

Interviewee Name: Leif Albertson

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Interviewer(s) Name(s) and affiliations: Matt Frassica (The Briney Podcast) and Kaitlyn Clark (College of the Atlantic Intern)

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Interview Description:

Leif Albertson

Phippsburg, ME

IT Project Manager

Interviewed by Matt Frassica with Katie Clark

Leif Albertson is an IT project manager who lives in Phippsburg, ME, and has a recreational fishing boat. His family has a long history of commercial fishing in Maine, and he moved his family to Maine to be closer to that heritage. He speaks about how important access to the outdoors was to raising his children and his hopes that his daughters will eventually return to Maine.

Collection Description:

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Transcription by: Kaitlyn Clark, College of the Atlantic intern

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LA: Leif Albertson (Interviewee)

MF: Matt Frassica (Interviewer)

KC: Kaitlyn Clark (Intern)

[0:00:00.0]

MF: To start, can I just get you to say and spell your name.

LA: My name is Leif Albertson. L-E-I-F A-L-B-E-R-T-S-O-N.

MF: And where are you from?

LA: I'm from Phippsburg, ME.

MF: And what do you do?

LA: I am an IT project manager for a living. That's what I do. I work at home, 5 days a week. I have a recreational fishing boat that was gifted to me by my father. So that's where my life is at the moment.

MF: So what do you fish for?

LA: My wife and I are gonna start recreational fishing lobster. We do have a commercial license for tuna fish. So if we catch, we can sell. But now that the quota is officially ours, we have some work to do. And lobster boat racing of course. I like to do that, it's a big thing with the family.

MF: So does your family traditionally fish?

[0:00:53.1]

LA: They do. We've got a few cousins that fish for a living. This is lobster. And also shrimp fishing. And that has been closed, but he was able to have enough catch that he's on the special list. So he'll be able to fish for shrimp soon.

MF: So having grown up around it, how would you say things have changed from your perspective?

LA: A lot. A ton. I grew up in the Midwest, but I moved here in 2006 with my family to Phippsburg. And my father always said not to move to Maine to fish for a living. Fishing has changed quite a bit. I have a very close friend of mine that has fished his whole life. And I've watched the number of draggers reduce in Casco Bay and actually in Phippsburg. A lot of boats

there, I've seen that number decrease. And there's a lot of global change and the impact that we're all trying to assess and determine. So there's been quite a bit.

[0:02:01.7]

MF: Yeah. So you grew up in the Midwest, why was your dad concerned about you moving to Maine to fish?

LA: Because it wasn't the appropriate thing to do. There was a romantic piece to that, which we've done. But because family has been fishing. The house that he is at has been five generations there in Phippsburg. So we've got some pretty deep roots for a fishing family and schooner captains and whatnot. So we've got a good tradition, and so that's why he said don't come fish for a living from that aspect. But here we are and now we can fish recreationally.

MF: Are you hoping to take people out fishing?

LA: I have to be careful because now we gotta talk about a license. We do fishing rod and reel. I can take friends and family out, and we do that a lot. We've got a big enough boat to take relatives and friends that come in because everyone wants to see what's out there.

[0:02:58.7]

MF: What did you hear growing up that made you want to come to Maine?

LA: Just the experience of lobstering. I've been on the dragger as well. I would take those experiences back as a kid. "What did you do during the summer? Let's share." So I've always been, they call it romantic, but it's the piece of lobstering, what comes up from the bottom of the ocean. Always something different. My grandfather showed us that. So I've always appreciated that. And I did work as a sternman when I was a young teenager. Took that back to Michigan. So that's what brought me back.

MF: That must have been exotic in Michigan.

LA: Yes, well, for me, it was normal. Because we came out every summer. So, you know, it was talk about your summer stories, and I was able to bring that back. They didn't know what a sternman was, so we had to express that. So absolutely.

MF: What did they fish for in the dragger.

[0:03:56.8]

LA: Groundfish. Most recently, this past ten years, the shrimping was good. And a friend of mine he's done quahog. And as a kid, he collected sea urchins. As many as he could collect, so he did very well. Our family, watching the change and the reduction of the shrimp, I tried to start a

family business: Maine Fresh Seafood. Which, it was a good idea, because I'm the IT guy and my cousins brought the product to market. But there's just so much change watching, I guess I'll call it the biomass. I don't know enough about it, but I'm learning.

MF: Having watched that change, what are your concerns going forward?

