



# NEWPORT HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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PAUL BENNETT

THE FISHING INDUSTRY IN NEWPORT, RHODE ISLAND, 1930-1987

## INTRODUCTION

The Fishing Industry in Newport, Rhode Island, 1930-1987, an oral history project, was implemented under the auspices of the Newport Historical Society and the University of Rhode Island Sea Grant Program.

Through question and answer format, the tape-recorded transcribed interviews document the fishing industry from the point of view of its complex traditions and changes. They provide a body of unedited primary source material focusing on priority issues of local concern and those beyond the geographic area under study.

Interviews were conducted by Jennifer Murray of the Newport Historical Society and were transcribed at the Center for Oral History, University of Connecticut. Narrators include representatives of the floating fish trap industry, the inshore and offshore lobster industries, the inshore and offshore dragger industries, the swordfish industry, the wholesale and marketing sector, and fisheries conservation and management.

Oral history enables us to learn about our heritage from those who usually don't write about it. It supplies what's often only hinted at in written historical documents. Readers and researchers using these oral history memoirs should bear in mind that they are transcripts of the spoken word and that the narrator, interviewer, and transcriber sought to preserve the spontaneity and informality inherent in such historical sources. The Newport Historical Society and the University of Rhode Island are not responsible for the factual accuracy of the memoirs nor for the views expressed therein; these are for the reader to judge.

Copies of tapes and transcripts are available for research at the Newport Historical Society. Copies of transcripts are also accessible at the library of the University of Rhode Island, Narragansett Bay. As stated in the release form which accompanies each transcript, the memoirs are to be used for scholarly and educational purposes only.

PAUL BENNETT

Paul Bennett is the husband of Hedy Bennett, who was also interviewed as part of this oral history of the fishing industry in Newport, R.I. Mr. Bennett has worked in the offshore lobster industry in Newport since the early 1970's and owns his own boat, Hedy-Brenna.

He provides a detailed account of his work in the offshore lobster industry, comparing the industry of the 1970's with that of the 1980's. Mr. Bennett also describes foreign fishing offshore during the 1970's, the tremendous gear losses suffered by domestic lobstermen as a result of gear conflicts, and the impact of the 200 mile limit on the fishing industry.

## Tape I Side I

Biographical Interview  
Early work experiences  
Offshore lobster industry in the early 1970's  
    Boats Bennett worked on  
Foreign fishing on the offshore grounds during the 1970's  
200 Mile Limit  
Lobster industry regulations  
Lobster dragging  
Concerns regarding lobster dragging  
Gear conflicts between lobster pot fishermen and lobster draggers  
Oil exploration, Georges Bank  
Offshore lobster grounds  
Early offshore fishery  
Current offshore lobster fishery  
    Year round operation  
    Trip length  
    The work of fishing  
    Number of pots used  
    Boats and equipment  
    Length of work day  
    Watch schedule  
    Sleep schedule  
    Various jobs  
    Crew  
Drugs and alcohol in the fishing industry  
Problems with people who fall asleep on watch

## Tape I Side II

Close calls with tankers out on the offshore lobster grounds  
Storms and weather conditions on the continental shelf  
Fishing as a dangerous occupation  
The kind of person it takes to fish offshore  
Lobsters harvested by offshore lobster industry getting smaller  
Changes in amount of money earned by offshore lobstermen  
Comparison of crews-- early 1970's and now  
Expenses in running a lobster boat  
Technological equipment on an offshore lobster boat  
Marketing lobsters  
Length of time between trips  
Best and worst times of year for offshore trips  
Limited entry  
Dock space for the Newport fishing fleet  
State Fish Pier in Newport  
Fishermen banding together--Fishermen in Newport  
Tourism and the fishing industry--Competition for harbor and  
    dock space  
Bennett's experience with society's negative perceptions of fishermen  
Bennett's feeling about being part of an occupation that is old  
    andan intrinsic aspect of life on an island  
Local ignorance about the fishing industry  
Marriage and family life

Family's reaction to Bennett's choice of occupation  
Perceptions of occupation  
Plans for future  
Diversification  
Tilefish longlining  
Taking time off-- Way of life to have very little time off  
Dealing with banks

Tape II Side I

Banks, contd.  
Future of the offshore lobster industry  
Future of the fishing industry  
Politics and the fishing industry  
Atlantic Offshore Fisherman's Association  
Changes in the offshore lobster industry

Interview with Paul Bennett for the Newport Historical Society, Oral History of the Fishing Industry in Newport, Rhode Island from 1930 to 1987. Interview by Jennifer Murray on April 20, 1987.

MURRAY: This is Jennifer Murray. It's April 20, 1987. I'm talking with Paul Bennett for the Newport Historical Society's Oral History of the Fishing Industry in Newport, Rhode Island from 1930 to 1987. Is it okay if I tape this interview?

BENNETT: Yes it is.

JM: Why don't we start with where were you born?

PB: I was born in Providence, Rhode Island on August 20, 1950.

JM: Most people don't give their age.

PB: Oh yes.

JM: Where were your parents born?

PB: My mother was from Ballina Moy. That's County Letrum in Ireland. And my father was born in New York.

JM: New York City?

PB: No, Mount Vernon.

JM: And their names?

PB: My father's name is Jerome Joseph. My mother's name is Anna Fee Bennett.

JM: How did your mother come to this country?

