

Interviewee Name: Krista Tripp

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Interviewer(s) Name(s) and Affiliations: Matt Frassica (The Briney Podcast) and Teagan White (College of the Atlantic intern)

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Interview Description: Krista Tripp, a lobsterman from Spruce Head, ME, speaks about her childhood experiences fishing and going through the lobster apprenticeship program and how her grandfather supported her desire to become a lobsterman. She addresses the realities of being a new female fisherman in this area and expresses her excitement at seeing more women on the water.

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Transcription by: Teagan White, College of the Atlantic

Matt Frassica: [00:00] So, can we start by just –? Can you say your name and spell it?

Krista Tripp: [00:10] My name is Krista Tripp, and it's spelled K-R-I-S-T-A-T-R-I-P-P.

MF: [00:18] Okay, and where are you from?

KT: [00:19] I'm from Spruce Head, Maine.

MF: [00:23] And where do you live now?

KT: [00:25] Spruce Head, Maine. [laughter]

MF: [00:29] [laughter] Alright. What do you do?

KT: [00:32] I am a lobster boat captain.

MF: [00:35] How long have you done that?

KT: [03:37] Well, I've worked on boats basically my whole life. I started, I'd say, probably around the time I was thirteen when I got my first official job with my grandfather on his lobster boat. I did stern for him for a year, and then when I started high school, me and my brother got a boat to share, so we each had a hundred and fifty traps. We would fish out of the same boat, and sometimes I would go stern for him, and he would go stern for me. He brought his friends sometimes, too, as did I. I did that all through high school, and that is what you would call the apprenticeship program. So, we would each have to log our hours, the amount that we hauled, and what we caught, poundage-wise. Well, unfortunately, I went to Massachusetts, went scalloping a little bit, and didn't get my paperwork in on time. I just left it up to my parents, and they're kind of old school. They didn't take me seriously because I am a woman, so they didn't really think to turn my paperwork in. Well, I was definitely serious about it, so I was kind of upset when I came home and realized that I had missed the deadline. My brother got his license, and I got put on the waiting list. I was able to learn some stuff, come back home, and still work on boats, but just recently, after being on the waiting list for twelve years, I just recently got my lobster license. I'm so grateful that at least I finally got it, and I've been – the first year that I got it, you're only allowed three traps, so I would go sternman with David Cousins, who is the president of the MLA [Maine Lobster Association]. Well, actually, he's now retired as of today. He's been great to work with, and I've been introduced to a lot of people through him, and I've learned a lot from him. So, that's always been good. You don't really know what's going to happen in the future. I fished with him while I was captain of my own boat that year and the year after. So, this year, I've worked my way up to five hundred traps. You're allowed a hundred each year. So, I started at three hundred, and last year was four hundred, and then this year is five hundred until you reach your trap limit, which is eight hundred. So, this year I'm going on my own, so it's really exciting. I'm sure it's a little bit different than when I used to fish in high school because I'm fishing in deeper water and I have a bigger boat. But it's really exciting because I actually ended up with my grandfather's boat. He passed away a couple of years ago at the time that I was getting my license, so it kind of worked out really funny. By the grace of

God, everything fell into place, and I ended up purchasing his lobster boat, so I've been able to keep it in the family.

MF: [05:00] Do you think your grandfather was more open to the idea of you being a lobster fisherman than your parents were? Because it sounds like he invited you on the boat, he treated you the same as your brother, and then your parents kind of dropped the ball with the license thing.

KT: [05:14] Yeah, I really do think he was open to it because not only did he take me as his sternman, but he took my aunt, who was also a woman, and actually my cousin who never really grew up in the lobstering industry – he brought her onboard just to show her the ropes, and she worked with him a year before he passed. Then, I was able to take her sternman with me for a year, but she went off to college and then found a job in what she was interested in doing. But it worked out kind of funny. He was definitely open. My parents have come around now. When I was younger, you never saw any women really working on boats. I mean, our family, that's all we did, so it was just the norm for us. I don't know if I was just really sheltered and didn't know of other women in other areas fishing, but I certainly felt the oddball in my school and growing up in my area. So, it's really great to see a lot more women getting into the industry, and it's really cool.

