

**Interview with Amber Jeskey [AJ]**  
**Occupation: Wharf Manager**  
**Port Community: Cushing, Maine**  
**Interviewer: Lisa Colburn [LC] and Amy Grover [AG]**  
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**Logger/Transcriber: Amy Wilson Sanger**

Interview Transcription

[AG]: Ok, it's on.

[LC]: XX could you give us your full name and address and phone number whatever that might be.

[AJ]: Amber Jeskey Scheurer and it's 410 Hawthorne Point Road; Cushing, Maine 04563.

[LC]: And when, do you know what your address will be when you leave here?

[AJ]: No. I'll be homeless, but Amy will know.

[LC]: Ok. Great. Can you tell me, when did you begin to get involved in either lobstering or fishing, or you know, where did your fish education begin?

[AJ]: I moved to Monhegan Island when I was seventeen, right after I graduated high school. Actually hated it and then after a few months absolutely loved it. And knew I wanted to fish out there eventually, but I went through college first, just summered out there and did college in the winter. And then, once I graduated from college I worked for a year on the mainland, absolutely hated it, and then moved out to Monhegan fulltime and began sterning. So, I just loved the way of life.

[LC]: And how did you come to be connected with the wharf here in Cushing?

[AJ]: My captain and I, this is where we used to sell our lobsters. So, at that point Sam actually had a smack that would run out, a big boat that buys lobsters is a smack, that ran out to Monhegan usually once a week, sometimes twice a week depending on the need. And he would sell them out there, but once the guys started selling to other people he stopped running the smack out there but my captain and I still would come in here and sell, because he's actually very fair as a dealer.

[LC]: How long does it take to make a trip from...?

[AJ]: From there to Monhegan?

[LC]: Yeah.

[AJ]: Depending on the boat it can range anywhere from 45 minutes to an hour and 45 minutes. I've done both.

[AG]: Yeah. Slow boats and fast boats.

[LC]: And what's the, can you describe... is your boat green?

[AJ]: No.

[LC]: Ok, can you describe the rhythm of your day as the wharf manager? What are the key things you're responsible for, and what's the rhythm... how they play out?

[AJ]: Well, I get up and I'm at the wharf by 5 o'clock am, 6 days a week. Without exception. I try to get there a few minutes before, because I have to start shoveling out the bait. Cause when the guys start showing up, about five or five-twenty, they show up one right after the other so I'm responsible for baiting up all the guys.

[LC]: What does it mean, "to bait up"?

[AJ]: Shoveling a LOT of herring. Most of the guys...

[LC]: Into their hole? Their bait hole...?

[AJ]: No, into the plastic trays that are on wharf down there and there're three trays per barrel, and a barrel holds five bushel. It's sort of a breakdown as to bushels per trays and I have to lower them down on the winch and get them baited up with the herring, which I do, and then they have two different kinds of top-bait they use, but they have to deal with their top-bait. One person couldn't possibly handle it. Cause on any given day I use between five barrels and ten barrels. And I would use more in a day before, and that's, you know, fifteen to thirty trays of shoveling just for one person.

[LC]: So, five to ten barrels of bait is used up per day.

[AJ]: Yeah. And we only have a small fleet. We only have about ten, give or take. We have a couple that don't have moorings here but fish out of this wharf. They live out on the water, on moorings at their homes. But they come here to bait up and they sell here and everything. So, they're responsible for, I order all their bait and offload all their bait but during the morning, the captain or the sternmen are responsible for shoveling their own flat fish or pogies. Cause I couldn't possibly do it. One person could never do that. 'Cause it's like, within an hour and a half you have to get them all out. My last person who shows up is Percy. And he's always here at 7am. He's not here at seven he's not going out. He's very punctual. So he's always my last person going out, and then over the course of the day I have my bait truck come, so I have to off-load the bait. I get bait from a few different suppliers, so. Its a few different trucks. And I...

[LC]: And how much...

[AJ]: do the trucks and I have to give the guys fuel...

