



NEWPORT HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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JEANNE PALOMBO

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 It supplies what's often only hinted at in written historical documents.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.

JEANNE PALOMBO

Jeanne Palombo was the wife of Raymond Palombo who was also interviewed for this oral history of the fishing industry in Newport, R.I. Because of Newport's close proximity to the offshore lobster grounds, fishermen and lobstermen relocated to Newport during the early 1970's to become part of that lucrative and growing industry. The Palombos were part of that group.

Mrs. Palombo worked closely with her husband and took over their business after his unexpected death in 1987. She describes the offshore lobster industry and the many important changes that have taken place within it since the 1970's, specifying how much the skyrocketing costs of boats, insurance and lobster traps have hurt the industry. Her manuscript is also filled with her perceptions and memories of what it was like to be married to an offshore lobsterman.

TAPE I SIDE I

Biographical Interview

Marriage to Raymond Palombo, 1971

Involvement in husband's work in the offshore lobster industry

Offshore lobster industry in Newport, R.I., early 1970's

Offshore lobster industry, comparison of 1970's with 1980's

Number of pots now on Jeanne Palombo's boats

Advantages to having 1200-1600 pots vs. 2500 pots

Why Palombos came to Newport, R.I.

Newport's proximity to the offshore lobster grounds

Length of offshore lobster trips

Grounds

Gear conflicts

Setting and moving gear around

Following schools of lobsters

Jeanne Palombo's current role in late husband's work in the offshore lobster industry

Description of Palombo's lobster boat, Kismet

Equipment and conveniences

Expenses in running a lobster boat

Crew

Depletion of offshore lobster stocks

Crew earnings

Alternative fishing

Fishing as a dangerous occupation

Drugs and alcohol in the fishing industry

Jeanne Palombo's offshore trips on the Jeanne Anne

Description of the time Raymond Palombo almost went overboard

Jeanne Palombo's work on offshore trips

The work of fishing

Worst part of an offshore trip

No bathroom, no privacy

Best part of an offshore trip

Attempts to harpoon swordfish

Involvement in husband's business

Comparison with other fishermen's wives

Description of work Palombo did and continues to do in the offshore lobster industry

I.R.S. and fishermen

The kind of person it takes to enjoy working offshore

Way of life-- lack of a regular schedule, little time off

Tape I Side II

Jeanne Palombo's reasons for selling Jeanne Anne

Irregular schedule and marriage in the fishing industry

The kind of woman it takes to be successful in a marriage with a fisherman.

Husband's total exhaustion after offshore trips

Support network, social life

Phone conversations, get togethers, and strong bonds with other fishermen's wives

Major changes in the lobster industry

Skyrocketing costs of boats, insurance, traps

Consequences of skyrocketing costs

Depletion of lobster stocks

Limited entry

Lobster pot fishermen, lobster draggers

Gear conflicts between lobster pot fishermen and lobster draggers

Future of offshore lobster industry

Marketing lobsters

Selling in Newport, docking in Fairhaven

Perceptions of being part of the fishing industry

Role of women in the fishing industry

Politics and the fishing industry

Government involvement in the fishing industry

Financial uncertainty

Most difficult part of being involved in the fishing industry

What Jeanne Palombo likes best about being part of the fishing industry.

Interview with Jeanne Palombo for the Newport Historical Society's Oral History of the Fishing Industry in Newport, R.I. conducted by Jennifer Murray on January 5, 1988.

JM: Is it okay with you if I tape our interview, Jeanne?

JP: It's fine.

JM: Let's start out with some information about you: where you were born, where you went to school -- those kinds of things.

JP: I was born in Randolph, Massachusetts on December 12, 1932. I went to school in Dorchester and then we moved from Dorchester, Massachusetts to Saugus, Massachusetts and I went to school in Saugus, Massachusetts.

JM: Where did you go to school in Dorchester?

JP: Florence Nightingale -- I remember that one. [chuckles] The only one I remember is Florence Nightingale.

JM: Was there anyone during your childhood that had a particular influence on your life in any way?

JP: Not really. During my childhood, we had a lot of illnesses. My sister was sick with tuberculosis. She came down with tuberculosis and was in the hospital for seven years. That had a profound effect on my growing up.

JM: There was a lot of that then.

JP: Yes, there was an awful lot of that then. She

came out of the hospital when she was twelve -- she went in when she was five and came out when she was twelve, so it certainly a profound effect on her, too.

JM: And your marriage to Raymond was --

JP: My second marriage.

JM: Yes.

JP: Let's start with the second marriage; the first one was miserable. That was 1971.

JM: Was he lobstering then?

JP: No, he just was building a boat -- he was building two boats, in fact. He was building the Palombo I and a yacht for a fellow by the name of Roy Bacon who lived in Saugus. He was building two of them at the same time. That's when I met Raymond. I was greatly impressed with the man. [chuckles] I was, yes, I really was.

JM: So he was working twenty-four hours a day when you met him?

JP: If there were forty-eight hours in the day he'd have worked forty-eight hours of the day. I met him at a Fourth of July party. We just took naturally to one another instantly and it just grew from there. But that's how I met him. He was building the two boats.

