

## **Interview with Tuddy Urqhart**

### **Retired Fisherman**

**Date:** December 4, 2003

**Time:**

**Location of Interview:** Mr. Urquardt's home, Jonesport, Maine

**Student Interviewers:** Brittany Sawyer **Grade:**12  
Martin Alley **Grade:** 12  
Misty Jo Blount **Grade:** 12

**School:** Jonesport/Beals High School

**School Location:** Jonesport, Maine

#### **Teacher or Parent**

**Interviewers/Chaperones:** Linda Church  
**Title:** Business Technology Teacher

Pam Smith  
Entrepreneurship Teacher

**Transcriber:** Hayley Alley **Grade:** 12  
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**Brittany Sawyer:** Hi, we are here today and we are interviewing Tuddy Urqhart. Umm-- I'd just like to ask you a few questions about yourself. Where and when you were born?

**Tuddy Urqhart:** South Portland.

**BS:** Do you know.....

**TU:** That date?

**BS:** Yeah.

**TU:** December 23, 1926

**BS:** O'okay.. We were kind of wondering when we found out we were interviewing you....how did you get the nickname Tuddy?

**TU:** I don't know to tell you the truth, when I was in school I was known as Tuddy, and someone asked me, I think it was yesterday, and I said "nope, I can't tell you." I guess my parents must of did it when I was young.

**BS:** Yeah.

**TU:** I am glad they did because I wouldn't like to be called Adelmar now.

**BS:** So we are kinda gonna get on the topic of fishing. What was your first job that you can remember?

**TU:** In the fishing business?

**BS:** Anything...first job?

**TU:** Well, ahh, I graduated in 1945 and while I was going to high school, I used to go with a fellow down to Cross Island, lobsterin'.

**BS:** Oh yeah.

**TU:** He was ahh.... in fact, his name was Simeon Dobbins.

**BS:** Umm hmm.

**TU:** We took him in, and took him into our family because he didn't have no place, but he was a professional lobster fisherman, and that was down by the Cutler Towers.

**BS:** Yeah?

**TU:** And anytime I wasn't in school I would go with him, so I guess I learned the business from him. I mean, .... he knew.

**BS:** That was your first job?

**TU:** That's right.

**BS:** O'kay.

**Pam Smith:** Now was that Jonesport High School Tuddy?

**TU:** Yeah.

**PS:** You graduated in 1945 from Jonesport High School?

**TU:** Yes

**BS:** So, he became part of your family pretty much, and you learned the ropes from him?

**TU:** Yeah, he lived with us for years.

**BS:** Um...who was the most positive influence on your life or in your fishing career?

**TU:** Well, I think it would probably be him. After I had graduated from high school and after I got out of the service, my father wanted to go into the trucking business so ....I went with him for a while, but that wasn't profitable. I wore out several second hand trucks and when I got through I was right back where I was when I started.

**BS:** I guess you should stick with fishing huh? (Laughing) Oh, can you tell me a thrilling experience you had during fishing?

**TU:** I think the most thrilling one was one time I was off shore fishing for cod fish, and I had three of my brothers with me, and it was thick of fog and next thing I know I heard this whale blow. So I tell my brothers, "git up on the bow and haul the anchor up, I heard a whale blow".... I didn't want to get up there. He said, "Oh no"- he said we was catching fish by the bail and that's just what those whales were there after-- the cod fish, so he said, "let's just fish, we can't go home". The water all around us was full of cod and there was more than one whale, there were several whales. There was one that come straight for us, straight to the side and come right on top of us, on top of the water and when it got almost to us he lowered down and went right underneath the keel, right up on the other side. and I told the boys, I said, " haul the anchor we are getting out of here!" and we did.

**BS:** Ooohhhh!

**TU:** That is the greatest experience I think I have ever had.

**PS:** About how big were the whales, do you think?

**TU:** Oh maybe about 60 feet.

**PS:** Now, where did you say you were cod fishing?

**TU:** Ahh, oh, we was off shore here, just off shore about eight miles out.

**BS:** Do you remember how far back that was?

**TU:** I don't know.

**BS:** But you was still fishing with your dad?

**TU:** Ahh no, not at that time. I was ahh... driving a truck for OWBS Look, hauling lobsters from North Sidney to Boston.

