

Interviewee Name: Phoebe Jekielek

Project/Collection Title: Voices of the Maine Fishermen's Forum 2018

Interviewer(s) Name(s) and affiliations: Rebecca Clark Uchena, Island Institute

Interview Location: Maine Fishermen's Forum, Rockland, Maine

Date of Interview: March 3, 2018

Interview Description:

Phoebe Jekielek

Hurricane Island, ME

Education Program Leader

Interviewed by Rebecca Clark Uchena

Phoebe Jekielek, an education program leader on Hurricane Island, ME, speaks about the realities and importance of working with students on Hurricane Island. She discusses changes she has observed through her years of work and the successes and challenges of aquaculture in education.

Collection Description:

Voices of the Maine Fishermen's Forum 2018 is a project of Maine Sea Grant, The First Coast, College of the Atlantic, and the Island Institute, with support from the Maine Fishermen's Forum Board of Directors.

Citation:

Jekielek, Phoebe, Voices of the Maine Fishermen's Forum 2018 Oral History Interview, March 3, 2018, by Rebecca Clark Uchena, 8 pages, NOAA Voices from the Fisheries. Online: Insert URL (Last Accessed: Insert Date).

Transcription by: Ela Keegan, College of the Atlantic intern

Start PHOEBE_JEKIELEK_VMFF2018_AUDIO

PJ: Phoebe Jekielek (Interviewee)

RCU: Rebecca Clark Uchena (Interviewer)

[0:00:00.0]

RCU: Okay so if you could just say your name and spell it for us please.

PJ: My name is Phoebe Jekielek, P-H-O-E-B-E J-E-K-I-E-L-E-K.

RCU: So I'm just going to ask a random question to get us started. Um what are the issues you are most concerned about in Maine's coastal communities?

PJ: Ooh, that's an interesting question. Um so, you know I work for an education organization I would say that I'm most interested, I'm not sure if concerned is the right word, but most interested in how we engage the next generation of Maine students, Maine fishermen, Maine aquaculturists, Maine policy-makers, all of that. Umm how we continue to engage them and education them.

[0:00:58.6]

PJ: umm and help them by giving them the the tools and the skills that they will need to face the questions and the challenges that are going to come for them in the future. So I would say my yeah my most my interest is mostly around education.

RCU: Great, and what organization do you work for?

PJ: I work for the Hurricane Island Foundation and Center for Science and Leadership.

RCU: Umm what is your connection to fishing?

PJ: Hmm well I live here is coastal Maine umm I'm first moved here in 2003 and I worked on fishing boats. I was an observer umm fresh out of college working on trawlers out of Portland back in the day and also some longliners out of Massachusetts. Umm and since that time I've always had a hand in research and education having to do with Maine, the Maine coast, umm fisheries policy.

[0:02:03.7]

PJ: I did my I did the dual masters program at UMaine in Marine Bio and Marine policy and really focused on um my policy project was focused on cooperative research. So bringing fishermen and scientists together to do research and the benefits and shortfalls of that. Umm so I have and currently I again now work more on the education side, still keep my hands in the research side, working with our science and research director, Kaitlyn Cleaver, to do research in our mid-coast cooperative scallop project with fishermen out of Spruce Head, Owls Head, uh Tenants Harbor, to monitor and survey a closed area that they closed about this going into its sixth year. Um so I still do some of that research

and I work with our education team to develop programs um that include a lot of local students.

[0:03:00.2]

PJ: and students from programs like Eastern Maine Skippers, Pathways programs, lots of island students from Vinalhaven and North Haven. Yeah, so it's a long answer to what my involvement in fisheries is hmm.

RCU: Excellent, um do you focus on specific student populations or student demographics or is it, are you programed to students in the state of Maine or?

PJ: Yeah our programs, good question, so we're open on Hurricane May through October and during the school year, so shoulder season really is what we'll call it. May, June, and September, and October we work with teachers to develop custom programs for them to bring students out to Hurricane um to focus on experiential science education. Those schools come from anywhere um right now about forty percent of our schools come from Maine.