JM: When did you start getting involved in working with him? Or did that start pretty much right

away after you were married?

JP: Not really. It evolved slowly after we got married. I started getting involved with the books and things like that. My boys would work with building the traps and helping him down in the cellar as much as they could. That's how that evolved -- slowly.

JM: Tell me how you decided to come to this area and fish out of Newport.

JP: I should say that the reason we were as long as we were in Lynn [Massachusetts] was because I had college to finish up. We had married in '71 but I still had another two years to get my Bachelor Degree so we stayed in Lynn in order for me to finish up my degree. As soon as I graduated, that's when we moved down here; that was the reason we stayed there. The reason we moved down here was because if we didn't, he'd have killed himself on the way. It was just too much driving back and forth -- he'd fall asleep behind the wheel.

JM: He was working out of Newport?

JP: Out of Newport, yes. He would drive all the way down to Newport and then drive all the way back. You know, after being out on the sea for five days he was exhausted when he came in.

JM: Was there much of an offshore lobster industry in

Newport then?

JP: No. It has certainly grown in leaps and bounds since then. No, there really wasn't much of an offshore fleet. He wasn't the first, by far, at that time. I think it was his original idea to fish offshore -- lobstering -- but they [the bank] wouldn't allow him to do that. By the time we got down here it was pretty well established. I'm trying to think if he -- I don't think he was one of the first that went out there.

JM: Are there many people in it now that were in it then when you came here?

JP: There's many more people that are in it than there was then, a lot more people, and the boats are a lot more sophisticated and a lot bigger and a lot more expensive and there's a lot more traps out there. You know, we started off fishing with five hundred traps and were able to make a living out of it. Now what's it up to? Twenty-five [hundred], three thousand?

JM: Is that how many you have on your boat?

JP: Right now we try and fish about twelve hundred pots. When you have twenty-five hundred pots, you're not fishing them. You can't fish them. You can't move them. You've got to put them in a place that you feel that there's lobsters and just go out there and haul them and reset them again

because you just can't move that amount of gear, you just can't. Ray always felt that if he kept it at twelve hundred or -- I have sixteen hundred pots now. I always say, "Knock on wood," [sound of knocking] because I never know how long I'm going to have sixteen [hundred] pots with the draggers and the tilefish boats and everything else that's out there going through the gear. But we fish the twelve, and that way you follow the schools of lobsters; you can really stay right on the lobsters. It's two different schools of thought. If you have twenty-five hundred pots you end up having to hire a crew to work on gear. There's no way you can expect the boat to go out and fish twenty-five hundred pots and then come in and repair gear, too. It's impossible. So, it's six of one and half a dozen of the other. That's the way it goes.

JM: Why did you pick Newport?

JP: It was the closest point to the offshore [grounds]. For him it was the closest to where he was going. That's why he picked Newport.

JM: Were there any support services or things like that on the waterfront then?

JP: Like what?

JM: Selling things that were needed on the boats?

JP: No. [chuckle] You had to go down and find it.

You had to establish yourself and find it. Yes.

JM: How long are the trips? You have one boat, now?

JP: Yes, I have one boat, now.

JM: And that's the Kismet?

JP: The Kismet, yes. Ray built that one, yes.

JM: How long are those trips?

JP: They go out on a Monday. It takes a day to get out there. They'll fish three days and then they come in on [Friday]. So it's five days, we figure five days.

JM: What grounds would they be on at this time of year?

JP: Out on the [continental] shelf, wherever that is, just trying to keep the gear safe through the winter months. You always lose some, though, especially the end trawls -- end of the pots -- because the tile boats get in there and hook up and just cut you off and there you are.

JM: Are the pots moved around at different times?

JP: During the year?

JM: Yes.

JP: Oh yes. They follow the schools of lobsters, sure. They'll fish an area and when the school runs out, then they have to move the gear again, yes.

JM: I don't have much about that. Could you tell me about that or is that information more something

that people have taken a long time to learn about and want to keep it a secret?

JP: Well, they all have their secrets, that's for sure. But I think everybody knows where those lobsters are -- everybody but me. I don't know anything. I just sit here and pay bills. I don't know anything about taking a boat out or bringing it back in again. But they all know where the lobsters are. That's why, when you see somebody who's fishing twenty-five hundred pots, he's got it in a place that he feels is fairly lucrative.

JM: How big is the Kismet?

JP: Sixty-five feet.

JM: What's on that as far as conveniences?

JP: You mean -- I'll tell you what isn't on it! [chuckles] There isn't a head [toilet] on it, that's for sure! There's no head on it. [They're] adamant on the heads. [They have] sacony buckets. There's all kinds of electronic gear. There's two radars, there's a VHF, a sideband, and a fathometer. It has the -- what do I want to call it? It guides the boat out -- you put it in automatic pilot. Is it automatic pilot? Is that what you call it?

JM: I think so.

JP: Anyway, whatever.

JM: You know better than me. [chuckle]

JP: No, I don't know better than you. It's up to date. I guess you could go on forever as far as electronic equipment is concerned.

JM: Yes.

JP: Yes, it's, hopefully, holding together pretty well down there.

JM: How much does it cost to leave the dock?