LA: I think it's really important for the fishermen to share their data. And I know that's been a long, long battle. To have them say, "Oh, here's what my catch was. Here's what's good. Here's not." Because of the old secret, of I'm not going to show you where my honey whole is. So that's been a challenge, and I think they're coming around, because they have to, and maybe they see either grandkids coming along and try to make it sustainable for them. So I think that's the hardest piece.

[0:05:16.1]

MF: So what're the challenges to that sustainability?

LA: Understanding what is enough, enough. Or not. With shrimp, I have my friend who's fished for a living. He doesn't agree with a lot of the politics, but he knows there's mass out there. But how much of that mass can be taken, that total allowable catch. Those are things that I think we understand and hopefully we've backed off. You know, we've overfished for years. So the hardest part is to know when is enough, enough. Shut down, and wait for the stocks to rebuild. If that's what happens or if they move.

MF: We have some charts here, can you take a look and see if you can find the appropriate chart here?

[Shuffling]

[0:06:02.9]

KC: Which part of the coast is Phippsburg in?

LA: Right here, it's on this one.

MF: Oh, okay, great.

LA: Uh, Georgetown, yeah, we're right... It may be just off. The Meadows River, yeah, there's Bath. So, let's here. Okay, right here. Phippsburg is actually. Route 209 goes all the way up to Bath and Winnegance is approximately... There's Winnegance. And from here down the peninsula is Phippsburg.

[0:07:11.3]

MF: Okay. Can you show me around where your grandfather fished for lobster?

LA: Right here. It's just off of Malaga [pronounced Malago]. Or Malaga. We've always called it Malaga [pronounced Malago]. And there's a lot of recent history with stories about the families that lived out there. But right there in Sebasco Harbor. And that's where grandfather's house is. And I think the family picked it up in 1900. I think Frank Ridley was the one that purchased the house. And I'm putting that story together myself. Because my father is 86, and I'm putting this story together myself with some family members to try to make sure we've got that documented.

MF: So when you were working as a sternman with your grandfather, right?

LA: Actually, it was with one of the fishermen locally in Phippsburg. Sparky, I think was his name. Long ago!

[0:08:07.7]

MF: And where did you guys fish then?

LA: We lobster fished inland, so we didn't go offshore, but we fished around Mark Island, Ragged Island areas. But we stayed, it was not offshore fishing. And again, I was fifteen-years-old and highlanders we were called. But he took me in, and I learned a lot that year, too.

MF: And how does that compare to where lobster fishing is going on now?

LA: Boy, if I could get back into it I would. There's a lot of restrictions, I think for a good purpose. Even though there is a huge amount of catch out there. I don't have the numbers, but my cousins were telling me yesterday about the amount of catch that was caught locally here compared to what was caught in Downeast. I don't know if it's temperatures in the water, but there's not a lot of lobster boats here.

[0:09:00.6]

So in terms of the fishing. I asked my girls, I have three girls. One is in college and the other two are about to go to college. They're seniors this year. And they enjoy fishing and lobstering, but they chose not to continue any kind of lobstering and fishing.

MF: Can I ask you about that?

LA: Sure.

MF: What are your hopes for them? Do you hope that they'll come back and live in Phippsburg? Or are you expecting them to go off and live somewhere else?

LA: I think they will go out and explore life and come back. They definitely want to come back. We built a new home in 2006, a new construction, because we couldn't find one that we liked. And now since we've been here, where they've been raised here, they definitely want to keep

the house in the family. So they've got now roots for themselves here. And they will return they said.

MF: Are you concerned at all about what kind of jobs are here or what kind of economy will be waiting for them when they come back?

[0:09:58.0]

LA: Sure. Just because, I think I've got worldly experience and knowing that local economies, the old fishing village that is still there for Sebasco. I mean, it's difficult. The governor or whoever it's going to be has got a lot of work to do. You know, we spend a lot of time outdoors. Beyond fishing, but hunting up in northern Maine as well. And the girls appreciate that. What Maine has for them, I don't know. There is concern, sure.

MF: Can I ask you what stories you heard about Malaga island when you were growing up.

LA: Sure, my grandmother, she had taught on the island. So that's the one story that sticks with me. Now, in the past couple years, some of the family has been involved with taking people over. There's a restaurant there in Phippsburg. They're able to take people over and tour the island. But the stories for me are those that are already published. And I can't quote them because I don't know. But I'm familiar with the old school and some of the troubles that were going on there, for sure.

[0:11:07.8]

MF: And so she taught on the island. She taught the children of the families who lived on Malaga Island?

LA: Yeah, a little correction, I said my grandmother, it's probably two great, at least one great back. But that was my understanding, yes. That she taught on the island and then she'd come back.

MF: She didn't live there, she would travel?