MF: [06:42] Do you have a memory of when you decided that that's what you wanted to do?

KT: [06:48] I always knew that that's what I wanted. I really enjoyed it when I was younger, and I would actually stack my study halls at the end of my day in school so that I could leave school early and go to haul. So, I guess I just knew then that I really enjoyed it, and that's what I really love doing.

MF: [07:24] Yeah. So, there was never really another option for you.

KT: [07:27] No, not really. I mean, a lot of my friends were going off to school, and I was the one that was like, "Okay, well, I'm just going to stay here and do college here, and that way, I can still go fishing." [laughter]

MF: [07:44] Yeah. Do you want to talk about where you go fishing? Because we have these charts here for that purpose.

KT: [07:50] Sure.

Teagan White: [07:54] Here, we'll get you a drastically different color than – well, maybe drastic's not the right term. [inaudible]

KT: [08:05] So, I fish – this is the Mussel Ridge Channel right here. Here's South Thomaston, and Spruce Head is – this is the Keag River right here, so this little island right here is called Spruce Head Island. There's Spruce Head, and then there's the little bridge right here that connects you to Spruce Head Island, and I live right here. So, these are the Mussel Ridge Islands, so I fish – you want me to mark this map? Oh, okay. [laughter] So the line probably goes from

here, through here, and there's some areas here around these islands which you can't fish because only the island people can fish. So, the line kind of goes out like this, and then this is Spruce Head bottom. Although I live on Spruce Head, this is South Thomaston bottom, and I fish South Thomaston because that's what my family always did. I actually had the option to fish Spruce Head because I live there, but I talked to my dad, and he just didn't think it would be right for me to do that, whereas all of us fish South Thomaston. So that's what I've been doing. Let's see. Here's Matinicus. Here's Large Green Island. This is not a perfect line, but it comes out to about here. On this side, let's see. Here's the [inaudible]. Well, it's kind of like this. This is kind of our area and in a roundabout way. It's not perfect. You can fish – there's a three-mile line right here, and then you have Matinicus Bottom and Criehaven. My dad, just recently when my grandfather passed away, bought my grandfather's house. My grandfather fished Criehaven, so my dad's fishing Criehaven now. He fishes in federal waters as well, and so does my brother. So, I'm actually left alone. [laughter] I mean, my uncle and my cousin's husband fish there. I wish more family was still fishing around me, but hey, it's okay, I'll figure it out. This island here is Tommy's island. This is where I grew up in the summers. My parents built a house out there, and that's where – this is called Tommy's Island. We own this island. Our family owns it. My grandfather had a fish weir that he bought into years ago. He went in on it with two other different people, and they always made a deal with each other that if one of them wanted to sell out, they would have to sell it to one of the other people. So, one person sold out, my grandfather bought his share, and that other person decided to sell out as well because, as you know, the fishing industry is always fluctuating, and there's things that happen. He bought out the other person's share as well, so we ended up with the island there. He was a very smart man. But that's where I grew up in the summers, and this is the island that I used to fish out of when I was a young girl. And so now I'm fishing out here, so it's a little bit different. I still have some of my gear inside there, but it's a little bit of a different scenario than when I was in high school.

MF: [12:13] So you fish this year-round?

KT: [12:16] Well, mostly. Someone asked if I was going to keep my gear outside this winter, and I was thinking about it, ultimately because they were going to do a story and then because I didn't sell to Red Lobster, who is sponsoring the story, they decided to find somebody else because I didn't sell to Red Lobster. So, I was like, "Well, maybe I'll haul my traps up," and I'm glad that I did because it was a really harsh winter. In the future, I do plan to leave some gear in the winter, but it didn't work out this year.

MF: [12:57] Would you consider fishing further out?

KT: [13:01] Yeah. Oh my God, yeah. I would absolutely love to be the first federal water fisherwoman. I think that would be so cool. It'd be great. Not only that, but I'd be with my brother and my dad. I think that would be really great and really cool. Yeah, absolutely.