PB: I think the same way most people at that time did -- with the hope of maybe a better life. She started out as a cook and she continued in that capacity until the 1940's when she met my father and they

were married. My father was, I guess, in the service at that time.

JM: Was that in the Providence area?

PB: My mother worked in Warwick. It was in either Warwick or Providence where they met.

JM: Did you have brothers and sisters?

PB: Yes. I have one brother and two sisters.

JM: And where did you go to school?

PB: What age do you want to start at?

JM: High school I guess. Were you in the Providence area?

PB: Warwick. I was brought up in Warwick all my life, and I went to Bishop Hendricken High School in Warwick and graduated from Bishop Hendricken in 1968. I entered the University of Rhode Island in the fall of 1968. From there I transferred to College of Honolulu for two years before transferring back to the University of Rhode Island where I graduated in 1973 with an Associate's Degree in Commercial Fishing and Marine Technology.

JM: You're the first person I've talked to from that program. What is your wife's name?

PB: My wife's name is Hedy.

JM: And you have children?

PB: Right. I have two children.

JM: How did you get involved in the lobster industry?

PB: In 1973 I was going to get out of school and I wanted to get into the fishing industry at that

time. I really didn't know anyone close to me that was fishing. I had to start looking around and I got a job in Westport [Massachusetts]. I was working for a man by the name of Larry Ukubian who was very successful in the early years of the offshore lobster industry. I stayed with Larry for a month, but things just didn't pan out. We were doing very poorly and I expected a little more out of the effort I put into it. So I came back to Point Judith and I went dragging for fish for a couple of months. Then I got back into lobstering in Newport in 1973 on a boat called the Spar Hawk out of Newport. That ended when the vessel sank offshore when we were under tow by the Coast Guard with a flooded fish hold. Then I came back. I figured, well, that was enough of that. I came back to Point Judith and went dragging again.

JM: Offshore?

PB: Offshore on a boat called the Alliance, which was owned and run by a man by the name of Jim McCauley, who is now President of the Point Judith Co-op. Jim was successful and a real knowledgeable type guy and I stayed with him for two and a half years to three years before I came back to lobstering with some of the people I had met when I was on the Spar Hawk back in 1973. Lobstering seemed to be a little more lucrative at the time and I had an opportunity to run a boat for Continental Shelf Fisheries.



JM: Was that a Newport group?

PB: Right. That started in the spring of 1976. I ran a boat called the Iron Horse, which was a seventy or eighty foot shrimper style boat converted for the offshore lobster industry. I ran that from probably the fall or winter of 1976 until August of 1980. During that time I purchased a vessel on my own while I was running this other boat and found a captain. He ran that boat for me. I purchased that boat in December of 1978 and he ran that boat for me until about three years ago when I sold that boat.

JM: What was the name of that?

PB: That boat was called the Anna Fee and that was a fifty-five foot steel boat.

JM: How big is the Iron horse?

PB: The Iron Horse was probably about eighty feet long. During that time, in December of 1979, I started having the Hedy-Brenna built, which is the boat I own today. We had some delays in the construction and that was finally completed in March of 1981. That's the boat that I'm fishing today.

JM: You have one boat now?

PB: Right. I sold the Anna Fee. I believe now it's probably three or four years ago. I'm not sure what year -- around 1983 or 1984 -- January 1984 maybe.

JM: When you started in the early seventies, were there a lot of foreign fishing vessels out on those offshore grounds?

PB: Yes there were. There was a lot of Russian, Spanish, Japanese, Polish, Mexican. There was quite a variety of vessels.

JM: And were there ever any problems?

PB: Yes. There were some big problems. I think I probably missed the bulk of the problems because I was dragging from the fall of 1973 until early spring -- actually late winter -- of 1976. I think during 1974 and 1975, the local offshore lobster fleet had some awful problems with the foreigners. There were some tremendous gear losses. They had trouble communicating with the skippers of these boats. When I came back in 1976, there were still problems. The 200 Mile Limit was not in effect at that time and things were still pretty wild out there. You'd see fleets -- Russian fleets particularly -- large fleets -- fishing twelve miles off of Block Island -- just big cities at night -- just a lot of lights. If your gear was in the wrong place at the wrong time, you had some problems.

JM: What effect did that have [on you?]

PB: When we were dragging for fish, we really didn't have too much of a problem with the foreigners. Again, communication was probably a problem, but we didn't usually have too much of a problem with the foreigners at that time, directly. Now indirectly, certain areas, according to what I'd hear on the boat, on the Alliance, was that the foreigners were

catching up a lot of fish and some of the grounds were getting depleted of certain species.

JM: How did people feel about the prospect of the government getting involved in the fisheries?

PB: When that was first brought up, I think everyone was pretty happy because there was a lot of conflicts. The problem with the local draggers and the foreigners -- as time went on here, the local fleets became more interested in some of the fish that the foreigners were after such as squid, butterfish, mackerel. They looked at the foreigners now as a threat. They had tremendous amounts of horsepower in these huge boats, they had big nets, and they were catching tons and tons of fish. So the lobstermen, of course, were all for it. I think most of them were at the time because they said, "Oh, this will be great. We'll stop these gear losses and get these foreigners off our backs. We'll own out to 200 miles." The draggers saw this as a chance to get the foreigners out or at least limit them as far as tonnage of certain species go. So the majority of people, I think, were definitely for the government getting involved. However, a few voices came up during that time and said, "It's not going to be any picnic here, guys, just because the government is getting involved. Don't think all your problems are over." Some people felt they were just beginning because of the government

intervention. Licenses now were going to be required on the boats -- Federal licenses. There was talk of Limited Entry. There was talk of shutting off certain areas for certain species -- which people had never heard of before. So there was definitely a dark side to things as far as some of the people were concerned. The conservationists came in and started examining all the fisheries real carefully.