JP: It costs about fifteen hundred dollars for the boat to leave: bait, fuel, food and well, you've got bands and everything else you have to buy for the lobsters. It's expensive. It's an expensive operation, it really is.

JM: And what are you talking crew -- how many?

JP: There's four [in the] crew: skipper and three deck hands.

JM: Are they people that have been with you for a long time?

JP: The skipper I have now has been with us for a good ten years. He was involved with the building of the Kismet. So he's been with us for a long, long time. The rest of the crew come and go. [They] just go from boat to boat. It used to be you had crew that stayed with you year after year, but that isn't the case anymore.

JM: Why not?

JP: For one thing, I think there's no such thing as unemployment anymore. They can get a job that

pays them very, very well and they stay inshore. All right? It's a hard life out there. Also, the catch has been coming down so they aren't making the money that they used to. Anybody that stays, really has to like what they're doing.

JM: How much is the catch down?

JP: Well, like I said, when we first started, we were able to make a living with five hundred pots. Now we're up to twelve and sixteen hundred pots. It's funny, if you listen to . . . They'll tell you that the poundage that's landed every year is the same poundage year after year after year. The trouble is, there's more and more boats out there with more and more gear and that's why it's down. They're saying the poundage is the same that comes in year after year. It's just more and more boats going out there bringing it in.

JM: Do you think that's true? Is the poundage the same for you?

JP: My poundage has gone down. It certainly has gone down.

JM: How much?

JP: If you went by how much we -- pounds is hard; I could go by money. I could tell you how much we're down on money, but pounds [is difficult to tell]. I can remember the time when I went out with Raymond. My goodness, we hauled, I think

it was a sixty or seventy pot trawl, and there was five hundred pounds in that. Then he would reset it and go back and rehaul it again and come up with another five hundred pounds. I mean, it was incredible. At one time, he was fishing seven hundred pots and it was nothing for him to come in with six thousand or seven thousand pounds out of the six or seven hundred pots. Once he got onto a school, he could stay on it forever. Ray could ride it right into where he couldn't go anymore. He knew his bottom and he knew how to follow a lobster school. He really did. It isn't that way anymore. Now you're lucky -- what is it -- two pounds, three pounds a pot is a bonanza, an absolute bonanza.

JM: What kind of living do those crew people make?

JP: It depends on how many trips they want to make and how often they want to go. The skipper could make at least thirty-five thousand [dollars] a year to fifty/sixty thousand a year. It depends on how much he wants to push. Of course, now it wouldn't be just lobstering, it would be alternative fishing. This time of year, now, is when they go into the line trawling and tilefishing.

JM: Are you into that?

JP: No, I'm not. I'm not into it because Tony [Gomes] doesn't know how to do any of that. He's going to

have to learn. If he's going to buy this boat, he's going to have to learn.

JM: What else do they linefish for?

JP: They also gillnet. They set out gillnets. The linefishing is mainly for haddock and cod; that's what gets the best price. I guess they do well, too, on the tilefishing. But you know, you're talking about twenty thousand dollars to outfit it. If I'm planning on selling the boat, it's really a foolish investment for me because I certainly wouldn't get my twenty thousand back on it, so it's really not very prudent for me to be doing thinking on that idea.

JM: What about the danger? You're in a unique position where your husband has died and you've taken over this business and suddenly you have the full responsibility.

JP: Yes. [chuckle] What do you mean? Do I sleep at night? No, I don't sleep at night, no. The anxiety is one of my biggest problems. You keep saying, "Anxiety is when you're buying the worst possible of scenarios happening." That's what you're thinking. That's what anxiety is. You're betting on the very worst happening. That's what you're constantly saying to yourself. You calm yourself down; but that is my biggest problem. That is my biggest problem -- anxiety. You're

either worried to death about not being able to pay the bills coming in or worried to death about something happening to the boat while it's fishing. You look forward to the spring when the weather's better and there's not the ice and the snow and everything else to worry about. But, boats go down when it's flat out there, too. It's a very risky business.

JM: Are you more worried now about them than you were when Raymond was going out?

JP: Yes, much [more]. Not so much when Raymond was going out. When Raymond was alive he used to say in Italian, "mungus gondati," which meant (because I don't know anything about Italian), "Don't worry about it because I'm worrying enough for the both of us." [chuckles] And it's the truth. I had him. He was like a rock to me and I wouldn't have to worry about anything. He did all the worrying, he did all of it. I always used to say to him, "Calm down, it's all right, it's all right. Don't be worried about it. Don't be worried about it." Because he was deaf, you see. He'd be sleeping at night and he couldn't hear -- that wind would wail out there! And I would be laying in bed with my eyes popping out of my head, listening to the wind. I'd say to him, "Don't you hear that?" He'd say, "No, no." Of course he didn't hear

anything. He was as deaf as a haddock. He couldn't hear anything. So I would lay there and worry until he got up in the morning and saw the trees all bent over. Then he'd worry. All right? [chuckles] But what are you going to do? This is the name of the game. It's no different today than it's ever been over the years, ever since its inception, really, if you think about it. Men have died and drowned and -- [sigh] -- yes.