[0:03:55.0]

PJ: Um both public and private schools uh and then in the summer we offer um open enrollment programs where students can sign up as individuals from anywhere and we have I believe right now about fifty five to sixty percent of our students are Maine students that come to those programs and we also work with Maine teachers and again were also working with Maine fishermen but um you know it's important for us to be active in our local community um and you know it's very important to our mission to be working with Maine's schools and Maine's students and the communities in Maine.

RCU: Um, switching gears a little bit um so you've worked on the water a fair amount, what changes have you seen in the Gulf of Maine?

PJ: Hmm um definitely warming waters, it's easier to get in the water in the middle of summer than it used to be and we are able to dive longer in the year than than we used to.

[0:05:01.6]

PJ: Um I mean I think again I don't have my hand as much in science anymore um but my bio thesis for the dual program was focused on copepods and how those populations are changing and so even down at the planktonic stage, obviously lots of research has come out about this um that those those populations and those species are being affected greatly, which really is the very base of everything else that happens here which in Hurricane or in in the Gulf of Maine. You know the issues with clams, green crabs obviously, lots of talk about the mussels you know a lot of our work has been with the scallop fishery specifically so changes in those populations over time um yeah, I mean I think it's pretty hard not to see changes and mine are definitely broader scale changes that I see rather than fine scale, because I'm yeah not involved in the day to day that fishermen are or even scientists in the state of Maine are.

[0:06:09.0]

RCU: So working with students, are students aware of changing ecosystems, kind of climate change.

PJ: Yeah

RCU: Issues?

PJ: Yeah I think so, I would say yes. um I think different obviously different schools and different students have different resources um but I would say yes a place like the fishermen's forum you see a lot of students walking around, you see a lot of kids walking around which is really great so they're getting a lot of information about the industry, a lot of information about the ecosystem from you know from the earliest ages um and yeah I mean I think it's become a big topic in a lot of schools and I think that climate change and um kind of its effects are really rising especially in education as ways to motivate students, ways to engage students, um and really ways to get them thinking about what they're going to face um in the future.

[0:07:17.8]

RCU: What are your fears for the future of Maine's coastal communities?

PJ: Oh my gosh. Wow! Um I think one of my fears is that yeah that the younger generation, well that's a really good question.

RCU: Or we could spin it and um what are your hopes and aspirations?

PJ: Yeah I mean I mean both, I think you know I think one of my fears, concerns is, are things changing too fast for us to adapt you know from a very socioeconomic and industry-driven place.

[0:08:07.5]

PJ: Um and do we have the the processes in place to be able to adapt at all you know, let alone on a short time scale. Um I think my hopes and aspirations are that things will continue, people will continue to collaborate, research will continue to um feed into policy decision and that fishermen, scientists, students, policy makers, that everyone will continue to work together to solve these problems. My hope is definitely that and I really think that if those things fall short then yeah really we're pretty screwed. So yeah, we'll see I mean, yeah it's hard to see things change it's hard to you know coastal flood warnings the last couple days you know those just because we had high winds and we had you know rainfall and it was right with the moon and all that stuff and you know seeing lots of communities face, thinking about what they're going to do with sea-level rise, you know so I just it, there's a lot happening, there's a lot to be concerned about, but you have to hope that there are enough people being engaged and enough people joining in the conversation and taking action um to solve the problems that need to be solved.

[0:09:36.4]

RCU: Um what do you think of aquaculture?

PJ: Ooh.

RCU: Possible viable step for these communities?

PJ: I think that aquaculture is something that will be beneficial um but does have the potential to create further issues, common resource issues if you will, access issues to ocean resources.

[0:10:11.9]

PJ: Um and again I'm not at the forefront of any of this happening, but this is just what my gut tells me and also um changing the ecosystems, the very fine scale local ecosystems around which those farms what have you, those aquaculture efforts, um where they're being implemented, that can have uh an impact. Not negative or you know I'm not saying negative or positive but just understanding what the impacts of implementing farms you know raising more seaweed, raising more scallops, you know it will mostly benefit natural populations but also there will be some challenges too, it will create challenges that maybe we weren't expecting. Um I think it's an amazing resource for students to think about. It's been a great way for us to connect with students, we've created curriculum, we've worked with local, multiple local teachers at this point to um, using aquaculture both kelp and scallop aquaculture as a teaching tool.