**BS:** Ok.

**PS:** What about cod fishing Tuddy? You certainly can't find a lot of codfish now, do you notice a big difference?

**TU:** Oh yeah, well... I can catch about one to three a day and that's down around Camp Island. I had two codfish and two flounders one day and the warden stopped me, that was last year, and they come aboard and they said, "you can't have those, you're not allowed to take them out of your trap", so he measured the two flounders and mine was both illegal, it wasn't quite long enough, and one of the codfish was illegal, so we threw them back overboard, but I think codfish are coming back cause I have seen more.

**BS:** You've noticed a change?

**TU:** We catch them everyday down there now, no big amount, but we catch about 2 or 3 a day and they're good size codfish.

**PS:** What did you use to catch?

**TU:** Huh?

**PS:** When you saw the whales.

**TU:** Oh, we was catching codfish, but that was years ago.

**PS:** So what do you think an average catch would have been back then?

**TU:** Well, Ernest Kelley and I...Ernest was in another boat, a separate boat, and we was catching two to three thousand pounds.

**Martin Alley:** Wow!

**TU:** We only got three or four cents a pound for them, some weren't hardly worth going for, but we just went for the fun of it-- more or less.

**Linda Church:** What do you think happened that they disappeared like that?

**TU:** Well, I guess it was the draggers, you know... and such with the new technology, the fish don't stand no show, they can find a herring or a codfish and they got the equipment to get them in, whether they are in deep water or shallow water....I think one of the things that I did that was interesting, was when Ernest and I used to be in the weir business and we owned the weir up to the bar and it was fun to go up there in the morning... we used to go up there in the evenings and watch for the herring to come in and some nights you could see the herring come right up in the weir. But the next morning there was nothing in the weir and we couldn't figure out why, so Ernest says, "let's go right up in the night and we will snag them right in the night". I said alright --so we went up and snagged her. We rowed up in the dory and there was 99% mackerel.

**BS:** Huh?

**TU:** What was going on, was the mackerel was going in there and driving the fish out.

**BS:** Oh yeah.

**TU:** Well, we didn't know what we was gonna do with the mackerel so we called up Roy Ray in Milbridge, and he said, "you bring them over I'll pack em'.

**BS:** (laughs) Have you had any close calls ever...like fishing, like close times when something bad almost happened, but you got through it?

**TU:** Oh I have had several experiences that has been kind of dangerous but I have always had luck to get out of it.

**BS:** Can you tell us about any of those?

**TU:** Pardon?

**BS:** Can you tell us about those...close times?

**TU:** I can 'member one time when we was in the sardine business and I was up to ...ahhh, May Brooke Farm on Roque Island. We caught some fish up there and we put the pocket on and then it was gone. Well, these two boys was with me and what we did when we put the pocket on--we took the outboard and run it right in over the pocket, covering the dory in twine and running out right over the leader when we get the leader, you pop the outboard out, so not to get it stuck in the twine, but this time I didn't make it, and I had to tip the outboard up to clear the wheel and the twine let go on the outboard and she tipped back over and I was leaned out over and I went over, in my new school clothes and all.

**BS:** Oh my lord!

**TU:** Course' when I was younger, I was always in swimming, so it didn't bother me a lot.

**BS:** Can you tell us anything you liked or disliked about working on the boat?

**TU:** Well, I ahh...one thing, you are free to do what you want. You can get up in the morning when you wanna, and come in when you want to, and ahh .. that's what I like about lobstering.

**BS:** That's good. You can get your own hours...so is there a lot of things you dislike ...about the actual work?

**TU:** Uhhh yes, there is something I dislike about lobstering and that is the way we are operating it today, too much gear in the water and they are not as honest today as they used to be years ago. When I first started lobstering, if you lost a trap somewhere--someone would find the trap and return it back to its owner. It works the other way around now, if they find it they will just cut it off.