JM: What other dangers besides the weather are the worst?

JP: Well, getting run down by [ships]. You've got to pay attention. You've got to have somebody at that wheel. You've got to have somebody on watch all the time. Of course, I'm in a position now where I certainly can't take this boat out. I have to rely on the crew doing those things. [I'm] just hoping that the crew realizes that their life is in jeopardy when they don't do these things. It's like that --

JM: Do you feel confident about them now?

JP: As confident as I could possibly feel about them. I don't feel any different than the rest of them do as far as crew goes.

JM: What were you going to say? "It's like that --"

JP: It's like a pilot. You know, you're thinking "If he doesn't stay awake, he's going to die with the rest of them." [chuckle] You've got to stay

awake.

JM: What about drinking and drugs and all of that?
Have you run into problems with that?

JP: If we do, I have no knowledge of it because that is absolutely not allowed on that boat at all, in any way, shape or form. Ray would absolutely fire somebody instantly. As far as I know, that does not go on that boat. As far as Tony, he would never allow it. You've got to be foolish to allow that stuff. You've got to stay on your toes. That is really silly.

JM: Are there many boats going out where that is a problem?

JP: Well, you always hear talk but I don't know how true it is. Nobody would knowingly hire anybody doing that stuff. Actually, it's the skipper that sets the tone. If he is straight, then you can bet your crew is going to be straight.

JM: You had mentioned that you had gone out. Was that on an offshore trip?

JP: Yes, I went with Ray several times on the Jeanne Ann and on the Palombo I.

JM: What was that like?

JP: I really enjoyed it. Of course, let's be totally honest, I always went in July and August, too, when the weather was the finest. I never went when it was wild. It was funny because he kept

saying, "Wait 'til I get her out there. Wait 'til I get her out there." My husband would say, "Wait. She's going to be waiting on me hand and foot. You wait and see. She has no idea. She has no idea. Wait. She's just -- Wait." Well, when I went out there on the first trip with him, the top of this table has more turbulence on it than there was out on that ocean. It was a beautiful, beautiful trip. Again, like I said, it was in July or August when I went and it was a starlit night and it was just beautiful weather out there. We had the hibachi out on the deck and we were cooking on the deck and I had the lawn chair out there, sitting there in the sun. Ray couldn't believe it. You'd have to work at getting seasick. He said, "God almighty." Of course, he has to make it -- "Now, I come home and she makes me wash the floor." But that was the first trip. I haven't been out in [weather]. When I say weather, I use it mildly because Ray never wanted me to go when it was really rough and dangerous out there. I've been seasick. It's terrible, terrible being seasick. He never wanted me to go out on the deck without him to go to the john because there's no bathroom on the damn boat. No matter what time of day or what time of night, it was mainly night, I'd have to get him up. He

would not allow me to go out on that deck by myself. You know, it's funny because I never thought too much of it until you realize, for one thing . . . He remembered one time -- Ray told a story of how he was on watch and he had to go to the john. It was a beautiful starlit night, just like the night I just described to you. I was not on the trip with him this time. He said he's sitting there on the (this is beautiful on tape and everything), [chuckles] but he's sitting there on the sacony bucket, you know, with the damn pants down around his ankles. And he said, "Oh," he was just taking in the beautiful evening, "What a beautiful evening it is." And he said when he got through, he got up, and of course he's straddling the bucket and the boat pitched and he started to lose his balance. He was going overboard, absolutely overboard and, of course, the thing is on automatic pilot. It would have just kept right on going. He was thinking to himself "What an ignominious way to die. What a terrible way to die," he's saying. "With my pants down around my knees, overboard." He said, "It just happened that the boat happened to pitch the other way and it [went] forward." But from then on, he never sat next to the rail, ever, ever, ever. That bucket was in the middle of the boat and that's how he made me go -- in the middle of

the boat. You don't ever get by that rail because you just never know. And you don't. No matter how calm or how beautiful it is, you don't know. You've got to be on watch and you've got to be aware all the time, all the time.

JM: Talk about a different world --

JP: It is. And they work awfully hard. I did the banding. I worked when I went out. I hate like the devil to go down there and not work because you'd go crazy.

JM: You couldn't.

JP: There's too much boredom. But I would cook and I would take watch and I did the banding of the lobsters. My hands looked like Palombo's by the time I got through with the banding. That was a time when we were catching five hundred pounds in a trawl. He'd always say, "Only one more, only one more." And by God, he would have us up working -- We'd start at four o'clock in the morning and this was about ten o'clock at night and we were still going. I didn't think I could [stand anymore work]. My hands were swollen like hams, they were so big from banding the lobsters. But they really work hard. They earn every damn dime they earn. They do. They work hard out there.

JM: What's the worst part of the trips?

JP: Well, the worst part of the trip for me was no bathroom. Now, for a guy that wouldn't be, but for me there was no bathroom and it was a big scene for me to have to go to the john. Just trying to get that little bit of privacy [chuckle] which you never got. As far as cleaning up, I'd wash up in the sink. I'd just get the old sink full of water. But again, I'd have to wait until it was the last trawl at night when the guys were washing down the deck that I would get down below and I would wash. I would wash everything [chuckle] and I'd get myself as clean as possible.

