

- Q: [0:00] We are now recording. First question is, how do you like to introduce yourself?
- A: [0:06] Well, my name is Caitlin. (laughter) My name is Caitlin Trafton. I live on Swan's Island, and I lobster fish for a living. Yeah, that's all.
- Q: [0:27] What year were you born?
- A: [0:30] I was born in 1987
- Q: [0:33] Tell me a little bit about where you grew up.
- A: [0:39] So, I was born in Bangor, Maine, and then my mother moved us to Fitchburg, Mass. We were in Corinna for three years, Corinna, Maine, and then my mom moved us to Fitchburg, Massachusetts. Then she moved us back up to North Yarmouth, Maine, and I was 13 or 11 when we moved back to Maine, and I always summered with my dad on Swan's Island. So, when I graduated high school, I moved to Swan's Island full-time.
- Q: [1:20] Where are your parents from, and what did they do?
- A: [1:25] My mother is from Fitchburg, Massachusetts, and she is a special education schoolteacher. My dad is from Princeton, Massachusetts, and he is retired now. He was in the Vietnam War, and he is sort of disabled. (laughter) He's good. More mental than physical. He did some lobster fishing.
- Q: [2:11] Can I ask what brought him out to Swan's?
- A: [2:15] So, my great aunt, Veronica – it's kind of interesting. I don't know the origin, but my great uncle Peter was a writer, and he – you know what? OK, let me start again. I think it was my great aunt Veronica, and she came here. She came to Swan's Island for the summer. So, she might have been the first one. It was probably 50 years ago when my family started summering there. They used to say Swan's Island was – the summer crowd was teachers and preachers. My great aunt Margo and her husband was a writer. It was basically ten kids. That was my grandmother and all her siblings. They all came to Swan's Island in the summer. That kind of sounded confusing, but they had a summer house in the harbor that my dad bought. My dad bought a house in Minturn and a dock, and he started doing the urchin – he started buying urchins because it was not long after he bought that property, the urchin boom occurred in the '90s, late '90s. So, yeah. I don't know how they found it originally, though.
- Q: [4:01] Was anybody else besides your father involved in the Swan's Island fisheries?
- A: [4:07] Yeah, he was the only one. Yes.
- Q: [4:14] Do you have any siblings?

A: [4:16] I have an older sister, Taryn. We were just talking about – how old am I? She's 39. My younger sister is 25.

Q: [4:32] Are they involved at all in fisheries like you?

A: [4:37] No, my older sister did do some sterning on lobster boats one summer. But no, she lives in Maryland, and my younger sister works with racehorses in Florida.

Q: [4:55] Do you have any family history of working in other roles in the fishing industry besides directly fishing, such as bookkeeping, fish processing, marketing, or with bait or gear?

A: [5:07] So, is clamming a part of that? If I'm doing other fisheries?

Q: [5:17] Yes, definitely.

A: [5:19] Typically, I'll buy the soft-shell clam license every year and dig clams if I have time. I have been scallop fishing before, just shucking. I'd be on deck and picking what we dragged and shucking scallops. Fishery-related? I've been pogie fishing, and I've been to the alewife run to get bait for other captains that I've worked for. I would transport the scallops that we got – this might have been like ten, 15 years ago, though I would bring them up to Mariaville, where there was a scallop buyer. But that seems the case – over here on Mount Desert Island – that was when I was living in Tremont – that people go all over for bait and to get a better price for whatever they're catching.

[6:35] So, sometimes I would go to get bait or go to deliver scallops. There are probably a few other random things in there, but all pretty much the labor part of it. I'm right now on our Swan's Island Fisherman's Co-Op board. They say I was the first woman member, but I feel like there were other women (laughter), and they just forgot. (laughter) I guess, right now, I'm working on getting us some dock workers for the 2025 fishing season. Yeah, that's it.

Q: [7:23] Incredible. We'll go back to a bit more about your role in a second, but just a few more questions about your family background. Can you describe your educational background?

A: [7:33] I graduated from Greeley High School, and I went to the University of Maine in Orono and graduated with a bachelor's degree. It's a liberal arts and science major – new media. Yeah, that's it.

Q: [7:55] Are you married?

A: [7:58] No.

Q: [7:59] Do you have any children?

A: [8:00] No.

Q: [8:02] If you were to have children, would you want them to go into fishing?

A: [8:08] Yeah, I really would. I mean, I know you can't choose that kind of thing. Yeah, I would encourage, but not too much. (laughter)

Q: [8:22] Before we transition to kind of focusing more on you, could I just get a little clarification for your dad? So, he started out buying urchin, so he's a buyer, and selling them, and then he also lobstered. Did he have a license, or was he working on other people's boats?

A: [8:40] Yeah, he had his own little – I don't know if it was like a 20-foot gas-powered skiff with a house, and he would fish whatever. I don't know. He probably didn't fish. Maybe he fished 375. At the time, that was the limit on Swan's Island. So, he did that. He did do that for, I mean, maybe 20 years, and then he gave it up, gave his license up.

Q: [9:15] Sweet. I know you've already covered this a little bit, but would you like to describe your role in the fishing industry in Maine?

A: [9:24] Yeah. My role, really – so, when I graduated high school, I started going on a lobster boat right away. I was a stern man for 20 years, almost 20 years, and I didn't really feel very involved in that capacity. I did it for the money because it's a certain amount of time. I mean, roughly, May 1st to January 1st for me. So, I could make a good chunk of money and then do something else, like school or travel. But now, now that I have my own license, I for sure feel a lot more involved in it. I don't know why that is. Maybe it's because I'm like the director of what my future holds. I'm accountable for myself. It used to be I'd just be like, I'll get on another boat if this one doesn't like me, or if this doesn't work out, I'll just get on another boat. So, it was really short-sighted.