**BS:** Oh man!

**TU:** I have lost about 50 traps this year-- someone findin' it and cutting them off.

**BS:** That's horrible.

**TU:** Younger ones getting into it.

**BS:** Younger kids?

**TU:** Not all the younger ones either ...some of the adults.

**BS:** Have you noticed any changes in it since you started up till now?

**TU:** Well yes, in the traps we used to fish... all wooden traps, and the heads that was in the material only lasted about a season, so we had to head them every year. The buoys, and the rope was ahh.. it doesn't last like it does today. I've had rope 10 years old and still was fishing it, but rope then-- it wouldn't last like that. Today you buy a trap, you buy a wire trap and the head... you never have to head them agin'. I never have a problem with wire traps or spongy buoys. Those spongy buoys don't like as much paint when you paint them. You take a glob of paint and paint two or three hundred --where with the wooden buoys-- 50 would take a lot. The wooden buoys--you had to make them yourself, and if we didn't, we all had to go to a fellow named Charlie Buoy.

**BS:** Did you ever have to make any yourself?

**TU:** I made a few.

**BS:** Did you like that better?

**TU:** It was....one thing about the wooden buoys you could tell where you were at all times because the wooden buoys weren't identical, like those ones you buy unless you put a number on them you can't tell where you were as far as buoy goes, and you don't want to get lost in the fog. Back when I started fishing all you had was a compass. Today they have such equipment that anyone can get into the business, no learning to it 'cause it's all done by machinery for you. Did you see the new one they have out; that new machine that can see all the rocks and ridges for ya?

**BS:** Yeah.

**TU:** It's just like a radar only it's underwater.

**BS:** So a lot of things have changed that you've noticed? How about in the lobster... like in the actual industry itself, have you noticed any changes?

**TU:** There's more lobsters today than when I started.

**BS:** The price value today, is that a benefit?

**TU:** Yeah, the prices are good. A few years ago, well, quite a few years ago, the price was \$.60. No, we was fishing for less than 60 cents a pound, and the federal government got after us for price.

**PS:** When was that Tuddy? Do you remember that date?

**TU:** That was quite a ways back, but I believe there is more lobsters today. There has to be, compared to the amount of lobster fishermen and the traps in the water, and everyone in the last few years have been into it. Ya know, its amazing how the other day I had a few traps by the mouth of Indian River....December, the first, I had caught four lobsters which I never, never heard tell of before. By November, at least the middle of November, everything in the bay was gone but uhhh... these last few. 'Course it was later comin' in this year, so later getting out.

**BS:** What's the most difficult part about being a fisherman?

**TU:** Well...

**BS:** Is there more than one thing that's difficult?

**TU:** Well, the most difficult thing is getting around your traps. I think next year I am going to have to put a cage over the boat.

**BS:** Uh huh.

**TU:** It's almost impossible to get around and set traps.

**BS:** Uh huh.

**TU:** If I had my way I would cut back to 800 traps for each fisherman, and I think people at the end of the year would have just as much money in their pockets.

**BS:** Really?

**TU:** Instead of going into the wharf and getting 25 cans of bait, you could cut that rate in half and you wouldn't have that extra expense in the traps. There would be more boats that would sit, that wouldn't be fishing all the time. I remember years ago starting in October we would shift out to the bay and down to Black Robinsons and there wouldn't be a trap there. Now the traps are there in July... so many traps they have to put them somewhere ... everywhere is covered at once.

**BS:** Are there a lot more people fishing now then when you first started fishing?

**TU:** Oh yes, in fact, I would say this year and last year there have been a dozen fishermen in my area fishing up in the bay.

**BS:** Does it make it more difficult for you?

**TU:** And another thing with these 800 traps is that these big fishermen, they fish about 400 offshore, and come right up into the bay and fish 400. They clear them right up in there. There are a lot of fisherman that don't come outta the bay and it's not fair. I had one of them federal permits, then they started fishing 20 on a string offshore...well if I got wound up then I couldn't get my traps out, so I didn't fish offshore anymore. I stayed in shore, and they wrote me a note asking if I was using my offshore permit, I told them "no". They wanted to know why not, so I sent it back in. But I should have kept it -that was one mistake I made.