JM: How did they feel about that?

PB: By the time the government interceded and declared a 200 Mile Limit, up until that point, by far the majority of people were for it because of the problem with the foreigners coming in. And it was getting worse and worse every year. The government came in and then a whole new set of problems came to light -- such as I just mentioned with the licensing, the restricted areas, mesh sizes on the nets, federal limits. We've always had state limits on lobster and now the feds were coming in, and they also were setting a limit.

JM: Do you think the management that was set up by the 200 Mile Limit is working?

PB: I think the lobster industry today is probably the least affected by it or one of the least. We've always had to throw egggers over, throw shorts over. We have seen a slight gauge increase. But we haven't really felt any bad effects yet. I think

most of us have been for the gauge increase and the other conservation measures that they came up with, such as escape vents in the pots, marking the ends of the trawls -- because the trawls are kind of long -- get a uniform method of marking those and so on and so forth.

JM: Now getting back to when you worked in Westport, did that have anything to do with the Prelude Corporation?

PB: No it didn't.

JM: They were also in Westport, weren't they?

PB: I think the base was Westport and maybe some of the early boats were out of there. But I think a lot of the people that ran the boats were from that area and I think it was maybe the people that were based there more than anything else. I don't know if the large boats could actually get in Westport Harbor because there's a sandbar right across the mouth of the harbor. I don't think you can draw any more than seven feet of water or so and expect to get in there with any regularity. The company might have been based in Westport. A lot of the people that ran the boats might have been from Westport, but I'm not sure whether those boats fished out of New Bedford or Fall River.

JM: When you were dragging in the seventies, did many lobsters come into the nets?

PB: At times. That's a good question. The boat I

started out on, the Alliance -- the first good boat -- was built originally for dragging for lobsters. A lot of the boats in the late sixties -- throughout the sixties and early seventies it started phasing out -- used to drag for lobsters. Again, the Alliance was built with a large combination fish hold and lobster tank. It had two holds and one could be flooded for lobsters. And that was quite a large area. They had that in mind obviously, when they built the boat. I mean, they spent a lot of money just to do that, so I guess, you know, that they thought it would pay off. As time went on, the lobsters did become scarcer and scarcer, and it became more unprofitable to drag for the lobsters. Certain times of the year, still to this day, certain boats look for part of their year's gross out of dragging for lobsters. Unfortunately, it's when the lobsters are pretty vulnerable. They've just come out of a shed. The shells are real soft. I guess there's concern over how much the product is actually damaged on the bottom with the nets going over them, but I don't know if I believe there's much harm being done or not with the (dragging).

JM: Doesn't the dragging do a lot of damage to lobsters in that state when the shells are soft?

PB: Well, I think the potential is definitely there. You've got heavy gear and it's got to do some damage definitely. You know, usually when the softs would

come up, you could just let them over. But probably the best thing to do is just lay off the dragging of them. It becomes a very difficult situation because these guys have been doing it for years and years -- long before the people were there with the pots in these certain areas.

JM: How long before?

PB: Oh boy, you'd probably have to talk to some of the older guys that are dragging, but I would think long before pots were in an area, say, like off Nantucket Shoals. That's a real popular space south of Nantucket off what they call the Fingers. There never used to be pots there and there would be guys always dragging for lobsters there. Now there are quite a few pots there. So there's a little bit of a conflict going on there right now.

JM: What did you think about that situation where they were exploring for oil off the Georges Banks?

PB: I don't know how they thought they could ever have these platforms built on Georges Bank and withstand the weather that we get up here. I just couldn't imagine that. They have problems down in the Gulf of Mexico sometimes. The weather up here is so severe that these people just weren't geared for what goes on up here. They brought these people -- seismic vessels and all -- from down South that were usually geared for southern waters, southern weather, and they weren't ready for up here. There

might have been a few of the seismic vessels that were used to what goes on up here maybe because they worked up here doing different projects and they were sub-contracted out. But there's one vessel in particular that I recall back in the mid-seventies or late-seventies called the Arcadian Commander. It was an offshore supply vessel probably 200 feet long. They just boxed in the back half of it. It looked like it went up about two or three stories. It just looked like a big floating shoebox. The boat didn't look very seaworthy at all and I guess that was the case because they almost lost the boat out there during a bad storm. These people were just doing seismic work for the oil company -- seeing what's under the bottom there, trying to get an idea of what's going on -- if there was any potential places.

JM: It sounds rough.

PB: Well yes, I guess they got water in the fuel, they lost power, and that was sad. I mean, I talked to some of the people that were on that boat. I only talked to probably a handful -- and out of the handful I talked to, two of them said they'd never go to sea again. That was how close they were to losing it.

JM: How far out do you go?

PB: We go as far out as a hundred and fifty miles.

JM: Do you go to mostly the same areas all the time



or is it different at different times of year?

PB: Different times of the year we go to different areas. During the winter months, generally the lobsters are down in the deeper water. During the late summer and fall they're in much shoaler water. So we do move around quite a bit from season to season.

JM: How did you learn where to go?

