

Narrator: Richard Waldron

Interviewer: Theresa Hollingsworth

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[Start Cassette Tape 965, Side A]

Theresa Hollingsworth: I'm in Sprucehead with Richard Waldron and we're talking about lobstering and making potheads. Is that what they call them?

Richard Waldron: Lobster traps. A lot of people wouldn't know. They call them, there's a lot of potheads here. But I'm not one of them.

Hollingsworth: Do some people refer to them as that though?

Waldron: Yes. Some people call them potheads.

Hollingsworth: How come? When I first saw that I was like what does this mean?

Waldron: Well I don't know, they're just used to call them lobster pots. But now they don't anymore, they just call them traps.

Hollingsworth: How long have you been doing this, been lobstering?

Waldron: Well I started in a good many years ago when I was ten, eleven something like that.

Hollingsworth: Did your father do it?

Waldron: Oh, yes. Well, I've just been at it. You know real serious since I was probably sixteen, seventeen something like that.

Hollingsworth: When you first, when you got serious about were you still working with your father, or when did you get your own boat?

Waldron: No, right when I was out of school. I never finished school but, you know I lobstering was more important than going to school back then. But not always so. I've been at it since I was a kid.

Hollingsworth: Was your father the one that taught you how to make your bate bags and your?

Waldron: No, no. This stuff I learned myself from other fishermen around. My father knit all of his stuff too at the time, and he used to knit for me too. That's probably why I never knit my own as long as I had him to doing it. But since he's been gone I've been knitting them all myself.

Hollingsworth: So are there many other people that do this here in the area?

Waldron: Not very many. Just about everybody buys them all knit. But I enjoy doing it to pass time in winter so, this is what I do.

Hollingsworth: Well what do lobstermen do that don't necessarily make their own traps and make their own bate bags and things in the winter. Do they have to do something else to supplement their income?

Waldron: Oh yes a lot of fishermen go scalloping in the winter, the go shrimping, and some hang on and go lobstering all winter. I used to go in the winter but I don't anymore. I haven't gone since '76. It's been about 15 years since I've gone in the wintertime.

Hollingsworth: Is it just better to go in the spring and the summer months? More productive?

Waldron: That's when the lobsters come in, in the spring. They come in to shed in the spring and hang on through the summer and do their mating thing and then they leave the shore in the Fall. And go offshore.

Hollingsworth: Is shrimping in seasonal too, or is that

Waldron: Yes, yes shrimp seasonal. I don't know when shrimp season starts. Must start in December maybe or January. I'm really not up on that.

Hollingsworth: Well can you describe to me a typical day? When you go out, what time you go, and

Waldron: I'll leave, I'm usually up at quarter to four, and I'll leave hear by four thirty, quarter of five. Some days it might take me an hour to get me an hour to where I'm going, and some days, some different days it'll take me half an hour or twenty minutes. That all goes with the season. And you usually just follow your traps and place them around. You might move a few or there's places you pick them up and take them and go set them somewheres else. You leave them where they are, where there's a few lobsters at. You'll get a storm sometimes and they'll move and you have to round them up and set them where they was. There's a lot to it.

Hollingsworth: Do you set them out, set your traps in the same general geographic location every time.

Waldron: Yes every year more or less.

Hollingsworth: How do you determine where you can go and where other lobstermen can go.

Waldron: I don't know, it's sort of, it's really hard to explain what determines it. It's all just a matter of where you start when you're a kid usually. This is the way it is, or who you start with.

Hollingsworth: So you're still going to the same place that you went to growing up.

Waldron: Yes, yes. I've been there since I started.

Hollingsworth: Did you have brothers or sisters that went out lobstering also?

Waldron: Yes, my brother always went lobstering.

Hollingsworth: Now does he still do this today?

Waldron: No, no. He hasn't gone for several years. No he got out of it. Something he just didn't want to do anymore. He was always a good fisherman, worked hard. Just got tired of it.

Hollingsworth: Is it hard to get started in lobstering today for people?

Waldron: Yes, it is today. It's expensive, to get started. Unless you're brought up in it it's pretty hard to get started. So, it's easier for somebody who has always lived around here, and brought right up in it.

Hollingsworth: You mentioned that your older daughter went with you some a few years ago, or last year.

Waldron: Yes, that was last year and the year before.

Hollingsworth: Did she ever go with you when she was younger, or was that?

Waldron: Back when she was in school. She went with me for several years.

