or 3:00. In the summertime I go just up here in the bay. In the winter time I go down below Monhegan. In summertime I pull about 250 to 300 per day.

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

A: I take and pick all the lobsters out while my sternman is baiting the trap and throw them in the plug box. Instead of sticking a piece of wood (plug) in them, they are banded now. It's still called a plug box. She measures all the lobsters, and anything that's too small she throws back, and if they happen to be over 5 inches, which is too big, she throws them back. She makes sure the females aren't punched. They notch them, and that's how you tell that they can carry eggs. You have to throw those back.

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

A: I catch sculpin, codfish, cusk, catfish, flounders, skate.

Q: What do you do with them?

A: Some of it I cut up and put in the bait, and some I throw back.

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

A: There are seven of us, plus the kids that we have, who own our own wharf. So I take them in to our wharf, and a truck comes down and buys our lobsters right there.

Q: Who determines the price you get for them?

A: We sell our lobsters to this guy, and we pretty much go by the most we can get. The wharf beside us helps us out and lets us know to make sure we're getting the right price.

Q: What is a normal haul for a day?

A: I've seen days when you could have 800 pounds or 50 or 60 pounds. It's hard to say. Springtime you don't catch much. Summertime you do pretty decent. Fall and winter months you do pretty good. The worst month is probably February, and that's when you won't catch too much.

Q: How does the weather affect your fishing?

A: Well, it's according to what kind of weather you get. If you've got an easterly wind, you don't catch as much as you normally do. Don't ask me why. A lot of times when you've got rough weather coming, you notice the lobsters are nastier. They want to bite and chew at each other. They try to get you when you take them out of the trap.

Q: How has lobstering changed since you began fishing?

A: Back when I was younger with my uncles, it was a lot more territorial. They took care of the bottom. They didn't just let everybody fish. People had kind of lines you couldn't cross, or you'd get the knife treatment. I shouldn't say that, but that's what they used to do. It's changed in that type of way--seems like people fish about anywhere they want now.

Q: What do you like most about lobstering?

A: I like being my own boss. I love getting up early and watching the sun come up. I'm out there by myself. Peaceful and quiet. Nobody to bother me. I like it.

Q: What do you like least about it?

A: Hassles of everybody here and there, lot more gear around. I don't like playing around in the fog. It wants to rip your eyeballs out.

Q: What happens when it's foggy?

A: It makes it difficult to stay in the strings. It hides the traps. You could very easily hit another boat, go ashore, makes it very difficult. You can do it, but it makes it that much harder.

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

A: I've had my boat break down. Different stuff like that. Nothing real serious yet. I hope I never do. I've lost gear and stuff like that. The main thing is, I guess, the boat breaks down. You call someone to tow you in. I've lost gear, had people cut some, had boats cut them off. That's part of the business.

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

A: The worst thing that ever happened to me was the time I was all by myself, and the rope was wrapped around my foot. I had just pushed the throttle wide open. I didn't know it was around my foot. Next thing I knew it had me right out straight and wouldn't let go. Finally it pulled my boot off. It scared me to death, and I had to go back and gaff that trap back up and haul the trap back up and get my boot back. That did scare me.

Q: Describe your most memorable time fishing.

A: Oh, a real big catch, but I don't know what the catch was--the most lobsters I ever had.

Q: Do you lobster in the winter?

A: Yes, I do go lobstering in the winter. I have, in other years, shrimped in the winter, too.

Q: How often do you eat lobster?

A: I don't eat it as much as you would think because I'm a lobster fisherman. I eat it some. I don't eat it a lot.

Q: Do you have a favorite way of preparing it?

A: I love lobster stew. The best way to eat it, as far as I'm concerned.

Q: Have you had any other scary experiences while lobstering?

A: I had a scary thing happen to me once. But I think they did it for a joke, which was funny afterwards. I didn't think it was funny at the time. I had these two fighter jets fly over the top of my boat, real close. I thought my engine was coming apart, it was rattling so. I looked up, and it was two fighter jets; one was going over the top, and one was tipped up so he could look down at me. I think they were doing it to have fun. It was funny, but I didn't think it was funny at the time. Now I think it's the funniest thing going.