TW: [13:24] Was it hard for you to find spots for you to put your traps in this new area once you got your boat, or did your family's reputation and already being there help with that a little bit?

KT: [13:37] It definitely helped. A lot of people say that the fishing industry is kind of cutthroat, and I did have someone tell me – I'm not going to say names, but they told me that a lot of

people might not like the fact that I'm fishing because my dad was a great fisherman. I really don't think that people think of me as posing a threat, so that's great. I have had a lot of fishermen that have been very helpful and very supportive. That's actually wonderful. So, I haven't had any trouble with other fishermen. It is territorial, but I'm not fishing outside the territory or anything, so I don't have anything to worry about. My dad has given me some tips and advice, and other people have given me some tips and advice, so it's been really awesome.

MF: [14:46] Are there any other obstacles you think you've faced, specifically being a fisherwoman, that your brother didn't face or your dad or grandfather didn't face?

KT: [15:02] Yeah, I think with being a woman fisherman, you're always going to come up against different obstacles. It's really hard, honestly, to be a woman amongst all of the boys because you're not one of the boys, and I think a lot of people don't take women too seriously in the industry. I hope that will change.

MF: [15:34] So, I'm curious about how it when you want to join when you want to start finishing an area that your family has fished traditionally, and you've gone through this apprenticeship as a teenager, is there – we've heard about the kinds of hazing or whatever that goes on when you're first starting out, like getting lines cut, getting traps cut and that kind of thing. Is that something that happens? Is that something that you've experienced, or did you have an easier entry?

KT: [16:16] Right, that definitely happens. It depends on who you are. I know that a lot of fishermen have been brought up through their families fishing, so they have a right to be there. I think the only time that happens is when someone comes into an area that hasn't necessarily lived there and wants to start fishing, and everyone's like, "Well, who are you, and where have you come from? No, this is our hometown. This is our livelihood. This is what we do." There's been a lot of people that I think have struggled with that, but I haven't. [laughter]

MF: [17:07] What are some of the things that you're concerned about looking forward to as somebody who is just starting in their career?

KT: [17:15] Some of the things that I'm looking forward to?

MF: [17:19] That you're looking forward to, or that you're worried about.

KT: [17:21] That I'm worried about? Things that I'm looking forward to. Well, I look forward to getting my full trap limit. Obviously, that's a big thing. The things that I'm worried about are changes in the fishing industry. I just sat in on this meeting that had to do with right whales. I can totally understand why they're concerned about their livelihood and wanting to work with us, but it can be really expensive, and if it is not effective, then it's us fishermen that suffer, and we're the ones that take the – we're the ones that are paying for it ultimately. So, I think that it's not a bad idea to think of ways to try to save the whales. I'm for saving the whales, but I just know that this is such a huge industry, and we are all interconnected. It's so big and worldwide that it affects us, and therefore, it affects everyone else. So, that is definitely a huge concern, especially where I'm just getting started in the industry and so late.

MF: [18:52] Late, how?

KT: [18:54] Late as in – well, my age. [laughter] Most people do the apprenticeship program, and then they get their license, like what my brother did, and he's way ahead of me. He's got a federal license, he's fishing offshore, he's got a bigger boat, he's got his trap limit, he's got way more experience than I do because my years of working on the back of a boat have been just that. You don't really have to think too much about what you're doing. You're just working. When you're captain, you have so many more things to think about – not setting on people, the tide, and all sorts of different things. It's kind of unfortunate, but hey, at least I'm starting now.

MF: [19:50] Yeah. Are you concerned at all about the ways the lobster population might change with the way that the warming water might affect your livelihood?

KT: [20:03] Absolutely, yeah. Yeah, that's a huge – I'm glad you brought that up. That's something to think about, and our generation is really going to have to come up with some solutions to keep the lobsters alive and well and producing. Dave actually has been quite an inspiration because he's done a lot of great things for the industry. We all need to do the same thing to keep it alive, well, and sustainable. So, we're going to be up against quite a few things, but I hope that we can find ways around it and not have to deal with any horrendous algae blooms or them moving way offshore and us not being able to go fish for them. That's why I'm stressing about getting a federal license because we don't know. We don't know what's going to happen. We can speculate all we want, but we just don't know.