[10:48] I guess, like, you could say – yeah, that was just it. I was a helper on a boat, and that's the most I really contributed to the fishery. I've been on, like, 15 boats. I probably have been on a few more than that. So, just been consistently in it. But now, yeah, I do like to go to the meetings, the Zone B council meetings, and see what the ASMFC is doing. I like to just see what – whatever is educational and being offered as far as the rulemaking and the health of the population, I've been trying to be involved in that, but that takes a whole other education. You have to understand that the law is a totally – it's its own thing. So, I think that's how I'm growing to be more a part of that aspect of fisheries, which is kind of exhausting. (laughter)

Q: [12:01] Yeah. We'll return to that in just a bit. Can you describe to me the process that you went through in getting your license?

A: [12:08] Yeah. It was eight years ago. I decided – well, I could buy a license when I was a little kid. I had a little kid's license. No, I had a license until I was, I don't know, I think maybe 13, and then my dad was like, you better keep buying this license, because pretty

soon the rule is going to be – it's going to change, and they're going to close this fishery. So, I kind of ignored that, and then it happened. It was maybe – was it 2009? I could be wrong. The state started putting limited entry programs in place. It was really limiting. People were really upset. It was really limiting who could come in and fish. They, at the time, wanted kids. They wanted their kids – the fishermen wanted their kids to stay in. So, they allowed students.

[13:25] So, two programs kind of broke off. One is that the students could get a license as long as they completed an apprenticeship. Two, anybody over the age of, like, 23, which I happen to be, had no choice but to go through the apprentice program for adults. So, I think I was like, that's stupid, and ignored it. But then I got sober in 2016, and I decided, well, if I'm going to be putting the time in on the boat, which I'd already put in 12 years or something, I may as well be logging my hours. Yeah. I just went to the DMR website, downloaded those forms, and it's just log sheets you have to fill out. You have to log 1,000 hours, 200 days. Maybe 200 of those hours have to be on land, doing gear work. And then the DMR signs – the Marine patrol sign all those log sheets, and you have to take a US Coast Guard safety drill conductor course. There was something else.

[14:51] So, once I started that, I got deep into that senselessly. But once I decided, all right, I'm going to do this, it took me three years to complete all that. Then, I got on the Swan's Island waitlist, and I waited five years to get a license, all while being really pushy about it, especially the last three years, going to all the meetings and calling the DMR regularly. It was April 1st last year that I found out that I got my own lobster fishing license commercially. So, yeah, it was grueling in a way because I didn't really know if I would get it. But here I am. I have a year of fishing under – a season under my belt, and it's good. It was the way to go for me because with stern man, you could just only get on the best boat. You don't have choices about what color that boat is, or how fast it goes, or how big it is, or what the name is on it.

Q: [16:08] Yeah. How is your father reacting to you getting your license and continuing lobstering?

A: [16:15] Well, he always was against it. He pushed me to get my degree. Actually, because he is a disabled veteran, I applied for – I'm not sure what it is, but I was helped to get a degree. Otherwise, I wouldn't financially – otherwise, I wouldn't have gone. I got the four-year degree because of the things that he did in his life. However, I really just stayed with fishing, and I love Swan's Island so much, I had no desire to go pursue anything else. But my dad, most of my life, was like, lobster fishing is going to end. I don't know what it was 30 years ago, but he was pretty convinced it was going to end. And then now it's global warming stuff or climate change stuff, and he's just like, the lobsters are all going north. They're all going offshore there. There's not going to be a fishery. He is like, don't. Don't join.

[17:51] When I finally got my license and started buying the boat stuff, I went over and I told him, and he was just – I mean, tried to be funny about it. I don't think he wants me – he still doesn't want me to go fishing. But I think that he knows – it's just, you can't be

afraid. You can't be afraid. With fishing, I know enough people on Swan's Island that they have their whole lives invested in it, and that I feel I am surrounded by a good group of strong people that I trust. I trust what they see. I'm not going to trust my dad, who hasn't been in it for – I mean, it's been 10 years, maybe now he's been out of it. So, maybe he trusts that, maybe he trusts that I see something about it that's going to last. So, I don't know.

Q: [19:04] Do you lobster inshore or offshore?

A: [19:08] I'm inside the three-mile line. I'm in the Swan's Island conservation zone. I could buy a permit, but I think they're going for minimum \$20,000. I don't know. I spent a lot of money in my first year. So, yeah, (inaudible) I'm not going to splurge on that yet.

Q: [19:34] Do you own your own boat?

A: [19:36] I do. The bank owns it. (laughter) Yeah.

Q: [19:41] Just to cover our bases, do you have any experience in bookkeeping, bait, or gear preparation?

A: [19:51] Other than my own stuff? My own business, the bookkeeping part. I've been doing that. It's changed a lot now that I have more. The bait and gear – bait, I just buy it from the Co-Op, so whatever they have. I don't have any part of that. Gear work. I've done gear work for a few of the guys I worked for. So, I'll do all that by myself.

Q: [20:32] Do you have experience in post-harvest processing, marketing, or trade?

A: [20:40] No. Other than – yeah.

Q: [20:49] In advocacy or community-based organizations related to fisheries.

A: [20:59] I mean, MLA. But that's – OK.

Q: [21:03] Or participating in your zone meetings?

A: [21:07] Yes, OK. NEFSA is a new one. I'm, I guess, a member of that and a member of MLA.

Q: [21:21] And you're on the board of the Co-Op?

A: [21:24] Yeah, the Fishermen's Co-Op.

Q: [21:28] Could you say a little bit about that? You started at the beginning, sort of saying you're the first woman, or are you? But a little more about what that work looks like and how you got involved in that?