JM: And get all dirty again. [chuckle]

JP: Absolutely, all dirty again, yes.

JM: What would you say the best part is?

JP: The best part is, it's funny, it's catching lobsters. You cannot acquaint catching lobsters with money because you don't think of it in terms of money. It's like a game. You set the trap overboard and you watch to see what comes up. You watch what kind of lobster you catch. Ray could always tell if he should set the gear again or if he should move the gear. Of course, when you hit lobsters it was an absolute high. I mean, just lobsters coming out of the trap everywhere. It really was a [high]. I can see why people stay with it year after year. But somehow or other, I

should think maybe there's more anxiety at home, not knowing, than being out on the boat. I was never really worried when I had Raymond there. I figured, my God, any man that lived as long as he did, and came in as many times must know what he's doing. I never really worried about anything like that when he was on board, ever. Sometimes I think the anxiety is higher because I'm home and I don't know what's going on.

JM: Did you see a lot of life out there?

JP: Like what life?

JM: Whales and things like that?

JP: Not too much in the whales. We were looking for swordfish one day. I was getting pretty good at spotting swordfish, too. The fin on the back is curved more. Sometimes you can't tell them from a shark. We never caught one of them, but we saw lots of them.

JM: Were you going to harpoon them?

JP: Yes, if we could but we never did. We never could harpoon them. We never got anywhere near harpooning them. [chuckle]

JM: You were set up for that if you wanted to?

JP: Yes. Well, other people were catching them. They'd shoot and catch them, but we never caught one.

JM: And you'd have brought it in and sold it or eaten

it?

JP: Yes, sold it or whatever. If the crew wanted to cut it up and take it home then we could've cut it up and taken it home. I imagine it would have been a decision that they all would have made.

JM: Do you think that you had an unusual amount of involvement in your husband's work? Or is that pretty typical in that industry?

JP: It's funny a thing. It seems like you either get the woman who is as involved as I am or totally out of it. Maybe that has a lot to do with the type of [woman]. Maybe it's the woman that can't handle the anxiety of the whole business -- with the stack of bills on the desk and two thousand dollars in your accounts and twenty thousand dollars worth of bills on your desk. It can be asolutely nerve-wracking, asolutely nerve-wracking. Some women just can't take that. I don't think I'm unique, because I know of other women that are just as involved in their husbands' business.

JM: In the fishing industry or the lobster industry?

JP: Yes. I would do things. I would help him branding the traps, which I'm doing now and branding runners. I couldn't lift or lug anything heavy because my back would go out, but I would go out in the field and tie back heads with him.

God, I don't know how many times we went to dumps and yanked out old inner tubes to use on the traps. [I did] that sort of stuff as far as physical things -- running down parts. Most of the time, if it was a part, it would be something he had because I don't know the first mechanical thing about it. He would say, "Would you go down and pick up this?" He'd have it on order and I would run down and pick it up, but it was nothing I could ever institute myself. I'm not that big of a brain. The bookkeeping mainly was what I did, the bookkeeping and the payroll, taking care of the taxes. That's the stuff that used to overwhelm Raymond, the paperwork. Especially when it came to the I.R.S. [Internal Revenue Service], the State [taxes], all that used to really upset him because the last thing you wanted was trouble. You get enough just existing without having troubles with Uncle Sam. That was the major portion of what I did.

JM: Did they give you a lot of trouble?

JP: Who? I.R.S.?

JM: I.R.S. Were they difficult?

JP: If they did, it was because of your own ignorance. Like Raymond said, "You're in the fishing business. You're not out to cheat anybody. That's not what you're doing. You're just out

there trying to make a living." So you don't fill out a form right and the next thing you know, you get a letter from the I.R.S. It wasn't because you intended to cheat or do anything like that. The last thing we wanted was an audit from the I.R.S.

JM: Talk about a different mentality.

JP: Yes. We did have the State of Rhode Island come down and we had to sit through an audit, which was a horrendous ordeal.

JM: I bet.

JP: Yes, it was.

JM: What kind of person do you think it takes to enjoy doing that kind of work, going out to sea like that, the harshness, the beauty and everything?

JP: A very special person. You really have to like this sort of thing. You have to be a strong, independent person, that's for sure. If you talk to fishermen, you find out they're all strong and they're all independent. They all have their own minds; they all have their own ways. It's funny because everyone knows their own traps. To you and me they all look the same but everybody knows their traps. They all have a special way -- They're quite convinced that by putting the head in this way it catches more lobsters, and this [other one] puts in the head a different way.

They are unique people, they really are.

JM: Is the schedule difficult to adjust to?

JP: You mean your husband fishing?

JM: Yes, or lack of a schedule.

JP: Well, that's the whole thing. You just can't plan things around him. You can't plan a picnic around him; you just plan it. If he's in, fine. If he isn't that's all right, too. A wedding is the same way. If you get a wedding invitation, you say, "Well, you realize, if he's home he'll go but if he isn't then he's not going to go." There's times he can manipulate the schedule that he can arrange to be in but there's other times he cannot. It depends on how many bills are stacked up on that desk. That's what calls the shots.