PB: We started fishing down on the edge of the continental shelf. In the area I fish now, we started down there probably in 1976. We've been down there ever since, just working the bottom more and more -- going more east and west. That's where we started from with the boat I was running at the time. We just branched out from there a little bit and we started spending more and more time in the deep water. In the early stages of lobstering, it was almost a seasonal fishery offshore. The boats were smaller. A lot of the boats would fish from, oh, late spring until Christmas and just wrap it up for a few months. We had a boat that was decent sized, and we fished the winter. We wanted to keep fishing right through the winter. So actually, that first winter I had the boat was the first winter that the Iron Horse to my knowledge did fish right straight through in the deep water. I think they had other years where they'd work late -- until January and February -- but they usually took some

time off there.

JM: Was that a pretty new thing?

PB: No. There was people out of Point Judith, I believe, and other places that were on the edge of the continental shelf lobstering year round at that time. However, where we started fishing we were pretty much by ourselves at that time with the gear. We didn't see any other gear until probably the end of April or the first of May. You wouldn't see any gear. As the years went on, you'd see more and more gear down there earlier and earlier. Now we see other boats down there year round just like we are.

JM: How long are your trips?

PB: The trips vary. They range from four to six days. I guess we could average it out at five days, which would be four days fishing and one day steaming -- twelve hours out, twelve hours back. Usually it's more than twelve hours. If we went to the furthest gear out, it's probably about sixteen hours, and the closest gear is probably thirteen hours if everything is right.

JM: What's the cycle of the work once you get out there?

PB: I like to get there maybe an hour or two before daylight or at daylight, so we plan according to when we leave Newport. Sometimes we'll leave early in the morning, depending on where the gear is, but generally noontime, two o'clock in the afternoon. We run watches on the way out. There's five crew on

my boat and every man is capable of manning the wheel. They watch the wheel for a period of an hour and a half. We have a radar going during that time. He has to make sure the boat stays on course. We do have an autopilot, so that's a pretty easy thing to do. Basically, it's just watching for other boats and watching the instruments, making sure the engines are running okay.

JM: Now once you get out there, what happens?

PB: Once we get out, we start right in. When we first started fishing, the trend was much fewer pots than there are today. When I first took over the boat, 441 pots is what we had, which was low, but 800 at that time was probably considered a full string. A thousand pots at that time was just about unheard of, but close -- somewhere right in there. Eight hundred to a thousand was a full string for a big boat. Some of the smaller boats would only fish five or six hundred pots. Lobsters were much more plentiful. Guys were only going out at that time for a couple of days. So, today, generally a rule of thumb for an offshore boat is probably -- a boat this size would be around two thousand. Some boats are fishing up to three thousand pots.

JM: Did you say how big the Hedy-Brenna is?

PB: The Hedy-Brenna is seventy-seven feet long.

JM: So you're basically going 24 hours a day while you're out there?

PB: No. I like to work maybe an eighteen or nineteen hour day, so that gives us five hours -- usually somewhere between five and six hours to turn in. During that period we have to run a watch schedule also, so someone is watching for other boats and watching the engines and so on and so forth.

JM: You don't get much sleep then.

PB: No.

JM: Do you get any sleep?

PB: Yes. I like to get at least four hours a night. That seems to take care of things.

JM: How about everyone else?

PB: The same thing for them. I used to mix my watch up with them. Sometimes, someone's got to have that third watch. You might lie down for two hours -- which is tough after working for that length of time -- get up for an hour and then have to go to sleep for two hours and get up again. I take my watch now at the end of the watch schedule, so I can make sure we're where we want to be in the morning. And that way, too, I feel tip top. If I have four hours in a row, I feel a lot better.

JM: What are the different jobs?

PB: Generally we go with -- obviously I'm running the hauler controls, and generally I run with three men on deck plus a bander. The three guys on deck, it's their job to actually work the pots. They work in a three station rotation, where the bander does the

same thing all the time. He'll just band the lobsters and help them bait, help them repair pots as they come up -- if a pot needs work or whatever.

JM: Who cooks?

PB: The bander.

JM: Have you had the same crew for a long time?

PB: The turnover in this business -- especially if you keep on a tight schedule like we do -- if a man's with me for a year, that's a long time -- a year and a half.

JM: Are you able to get good people?

PB: Not particularly, no.

JM: I've heard there's considerable concern in the industry about people who are doing drugs or hungover. Have you had any trouble with that?

PB: Yes. I think most boats probably have -- not doing the drugs or drinking out there. I think we'd be able to pick that right up. If someone's on the beach, they're only on the beach for two or three days sometimes and they're right back offshore again. If someone is heavy into partying at night, you can see it, and it does hurt their performance. There are some boats out there that do allow the smoking of pot and I don't know what else to go on. We don't allow any alcohol or any type of drug on the boat. It's hard enough working for those three, four, five days being straight without having any outside . . .

JM: I would think so.

PB: It's too bad, you know, because you know what goes on out there. I mean, I hear the stories of it and I just shake my head. I don't see how these guys -- I always tell the guys, when they're on watch, if a boat gets -- any boat -- the big boats, they get me up at three miles when they're on watch, but for smaller boats two miles. Because the guy might be sleeping or you just don't know.

JM: Is there much problem with people falling asleep when it's their watch?

PB: It's happened.

JM: It happened to you?

PB: Have I fallen asleep?

JM: Yes.

PB: No. I guess it's my boat and I get a lot of --

JM: I'm surprised you sleep at all with that responsibility.