[LC]: And is that on a daily basis you're doing these things?

[AJ]: Yeah. Everyday. And then like, the crab truck just came to pick up crabs, 'cause some of the guys happen to fish and they get tons of crabs, so we have one supplier that takes crabs. He'll come if we have crabs, and then there's one supplier that always wants our hard shells, so he'll come, and then the soft shell, so they'll come; its numerous people. So there are always trucks going in and out of here. And I'm loading. And then at the end of the day when the guys start coming in, I have to weigh up their lobsters and put them all, ten in a, ten per string. Float them in the harbor and get ready to off-load them onto the next truck that comes along. And do all the paper work, as well.

[LC]: And are they always Sam's trucks?

[AJ]: No, not always. Some, it depends. If the people happen to have a truck in this area and they'll come and pick them up and Sam might drop the price a little but. Otherwise, Sam has to pay a driver to be on the road driving them, so. Or sometimes one of our suppliers in Boothbay, his truck breaks down regularly. So we usually have to bring them to him. So, it depends, but Sam has his own fleet of trucks. And it's his trucks that go to Canada to the processors. We just put three hundred and seven crates, which three hundred and seven by 90 lbs per crate, is a lot. And they just all went to Canada last night.

[LC]: From here? They can get trucks that size down here?

[AJ]: We use two of Sam's smaller trucks. We back them down here, load them onto pallets, then they go up and use the pallet jack to get them to the tractor trailer, then they come back down, get another load. Fill that truck, go back up and we did three loads last night, to fill that one tractor-trailer.

[LC]: So, on a normal day when your day begins at 5, when does it end?

[AJ]: Today, I could be done in half an hour and that never happens. This time of year usually it's 6 o'clock. And I have on Tuesdays and Friday nights my flatfish truck comes. And she's coming up from Cape Porpoise. Which is down at the southern part of the state and sometimes she delivers at 8 o'clock or 9 o'clock at night. So, on those two nights I'm here until whenever she gets here. Yesterday she showed up at 4:30 and that's never happened. But last summer she showed up at nine, sometimes, so, it potentially can be from 5am to 9pm.

[LC]: And how many summers have you been doing this?

[AJ]: This, I've been here doing the wharf managing job since January. But the past two summers I've also worked for Sam grading lobsters in the summer when I wasn't teaching. Cause sometimes there are, like, a lot of restaurants in the, you know, Boston area that will do these promotions. Like, Red Lobster does these promotions all the time like, "Three lobsters for 20 bucks!" And they're like little one-pound lobsters that are just legal, you know, like the smallest legal lobsters. And I grade them and decide, you know, "Oh, this isn't the right size. This isn't the right size. "Or shell hardness. Or the shedders that are starting to get really hard. And the restaurants will pay more for those, because they're of better quality and they'll become hard shells quicker. So I was doing that for two years, before...

[LC]: Where do you do that?

[AJ]: Right down there on the floats.

[LC]: Oh, Ok. So right down here.

[AJ]: Yeah. So, I'd be down the floats all day hauling the crates up over the side and picking them up and grading the lobsters. So, I liked that better than this.

[LC]: Yeah?

[AJ]: There's no paperwork involved in that work.

[LC]: So paperwork is also part of this?

[AJ]: Slips for each and every one of the fishermen, everyday. For their bait, their fuel and their lobsters, and also for everyone who drops lobsters off or comes and picks them up. Cause Sam buys, obviously, all these lobsters from our fleet. And then next door at John's Wharf is where

his father is. We buy all those lobsters as well. Even before Sam bought the wharf we did. And then there's a, two wharves over in Friendship that we buy lobsters from as well. And sometimes we have to go to Friendship and load them in the truck and bring them here and put them back in the water until the next truck comes, then off-load them and put them in the truck.

[LC]: Wow.

[AJ]: So, there's a lot of handling.

[LC]: Now, are you going to continue to do this work? Do you think? I mean, do you have any plans to...