A: [21:38] Yeah, I got the license, I went into our Co-Op, and I was like, I want a member worksheet. Our bookkeeper was like, oh, no, you haven't sold lobsters here for a year. So, no. I went to the president, and I was like, so I can't be a member? He was like, you can come to the meeting, and we'll see. We'll talk about it. I showed up to the meeting, and then he said – the president said – who is Ken LeMoine right now and seems like he's always been. But he said, do you want to be on the board? And I said, yes. I don't think anybody wants to be on the board or something because the second guy that was asked, they're like, Elijah (sp?), you want to be on the –? He looks at Elijah. He's like, you want to be on the board? And Elijah was like, if you got nobody else.

[22:41] I was like, this is a great opportunity to really be a part of – make it better. But it's hard. It's really hard in small towns when people are comfortable. It's hard to tell people, I think this would be – this would be a good – we could do this, and I think it would make it better because people automatically think we don't like the way we do things around here. (laughter) So, you got to be really – my role is – it's very disorganized. The board is disorganized, in my opinion. It's very relaxed. The people that have been doing things for a long time, they just handle it. They don't ask for help. So, I come every month, and there's no agenda, but things have gotten done, and it was all word of mouth.

[23:49] But my role in that is – I'm one of seven board members, and the two bookkeepers are female, but the rest of the board are all male. I try and go in there and I say, look, we want dock workers. Our dock workers are injured and tired. We need more dock workers. I'll put out an ad, and I'll do some interviews. They're like, yeah. (laughter) I need a “yes” though. I'm like, OK, so I'm going to do that. Do I have everybody's permission? (laughter) They're like, if that's what you want to do, yeah, go ahead. Then, I'm like, I feel like – I don't even – a sultan or something. I'm like, yes. I don't know. I feel like somebody with power, where I heard the word yes, and I'm like, I could do something now.

[24:49] So, I go and do that, and then I come back, and everybody forgot that that was something I was interested to do. So, they're like, oh, really, you're still doing that? I'm just like, Oh my gosh. They're like, because we got some workers that are going to come up, and they said, they'd do it. I'm like, look, if you don't need me (laughter) – you know what I mean? If you want to do this, you do this. But it's hard. It's hard. It's very hard to get things accomplished. I don't know what those dynamics are. Small town, coastal Maine. The way they have done things have always worked, so don't come in with your big ideas. (laughter) I've been there for 20 years, so I don't even think my ideas are that much different than theirs. So, that's what's been going on for me. It's just been the last year that I've been on that board.

Q: [25:52] Are there any other projects or undertakings that you've tried that they've also been hesitant to approve?

A: [26:05] From what I understand, co-ops have this problem. When we count crates, lobstermen will catch 10, 20 crates, but it's up to the dock worker to count those crates on a line. So, at the Fisherman's Co-Op, they'll just throw those crates into the water, and if they didn't tag the first crate, that's just an accident. Suddenly, we have an issue. Now, our

count is going to be off. So, that was my biggest issue. And I think, like in any situation, it's not good to come in with an issue. So, they knew that I thought a crate count needs to be done well. No solutions really were made. But somebody from the outside told me, just put a whiteboard in the shed, and they can just do a hash mark for every crate they send in the water. I was like, all right, this is going to be great.

[27:14] So, I went in, and I said, whiteboard. And the interim president was like, OK, whiteboard, great. I was like, OK, I heard it. I heard the thumbs up. Then, I came back with a whiteboard, and I put it in the buy float, and it was like mayhem. The dock workers that have been there forever were like, what is this thing? What is this? They called the interim president, and the interim president was like, what did you do? I'm like, OK, I only did what I was OK-ed to do. He was kind of like, who told you this was OK? I was like, you said yes. He was like, I didn't say, do it. I was like, oh, my word. Well, another board member said, just put it in the buy float, and if they want to use it, they can use it. So, it was all smoothed over. But I mean, that's just one thing that just can't –

Q: [28:19] Just a whiteboard. Too much.

A: [28:22] Too much. It was even too small. It was as big as an 8.5 x 11 sheet of paper. It wasn't even big enough to do this job. But that was one, and I kind of just try to – and the employee thing. I don't know why everybody should be in agreement. Everybody wants to be everybody in agreement. I heard somebody say, feelings need to get hurt for us to be able to make changes happen. It's hard. I don't know. It's nice, though. I guess it's nice to have your feelings considered on the other side of it.

Q: [29:15] Do you have any experience in extension related to fisheries and aquaculture, research and development, hatcheries, or food service, food preparation, or customer interface related to seafood?

A: [29:30] No, the only thing I'm going to do is – oh, I told I think it's Kristen at the DMR. She's doing the Sea Sampling Program. She might not need me because I'm in up inside, but I said I'd help take her out if she wants to go.

Q: [29:48] Awesome. What does an average day of work look like for you?

A: [29:52] So, when I'm fishing, when my boat's in the water, everything's baited, right in the middle of the season, I would probably wake up – I don't know if it's wake up at four, but the sunrise. I want to be there just before sunrise. I live inland a little bit, and I rent a place. So, I just drive ten minutes to the dock. This was the Fisherman's Co-Op, and I'm probably going to be going by myself. So, I have already, at this point, just before 5:00 AM – it's dark. I've already gotten my bait either on my boat or on the dock, and it's thawing. So, I use frozen bait. I'll use rockfish, and I use pig hide. If I'm there early enough, I will be able to skip any lines, and I can pull my boat in. I actually have a skiff, so I can run my skiff out, put my skiff on the mooring, take my boat in, use the hoist to put the bait on my boat.

