

UNIVERSITY OF MAINE

AN INTERVIEW WITH LYNN BOWDEN

FOR THE
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PROJECT

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Anna Henry: This is an oral history interview with Lynn Bowman for the NOAA 50th Oral History Project. The interview is taking place on July 26, 2011 in Eastport, Maine. For the record can you state your name?

Lynn Bowman

AH: And your birth date?

LB: December 20, 1938

AH: And the place of birth.

LB: Eastport, Maine

AH: And your current address.

LB: 175 Water Street, Eastport, Maine

AH: So how long have you lived here?

LB: I have lived here, let me think, I graduated from High School. Born here, I'm a third generation Eastporter. Born here and went to High School, and after graduation like most young people here you have to go away, you either go to college or you go to the city someplace to live, so I went to Portland, and I lived in Portland, for oh golly now you put my on the spot. I think forty eight years, and I've been back, I should have thought about this earlier, maybe fifteen years.

AH: What is your occupation or if your retired?

LB: I'm retired, and I was in, I worked at Blue Cross and Blue Shield. [Laughter]

AH: Have you ever been involved in the fisheries?

LB: Yes, I was. A lot of us was when we were in High School. So when I was fifteen I went to work in one of the factories, it was a summer job and we thought we were quite grown up to be able to go to work, and it was fun, it was not hard work, and it was fun.

AH: So what were you doing at the factory?

LB: When I first went to, at that time I think, I shouldn't say twenty six factories but there were a lot of factories and that is what sticks to my mind because there were all around the Island. It was called cartoning, and that was, cartoning was when you take the can that has already been packed and it's all sealed, you make a box with one hand and you put the can in it so each can is in a separate box, it's fancy. If you look at them on the shelf in the grocery store you'll see especially the ones from out of the country like Sweden and Norway, there in a little cardboard box and that's what I did. I did spend I think it was one day, pack and fish, its hard work, but it was fun. I enjoyed it and it was, when you're fifteen and other girlfriends did it and it was a summer job, like some of the girls now you work at the dairy you did whatever was available, and it was fun it really was.

AH: Okay, do you have any other family members that have been involved in the fisheries?

LB: No none

AH: So can you tell me a little bit about this community when you were growing up here?

LB: Oh it was a wonderful place to grow up, it was as nice as any place could ever be. It was almost like a close community I didn't really leave the Island very much, just to go to summer swimming program and things like that, ride the (Molly?) with a friend because we didn't have a car and it was bustling, it was busy, it was everything that growing up you could ever want, movie theater, roller skating, bowling alley, ice skating rinks, three soda fountain places to go to, I mean it was very complete, wonderful place, loved it here.

AH: How was the overall economy in the community at the time?

LB: Back then it was very good, it was quite a bit better than it is now.

AH: And what were the most important sources of jobs and income?

LB: There were businesses downtown, we had factories so you had people, and the biggest of course was working in the factories. We had five dentist and two doctors, I mean we had everything you could want here. We had a hospital here, it was self-contained, it was wonderful.

AH: How important was fishing to the community?

LB: It was the community.

AH: What kinds of fishing industry jobs were here at the time?

LB: It was mostly sardines packing, I can't think of anything else that it was, but it was sardines. We were the largest sardine capital in the world.

AH: Were there other important kinds of commercial fishing that took place?

LB: Not that I know of. I didn't have anybody in my family, my dad was a cobbler and my mother owned a grocery store, so we didn't have any relatives in that. Oh my grandfather way back, he was a fisherman in Saint Andrews and he drowned.

AH: Sorry

AH: What was the waterfront like?

LB: The waterfront was it was busy, you've been downtown today right?

AH: Yes

LB: Well the whole water side was all filled in just like across the street, you didn't even see the water from there. That was all those brick buildings down there and all kinds of stores. In that book there they show you a picture of the movie theater that was State Of The Art Movie Theater and just everything that you, places where kids could hang out, there was plenty to do. We had dances and socials. We used to go to other communities too, we'd go to Lubec, we'd go to Dennysville, we'd go to Calais, we did a lot of dancing back in those days that is what we did.