[AJ]: I just got hired in a full year-round position through the state. Teaching year round, so I won't be able to anymore. Otherwise, I mean, it's a perfect summer job, because that's what our busy time is, for Sam. So normally there's another person, so I probably won't, unless I absolutely despise this new job I have, this is a fallback. But I prefer sterner to this. I'd rather be on the water.

[LC]: Ok, can I ask, how much does somebody make being a wharf manager?

[AJ]: Not enough.

[LC]: Just to put it into perspective...

[AJ]: In the winter time I'm 500 a week before taxes, and I get free rent and electricity here. Which is not necessarily a good benefit cause then you're here 27-seven. And tourists can knock on your door at 7 o'clock at night; "Can I buy lobsters?" and I go down. And in the busy season, from July 1<sup>st</sup> until December 31<sup>st</sup> it's 800 a week plus free rent, but no benefits. And you are working an incredible workweek. You know, six days a week. From 5am-5pm, minimum. So.

[LC]: And does that, you're a school teacher now, during the rest of the year. What percentage of your income comes from this?

[AJ]: Depends on the year, because a couple, two, years ago I made a lot more here than I did last year. This year, of course, I'll be making more 'cause I've been here since January 1<sup>st</sup> full-time, on leave from school. So this year, the bulk of it it's gonna come from it. Cause I'm only going to have, what, four months teaching before this fiscal year ends.

[LC]: Yeah.

[AJ]: So this year, probably 70 percent, but in years past it varies from 10 percent to 20 percent.

[LC]: Ok. So it was supplemental?

[AJ]: Yeah.

[LC]: As opposed to primary.

[AJ]: Yeah. And now it's primary. But it won't be for much longer.

[LC]: Ok. Well that's, that kind of nails the question that I have in my mind. Is there anything in particular you can think of that would be useful for somebody outside of the industry to understand about your job?

[AJ]: I'm not sure. It requires a lot more hours than anybody has any idea about, is all I know.

[LC]: Yeah.

[AJ]: And there's a lot of handling with lobsters.

[LC]: And you're servicing just ten boats.

[AJ]: Yeah.

[LC]: Plus all, and the lobsters that these ten boats...

[AJ]: Bring in.

[LC]: Bring in.

[AJ]: It's a small percent of what Sam's seafood deals in because of the other wharves. Like we have, you know, ten, plus or minus 'cause I've got, you know, those other guys from their own private wharves that come here. And there's probably a fleet of twenty next door. And Hatchet Cove has another twenty lobstermen, and Friendship has another fifteen or so. And those are all wharves that we buy from. So what I actually buy is such a small, is maybe twenty percent of what we handle.

[LC]: But that twenty percent, for you, means the day begins at five and it usually ends at six.

[AJ]: Yeah.

[LC]: Six days a week.

[AJ]: Yeah. And like, last night I didn't get out 'til, it was after six. And we were loading the tractor-trailer. And I had boats coming in while we were loading it, so it's a lot of multi-tasking.

[LC]: Yeah.

[AJ]: But this should be a two-person operation. To make it, you know, so people can actually breathe during the day. I've never had a day that's slow. Since February. So, you're seeing a very bizarrely slow day. I never get to sit at 3 o'clock in the afternoon and do nothing but talk to people.

[LC]: So, once your last boat has come in, then...

[AJ]: Then I, I...

[LC]: ...you can...

[AJ]: Yeah.

[LC]: Check out.

[AJ]: Unless we're loading a truck. And I'm not always told. Sometimes they just appear.

[LC]: So, you could be in the middle of a lobster supper and dripping butter...

[AJ]: And I go down, I've walked down there in the morning with my cereal bowl cause I had, all my guys had gone out and I eat breakfast after that or I would never get my day started. And somebody came down at 7:20 and wanted lobsters. And I'm like, I'm eating my cereal on the wharf because I wasn't going to let it go soggy. But the expectation is that as someone hits that wharf, boom-boom-boom I'm down there. No matter what I'm doing. So. And they have more employees next door.