[end of side one, tape one]

PB: Out there I don't have any trouble keeping awake at all. I'm a pretty light sleeper. I've had problems with some guys though. I had to let one guy go one time because he slept. I caught him. There's some boats that everyone turns in on. They leave the lights on, and everyone goes to sleep. But, you know, I've had some close calls with tankers when we've been awake on trawls with them just not seeing us or whatever. So you can't really depend on people

to see you.

JM: How close?

PB: We were on trawls a couple of times. This has happened twice. One time we had to cut the trawl and the other time we had to let the high flyer go and steam away from the point where we were. One time it was an LNG -- a large LNG ship like the one at Derecktor's (shipyard). Another time it was a container ship. Both were moving at a good rate of speed. They wouldn't answer me on the radio and I had to steam away from the spot where we were. Both times they went right over the spot.

JM: Do you think they didn't see you?

PB: Yes. One boat came back to me after he'd already gone by and just admitted he didn't see me. I reported it to the Coast Guard. It's hard for them to do much about it. They can file a formal complaint to the shipping company, but that's it.

JM: What about storms out there?

PB: This is definitely a real tough area to fish. When you're going out, the further east you go, the worse it gets, especially during the winter months. The pattern is in the wintertime -- a lot of the storms come off of Hatteras to the Middle Atlantic States. Then once they get offshore, there's a lot of moisture around, there's some warm water, and most of the time they intensify quite rapidly. The track is generally pretty close to us. We really have to

be on the ball for storms. We've gotten caught in a few pretty good ones.

JM: Do people talk about being afraid of the danger very much?

PB: Not especially. I think we're aware of what's going on there and we're trying to be as careful as we can about things. I don't like it when it's blowing eighty miles an hour. I think anyone that tells you they did would be crazy. It worries me. I know I maintain my boat real well and I know my boat real well, but anything can happen. Things usually happen when it's bad out. Things don't seem to happen on the nice days.

JM: Does it take a special kind of person to want to go out and do that under those conditions?

PB: Probably. It's definitely a way of life that's not for everyone. I've been doing it for quite awhile now and it's just the way things are. If I'm taking out a new guy or something -- I always take people for what I call a ride first -- just come out and see what things are like, because a lot of people get seasick or they don't have any idea how hard you work out there, so they don't want to put in the long hours.

JM: How do you work out paying people?

PB: The people get paid on a share basis -- percentage after expenses.

JM: Have you noticed during the years you've been



lobstering out there much change in the size of the lobsters you're getting or the quantity?

PB: Yes. The lobsters have gotten smaller. There's no doubt about it. You know, I can show you trip sheets and percentage of selects or large lobsters has dropped right down. The effort has gotten greater. I think we're pretty much maxed out now where we are, but the effort has gotten greater each year. The stocks really haven't changed -- gross stocks -- I'm talking money -- probably since my first full year with the boat. It's probably five percent either way.

JM: How about the amount of money someone who is on a crew can make?

PB: Probably, if anything, I would think that that may have gone down over the years. I think things are back more normal now. I think in years when we first started -- the seventies through the early eighties -- there was a lot of money for crewmen to make in this industry with not a lot of work put in. Now they're working harder -- more shore work -- because there's more gear to maintain. They're definitely not making any more money that I see. I know I'm not. I think they were making a good year's pay when the money was worth something.

JM: Do you think you could get better crew people than now?

PB: Probably. That's what attracted me to the lobster

industry. It sounded exciting -- not only the idea of running a boat, but I was going out for a week at a time, while some friends of mine were going out for two or three days and they were making as much or more money than I was in a year. This was back in 1976 -- probably as much as, oh boy, half again or forty percent more and having a month off in the wintertime. It sounded pretty good to me.

JM: Where do you get your crew? Do they come to you?

PB: Yes. We've never put an ad in for crew on a boat in the paper. We've thought about it. Certain years it's harder than other years. Generally there's a pool of people in Newport, or there has been for the last several years. Unfortunately, it's the same old pool. Some of them are real good and some of them aren't. You seem to be stuck a little bit. There doesn't seem to be a lot of new people coming in. There always seems to be a couple. I'm always looking for someone new -- just a fresh face.

JM: Besides all your lobster pots and your crew and all of that, someone made the statement to me that a boat is a hole you throw money into. What are your other big expenses running a lobster boat?

PB: Things have changed again quite a bit -- for insurance. Fuel hasn't been too bad. Actually, you know, it's been reasonable the last year or so, but insurance has been a killer because you have to have so much P and I.

JM: That's Personal and Indemnity.

PB: Yes. Probably for good coverage for a boat my size, someone's going to be paying in the low thirties -- at least \$30,000 a year to be properly covered and that's a lot of money. That's gotten a little out of hand, because everyone's ready to sue today.

JM: Have you ever had to use that?

PB: Once. Since I've been running a boat or since I've had my own boats -- just once.

JM: Now how about technological equipment? You mentioned your radar and --

PB: Well, we have good depth recorders. A depth recorder, the way we fish, is probably one of the most important besides a Loran. The depth recorder is probably one of the most important tools on a boat today, besides, obviously, everyone knowing where you are.

JM: How do you keep the lobsters?