[31:24] Basically, I need to cut my pig hide into chunks so that I can make the most out of it. Then, I'll probably – there's so many things. I should have checked the oil on my engine. There's so many things I should have done, but all I want to do is go out, so I'll bait a few needles, and then I'm just going to go to the first trap that's been soaking the longest and go through those. Last year, I had 300 traps, and I could probably haul 150 by myself in a day. So, I would try and get through 150. Really, if I could catch – if I could catch six crates, I'd be happy. I don't know what the price is, but I'd come in and sell my lobsters to the girls at the buy float. I have to wash my boat down.

[32:27] Then I'm so tired that like I'll go get more bait for the next day to haul the next 150, and then put my boat on the mooring, and check things over. Just check down forward, make sure everything's good, look at the oil, make sure there's oil pads under my engine, and make sure it's pumping out, and go in and run my skiff into shore to the punt float, and probably talk to whoever is around. That's a part of the day. Anywhere you go on Swan's Island, it's like, I'm going to talk to you now. (laughter) Oh, man, you never know what you're going to hear, what people are going through, too. Then I'll just go home, and I like bath time. That's the best part of my day. (laughter)

Q: [33:29] Nice. You mentioned you're usually alone. Do you sometimes have somebody helping you?

A: [33:35] Well, my boyfriend helped me set out last year and became too – and I would stern for him, and that was too much at the height of the season, too much work. So, we had a friend. She came from West Virginia. She's 18, and she was helping me out. She was the first person that's ever worked for me. My dad actually, one time when he was mad at me, he was like, I would hate to work for you. I just was like – I'm like, yeah, whatever. But I know I'm not – I'm super particular, and I'm very direct. I'm also an angry person. So, if I'm mad, I have to make sure that I'm not actually mad at this human being that is in this tiny space with me.

[34:34] Yeah. I took Brooke, and she ended up going – I was like, you go with somebody else because you need to make money. So, she'd go with me on a few days. Then, it was kind of funny. She was making a little money with me inshore when the lobsters are in. But she was going with my boyfriend's brother, and he was going a little further out. So, when fall came, he was catching them more in deeper water. So, her paycheck started to look pretty bad on my boat because they weren't up inside anymore. It was looking better on his boat. Marsh (sp?), he would always be like, I'm not trying to steal your stern man. I was just like – one day I was like, she's gone. (laughter) She's making more money on his boat. I just laugh. I tell that story because as if Marsh stole – he stole her from me. All along, he knew what he was doing. (laughter) I don't really actually care that much because I'm not a professional, but that's part of the game, I guess, is free agents, they go where they want to go.

Q: [36:00] I see. So, your boyfriend is also a lobsterman. Is he from a generational lobstering family, also?

A: [36:07] Yeah, he is. His dad's from Augusta. He's a Merchant Marine, so he came with the ferry service. But his mother is – that's where the fishing really is. I mean, his grandfather, I think people really considered him to be the best fisherman for a period of time. I don't know. So, he's a professional, really. His grandparents on his mother's side – I don't know how far it goes back, but they've been on Swan's Island from the beginning, I think.

Q: [36:53] How do you feel your background or identity shapes your work in the fishing sector, including how others perceive or treat you?

A: [37:05] For a while, I would be considered from away, so I still think of myself like that. I don't think anybody was like, hello, Caitlin, how's it feel to be from away? Nobody ran into me at the store and was like, from away-er. But you hear how people talk. I came from Massachusetts, and that's how they remembered me. My dad came from Massachusetts, so the local people would say I'm not from Swan's Island. It's strange. Some people will say – the president of the Co-Op, he says, you're an islander if it's in your heart. I'm like, that's really sweet, Ken. I feel like you're really alone on that. (laughter)

[38:05] But I think I think that part of me – I think that part of me affords me the want to go. So, I can visit – I'll visit my sister in Maryland. I'll visit my little sister in Florida. I came off here for the winter. I went to college, and sometimes I think that's really hard for people who are really enmeshed in a fishing community on an island. A lot of people just hunker down and don't really go out. That's not true for everybody because there are people who have been there forever, and they're like, go to Florida for the winter. And their kids all go to college. I guess having a little bit of outside perspective, I think, has benefited me in that it's not all happening here on Swan's Island. There are other places. Maybe it's allowed me to network too with people outside of the island a little bit, which is really important, I think.

Q: [39:37] Yeah, absolutely. How do you feel your gender identity plays a part in your role in the fishing sector?

A: [39:45] Just to be honest, I think – look, I'm not going to say all men like to see me coming. I think sometimes there's – with women, people almost care less that I'm on the water. I'm not as much of a threat. I don't know. I mean, it's working to my benefit, I feel. I don't mean to – I'm not trying to say that lobster fishermen are ruthless or anything, but they're very territorial. Yes.

[40:38] So, where I threw my traps, it was where my boyfriend helped me to go, so I wasn't in anybody's way. I think people see me out there now, and nobody really bothers me. I think maybe because they don't think I'm a threat as much, maybe. I can't speak for other people, but this is just how I feel. I'm talking and thinking they're going to hear me, and they're going to be like, Caitlin, OK, really? But I do feel like, one, women are more of helpers or they're more like – not submissive, but they're not – what is the word? Men want to show how big and strong and brave and tough they are, and I got nothing to prove. Really, I don't.

[41:38] So, I think maybe that energy is that I'm a helper, and I'm skirting around. I'm not here to cause problems. I'm not going to sink their boat or cut their traps or cause problems in their life. I don't know. Maybe my response is so – I'm so frightened at what people would hear me saying. But I do know – like, the Stonington guys. I fished close to Stonington, so I felt like I had an advantage because they're like, oh, I'm not worried about you. I talked to a few of them, and they're just not worried about me. I don't know.