Hollingsworth: And would she haul traps and do just exactly what you would do?

Waldron: No she would just sort of stand behind me. She would put the bait bag in the trap, I showed you, see the bait bag. She'd take the old bait bag off and empty it out, empty the old bait out and put the new one in, and clean out the crabs and lobsters and other junk that crawls in. And she'd keep my bait bags filled and keep the lobsters banded. Is what she did.

Hollingsworth: Now who do you sell your lobsters to when you bring them in?

Waldron: Over to the co-op on Sprucehead Island. This is an island right here, and the lobster buying places are over there.

Hollingsworth: What determines the prices on lobsters?

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Waldron: Well it determine, it all depends on how many there are. If there's a lot of lobsters the price is down. Last year there was a good amount of lobsters and the price was steady right around \$2 from first of August on. Price was steady. Where the supply was good, it was until January before they was up, but of course I was out of it by then.. But I started in at \$4 in April and now they're down to \$2.75. So all the fisherman's got their traps out to catch a few lobsters so.

Hollingsworth: Does the demand for them go up, I guess in the summer?

Waldron: Yes. Tourists buy a lot of lobster.

Hollingsworth: So when you were growing up and used the lobster, was that just considered a natural resource for you all? I mean did you eat a lot of lobster as a child, or was it also?

Waldron: No I guess I've probably always eaten lobster. Whenever we wanted some, we've always eaten lobster. And right now it's one of the cheapest things going. You know all the fishermen and everything, you go buy one in the store it'll be a lot more.

Hollingsworth: Now is this the net, not the net, but the trap that you're, the lobsterhead. Is that what they call it?

Waldron: Traphead.

Hollingsworth: The traphead. Is that, I mean, the way it looks is that the way they always look? I didn't know if they ever differentiated any.

Waldron: Yes. They'll some fishermen have a different way the knit them. They all fish the same though.

Hollingsworth: Now you showed me two different kinds of traps when we were outside. What are the two names for the two different kinds of traps?

Waldron: Well they just, the smaller one is just what we call a 3-foot trap. I got quite a few of those, I use them around the shore and places where the sea urchins are. You know what a sea urchin is?

Hollingsworth: I've seen them in books.

Waldron: Well your trap will fill up with those sometimes, or half full, or just a few. And they're easy to dump out. You just roll your trap upside down them out. That's mainly what I have all those 3-footers for is the sea urchins. Those 4-foot traps fill up with sea urchins, they just take you a lot longer to get them out.

Hollingsworth: Now the piece of wood you got on the ends that you wrap around it. What does that do?

Waldron: We call that one meshboard, I guess. This is made out of hornbeam also. It's a real hard wood it's almost kind of a wood with no grain in it. It's real hard and don't wear down very quick.

Hollingsworth: Now, can you remember who it was who taught you how to do this? Was it one person in particular?

Waldron: No, no I've watched people knit them, and I knit them when I was a kid and got out of it, and then I knit again and then I stop. You know just been up and down. But I'm getting these ready now for next winter. I'll have 200 of these big ones and 200 of the little ones, all knit and ready for this winter, when we get ready to bail again.

Hollingsworth: Do they ever break?

Waldron: Yes. The sea urchins are hard on them. They rough the nylon all up and wear it down when they crawl in and out. When the crabs will get down in the corner and the lobsters get up in the corner, down in the corner, and chew away on. But sometimes you have to patch them up.

Hollingsworth: Is that hard to do, to patch them?

Waldron: Well it all depends on how big the hole is. It just tell you. You probably just make some loop run some string over where the hole is.

Hollingsworth: Have you ever taught anybody how to do the netting?

Waldron: No.

Hollingsworth: Do they call it netting?

Waldron: Twine.

Hollingsworth: Twine.

Waldron: When I get down to the other end here I knit, just knit it together.

Hollingsworth: Do you get your bait bags from the marine supply place too?

Waldron: Yes.

Hollingsworth: How many of those do you usually keep around?

Waldron: Oh I probably got a thousand or so. Something like that. Because I'll keep, sometimes I'll fill up three or four hundred and then all of my traps have a bait bag in them so I got quite a few around . All filled ready to go.

Hollingsworth: Are there many lobstermen in this particular community?

Waldron: Oh yes. There's a lot of fishermen.

Hollingsworth: I guess there always have been though.

Waldron: Yes. Of course it's getting more so right now. There's quite a few fishermen, more than what there really should be. But there's not much anybody can do about it, everybody needs a job so. You live in Sprucehead this is what you do.