PB: Circulating sea water -- no refrigeration -- large four inch pump that pumps water into this flooded compartment, which is flooded right up to the deck of the boat from the bottom to the top so there's no free surface effect, which would be a sloshing from back to back. If you could picture the boat, if that tank was half full and the boat rolled from one side to the other, if you can picture that wave -- everything just kind of sloshing back and forth in there. But if you can picture with this level of

water filled up -- actually it's slightly above the deck -- it's probably a foot and a half above the deck into a combing, then there's no what they call free surface area for that water to roll with. So it doesn't hurt the lobsters. All compartments with lobsters in them have to be flooded completely.

JM: Do you lose many?

PB: Certain times of the year, in warm water. We're pretty careful about it. Certain times of the year we pick through the tanks before we come in and make sure we get rid of all the weaks. When the lobsters come up, you have to make sure you don't take the weaks and put them in the tank with good lobsters.

JM: What are the weaks?

PB: Just not healthy lobsters. They might have a new shell. The lobster might be a hard lobster, but he might be real weak and he just isn't going to make it at certain times of the year.

JM: So you don't want to take up the space with him?

PB: Right.

JM: Who do you sell most of your lobsters to?

PB: Aquidneck Lobster.

JM: Fatulli.

PB: Right.

JM: Is there anyone else for people to sell to?

PB: Oh yes. Lobsters are real easy to sell. There's no problem there at all. You can contact a number of people, but I've been doing business with Ronnie.

since 1976 and he's been real good. You know, I think his price is as good as anyone.

JM: Everyone seems to think he's so fair that I've spoken with.

PB: Yes, that's right.

JM: So you bring the lobsters in and you get them off the boat. How long do you wait before you turn around and go back out again?

PB: A couple of days. If you're in on a Monday, if the fishing was real good and things look like they're moving, you'd probably try to get out Wednesday. If not, the latest you'd go would be Thursday.

JM: And what do you do while you're home?

PB: Work on the gear.

JM: What are the best months for you out there?

PB: The fall months -- starting in August -- September, October, November.

JM: Is the winter the worst?

PB: Generally. The fishing slacks off. The prices -- you're just not catching the poundage to make up for the price. But this year has been exceptional because of the high price. Ex-vessel price the other day for selects was \$6.40 which is unheard of.

JM: We were talking a little bit about conservation. Have you ever been boarded?

PB: Yes.

JM: You have. You've been checked. When we were talking about the depletion -- I wonder what you

think about Limited Entry.

PB: Well, I think it's probably something that's going to have to be looked at. I'm not sure how fair it is. I mean, it's a great thing to say if you're already in the industry and you have your boat and you have your license. But if you're trying to get into the industry, I think it makes it a little tougher. But unfortunately, sometimes life isn't fair, so that's the way it goes.

JM: It sure isn't. When you started in this business here in Newport, where did most of the people dock their boats?

PB: Probably just scattered throughout the harbor. When we first started, there wasn't that many offshore lobster boats here and they were just kind of scattered around.

JM: How many were there?

PB: When I was here in 1976, there was probably a handful. Some forty-five foot boats then were offshore boats. Fifty foot boats were going offshore.

JM: About how many would you say there are now?

PB: Probably twelve or so.

JM: Where do you keep your boat?

PB: In back of Newport Oil Company.

JM: Where are the other offshore lobster boats?

PB: Scattered throughout the harbor, but pretty much everyone's right at the State Pier in Newport.

JM: Do you think the State is ever going to come across and make that what it should be?

PB: I think eventually. It's just tough getting the money out of the State. For some odd reason they do an awful lot of expansion work at Point Judith because there's so many boats there. Over here they seem to do very little. The place is very poorly run. It's very poorly managed. They have rules over there. Even though there's a person there six days a week, to my knowledge, I don't see where much gets accomplished. For instance, there's supposed to be a loading and unloading spot over there and at present there's a boat there all the time -- tied there permanently unless he's out fishing. There's a ton of bait barrels around. Besides the fact that they haven't been doing anything to the docks, the place is not managed the way it should be. I guess there's two different problems there. But I'm optimistic the State's going to come through. They have to do something, because they've got a huge lot over there and a lot of water frontage, but they've got to put in some more piers.

JM: Do you think the people who dock over there have gotten together as much as they should or could?

PB: I think so. I'm not real involved in what's going on as far as the fishermen's group goes. I am a member, I do support it, I do contribute.

JM: Which fishermen's group is that?

PB: Fishermen in Newport. It's a group of fishermen down at the State Pier that try to get together. They're the ones that set up the particular rules for keeping the place clean and where people will dock and just rules to live by down there.

JM: Well, it's hard to get involved in things like that when you're out on your boat all the time.

PB: Yes. Like I say, I help and I contribute to the funds. They had a clambake at the Tall Ships last year. I helped out at that.

JM: How is tourism affecting you, or does it have any effect at all?

PB: It makes it a little tougher to get around. I don't think it really makes much difference for me on the lobster price at all. Most of the lobsters, to my knowledge, are going out of town. We deal in volume. Not to say the tourists are to blame, because it's probably more the people that live on the Island, but it's tough to compete down here for dock space. As you know, we almost didn't have a place to dock if that State Pier wasn't purchased by a group of fishermen and then sold back to the State. I don't know. I suppose it's just going to keep getting worse as far as the crowds and the dockage and things go, but right now the dockage situation seems to be under control.

JM: Is there much room for new people to get into the business?



PB: With regards to --

JM: Newport and docking.

PB: I think it's tough, because again the way they're set up down at the State Pier -- they don't want boats to raft, or they'd prefer if they didn't unless they were both owned by the same person. I think there's a waiting list down there for boats now.