LA: She just went across on boat, is my understanding.

MF: What do you value about the community you live in? You've obviously made a very intentional choice to live there.

LA: Sure, sure. It's how to raise your children in an ideal environment. You're going to find drugs in any environment. All the concerns that big cities can have, or 'cause I grew up in suburbia America, spent a lot of time here in Maine. And opportunities came and I was able to relocate here and bring my family and share with them what I got. And they really appreciate it and what Maine has.

[0:12:13.9]

MF: You mentioned like bringing up your kids. What are some of the ways that you can do that in Maine that are different from where you grew up, for example?

LA: Well, it's just, you don't have to go on vacation. Vacation is out your back door, right? And whether you're on the water fishing. There are days that we intended to go out to see the puffins, because we can buzz out there pretty quick. And we've detoured from that to go tuna fishing with friends, had a couple of their gentlemen with me. So that's kind of a not good story. But they appreciate it, these are things that are character-building. And then skiing. I think just what Maine brings in terms of the outdoors. And they really appreciate it. And we actually built their home in a what I played in a gravel pit years ago. And that's obviously closed. And we bought three acres and that's where we live now.

[0:13:09.6]

MF: So you remember being there as a kid?

LA: Oh absolutely. As a kid and a young teenager.

MF: That's funny. Wow, so is it weird to be there and to have built a house on this place where you used to play?

LA: It is. But we looked really hard. And they say our house is large, but with three girls, you need four bedrooms. So we couldn't find anything that fit. And we went as far as Sebago Lake and went as far as Portland. And we had family here. Dad retired, and I'm one of six. So I decide, okay, let's go a little closer to Dad, and we ended up building. And found property that was deja vu when I went back, said, "I've been here." So yeah, that was fun. That was good.

MF: That's great. And your other siblings, your five siblings, do they live around?

[0:13:57.3]

LA: No, I'm the only one here in Maine. I'm the youngest of six, I kind of forget how old I am. But they're started to move down to Florida actually. They do come back for summer and come back to visit Dad. We just lost a relative, my dad's sister, who lives in Sebasco there. So he's the matriarch. And he's here at the Forum today. He comes every year, as grandfather did. So we've got a lot of history with the Forum as well.

MF: Very cool. Are there any other overarching concerns, just like totally open-ended question, but what concerns or issues do you think about that we haven't talked about already?

LA: In terms for Maine for anything?

MF: Or in terms of your life or in terms of your community, yeah.

[0:14:51.8]

LA: We're involved locally in the community. My wife's on the Budget Committee. Now she just went to class to help with when we have town halls. She can now be the chair for that town hall. So she's doing that. And I volunteer with the camera work for the town hall. And I don't know what's going to happen. We have a very small school in Phippsburg. It's the elementary school. And I wonder how many kids are going to stay in that before they end up closing the school. And change, I can deal with change but I think it's very difficult for local folks to adapt to that change or the tax dollars. Because people are coming to small communities and they bring a ton of cash and want to put up huge homes or, God forbid, a condominium. But, we have to be careful about making sure we have controls in place. Change is going to occur. But we've got to do it carefully.

MF: Cause presumably you want to preserve part of what you knew when you were growing up.

LA: Exactly. The coast, things will expand. That's what happened in Michigan, northern Michigan. Lakes start off with only a few camps and then they explore. If it's a nice place and people want to go, then they'll build it.

[0:16:13.2]

But for Maine, I think the controls are in place to keep it from overpopulating, urban sprawl. I know Phippsburg did that Urban Sprawl Committee to prevent people coming in and buying large chunks of land and then putting up whatever they want to do. So preservation is important.

MF: Urban sprawl from Bath?

LA: I just look at Phippsburg. Actually, my father that's one of the first things he did when he retired here. Because he retired here to Maine. He was part of that sprawl committee, so good controls in place, but change is going to happen.

MF: Anything else on your mind? Any other stories from when you were a kid growing up spending summers in the gravel pit?

[0:17:01.2]

LA: No, it is. Gravel pits, on the water, just going offshore fishing with my grandfather. Which was awesome. Just a lot of rich history. I've got to learn more about my family, and a lot of it started there in Phippsburg. So, good stuff.

MF: Alright, thank you. Oh, can you, what was your grandfather's name?

LA: Dutch Albertson, his real name was Wyatt. But Dutch Albertson, yep.

MF: How did he get that nickname?

LA: I don't know. I don't know that answer. See, I'm the youngest, so I was never told all the stories.

MF: That's why you need to do the family history.

LA: Yes, absolutely.

MF: That's great, well, thank you so much.

[0:17:44.4]

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