[42:35] That may not have made sense, but I do think that gender has something – I do think gender has something to do with it. I'm not as strong as a man, and I'm not going to take their women. I'm not anyway. I know this sounds – this makes the men sound like cavemen. (laughter) But it's true. There's certain things. Being on the island, when men move to Swan's Island, it's like, oh, great. Is he going to fish? Is he going to start taking up my fishing area? Is he going to –? I don't know. As far as other women go, I feel like other women are supportive of each other. I don't know if it's because we're women, but there is a little bit of like, we know what it's like. We know what it's like to be in this male-dominant industry. I don't know what those – I don't know what those features are. Maybe that we're – I'm not sure what it is. I wish I had better answers.

Q: [44:03] It's all good. Have you noticed a change in the amount of women or the status of women throughout your years fishing?

A: [44:12] Yeah. I remember Cindy Turner (sp?) was always a lobster woman my whole life. Lisa Stanley (sp?), must have been. I can remember a couple from my childhood. But now there are more for sure. I don't know if that number is ten on Swan's Island out of – I don't know how many lobster licenses we have, maybe 50 on Swan's Island or 60. But it's not uncommon to see – I do see a lot of young kids, girls doing it, whereas, I don't know if I remember the girls really being into it when I was a kid. But it's old-fashioned on Swan's Island. I feel like it is. I feel like there are a handful of housekeepers. The women are having children and raising them and taking care of the house, doing other jobs, part-time jobs, on the side. So, maybe I'm seeing more the younger girls are sticking around and doing fishing.

Q: [45:54] Awesome. How does your role in the fishing sector work with any family or caregiving responsibilities you might have?

A: [46:02] How does it –? Would you ask me again?

Q: [46:06] Yeah. How does your role in the fishing sector – so lobstering – work with any family or caregiving responsibilities that you might have?

A: [46:18] How I want to answer that is that being self-employed affords me the time to be with anybody in their time of need. I've seen two of my nieces be born just because I was – I hear a lot of people that work for larger companies or in cities and things, and it's like, well, I just can't take work off. But with fishing, any boss that I had – I'm like, I'm waiting for my niece to be born. And they're like, oh, go ahead, Cait. Go. So, I would go. Then,

they're wondering, has she had the baby yet? And I'm just like, no, still waiting. (laughter) Waiting for a baby is like a joke. Yeah. I think if that answers the question, it's the community itself, the people that it employs, fishing employs – family is really important, and time with people is really important.

[47:33] I mean, Maine – it might just be like Maine is like that in a lot of ways. But time. You walk around Swan's Island, you end up talking to people. It's just like – I rarely am like, no, sorry, got to go, unless it's the ferry, and the ferry waits for no man. I think that is really – time is really important, community, family, and those are things that – I don't know – seem really important around fishing. Oral tradition. Getting into lobster fishing, there was no video, there was no manual, there was nothing that I could look up to do. I had to go to these people and ask them, what engine would you get? Who will work on my engine? I don't even know rope lengths, what thickness of rope, what depths? Well, if you're on that side of the island, the tide runs harder, so you need more rope. I'm just like, how would I have known that I have to go around some journey for information? So, yeah, I don't know. The oral tradition being really important, too.

Q: [49:11] Yeah, absolutely. Moving on to environmental changes. Can you describe any changes in the marine environment you've noticed?

A: [49:25] It's funny when you ask that question because I always feel like I know nothing. I'll tell you what people have said. I think it's all been the same. That's how it has felt like for me. I dug clams when I was in bare feet, digging clams with my dad, and I caught lobsters. I'm 37 years old. Since I can remember, I'm five years old or whatever, on my dad's skiff, catching lobsters. It's the same things that come up in the lobster traps. Maybe starfish. I haven't seen as many starfish. It used to be I'd climb under my dad's dock, and there'd be starfish all over the spilings. Maybe it's because I'm not crawling around under the dock, but I don't know.

[50:37] In the trap, it was always snot wrinkles – or sorry, conchs. Is that what they are? (laughter) There are real names for some of these things. The quick crabs and the Jonah crabs, lobster, and I feel like cod are coming back. I feel like if a lobster trap is catching a cod, there has to be quite a few of them down there. I know they like to eat lobster, too, so maybe they're just going into the trap to corner a lobster. But I have seen some – based on the places I've been in the boats I've been on, some of the boats go deeper water than others. So, I have seen – as far as what's coming up in the trap – the random things are those big eels, and I have seen a wolf fish and all kinds of different things.

[51:48] Recently, I guess, four years ago, there was an Atlantic trigger fish that came up. People are like, oh, those are a warmer water fish. And Hake. I've seen quite a bit of hake, but always sculpin. Sculpin is the one. That thing's been around. Those horn dogs that come up that look like a sculpin. The seaweed all looks the same, the rock weed and the kelp, and the – I don't know – sea lettuce. There's just so much seaweed. But I was telling you guys about the flight of the sunfish. We saw a ton of sunfish just two summers ago. Maybe it was a few summers ago, which I had never seen one of those. Maybe I had seen one before, but not like that. And the pogies were a big – the pogies in abundance

– actually, I had never seen a pogie before three years, or whenever it really kicked off. Maybe that was five years. It's like time – I'm like, it was yesterday.

Q: [53:19] We're all 32.

A: [53:20] Yes. (laughter) We're all 32. Oh, my word. Those are the things that I have seen the most. I don't feel like I'm not seeing anything anymore. I mean, the mackerel come up. It's like the jellyfish hit, the mackerel hit, the striper hit. I know a bunch of people are fishing tuna more offshore. I guess it's bluefin tuna. I think that's what it is. The birds, the sea birds always the same thing. In the fall, you start seeing the gannets, and they're going and diving for fish. I have seen some whales, but they're always – really, the whales are only where – only when I started fishing on boats that fished offshore. So, I've seen basking sharks off there, and minke whale and those finback whale and humpback whale, but that's all I've seen out there.

Q: [54:42] How are these, if they are, changes impacting your work at all?