JM: If you can't get in there, where do you go?

PB: You'd have to dock at the place you take out your catch, which would be Ronnie's or if you're fishing, you'd have to dock at Parascandolos. And those places are pretty crowded.

JM: You're involved in an occupation that's pretty old. How do you feel about that?

PB: I guess the only time I really think much about that is I live out in Middletown. I have some pots in my field next to me. About five years ago I bought the house out there and figured I'd get out into the country and just -- I needed a place to work on the gear. I picked up a -- as a matter of fact, it used to be the old Middletown Fire Station. I did a lot of work on the buildings and tidied the place up. A group of people went around -- I don't know if it was just one person or more than that, but I get along with most of my neighbors okay. I guess a petition -- word has it was passed -- where some people didn't like the pots I had in my yard next to

my house. Everything was stacked up as neat as could be, but nevertheless, it went before the Town Solicitor in Middletown. He ruled that according to the zoning laws, you can operate a business out of your residence and unless I caused the public nuisance or some other problem, then I was entitled to keep those pots there. I got to thinking then about how old fishing is and how long it's been around. You need a place to keep your nets and to keep your pots. There's no smell to pots at all. How they could ever step in and tell me, "Hey, you can't keep those pots there." We're on an island. I would think fishing, especially on an island, you'd never encounter anything like that. To me it was just absurd and I still can't see it to this day. I would have fought that to the Supreme Court if they ever told me I had to -- I asked the Town Solicitor, "What would have happened if you ruled the other way?" He says, "You'd have to get them out of there."

JM: Oh, that's terrible.

PB: Like I say, it just seems totally absurd. I have sixteen acres of land. It's not like I'm keeping them right in my front yard or right next to someone else's house. I would think the closest they are to someone's house might be 200 feet, maybe further.

JM: Do you think people who live here have much awareness of how much the industry has brought to

the Island? Or do you think they'd all rather see yachts?

PB: I think some people do.

JM: You seem to have very little free time. How is that for a family?

PB: I think it's tough. I don't know if the families break up anymore than they ordinarily would in any other profession. I've never seen any statistics on it. Oh, in some cases it could probably make things better or stronger because, you know -- especially if you're going out fishing, you depend on your wife to help out with the bookkeeping and making calls here and calls there. She actually becomes, in a lot of cases, very involved in what's going on with the business.

JM: Is that unusual -- to get that much support at home?

PB: I don't think so. I'm not sure what the norm is, but I guess it's what you expect. I would expect that's the way for me that things would be. I'm not sure what I would do if my wife told me to do it myself or something else, you know. But she has a part in it too, so it works out.

JM: So this is her business too.

PB: Right, I guess as my spouse.

JM: And being a mother.

PB: Right.

JM: Your children, are they old enough to be involved in any way?

PB: No. One is going to be five in June, and then my daughter's seven.

JM: And your five year old is a boy?

PB: Right.

JM: How would you feel if he followed in your footsteps?

PB: That would be fine. Whatever he wants to do is fine with me.

JM: What did your family think when you got into this?

PB: When I first mentioned it, which was in 1968 when I enrolled at the University of Rhode Island, I was in geology. I had in mind to go into oceanography. My sister, at that time started going out with a guy who was in the Fisheries Program at URI. I mentioned that to my folks and they didn't think that was such a good idea. Why should I go to school to be a fishermen because fishermen are drunks and bums and everything else in their eyes. They pretty much squashed that. Then I don't know if I revolted a little bit . . . That's how I ended up going out to Hawaii. I used to do a lot of surfing. I figured I better stay in school, and I transferred from geology to accounting. I liked geology, but I didn't like all the reading and some of the pre-requisite courses that I had to take.

JM: I bet it's come in handy though.

PB: Which one?

JM: The geology and the accounting.

PB: Yes. I was always pretty good with figures. I

wasn't really sure what I wanted to do. I thought I was. Then I figured it wasn't accounting I was interested in. My folks realized -- by that time I had gone through three years of school. I was getting closer to a degree, but for what I don't know. So they probably figured, well, they'll back off a little bit, and they were supportive once I started. I think when they saw how well I was doing at that time -- when I got out, my brother had gone through Georgia Tech and done this and done that. I think sometimes parents -- maybe at that time more so than today -- judged how well the kids were doing probably by what their annual salary was. They saw I was happy at what I was doing and also making more than my brother was, who just went through the Aerospace Program. I think that helped. They backed off a little bit and it helped them see that maybe this wasn't such a bad thing to be in. They met the guy I worked for. He was a pretty educated guy -- the guy I ended up with on the Alliance. So not everyone was how they pictured them in that industry.

JM: Is that a new thing in the fishing industry, that people have school education?

PB: I think there's a lot of them around with degrees. It probably doesn't mean too much other than the fact that they have them. I'm not sure it means much more than that.

JM: What do you like the best about what you're doing?

PB: I never used to worry about the money end of things. I just wanted to be the best I could be at it. I didn't care if I got paid in peanuts for the lobsters. I just wanted to have more lobsters at the end of the year than anyone else. I guess it's just like an athlete or whatever, just wanting to be the best. I had a strong drive to do that. It's the same thing I tell the kids. I don't care what they do, as long as they try to be the best at what they can do.

JM: What's the worst part of it for you?