AH: So how has the community changed since you were growing up?

LB: Well economically it's been very poor in the last few years. But as of now I have high hopes I feel very very good about Eastport. I can see it coming as a tourist place, which it never was. We never saw anybody in this town that you didn't know for years, will, I mean you just didn't see anybody you didn't know it was quite happening, and if you did it was like strange. [laughter] But people coming from away and buying homes here because it's beautiful and I think that the world economy has changed and people do not have the resources to fly all over to Europe and buy homes other places. Its safe here and I think it's friendly here, we like people and I think it's on the rise, I feel it strongly.

AH: How has the role of fishing in the community changed?

LB: As far as I'm concerned I have no idea what anybody's doing for fishing. I don't think there is any fishing here, curtained no sardines being packed that I know of. There was a factory a few years ago I think it was Stinson's or whatever, but certainly not, not anything. I don't have anybody in my family in that business so I really don't know.

AH: Right

AH: Are there any fisheries that used to be important here that are no longer important here.

LB: Fisheries or just fish?

AH: Yes Fisheries

LB: I don't think there were any here, so they were the town back then. They were the source of income and now they're not here and start to depend on tourism now.

AH: Do you know what caused that change?

LB: I don't, when I was growing up the War was on and the sardines were a wonderful thing for the solders to carry you know they were in a sealed can, and they were very nutritious and you put them in your backpack and opened them anywhere so that is when the big money came in. It was during the war and after that things changed.

AH: Oh okay

LB: Will at least that is my take on it.

AH: Has agriculture been important to the community?

LB: I don't really know much about that, I really don't.

AH: So you mentioned tourism a little bit, how important would you say it is today?

LB: I would say it's top of the list, I really would.

AH: And do you know when it started to become important?

LB: Not very long ago, actually the downtown is being revitalized and it's wonderful and people from away have come and opened bakeries and opened shops and bought houses here I mean, seventy four you could go for years and years and not see anyone that you didn't know and now I hardly see

anybody I do know because they there all new, but it's wonderful, it's wonderful because they feel good here, at least that is what I'm getting.

AH: Do you think the town should cater to those interest?

LB: Oh yes I do, I think if people want to come here and live here or summer here I think that the shops, if it's a bakery or dress shop or whatever they need that is what we should have.

AH: Do you consider this place to be a fishing community today?

LB: No

AH: And why not?

LB: I just don't see, certainly the sardines have gone as far as I'm concerned that I know. I don't know anybody in there now, growing up I didn't know anybody that wasn't.

AH: Right, okay

LB: Very few people that wasn't.

AH: Do you feel that the community here is resilient?

LB: I do, that's why we're still here.

AH: Right

AH: Why, what do you think makes it?

LB: I think living here on an island and we take care of each other, we watch out, people are friendly I mean it's not that many of us so we do have to get along. We need each other. Everybody does but not everybody realizes it.

AH: Would you consider the community here to be vulnerable?

LB: In what way for instance?

AH: To the like to the changes in terms of the ability to response to the changes.

LB: I think that they're ready. I think they're welcome changes, I think they go maybe a little slower than maybe you know some parts of the country because we're here for the long haul, so we don't just jump in and take any old thing that comes down the line, if anyone wants to come in with a product or a business or whatever. People think about it, most the time people stay here. Welcome them in so they stay, so you do think about it. Yes

AH: What do you see as the major threat facing this community?

LB: Just the whole economic structure of the country right now that it's in a decline. Where most the poor areas in money and not in other things. It's harder, you can't send your children off to college and there things that can't be bought.

AH: Has access to the waterfront changed? Some people have mentioned that.

LB: I don't know that, I don't feel that. We never had a boat or anything like that. No I don't see that. I don't know where they are coming from on that.

AH: Other than fishermen, who else using the water or dock space?

LB: Oh people with the pleasure boats now which we never had. Which is nice, I'm for it.

AH: Do you know if there's any recreational fishing that happens around here?

LB: Yes there is some. And there is Harris Point that take out groups fishing. Yes, and its fun. I've gone out myself, it's nice.

AH: Yes we talked with Butchie Harris.