Hollingsworth: How far out do you go?

Waldron: Anywhere's, just across the way over there, and about three mile miles from here out around. And get out there and then usually in the spring and the fall of a year I'll go out seven, eight miles but that's about it. That's as far as I go right now. Don't go any further than that.

Hollingsworth: Is that typical for most people? Most lobstermen?

Waldron: Yes, well some fishermen they still go of further, way of shore. But I don't anymore.

Hollingsworth: How come?

Waldron: Just got tired of going in the wintertime. It's cold, just don't want to do it.

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Hollingsworth: Do you wear fishermen's mittens?

Waldron: I have a pair. I have a pair right about the boat, big white, woolen mittens.

Hollingsworth: Is that the kind I heard about, that shrink?

Waldron: Yes, they shrink. I got a pair. I haven't got any here right yet, but I'll put them on in the morning when it's cold, keep my hands warm when I'm going out.

Hollingsworth: Where do you get those? Were those made for you or did you buy them?

Waldron: No, My mother knit these, these big white ones that I have, my mother knit them.

Hollingsworth: How long have you been wearing them?

Waldron: Well I've always had a pair of woolen mittens. But course rubber gloves took over. But I like the woolen mittens the best.

Hollingsworth: And they're the kind that can get wet, but they still keep your hands warm, is that true?

Waldron: They, yes. They'll shrink all up and get tight, but they can get wet. But when rubber gloves came around why a lot of fishermen wore rubber gloves. A lot of boats now they have a hot tank in their boat. A little hot tank to just dip your hands in when it's cold.

Hollingsworth: Is that just full of warm water, is that what it is?

Waldron: Yes, hot water. The engine heats it as you go.

Hollingsworth: So it's really changed a lot. Lobstering has changed a lot.

Waldron: Yes, yes.

Hollingsworth: What kind of regulations, federal regulations do you have to go by?

Waldron: Well the first thing is you have to have a license and your boat has to be documented or registered. All your traps have to have these vents in them. And you have to have your color of the buoys, red and yellow which is mine.

Hollingsworth: So everybody has

Waldron: Different colors.

Hollingsworth: Different colors.

Waldron: Yes and you have to have your number on them.

Hollingsworth: And is that a number that is assigned by the state or whatever.

Waldron: Yes, when I first got a lobster license years ago when I was a kid I got the number 771. And I've had it ever since I was a kid.

Hollingsworth: How does that work when lobstermen have people that work with them?

Do they

Waldron: See when you get, you knit down twelve of these and then you bring this right around here just like that.

Hollingsworth: You pull it together.

Waldron: Yes, knit it together. That's about right, just about like that and that's the starting of it and you just come right back in.

Hollingsworth: What kind of knot is that?

Waldron: Oh gosh, I don't know what they're called. No idea. There must be a name for it I'm sure I just don't know. Knit it right together just like this.

Hollingsworth: So it takes about 30 minutes to make one, is that about right?

Waldron: Gosh I don't know. Probably less.

Hollingsworth: I guess it doesn't take as long when somebody's not talking to you.

Waldron: Well if you got the needle all full to start with and just start right in knitting, you can get one done in less than half an hour.

Hollingsworth: Where did you get your hook that it's bolted into the wall with.

Waldron: Gosh I don't know. That was just a, well it's a real old hook. I don't know where, nothing but a big screw iron.

Hollingsworth: When was it that you stopped making your bait bags?

Waldron: When was it? Oh gosh it was many years ago. You know cause you could buy them all knit. I never was very good at knitting bait bags. I could knit them alright. It's just too time consuming.

Hollingsworth: Well the loops are a lot smaller.

Waldron: Yes. Oh yes. Just put a knot in it.

Hollingsworth: Is it just easier to melt the twine with a match instead of cutting it?

Waldron: Yes, if you cut it it frays. It'll all fray at the end. That's it.

Hollingsworth: And it's ready to go. Do you ever catch anything other than lobsters?

Waldron: Oh you get lobsters, and crabs.

Hollingsworth: Do you go ahead and bring in your crabs and anything else?

Waldron: Sometimes. If anybody wants a bunch of crab, I'll bring it in.

Hollingsworth: Well I think those are all the questions I have for you so thank you very much.

Waldron: Okay, I can't think of anything else right now. I'd say, it's just a pretty simple operation.

Hollingsworth: Oh, but it's fascinating though, it really is.

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