PB: Oh . . . Sometimes I don't have much patience dealing with the help. I suppose if I was going to pick one part of it that really gets to me sometimes, it's dealing with the help -- the lateness to work in the morning and hearing the excuses. After all these years, you get tired of it. And the help has gone downhill -- the quality. There's no doubt in my mind about it. There's still good guys around, but we used to get guys that were -- like I say, it just seemed to be a little different.

JM: What do you see in the future for yourself as far as this goes?

PB: I think I'll just continue along here. This year we got into some longlining. We converted the boat over in February to do a little longlining to boost

the winter trips up. Sometimes in the wintertime we're already on the grounds close to where we can get the tilefish. We thought maybe we'd -- instead of having a mediocre lobster trip, try to change that into a good trip with the tilefish. I think that's going to work out real well.

JM: Are you longlining for anything else?

PB: No, not right now. That will help things out.

Unless the price changes dramatically in the course of the year, I don't think the money stocks are going to change much. I think that will continue. We're looking at things going along pretty much as they have been. Unless -- You have a lot of gear, and you have to keep on top of the boat. You can't let things go. You can't let things slide. There's a lot of maintenance all the way around.

JM: Do you ever take a day off or very often have any (time off)?

PB: Yes. I took yesterday off. But I didn't used to. I don't think I took a trip off for a long time -- I mean, sometimes for years, just keep going . . . Sometimes we'd be in for a few days because of weather and this and that. But, you know, I was always gone.

JM: When you say take a trip off, does someone else run the boat?

PB: That's right. My boat's out right now.

JM: You have someone else who (runs the boat)?

PB: Right. Right now I'm at the point, in the last couple of years, I've been taking it easier. He takes three trips and I take one. That makes it nice.

JM: Would you possibly have another boat?

PB: I started one in the plans. I finished the plans, sent out the bids and then I got cold feet. That was a couple years ago. I still think about it.

JM: How are the banks? Has that changed much as far as interest in the fishing industry? It seems like around the 200 Mile Limit there was a strong interest.

PB: It's the same old thing. From what I've seen, it depends on who you know in the banks.

[end of side two, tape one]

When I was going for my first boat, I figured I'd gone to school for this; I'd fished for five years, and I owned a house. I had money in the bank. I wasn't asking for a lot of money, but I didn't really know any bankers. I went to the bank and filled out my application and it sat on the man's desk for a month. He didn't even look at it. I couldn't understand that. I had trouble getting the bank to move. I met someone who knew that someone in that bank -- actually knew the man that was supposed to look at it -- got him to look at it. I ended up paying the guy that got the man to look at it. They looked at the application and they gave me



the okay. So that happened once and I figured -- I had that boat, was successful with it. In the meantime, I was still running this other boat and I went for my next loan. It was a lot of money, this time around. But again, I had something to show for it and the same exact thing happened. I had to pay someone to get the bank to move on the loan.

JM: Was that a local bank?

PB: It's the largest bank in the State. So I don't have to say who it is, I guess.

JM: No, you don't have to.

PB: It's just a little mind-boggling how things like that happen. I don't think it matters much about what the bank thinks. I think if someone knows that someone's got a good line of B. S., I think they can talk the bank into just about anything they want. I'm still convinced of that to this day. If you know the right people. I'm a little bitter about it too. Fortunately, I think I finally got across to the bank. I wouldn't run into that problem now because I do business with two different groups and have a good friend in a third group in Boston. I'd probably be in much better shape, but it still bothers me that I had to go through that.

JM: Yes, because you shouldn't have to.

PB: There's still people getting big loans today that I'm sure the banks are going to lose. It's nothing different than they've been doing all the way along.

They take their chances.

JM: What do you think is the future of the industry right here?

PB: Lobstering?

JM: Yes, and the fishing industry in general.

PB: Lobstering is a selective fishery. You're throwing (back) the shorts, eggers. They're talking about raising the gauge again and I think that's going to stay pretty constant. I think one of the problems they're going to have to address shortly is a limited entry type of mode. There's only so much (room). It's fixed gear. In other words, my gear -- my twenty trawls, forty trawls or whatever I have is out on that bottom right now taking up space and there's only so much bottom out there. It's getting tight.

JM: There are only so many lobsters too.

PB: Right. The pie is only going to get split up so many times before someone does something about that. On the dragging, I don't know what's going to happen with that. They've had an excellent year this year. They did do some things with the tax reform that I think helped. They did away with investment credits. They should do away with the Capital Construction Fund. They should do away with a lot of the incentives to build boats and make it a little tougher. I think that would help get the investor groups out of it.

JM: How do you get your point of view across to people who are making decisions?

PB: I belong to the Atlantic Offshore Fishermen's Association. We pay our dues every year. If you have something to say, you just go see one of the guys down there. I'm on the Board of Directors for that. Usually I just talk to a man named Dick Allen. Have you talked to Dick?

JM: Yes.

PB: Dick's quite a guy.

JM: They listen to you and will fight for what you want?

PB: Yes.

JM: Within in reason.

PB: Yes.

JM: It's pretty complicated.

PB: Yes, it is a complicated process to get things done, but it seems to work. At least, I feel it does. I feel it's a worthwhile group to support.

JM: What has the biggest change been in the lobster industry since you started in it?

PB: Probably the number of boats, the amount of people doing it.

JM: I've run through all of my questions. What would you like to add?

PB: Not much. I think that's just about (it).

JM: I hope we've covered it. I want to thank you very much. I'm glad I had a chance to talk with you.

PB: It was very nice meeting you.

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39

JM: Thank you.

End of Interview.