A: [54:40] Oh, those sea squirts. Those were the things. Those came and loaded the traps only on, it feels like, the Northwest side of Swan's Island, but they've now come to other places, and they just make the traps really heavy. People are saying they suck the oxygen out of the water, so it could be not good for whatever else wants to live down there. But I haven't seen – so, I've always been on boats that wanted lobster, so I was always, always focused on catching lobster. I think the lobster fishing has just gotten better. I know when I went – I lived on the mainland. I lived in Tremont for like five years. That was like peak lobster fishing, and everybody, all the young guys, bought bigger boats, and it's like, we have arrived. Now, it's sort of plateaued, or now it's kind of on a little bit of a decline.

[55:58] But I do think a lot of these things happen in sevens, every seven years certain cycles occur. So, I'm not worried about it, but I do think – I think that everything's been pretty good. I mean, everything's been pretty steady. They say the lobsters are just weird. If you ever read *The Secret Life of Lobsters*, that first quote is the American lobster is the mysterious – it's a mysterious creature. That always comes to mind. I'm getting the quote part wrong. I feel that like they're always creeping around somewhere. But people have all these different ideas why. Too much rain and they're not close to shore, or too much heat, and they stay in deeper water. What was the other one? The scallop draggers ruin the habitat, so you won't catch lobster there the next year. Some of this feels like old wives' tales, like they're just trying to blame the scallop draggers, but a lot of it has merit because even though it's not written in a book, as far as fishermen are concerned, it's there. It's lore or whatever – spoken.

Q: [57:33] Yeah, absolutely.

Q: [57:35] A follow up about the sea squirts. This is something that's come up across some of the other interviews that just depends on people's location and whether or not it's a problem. But for some people, it seems like it's really become one of the things that's

changed that can be a burden. What do you do to deal with it? Do you just manually get them off your traps? Do you have to air them? How do you deal with it?

A: [58:01] I didn't fish where they're concentrated, and the time that I fished was short, so I think they didn't have much time to grow, and really – and I moved my traps around a little bit, so maybe they didn't stay. For me, I only know what other people have done. I think people have pressure-washed their traps. When I was just sterner for my boyfriend, I would just be ripping the clumps off as we went, but you can't keep up with it. He still has traps in that spot. So, those things are probably 200 pounds apiece. But I don't know what other people do other than pressure wash. If you take them out and dry them out, they'll fall off. Maybe you could just use a brush or spindle to scrape them off.

Q: [59:07] So, that's not been too bad for you just based on the locations you're fishing?

A: [59:11] Yeah.

Q: [59:17] OK. What is – or if there is not, that is also OK – your biggest concern about the marine environment for the future of Maine's coastal fisheries?

A: [59:37] Well, I feel like the ocean is really resilient. I mean, the amount of trash and sludge that gets thrown into the ocean, not by anybody I know, but just by other countries. I feel like the ocean is really tough. I just think that it's going to be OK for whatever reason. I don't think that's probably a great attitude, but as far as I can see, I think management is really good. I think fisheries are a great way to understand what's happening down there. Obviously, I'm biased. I'm like, I want this job. (laughter) I just think allowing us to fish is – that's the way to go. But it's biased.

[1:00:47] So, with saying all that, I worry about things like – so, I went to Newport, Rhode Island, and I see the Newport mansions. Oh, this is cool. But then I started to see where – the friend that brought me down there, she lived in – it was a fishing village when she was a kid. But now she's like, oh yeah, it's yachts. I just see that as I'm like, oh man, you slowly work up the coast, and that culture is just becoming condos on the water. The fishing heritage is – what's the word? It's like novelty. So, you have these play fishing spots with the big red lobster. You have token fishing or recreational fishing. I feel like that's a sad thing.

[1:01:55] I mean that because I don't know what – I mean, it'd just be science – maybe it would just be scientists studying the water, and that would be totally fine. But for me, I feel like Swan's Island has a really good working waterfront, and you have these people who know a lot about what's happening down there. I'm not one of those people. I think keeping fishermen in it is a really good part of keeping the bottom stable in ways. I just think they go other places. I don't think small-time lobster fishing is so detrimental. I think big, big corporate boats, those, I'm not in agreement with, because it costs a lot of money to run offshore operations like that. I don't know any myself, but I do hear stories of well, there's these big boats. Down in Massachusetts, I think you can buy a license, but it's so

much money. You don't even have to be a fisherman. You can just outfit it. That environment, I don't think it's – I don't know. Now, I'm going off on a tangent.

Q: [1:03:40] (inaudible)

A: [1:03:41] I don't think it's super healthy because now you've got this – you have this boss that doesn't understand fishing, but you have to meet these expectations, so then you have a stressed crew. It's not like, OK, your arm hurts? It's OK. We can take tomorrow off for your doctor appointment. I'll find something else to do. It's more so – it's just less – I don't know. It's more corporate and very scary. If it's coming from me, if you want to hear what I have to say, it's corporate, very scary. I very much like the small – I like mom and pop. I like that. Yeah. (laughter)

Q: [1:04:31] Is this more of a recent phenomenon that you've been hearing about, or is this something that's been existing in the lobster fishery for a while?

A: [1:04:41] Bigger boats?

Q: [1:04:42] Yeah.

Q: [1:04:44] It's in Massachusetts. It's a state-by-state. Maine has owner-operated requirements that Massachusetts doesn't. So, you can be a landlord fisherman. You own (inaudible) that you don't fish. You can't do that here.

A: [1:04:57] Interesting. I didn't realize you couldn't do that here.

Q: [1:05:01] Yeah, I don't think you can.

