

FRED HERSOM

Lobsterman

Date: May 10, 2006

Time: 3:15 p.m.

Location of the Interview: Ellsworth High School Library

Student Interviewers: Kim Tupper Grade 10

Kim Crane Grade 10

Ben Rudolph Grade 10

School: Ellsworth High School

School Location: Ellsworth, Maine

Teacher or Parent

Interviewer/Chaperone: None

Transcriber: Kim Tupper

BR: I guess we can start. So what exactly do you do for a living?

FH: I fish for lobster.

BR: How long have you been fishing?

FH: I have been fishing since I was about six years old.

BR: About six years old?

KC: Holy.

KT: Wow.

BR: Wow, how old are you now?

FH: Twenty five.

BR: So that means that someone else in your family fishes?

FH: Yes, yup, my whole family fishes.

BR: Who taught you how to do it?

HF: My father.

BR: Your father?

FH: Yup.

BR: Alright and where do you usually go?

FH: Where do I go? It ranges. Well, I go out of Stonington. That is where I go out of. I go offshore lobstering too.

BR: cool, how many traps do you usually fish?

FH: I usually fish between four to five hundred.

BR: How many days out of the year are you able to go fishing?

FH: It depends on the weather. Ah, you might get one hundred days; you might get one hundred and fifty days...probably one hundred and fifty days.

BR: Is there like a limit? That you can only go out so many days?

FH: Nope, not on lobsters.

BR: What do you think is the hardest part about fishing?

FH: Probably the weather and the winters.

BR: Alright, what kind of bait do you usually use?

FH: We use herring and red fish.

BR: Herring and red fish?

FH: Yeah, I don't know if you know what they are. Herring is like you know the sardines that come in a can. Basically it is that.

BR: Where do you usually go for bait?

FH: Where I sell my lobsters.

BR: Where do you sell your lobsters?

FH: At the Greenhead Lobster Company in Stonington.

BR: How long is your work day? Like how early do you get up?

FH: It ranges. It could be a ten hour day, it could be a six hour day, or it could be a fourteen hour day. It depends on where you are.

DC: Kind of like being a logger, my dad does that.

FH: Oh, he does. Yep.

BR: So, you go if it is raining?

FH: Raining, sunshine, it doesn't matter just as long as the wind doesn't blow. If it is blowing anything over twenty miles per hour that is when you can't go.

BR: Oh. Have you got into any dangerous situations because of like the weather or any malfunctions?

FH: I guess the only dangerous situation would be the boat. If one of the pumps go and you are leaking water somewhere, that could be dangerous. I've done that. It is not much fun.

BR: Got a little bit close?

FH: Yeah, but you got your survival suits and life rafts. I have a satellite signal direct to the coast guard so if the boat sinks the coast guard can find where I happen to go down.

BR: Will it go off without you making?

FH: Yes, yes.

BR: Have you ever had to use that before?

FH: No.

BR: That is good.

FH: Not yet.

BR: Um. What are some of the local rules for lobster fishing, the rules and regulations?

FH: Well most of them are federal or state. You have an eight hundred trap limit.

KC: How many traps do you usually put out?

FH: I put out between four hundred and five hundred. But I am getting up to where I'll be getting to the limit next couple years or so. I'll be having eight hundred.

BR: Are you able to do all this yourself?

FH: No, I hire a stern man.

BR: You have a stern man?

FH: And he comes and works on route with me.

KC: Is it just the two of you most of the time?

FH: yeah, most of the time.

BR: So how big is your boat?

FH: A thirty-six footer.

B R: Let's see. So you are like an independent lobster man and you just sell to a company?

FH: Yes, I'm kind of self-employed if that is what you would like to call it.

BR: How has the lobster industry changed since you were six and now?

FH: There are a lot of rules and regulations to do with. The Right Whale Act is to save all the right whales. You have to have a break away which is a six hundred and fifty pound break away on your trap in case a whale gets entangled with it than the break away will break. There are quite a few different ways at doing it but that is the best way, put the break away on. And I guess they are now trying to put on a rule where you can't use any floating rope.

BR: Yeah.

FH: Rope that floats.

BR: Like nylon rope or something like that?

FH: Like nylon rope in a way. They want you to use all sinking rope. But when you use sinking ropes you will set your traps around a rock or around the shore which I would call on top of the bottom. You know they may be ten fathom which is sixty feet. When you come off that and you got rocks around it when you set your traps, you will get your rope entangled around the rock and you will lose a lot of traps and have a lot of ghost traps, they call it.

BR: Right.

FH: Covering the bottom is probably more harmful to the environment then, you know, a whale because I've never seen a whale in my life. (Laughter)

All: (Laughter)

FH: Do you want to know what a typical day is like, like when we start and all that?