[LC]: Now, is that a house as well?

[AJ]: I'm not sure. I don't know what goes on at that wharf. I've never been over there. I know that John has a house over there, but it's not connected physically, to the wharf. I think its right beside it.

[AG]: Does he live there?

[AJ]: Yeah. And so I've never been over to that wharf. It's falling into the ocean, so it's very unsafe. But as you know, he's slowly going to build, I guess. So, it's, it's an interesting job. Physically, it's demanding, which I like. That's the part of it that I like. But the, sometimes like today, I'm just waiting.

[LC]: Yeah.

[AJ]: For one boat. And there's a lot of waiting involved, if it's a slow day.

[LC]: Yeah.

[AJ]: I'd rather be busy all day. I love the physical aspect of it.

[LC]: What do you do if you need to go do something?

[AJ]: I don't do it. I haven't registered my vehicle yet, 'cause I haven't had a day off in August. Except for Sunday. So it doesn't get done. That's the expectation, is that I'm here all the time. So.

[LC]: And the previous wharf manager? How long did they last?

[AJ]: A year. And she was a nut case by the end, by the middle of it. And the one before her was a drug addict. So, he actually did really well in this job because he was fine sitting here waiting. He never had anyplace else to go. He was so, he got fired, obviously, as soon as everything went down and we all found out about him. But, before that, he seemed to be a good fit in this job.

[LC]: Yeah.

[AJ]: But.

[LC]: Waiting didn't bother him.

[AJ]: Yeah, it didn't bother him. And he didn't care if he registered his car. I mean, I'd like to, register mine. Don't stop me. You're government! Don't tell them it's not registered. I haven't had time off! But that's one of the things, is, everything else takes second place to this, to succeed in it.

[LC]: So it's not really something that most people are going to be able to sustain for any significant length of time.

[AJ]: Yeah.

[LC]: I mean it sounds like it has its own level of burn-out potential.

[AJ]: Yeah. It does. I think it does.

[LC]: Yeah.

[AJ]: I mean, I've been here since January and I don't burn out easily. And I'm used to working long hours and I love it, but...

[LC]: You're, like, ready to...

[AJ]: I'm ready to move on and have more structure in my life. 'Cause, you know, I know that I have to be here at 5am but I never know, you know, when I'm going to get out of work.

[LC]: Yeah.

[AJ]: So. That's what I like about teaching. 'Cause I go in at this time, and at this time I'm all done.

[LC]: Yeah.

[AJ]: So.

[LC]: Now, do you have any fishing history in your family or are you just kind of first generation?

[AJ]: I'm the first.

[LC]: Yeah.

[AJ]: I am the first. My mother went out with a lobsterman once and sterned a couple days, in high school. But other than that, no. So. But I loved it when I did it. I'd prefer being on the boat, on the water, to being on the wharf.

[LC]: It doesn't sound like a lot of people here have sternmen.

[AJ]: Yeah, it depends...yeah. Like some of the younger kids don't; some of the older guys don't. Which is bizarre. You would think that they were the ones that want the help, but. Actually, I've got a very young fleet. I've got Jared, who's just graduating from high school in June, and Nick who is just going back into his junior year in high school. And Tyler's 22, and he's been fishing, you know, four or five years. So we have a very young fleet here, which I find very interesting, and they're the ones who don't usually take sternmen. And Percy, who would, is quite old. He doesn't take a sternman, usually. This is the first year I've ever seen him with one and it's a granddaughter that goes part-time. But it's the, you know, thirty, forty year olds, they all have sternmen.

[LC]: Ok. Are any of these sternmen women?

[AJ]: Not here. Well, Percy's granddaughters, yes. She is fifteen, and the other one's fourteen. But other than that they're all guys in this wharf.

[LC]: I can't think of anything more to ask. Can you think of anything?

[AG]: No. I can't think of anything either. I'll stop it.

[LC]: Ok.

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