A: [1:05:03] I feel like that's a wonderful thing because if you have money, you're king in Massachusetts. You don't have to be a good fisherman. You don't have to be a nice person or somebody that shows up at meetings or fights for rights. You just have to have money. That changes the whole thing. It's actually kind of a scary thought to think that you just push it – people with money will just push little guys right out of the way. For what purpose, I don't even know. But yeah, that's not a good thing at all, I don't think. I don't know what other countries do. I just don't think – I'm sure it's happening, and it's probably happened a long time in other places, but not Maine.

Q: [1:06:06] Are there other types of changes, not environmental, that are impacting your work or impacting Swan's that you would like to tell us about?

A: [1:06:14] I know the price of bait and fuel has gone up in the last few years, and I think last year, bait was – for me, 15% of what the boat is making would go to a stern man on my boat, and 15% is going to just bait, maybe bait and fuel. I could probably combine them, and it's pretty much the same. So, I don't know what it used to be, but everybody says that bait has gone up. I don't know. A tote of herring is close to \$200, and a 20-pound box of rockfish is 25 bucks or something. So, in a day, I was spending like 600 bucks on bait, at

least. Maybe 800 bucks on bait because I would get the pig. The pig was, I don't know, close to \$100 a bucket.

[1:07:20] That is really hard because it looks like I made money. I did not make any money this year. I mean, not just because of the bait, but because this is the beginning for me. I needed to buy everything – the boat, traps, rope, buoys, insurance, licenses. The regulations are overwhelming. The amount of rules in this fishery – somebody coming in who hasn't been in it, they're like, what do you mean? What do you mean? There's just so many little things you have to do. There's a lot of the whale safety stuff, too, which is new, but I think it is really – two things like that are coming down the pike. The pike? Is it pike?

[1:08:32] Pipe. Down the pipe. Oh, my word. It's the lobster measure increase and the whale rules. I don't really know much about what's going to come down the pipe with the whale rules. But the regulations are for sure – those are the things. For Swan's Island, the ferry is a huge concern right now. The Maine State Ferry Service has increased our rates. Two years ago, they increased the rates. This year, they're going to increase the rates again. So, it's like close to – I think it'll be like \$50 to take your vehicle on when they increase the rates. I think it's almost 40 right now. People are saying that the crew used to be really, really tough, and they would go in any weather, but now the ferry cancels – a breath of wind, and the ferry cancels. I've talked to other people in the maritime industry, and they're saying what we're saying about fisheries. They're like, it's not what it used to be. There was a good old days with the maritime industry, and now it's just so regulated. I think that's a lot of what's happening with the ferry is there's protocol, and it's there's a lot of “no's” in all of that.

[1:10:09] So, our ferry is a stress right now. When we had COVID, we used to have a lot of benefit dinners, and people, it seemed, got together a lot more. I feel like we're slowly getting that back. I think obviously that's everywhere. Maybe that's not obvious, but I would think that's everywhere. And then we have all the remote workers. So, what happened with the remote workers is they're getting – maybe I'm wrong. I'm not one of them. They're getting the New York income, but a \$350,000 house is peanuts, so they buy that up and renovate it, so they double the value of this house. For me, the income that I've been making can't even compare.

[1:11:13] So, I know housing is an issue nationwide. For me to buy a house on Swan's Island has been impossible. If it wasn't for my recent tax return, the increase of my income on my tax returns, a bank would never have given me money to buy a home because of the income that I was making as a stern person, so I've had to rent, and it's fine. I got a late start. I got sober eight years ago. So, I wasn't living great for 15 years, so I'm a little late in the game. But that's the word on the street. People are like, I can't buy – young people can't afford to live here.

[1:12:16] So, what I have seen – and also, the Airbnb thing has – not only have we remote workers, but we have all these people found these remote places, and there's this buzz on – people are starting to find us, and now it's like, oh, I could buy this house, and I could

Airbnb it. Our town last year put in a short-term rental ordinance, really, really bare bones. I talked to other towns because I do the code enforcement officer job for Swan's Island. So, I talked to our other towns, and they're like, it's so hard. Mount Desert Island – all of our people are moving off to live off of MDI because it's cheaper, and some of them still come back to work, but their schools are getting smaller. There's a real fear that – I don't know. There's some sort of movement of people, and I find that to be true.

[1:13:30] On Swan's Island, I found this year, more people bought – more Swan's Islanders bought land on the mainland. I can think of three right away. They may not have moved off completely, but that's the trend, is that people are like, maybe I'll move to MDI. It's a leapfrogging thing because I don't understand how Swan's Islanders can afford to move to MDI. It might be more so the back side. That I've been seeing just since COVID, and that's a fast trend, which is scary for me, because Swan's Island is not – and people are saying it – it's not what it was. It's a weird feeling of we're all looking at each other, like, are you going to leave? Is this what we're doing now? Yeah. That's a weird thing. I don't know what it means or what.

Q: [1:14:41] Yeah. So, in terms of the changes to regulations and bait prices, are there any personal adaptations that you're making to try to cope with those?

A: [1:14:53] Oh, my word, no. I just sent it. I was like – all the bait. Then, I was like, I need to chill. I would probably advise somebody – I don't know, though. The lobsters like bait. I guess if you had a smaller engine, you'd pay less in fuel, a smaller boat. Pogies, I think, are a cheaper bait, so you can kind of shop around, but me personally, just send it.
(laughter)

Q: [1:15:29] If you could tell policymakers in Maine what their biggest priority should be to help people adapt to climate change, to these other changes that you're telling us about, what would you tell them?

A: [1:15:42] Oh, man, the policymakers. I kind of think about – when I do a job, like manual labor. This was the tree service stuff that I did this last winter. It was always nice when one person, say, the guy I was working for, was running the excavator, and he's needing – and I'm dropping the trees. Well, he comes, and he picks up the trees at the excavator. But if I don't run the excavator, I don't know what position he needs the trees, or I don't know what would work better for him on his end, because all I understand is I just need to drop the trees, so that is best for me. So, I always think – I have this idea that if people did another person's job, they would understand what actually would work better for the other party.

