

Interview with Amanda Wright September 24, 2006

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Name of person interviewed: Amanda Wright (AW)

Facts about this person:

Age: 55

Sex: Female

Occupation: lobster sternman

Home ports: Wickford, RI, Newport, RI

Residence: unknown

Ethnic background: unknown

Interviewer: Janice Fleuriel (JF)

Transcriber: Sarah Smith

Place interview took place: Working Waterfront Festival

Date and time of interview: September 24, 2006

**INDEX / KEYWORDS****KEYWORDS**

Lobstering; Rhode Island; woman fisherman; bycatch; trap limits; health care; poetry; bait; privatization; scalloping

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[00:00] Done everything on a fishing boat, but primarily lobstering; been fishing for twenty-two years; work out of Newport; worked out of Wickford and all over Rhode Island; lobstering fits her lifestyle best; born in Princeton, NJ and then moved down south; no one in her family fished; moved to Provincetown as a potter, had trouble making ends meet in winter; worked one day opening scallops

[03:04] Made a lot of money shucking scallops; went out as a cook on a dragger; had a great time and didn't get sick; sense of humor is important in fishing

[05:52] Lobstering has good times and bad times but it evens out at the end of the year; goes lobstering all year long; worked in scalloping for two or three years and then went out to Alaska on a boat; got into lobstering when she moved to Rhode Island; worked as shellfish predator coordinator in Wellfleet; built traps for crabs and conchs and other predators; developed markets for the predators; sold green crabs as bait; sold conchs and whelks to local restaurants; loved working out on the flats

[10:00] Started lobstering in Wickford, Rhode Island; worked for Bruce Barr; did all the work preparing for the season and then he fired her; after eighteen years he hired her back as deckhand; she was then diagnosed with breast cancer at forty-eight, and he was the only boat with health insurance; fired her because he didn't want to work with a woman;

[12:47] Lobstering is like a dance, because the deckhand and captain have to know each other well for things to go smoothly; many captains keep their boats very clean; learned to string bait and stack gear in the beginning; started off with wooden pots; wire pots much lighter, but many lobstermen didn't want to change

[16:06] Pots now weigh 35-40 pounds a piece; learn tricks to handling them; become very strong; allotted 800 pots each, but they are changing the regulations based on fishing history; usually fish 275-300 pots a day, with fifteen in a string; fish in Area 2; Addendum 7 is coming up which would privatize lobstering industry, and people would have to buy a license to get into the industry

[19:08] In favor of privatizing because she thinks those who have hung in there deserve to make money from their licenses; some guys would get fewer pots if they fished fewer; they would also have to prove their landings; always been happy to be sternman because she can get off the boat whenever she wants, and the day is done when they get to the dock; strings the bait while they steam out and while traveling between trawls; use skate, flounder, and cod for bait; bait has become very expensive

[23:14] Everyone has their own place where they sell lobster; many guys go to Aquidneck Lobster; she likes lobster fritters but won't eat a whole lobster; story about a boat being covered with maggots after someone left some bait in the barrel on a hot day;

[26:27] Wrote a poem; poem is inspired by working on a gillnetter and having to untangle all the fish and cut off skate wings; picking nets like dressing and undressing dolls; lobstermen want to eat the tomcods that come up in the pots because they eat the lobsters, but she insists on releasing all the bycatch

[30:13] Reads poem about catching a tomcod in a trap and releasing him;

[33:24] Read poem to an audience in Astoria; has a love-hate relationship with fishing – always said she would get out of it soon; the job gets better; keeps her healthy; gets to see things other people don't; sometimes doesn't want to be there, like any job; likes the routine

[36:31] Go out fishing all year long; gives details of her daily routine; works about four days a week because of weather; some seasons are slower than others; winter isn't bad if you dress properly;

[40:21] Wants festival visitors to understand that fishermen are literate, not all drug users; that they respect the environment, this is their livelihood, and that a fish bought in the market comes from somewhere; understand the personal histories of fishing, people have made a living and put their kids through school; fishing isn't all fun and games; any education people can get about the industry is good; there are a few bad seeds who use drugs, but there are also corporate executives who use drugs and it's no different

[44:02]

[end recording]