JM: Plus, it seems like it's the kind of work that people don't get a chance to leave much.

JP: Well, because not only is it the fishing, it never ends when you get in, either. Now, I didn't fall into this bracket, but when my husband would get in, there was always something to be done on that boat, always. Something had to be fixed or something had to be repaired. So even when he was in, he wasn't home or else he's working in the cellar. Of course, you know Raymond. He knitted all his lobster heads and built all his traps and even the wire ones. He fabricated them and built

them, too.

JM: If he was going to be home, would it be more apt to be in the winter?

JP: Yes, it would be in the winter months he'd be home. Actually, it wasn't until the last few years we took any vacation at all. With Raymond, the wolf was always at the door.

[end of side one]

Even when we went on vacation, one time when we went to Florida, he knitted five hundred heads. I was ready to shoot him, I really was. Here we are, up in St. Augustine and he's got the television on, the soap operas on all day long, sitting there knitting heads.

JM: His vacation.

JP: Yes, that was his vacation. Of course, it was my vacation, too.

[tape interrupted]

And he was always trying to perfect the heads of the traps, always trying to make them fish better. The last heads he made really fish well. And now, of course, now he's gone. It seems ironical. Here I am in a situation, now, where the boat is maybe, eighty percent paid for and, though certainly I'm not living in the lap of luxury -- we're still trying to bail out from a horrendous year of catching -- I think, "Great God, finally

I've got it to a position where I might see the light of day." I'm almost afraid to say anything because in this business it turns around so rapidly, and he's not here to see any of it. So it's tough. Knowing Raymond, I think if he'd lived, he probably would never have sold the Jeanne Ann, knowing Raymond. I know he never would have sold Jeanne Ann. In fact, the reason I sold it was because of the gear problem. It had a thousand wormed up traps and there was just no way possible that I was going to be able to come up with -- well, you're talking close to a hundred thousand dollars for more gear. I really didn't have a choice. Then, of course, a woman trying to manage two crews is tough, too. If not impossible, really, to be totally honest.

JM: Do you think that schedule is tough on people's marriages, from what you've seen in the industry, not being able to count on his being home?

JP: I don't think so. I would say no. If you've got a good relationship -- it's the people that make it. Either they make it or they don't make it. When a woman marries a man, she knows damn right well if he's fishing, what she's buying. Sometimes they're not very realistic about it. You've got to be a strong individual, that's for sure. You can't be sitting around crying because

you've got a flat tire because that flat tire is going to be flat the next day and the next day and the next day. Either you get out there and fix it yourself, or you don't go anywhere, or get somebody else to fix it -- one or the other. That's the problem sometimes. Frankly, I don't know how a fisherman makes it with a dependent wife (somebody that's weeping and wailing and crying all the [time]). I don't know how because their life is so totally absorbed with what they do. I don't know how they deal with -- somebody coming home to a weeping, wailing woman who's crying about this or crying [about that]. I don't know how they exist at all. I don't know how they could do that. But the other side of that is, you marry a strong woman and then you get the other side of her, too. And I definitely have my own ideas. They always didn't agree with the things that Raymond wanted to do. I used to say to him, "You love me, darling, just as long as I agree with you. But the strength that you see that you admire in me is the very thing that'll also come up and say, 'No, I don't like it' and you don't like that part of me, either." That's what I'm trying to say. It's tough, it is. I don't know how a guy -- like I said -- he has to marry somebody that's strong. Yet, he also has to live

with that strong person, too, which isn't always easy, either.

JM: So you came into this, an independent person.

JP: I was alone with five kids when I met Ray. I was going to college and heading for a career. That's what he married. That's what he came into. That's what he got when he married me. I think, probably, the thing that attracted him to me was my strength. I think what he saw in me was my strength and I think that's what he admired in me and what attracted him to me. But, of course, it was also the same strength that would say to him, "I don't approve. I don't like what you're doing or I don't agree with you, that's the wrong way." Then with Ray, you had to be very pragmatic. You know, with Raymond, if you didn't like anything you had to give him an intelligent reason why and it would have to be very pointed and you'd have to explain every point of it out. If he came in the door and you were screaming and hollering, yelling and throwing things around, that would just be a total turn-off to him, a total turn-off to him. In fact, he'd get furious with you. When you'd wait until he wasn't tired -- which he was tired as the devil when he came home -- and then sit down and pick your time. You'd always have to pick your time with him and pick your words. He

listened, he really did. He did listen.

JM: You must be exhausted when you come in from one of those trips.

JP: Oh, he was exhausted, totally exhausted.

JM: I wonder what it's like for people who have little kids?

JP: [Sigh] I don't know. When I met Ray, my kids were not his kids and his kids were all grown up. But, I'll tell you what we did, because he was impossible. I dearly loved the man, but when he came home, my God, there was no living with him. He'd just be so ugly; anything would set him off, anything at all. In fact, when I would go down there to meet him on the boat, I would stand on the dock and I would catch the guys' eyes on the dock and I'd put my thumbs up or thumbs down, meaning, "What kind of frame of mind is he in?" And I usually would get a thumbs down. So I'd know what to expect from him. A lot of times, when he came in, I would just be gone. I would go to the mall and I would roam around the mall and I would stay there until I figured he had come home and had gotten a shower and was asleep because that was one way of avoiding any arguments because he could really be very argumentative when he came in.