MF: [21:16] Are there things that you've seen change just in the time between when you were with your grandfather as a teenager and now?

KT: [21:25] Yeah, I mean, there were a lot of lobsters back then. There were guys coming in with thousand-pound hauls on a daily basis, and they were so plentiful, and they've really dropped off a lot. Thank God the vents have been put into place and the V-notching has been put into place; throwing the egg-bearing lobsters back has been put into place because that's definitely had a positive impact on the whole industry, at least here in Maine.

MF: [22:06] Yeah. So you think there's less – even though the total number, the total amount of catch, has been going up and up and up, you think there are fewer – you're seeing fewer lobsters coming in on each trip?

KT: [22:20] Inside. Inside. I don't think a lot of people know this, but years ago, people would just fish in this inside channel here. My father actually was one of the very few that started fishing out here to get away from all the other fishermen because there were a lot of traps, and it was affecting his catch. So, when people started finding out that there were lobsters out there, and there were a lot of lobsters out there, [laughter] then people started fishing out here in the outside channel. Same thing with the federal lobsters now. Now, a lot more people are finding that there's lobsters way offshore, so they're getting bigger boats, and they're getting the equipment needed to go fish offshore because there's a lot more lobsters. But definitely, the location of the lobsters have definitely shifted. So I don't know. Who knows if they were always

out here, or if they just stopped coming in, or if global warming is affecting their patterns, or what? I don't know.

MF: [23:49] You decided to stay in the place you grew up. What is it that you value about your community?

KT: [23:57] I value my community because we're all pretty close-knit. We all watch out for each other. We work together, for the most part [laughter], just keeping a healthy environment and community for all of us. We want to raise our children in a healthy, safe, friendly environment. I've seen a lot of people, just really close, and I think that that's important in every single community that you live in. It's nice.

MF: [24:50] Are there any things that you're afraid of changing in your community that you're afraid won't be around for your kids or grandkids?

KT: [25:00] Well, definitely, if the fishing industry goes away, then that's a huge concern. I always had the idea that I would pass it down to my kids and that they would pass it down to their kids. This has always been the way of life here that we really don't know what else we would do. Hopefully, we'd be able to find some kind of other thing to do on the water, maybe another species or something to catch, but the fear is that we're not going to have an industry to pass down to future generations.

MF: [25:45] Yeah. And obviously, that would affect everything about the community.

KT: [25:49] Absolutely, because what would we do? We were all built on lobstering, at least since I've been around. So, it'd really, really be sad.

MF: [26:05] Yeah. Alright. Well, thank you so much.

KT: [26:09] You're welcome.

MF: [26:09] This is really great. Is there anything else? Any other issues, topics, or stories you came in wanting to talk about that we didn't get to?

KT: [26:19] No, not that I can think of. We covered quite a bit. I came in here thinking, "What am I going to say?" and it all just flowed very well. [laughter]

MF: [26:33] Well, thank you so much.

KT: [26:34] You're welcome. It's been great talking to you.

MF: [26:36] Oh, I'm really glad we got a chance to talk with you.

[RECORDING PAUSED]

KT: [26:39] A lot of women working on the back of boats, going sternman, but there's not a lot of women captains. So, it's really cool to maybe pave the way for some other women that want to get into this industry.

TW: [26:59] I am pretty excited that you came in.

KT: [27:02] Yeah. Well, I am glad that I did. Thank you for having me.

MF: [27:07] Thank you. Tell other people to come in.

KT: [27:08] I will. Okay. It was great to meet you.

MF: [27:09] Very nice to meet you.

KT: [27:10] Thank you.

MF: [27:11] Thank you.

KT: [27:11] And –?

TW: [27:12] I'm Teagan.

KT: [27:13] Teagan, okay.

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Reviewed by Molly Graham 1/28/2023