BR: Sure.

FH: Usually a fisherman gets up around three o'clock in the morning. And then most of them are on their boats between four and five. You usually go get your bait and fuel for the day. You go over to where you sell your lobsters and get your bait. Then you leave the dock like around five. Then you head out and you start hauling. It depends on where you are running. If you are running off shore, you know, you got maybe a two hour run sometimes. But like today, it was probably forty five minutes before we started hauling. Today we got done around two o'clock. I got home and took a shower and stuff. I had to come up here. So, sometimes you are pushing yourself.

BR: When you take your traps in, I used to live with someone that went lobster fishing quite a bit and I used to go with him but I was pretty little He used like an automatic reel.

FH: You have what they call a pot hauler. Its range is from ten to fourteen inches, some of them are bigger than that. It is all done by hydraulics. You got to pump on your pot hauler. On your hydraulics you have a control valve which you can control when you haul the trap up.

BR: What is the biggest lobster you have ever caught?

FH: The biggest one I have ever caught is probably one that was three or four feet long. I caught it with my father, actually, cause he fishes in a different place than where I fish. I think it was over by Vinalhaven, have you heard of that.

KT: Yeah.

BR: Was that recently?

FH: Oh, that was probably four years ago.

BR: Was that legal, could you keep it?

FH: No, you can't. In New Hampshire you could but not in the State of Maine.

BR: Really?

FH: In Maine you have to throw them back. If you get a lobster between three and a four inches and five inches, you can keep it. You measure on the back of the lobster from the eye ball to where the tail is on it.

BR: Do you have to throw back a lot of lobsters?

FH: Yeah, like right now cause it is springtime, you get a lot of snappers and your traps come up full.

BR: That is like little lobsters, right?

FH: Yup, you might be able to keep one at the most.

BR: What do you think is the best season when the lobsters are more plentiful?

FH: summertime, definitely, summertime and fall. The time that you make your money is usually from August through December. From December on, it varies based on the weather and everything else.

BR: What is the most rewarding part for you? Like what do you get from it?

FH: Money.

All: (Laughter)

FH: No, I like doing it. You know, I do it for the money but I like being outside and being on the water. You know today was beautiful I mean there are not many jobs where you can go and be on the water and in a boat everyday of your life.

BR: You like the fact that you are self employed and you can be your own boss?

FH: Yes, very much. I am my own boss. I can do what I want. I don't have to ask anybody. It is time consuming. On the days off I am working in the shop getting gear ready or building new boys or buying new rope or making new rope or making new bait pockets up.

BR: Do you set aside days off or do you wait until the weather is bad?

FH: I wait 'til the weather is bad.

BR: So it is pretty much like a seven day a week job.

FH: Yes, it is an everyday job. Usually I take Sundays off or I try to but sometimes...

BR: sounds pretty rough.

FH: Sometimes you have to do what you have to do but usually I try to take one day off a week, usually Sunday.

KC: Is there any kind of special equipment that you have to have on your boat when you go out besides your traps and stuff?

FH: You have to have safety equipment. See, it is different for me than somebody else cause I have a federal license to go in the off shore waters.

BR: Would I be allowed to go like you do, into federal waters?

FH: No, nope. You have to have a special permit. You either have to buy one or you already had to have one. If you have to buy one it is like fifteen thousand dollars for a permit.

BR: Fifteen thousand dollars. Is that like permanent or do you have to...

FH: It is a one shot deal. Once you have your permit it is yours.

BR: Do most lobstermen around here have that permit?

FH: More guys are buying it because there are more lobsters out there. But not everybody because it is very expensive and keeping up with all the others thins, you know can be difficult.

BR: Does your safety equipment have to be based on the size of your boat?

FH: Yes, the length of your boat. If a boat is over thirty five feet you have to have an inflatable boat.

BR: Usually, how deep do you fish?

FH: I go down to fifty or sixty fathoms of water.

FH: So what class are you doing this interview for?

KT: All of them basically, it is like English, World Studies, and Biology. We started out reading the book Cod.

FH: Yeah, cod. I have a multispecies permit too which allows me to ground fish. I don't do any of it but I have the permit.

BR: But you could if you wanted too.

FH: Yeah, I could. That is a lot different than lobstering.

BR: Is ground fishing more plentiful around here?

FH: Not so much up in this part of the state but the southern part does very well.

BR: did you always know you wanted to be a lobster fisherman?

FH: Yeah, pretty much. Until my body gets tired and I can't do it any more and that won't be for a long time. Most fishermen when they are forty, they are pretty well gone.

BR: we appreciate your time and thanks for coming up to let us interview you.

FH: You are welcome. Turn that thing off quick.

All: Laugh.