JM: How old was your youngest child?

JP: When I married him?

JM: Yes.

JP: [He was] about ten when I married him. Yes, about ten, yes.

JM: Who did you rely on for support and a social life when he was out fishing?

JP: Fishermen's wives, usually. Because they're all going through the same thing you're going through.

JM: People around here?

JP: Yes. Crew members, sometimes, their wives.

JM: [You'd] go out at night?

JP: Not so much out at night as phone conversations and usually you'd get together for a lunch.

JM: You must get very strong bonds with people like that.

JP: Very strong, very strong because we all know what everyone's talking about. You know what they're all going through.

JM: What are some of the major changes you've seen the lobster industry go through since you've been involved in it?

JP: The cost of it is one of the things. The cost of it is out of sight. I don't know how -- I look at people that pay four and five hundred thousand dollars for a boat. I don't know how on earth they plan on paying for it with what they're catching. The cost of insurance, the cost of

traps. Just the cost is out of sight.

JM: What kind of insurance bills are you paying, now?

JP: On the Kismet, twenty-six thousand dollars a year. You figure, this year I've grossed two hundred and sixty-three thousand dollars. You know, twenty-six thousand [dollars] coming out for [insurance], it's just --

JM: That's a huge chunk of money.

JP: It's huge, it's huge. And it's funny, because somebody said recently, "Gee, what do you think is the matter? Why do you think there's so many boats going down?" Everybody looked at one another and they started laughing. "What do you think so many boats are going down for? The cost of insurance is so high, they're forcing the boats to go out in weather that they shouldn't be going out in, staying out in weather they shouldn't be staying out in, and then they're wondering why they're going down!" Really, it gets to the point where you wonder if you're just not going to make it at all because the insurance cost is so high.

JM: How about the depletion, too?

JP: The depletion of the vessels?

JM: Of the lobsters.

JP: Yes, yes. As I said to you earlier, if you talk about the pounds landed, anybody I've talked to says it's the same poundage. It's just more and

more boats out there with more and more traps catching them.

JM: What do you think of things like Limited Entry?

JP: I don't know what I think about that. I think maybe limited pots should be one of the things that should be considered. In the first place, it's so expensive to get into this business anyhow, you're going to have limited entry because it's so expensive to get started. But to limit entry, that's like a dictatorship, really. I know Ray was always against Limited Entry, but I do think they really should curb the amount of traps people fish, truly. They ought to stop dragging lobsters. They should stop dragging, period, but they should stop them from dragging lobsters, at least. It is insane for us to go through what we go through for our traps: making the escapes bigger and using a larger lobster gauge and going through all this to preserve the lobster industry. Anybody who is a lobster fisherman is doing everything they know how to -- We're not cutting our own throats. We don't take eggars. We don't take shorts. I mean, it's silly, you're only cutting your own throat. But the draggers don't feel like that. They're going to get out there and they're going to catch whatever they can catch and I think they should stop the sale of dragged

lobsters.

JM: Are many people -- well, obviously they are if there's a problem -- still doing that?

JP: Sure they are, sure. And then, of course, not only are they dragging for lobsters, but they're also into all your gear. Just the pot alone -- never mind the line and everything -- is sixty dollars. Then they just go through it and just ruin your gear. They put you out of business. It's a tough business.

JM: Are most of the boats here still owner-operated?

JP: Less and less of them now. Most of them are owned and they hire a skipper. Except the newer ones. The newer ones are so damned expensive, the only way they can possibly pay for them is to fish them themselves. I can't take my boat out. I have to hire a skipper. I have that much less because I'm certainly not doing this for nothing. I expect to earn a living out of it also. But it's that much less I have to spend on traps and on gear and on everything else.

JM: What do you think about the future?

JP: In the lobster business?

JM: In the lobster business.

JP: I think everything's going to take care of itself. I think there's going to be a lot of people that are going to go under.

JM: A lot of people here?

JP: Anybody that's trying to pay off a huge mortgage with less and less lobsters. The alternative fishing isn't that lucrative, either. The line trawling and the -- there isn't that much. There's just no way you can pay for all these big, big expensive boats. The boats are going for four and five hundred thousand dollars.

JM: Do you feel that way pretty much about the fishing industry, in general?

JP: As far as dragging is concerned, I think they're going to do themselves in. I think the draggers are doing themselves in, slowly but surely doing themselves in because they're depleting their own source. They are. As far as the other fishing industries are going? I don't know. Well, again, you can look at the scallop draggers. They're paying through the nose for their insurance. Again, it's insurance and of course there's a lot of accidents on the boats and it goes higher and higher and higher. You don't know what the answers are unless they come up with some kind of limited liability thing, which they're trying to do now. They are trying to get that in now.

JM: Do you sell all of your lobsters here?

JP: I sell them all in Fairhaven.

JM: How do you get them there?

JP: He steams -- he docks in Fairhaven. We used to dock down at Ronnie's [Ronald Fatulli] down in Newport.