LB: Butchie, that's funny.

AH: That's what everybody else called him.

LB: It's weird. We have a lot of nicknames in this town and they just go on forever and they never let you forget them.

AH: How affordable is the current housing situation here?

LB: I think people from away can afford to come here and buy houses because the houses are fairly reasonable. Because these people have sold their homes from away or they're in the position to buy a second home, so I think if anybody wants to live here they could. I think it's harder for the locals to buy a house here because there's not that many jobs here.

AH: Has this changed over the past twenty years?

LB: Yes, will twenty years, yes?

AH: Or I mean any [inaudible]

LB: Probably the last ten years we had more people come from away and buy summer homes here.

AH: Okay

LB: I don't have anybody living here now besides me so I don't know in my family. My husband was from here too. I don't know how local people are doing buying houses. I have no idea.

AH: What do you feel have been the most critical changes in the community since you lived here? Or maybe since you came back.

LB: Critical changes. I would just say that the people that have come here and seen it's a wonderful place to live and brought their dreams and their money with them, opened up stores and bought homes, that's it.

AH: What do you think this community will look like in ten years?

LB: I think it's going to be quite a tourist place. I think it's going to be a little too busy for me, however that's progress.

AH: What would you like it to look like?

LB: I would like to see it be self-sufficient. People be able to live here comfortably with a good income and be able to send their children off to college and just live a comfortable life. I think that's what we all want.

AH: What do you like most about living here?

LB: Beautiful is number one, as far as I'm concerned its paradise, but I've always thought that. And I've been to other places, it's not like I have been here my whole life. It's safe and it's friendly and it's beautiful.

AH: Those are kind of all of the questions that I have. Are there other issues that you would like to talk about or things that you feel are important to understanding kind of the past and present and the future about this area?

LB: Not really, I feel very good about Eastport I'm very optimistic I've loved it my whole life. It was wonderful to grow up here and the only thing was if you didn't go to college then you had to leave town more or less because there weren't jobs for young people getting out of school, but we all did that and it worked out well and that was the way we knew it was, but I feel very happy with Eastport and happy that the people that I'm meeting because I do volunteer down there in the church etc. That people are happy here and feel secure and I love that. That's the most important thing is to feel good about your neighbors and your town. I mean you could walk all over this place anytime the day and night and not worry about anything, and everybody takes care of everybody. You're every body's daughter [laughter]. You're taken care of wherever you are, folks look after you because we're we go back so many generations that even though we're not all related we are in our hearts related. I feel Eastport going to be fine and then it will probably be too much. [laughter] But I won't be here and that's okay.

AH: Okay

AH: Do you recommend anyone else in this community that we should speak with?

LB: Are you looking for someone that's from here or from away, as we call them.

AH: From here.

LB: From here, oh dear I can't right now tell you anybody Anna because we just lost a classmate and that's all going on, getting ready for the funeral.

AH: Oh okay

LB: There's not many of us that has been fortunate to come back for whatever reason. So I can't think of anybody at the moment with the exception as I say of the people involved with the funeral.

AH: When you were growing up everybody kind of left after High School, after they graduated.

LB: They had to.

AH: Would you say that that has changed much?

LB: I really don't. I honestly don't think they do and I think they stay. How to put it. I don't think they're ready to take on the world outside and they stay and that's not a good thing for them, cause you don't grow that way and there's not a heck a lot to do here, there's no movie, there's no this there's no that. I feel sorry for a lot of them that stayed, they should go after graduation and try to find work and a life outside of here, but it's an easy place to stay because you love it here so it's push pull type thing. It helps if people have relatives that live away, you know that will say come stay with me until you find a job type thing and that's usually what the story is, somebody's sister or an aunt or grandmother will say come. I feel their staying here, but you don't see many young people here not like we used too, gather downtown, bowling alley and the movie theater, you don't see that. I don't see young people anymore, and I feel that's a bad thing. And our schools are getting smaller and smaller so they will be consolidating all the more so you lose a lot of your things that bind you together like your sports programs and your plays that you have your school plays, recitals and all that when those go and people just stay separated more then I think is good for us.

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