[1:16:39] So, I'm not saying give Ken LaMoine a chair in the legislature. But I almost think it would be good to have fishermen in there, ones that genuinely wanted to be there and trained and knew what they needed to do. Also, they should be on the boats. I think there should be some sort of understanding. I know that's occurring to an extent with the sea sampling and the trawl surveys. What is the other one? Ventless traps. I know that there is some of that, but I don't think it's enough. I don't think there's enough

communication between the two groups. Just come lobstering for a day. That's pretty educational. And the other way around. Because I go in there and be like, you're going to tell us what to do. You don't know anything. You don't know. But I don't know how hard their job is, either, and how they're kind of pressed between other groups.

Q: [1:17:58] I'll just ask the question, have you participated in any climate resilience or adaptation training or programs for the fishing industry?

A: [1:18:09] No climate resilience stuff. What were the other two?

Q: [1:18:12] Climate resilience or adaptation training programs.

A: [1:18:14] No, no. I wouldn't know where that would be offered.

Q: [1:18:21] Are there any strategies that you think would be effective in building resilience to potential environmental change? No worries if not as well.

A: [1:18:38] Yeah. I feel like living on an island, we're wicked conservative. We use everything we possibly can, and there is very little waste because you could use that. It's like, oh no, don't throw that away. Oh, don't do that. On boats, in the home, we're very conservative. I don't want to point fingers, but it is hard when you look at the waste in other ways. I don't know. You have people who have three, four houses, and you're like, well, I could do my part. I could get silicone baggies, or I could get an electric engine. But it's hard. I feel like I'm living as environmentally friendly as possible, other than my diesel engine and my gas vehicle. I feel like I'm doing the best I can. It is hard to look at those other things that are occurring. You're just like, ah. So, I don't know what the answer is.

Q: [1:20:06] Can you tell me about any opportunities or positive changes you've experienced in the industry during your time?

A: [1:20:18] Hmm. Opportunities? I guess, social media seems to have – so you've got Jacob Knowles and then Blake Haass. So, you have them two on Instagram, and they're showing you what – Jacob's more educating people about lobsters' anatomy and bait and things like that. And then you have like Blake, who will show him putting a new engine in his boat. Maybe that part, that many-to-many platform of social media, has given people insight who know nothing about fishing. Then, suddenly, they do. They don't have to go on the boat, but they're asking me questions. They're down in Massachusetts, and they're like, do you really do this? So maybe that I think is a good thing. It gives a face, I think, to us who are maybe 5,000 lobster licenses – five to 6,000 licenses on the coast. Whereas, when there are regulations coming up against us, maybe there are people that are like, oh, OK. They know what lobster fishing is, which I think maybe before it was like – I don't know. I don't really know what that is. But yeah, you can see a lot of my things are like, the government's out to get me. I'm too busy worrying about that. (laughter)

Q: [1:22:08] What is your hopeful vision for the future of Maine's coastal fisheries?

A: [1:22:16] I would like to see it – I would like to see the working waterfront sustained. I really would. I visited North Haven to get my lobster boat. North Haven is pretty close to population size as Swan's Island. They have a Maine State ferry service as well. They use the ferry service. When I went to go get my boat, he gave me traps and lobster tanks – bait tank. We had to go collect all this stuff from all over the island. He lived inland, and we loaded all the traps on his trailer, brought it to the town dock, and we ran 100 traps down a ramp at low tide. Of course, I had to get it at low tide, but we ran all the traps down a ramp, and the buoys and the rope, and put them in my boat.

[1:23:32] If we were on Swan's Island, we have a hydraulic hoist, and we would have just backed the trailer up to the end of the dock and used the hoist to drop it into the boat – everything into the boat. But him, we had to get his lobster tanks off of some float in the middle of another harbor. There was no hoist or nothing there either. So, he took his skiff. Him and his stern man, and me and my boyfriend, we were all in a skiff. We got this lobster tank, and then we ran it up into a cove and put it onto a beach, and then we went back and got the truck and backed the truck up to the beach and got the lobster tank. We asked him how he sold his lobsters, and he was like, a guy comes from Stonington and ties up to that float and gets them all up. So, the lobstermen just weigh their lobsters, leave them, and then I guess that guy that buys the lobsters just leaves them their bait.

[1:24:33] But we described our operation on Swan's Island, and he was like, wow, you have a real working waterfront. I was shocked that not everybody had that, and it's a real privilege because, I mean, it makes work easier, but you also feel empowered in numbers. You're like, oh, there's plenty – if this person can't help me, there's this person. So, it's not futile trying to repair your boat or get help if you're out there on the water or whatever. So, I think a strong working waterfront is really what I would like to see, a balanced one, because I guess if it was too small, it would – it's like Goldilocks or whatever. I'm like, it can't be too big, though. (laughter) So, I don't know how to get there, but I think it's good the way it is. I like the way it is. Yeah.

Q: [1:25:33] Awesome. Hillary, do you have any questions?

Q: [1:25:38] Yeah, I think amusing. That was really cool to end on and hear you talk about the strengths that Swan's has, in terms of the working waterfront, and I'm just thinking about the co-op as well, that you all have that, and not everyone has that. I think going into it, I was thinking it'll be cool to talk to people from unbridged islands because that creates additional challenges, like the ferry and different things. Anyway, just more of a musing or comment that it's cool to hear you talk about maybe what is working well out there as well, that makes your job easier.

Q: [1:26:15] Is there anything else you'd like to tell us about?

A: [1:26:21] No, I think not. (laughter)

Q: [1:26:24] Awesome. Well, thank you so much. I'll stop recording.

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