JM: I thought so.

JP: Yes, he did. But see, it's a wooden hull and we have to be careful with that wooden hull. You can't be banging it around and have it rub up against other vessels. So, he was selling in Newport and then steaming to Fairhaven. That's a four hour steam! It's a long steam after you -- It's too much. The guys are tired. They want to get off that boat and I can't blame them. It was really something because Ray dearly loved Ronnie Fatulli and he looked at him as a true, dear friend right to the very end. He really had an awful lot of respect for Ronnie Fatulli. He knew the most prudent thing for him to do was to sell his lobsters in Fairhaven, but he felt like Ronnie would take it personally if he pulled away from him. He didn't want to offend Ronnie, so for the longest time, well, for years, we just did the four hour steam. Then, this past year, he finally talked to Ronnie and said, "Gees, I don't want you to take this personally at all, but it's really not a good idea for me to sell here. It's just too much on the crew. It's too much on the boat, too much unnecessary steaming time." Then if we

had really bad weather, that four hour steam was really tough. That's why we're in Fairhaven.

JM: The fishing industry is so old. It goes back as far as time. How do you feel about being part of all that?

JP: Being married to Raymond, he opened up a whole new world for me, a whole new exposure. Now that I'm facing the prospects of selling the boat, it's like losing a great part of me. It's tough.

JM: A whole way of life.

JP: Oh yes. It's a whole new world, a whole new life. I can tell a good-designed boat now, which I never could tell one from the other. Now I can see a boat on the water and I'll say, "Gee, that's really beautiful lines on that boat." That was totally foreign to me before I met Ray.

JM: What do you see, as far as the role of women in this industry? Is there a difference between the traditional fisherman's wife or a more modern [wife]?

JP: I do think we should get into more if [for] nothing else than the political aspect because, let's face it, the guy is out to sea. He can't be fishing and be involved politically. And sorry to say, a lot of it is political. There are decisions made by our government about a business they don't know anything about at all, nothing at

all. We do have some guys that are really active. Dick Allen is one who is very active in it and I think he still fishes. He still fishes, doesn't he?

JM: Lobster.

JP: Yes. Is it inshore, though?

JM: Yes.

JP: Yes. See, he's got a little more time than the offshore [fisherman]. But you've got to have people who know what they're talking about, too, to be involved politically, absolutely, because Congress comes up with some hairbrained ideas. They're trying to regulate a business they don't know the first damn thing about.

JM: Have you had much involvement in that area?

JP: No, I really haven't. I wanted to get into the Atlantic Offshore [Atlantic Offshore Fisherman's Association] but Ray never encouraged me because he felt like a woman would be something that nobody'd pay any attention to and they'd only ridicule you. Of course, since he died, it's been hard for me to do much of anything, let alone get involved politically.

JM: Well, do you think being a woman is a real obstacle, even on the political end?

JP: I think it is if you let it be. Let's face it, if you walk into a room full of men, it can be quite

intimidating, but I think I can handle it. I am thinking of doing that. That's one of the things I thought I'd get into. After the boat is gone and the business is gone, I'm going to have to find something to fill these hours and that's one of the things [I thought I might do]. I was also thinking of getting into that N.O.W. [National Organization for Women].

JM: Yes.

JP: Yes, getting active, politically.

JM: What about the financial uncertainty for people? Does that make it particularly hard?

JP: You mean getting into it or trying --

JM: Not knowing from year to year how much money you're going to bring in.

JP: Yes, well, what you do is, if you're smart, you keep your bills to a minimum and you don't spend money you don't have. Yes, it is tough because if you need a new car -- nine times out of ten, you have to finance it unless you're a millionaire -- if you finance it, you're planning it on next year's income. I suppose you don't have to buy a real fancy car, you can go inexpensive. But on your houses and things like that, you're going to have to keep your expenses [down]. That's how Ray and I have made it through the years, is just keeping everything [down] -- and I don't run up

bills. If I can't pay for it, I don't buy it. If I can't pay cash for it, I don't buy it because -- you're right -- you just never know what's coming in or what isn't coming in.

JM: What would you say is the most difficult part of being part of the industry?

JP: For me, right now, it's just the worry of it, of nothing going wrong -- coping. For Ray, he'd have told you something different, but for me it's just coping with anything that could [go wrong] like a motor overhaul or any major expenses. I'm still treading water here, financially, you know.

JM: What would you say you've liked the best?

JP: The camaraderie. It's funny. For instance, I'll meet Al Eagles and it's like an instant communication. You don't have to say anything. Each one knows what the other one is feeling, you know? Which you don't get if you're working in the G.E. [General Electric] or a big [corporation]. It's altogether different.

JM: Why do you think that is?

JP: Actually your lives are really independent. Each one, even though we compete like hell with one another, sometimes your life depends on somebody going to help you. There's times when the boat will break down and you have to tow somebody in, but then the next guy is there to tow you in. Yes,

that's what I see that's the best about it.

JM: I've asked most of the questions I've planned and I'm sure I've missed a lot of things. Is there anything you'd like to add?

JP: No, I can't think of anything.

JM: I really want to thank you.

JP: Thank you too.

[End of Interview]



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