**BS:** So what's...

**TU:** And another thing...

**BS:** (laughs)

**TU:** I don't like about lobster fishing. I don't think fishermen should come in here now with pairs and triples, they are all right further out in the ocean, but up in here you don't have to have it. That makes it hard fishing.

**BS:** Like you have your favorite places to go and fish, and then these guys come in and it makes it difficult?

**TU:** Like some of these guys have brick runners on it and I can't even pick them up.

**BS:** If you could change anything about fishing what would you like to change?

**PS:** We've already kinda said that, I think.

**BS:** Kinda

**PS:** We've already answered that, right?

**TU:** That's one thing.

**BS:** Umm...What's something you remember about Jonesport, either with fishing or the town itself that is different today?

**TU:** You mean, from ahh ...cuz I fish over towards Rouque's Bluffs and Kenny Bay. I don't fish much in Jonesport. I always.... I just started fishing there because it was easier to fish there.

**Linda Church:** What about the town itself Tuddy, not just fishing.



**BS:** Like Jonesport, this community.

**LC:** Do you feel like the town itself has changed much since you were a young man?

**TU:** I think it has, and I think it has changed for the best. I think people have a better relationship with each other, they get along better with one another. I know that I have talked with a lot of these people who have moved in here and built houses and such. In fact, the Mazza family up here, he is a lawyer from Pennsylvania and his family and I got acquainted about 31 years ago. Last year I took 22 of them over to Rouge Island for a picnic. And I remember Paul's children, I used to take his kids and stand them up on the bucket to see over the bow, they called it driving the boat. So I used to set a five gallon bucket up there and stand behind them so they don't fall. Now they are all grown up and got married and have children of their own. Now their kids stand on the bucket. I like that. It was the only time I got to go over to the beaches, when Paul was here in the summers. Once or twice a year

**BS:** That's a good story. Have you ever done any other types of fishing besides lobster fishing?

**TU:** I ahhh...Ernest Kelley and I had a boat we called the Golden Nugget, we got it from Canada. We did a lot of draggin here, we dragged fish in it and ahh... we dragged scallops and shrimp. That shrimpin' was the best.

**BS:** (laughs)

**TU:** I'd seen ahh ...well, I bought a new shrimp net, this is kinda a funny story. I bought a new shrimp net up here at Sterling Net and Twine. Alfred Wright who's passed on now, a good friend of mine, cuz we always fished alongside of one another just in case one got in trouble the other one would help em' out or vice versa. So I bought a brand new net, and I said, "Alfred, there's quite a few people around town who would want to have shrimp, so instead of takin' one of my days when we are out for the whole, why don't we take one of the slower days and try it out. So I had Huntley with me, and Alfred took one of his boys, well, his only boy. His boy had a friend who wanted to come, so we set the net out by the black rocks and she fetched up good. Well, we hauled her up and she had a transmission in her, someone had thrown a transmission overboard. So I said, "Let's haul her outside, Alfred." He said, "Well, I don't know about that! Jumpins'!, we've destroyed it." But we hauled her outside on a Saturday afternoon. We hadn't gone now ways at all and she fetched up, so we hauled her up. We was in my boat and she laid right over so her guard was down. Alfred says "We got a rock in it", and Alfred's boys said "Well, it must be a red one"--and it was a net solid full of shrimp.

**BS:** Oh my gosh!

**TU:** And they hadn't a cut -off in the net so we had to take the whole thing aboard at once. What they do is they put a cut -off strap in it so you don't have to haul it all at once.

Well, I had a big bin in the middle of the boat and we finally got her up and put her in the bin. Alfred said, "What are we gonna do with them?" I said, "Well", I said, "lets go see Arlin Smith and see what he would do." So we went to see Arlin, and he says, "We'll get some plywood, and we will put plywood over it, and I'll take care of it tomorrow."

**PS:** But the shrimping certainly isn't plentiful like that anymore?

**TU:** Nope

**PS:** We really should be going now, we have to be back by 2:15. Thank you Tuddy for inviting us into your home.

**LC:** Thank you, your stories were very interesting.

**TU:** You're welcome, come any time.