[0:11:13.6]

PJ: Students grow their own kelp in the classroom, they come out they deploy on Hurricane Island, they come up with their own um hypothesis and experimental designs and then you know they'll come back out and in the Spring and they'll harvest it and they'll see if you know they'll see what the results are. We also students that are growing their own scallops. Um I think its for us it's a great teaching tool, I think it's a great way to educate people about the environment around them um there are just pluses and minuses with every every single thing about aquaculture, you know it's a great tool, it's also going to be a great challenge I think for management.

[0:11:54.9]

RCU: So you do this a lot with your students, aquaculture work?

PJ: Mhm, yep

RCU: Summer kids or mostly local schools?

PJ: Uh Local schools and summer kids so we work with teachers right now year-round who have

created curriculum focused on aquaculture, using mostly the organisms as their base, the kelp. Um so for example a teacher from Northport he just really took it and ran with it and you know created a whole curriculum around biology and reproduction that you could use um with the growing of the kelp in the classroom, chemistry with the idea of nutrients, um physics with the idea of light and waterflow. So he really took it and ran with it and then once the students deployed their kelp, took it one step further and got them thinking about the economics of running a business so they had to do product testing, you know they had to create a product that they would um that they would sell uh made from their kelp you know and so they had to do experiments and do beta testing with with audiences, live audiences, come up with a business plan um and really, it just really allowed them to own it and get involved and you know become become the voices of what aquaculture is and what it could be and also the voices of the challenges that they face in their experience.

[0:13:21.9]

PJ: Um so yes we do that with, we have a couple of those programs going on in Northport and also in Vinalhaven and then we also um use it in almost every single one of our open enrollment programs that come through and at this point also our school programs you know it's become a really big, a really big part of our programming and our curriculum on Hurricane Island. Um you know we take students out on boats, show them the aquaculture site, pull up kelp, they help us sort our spat bags where we get our seed for our scallop aquaculture, uh so it's really become a great way to integrate the research that we're doing with the education that we have on Hurricane.

[0:14:00.3]

RCU: Um what's one thing that you're like most excited about this coming summer?

PJ: Ooh Fun! Um one thing that I'm most excited about this coming summer... I think...we as an organization are just continuing to grow and we're continuing to hone our message and we're continuing to hone ways to engage every single person that comes to Hurricane and that is just really excit- you know, every person that comes to Hurricane learns about the scallops at this point, even if they're just coming up on the dock and they're you know grabbing a mooring and hiking around the island for the afternoon. It's very rare that they won't come ashore and learn about what we're doing on Hurricane, um so that's always really exciting that we're reaching broader audiences just by being on Hurricane and opening ourselves to visitors and other collaborators and people just to stop by and learn about who we are.

[0:15:04.3]

PJ: Um I'm really excited to get back in the water, um I am lucky enough to get to still participate in our research program so doing dive surveys, even just checking the moorings and you know going around the bay and checkin' on the bay, making sure everything, making sure that everything is where it is. Um so really reconnecting with the ocean in my favorite way which is to be in it and under it rather than on top of it or on a piece of land looking at it. Um so that's really exciting and hopefully in the future maybe getting students in the water in that capacity, not diving, but maybe snorkeling, that's

one of my long term goals. Yeah, totally.

New speaker?: Yeah

RCU: Um you may have to think about this for a minute. Um do you have like one story of your diving experience that was like super terrifying or super exciting and awesome?

[0:16:03.5]

PJ: Yeah, um yeah I mean I've been diving for about fifteen years now um man there are so many. I think, so I used to live in California on an island of the coast and that was one experience. I've done a lot of coral reef research so those, that has this whole other experience but I think here in Maine, one of my favorite, actually no my favorite favorite way to get in the water is with our scallop project, is with the cooperative scallop project. It is the fish, you know we dive off the lobster boats and scallop boats with the fishermen that work with us and we do the surveys and I get to do it with one of my best friends, um Kaitlyn Clever, and you know, we over the years have become a really really really tight buddy team.

[0:17:04.1]

PJ: You know we know each other, we know how each others dives, we know our habits underwater, we know our habits in life. Um and it is dark, it is cold, it is murky and there is almost always a ton of um current but it is so quiet and so just mesmerizing to be underwater um looking at the environment that so rarely gets to really be seen here in Maine you know diving is not, there aren't that many people that dive in Maine you know so it really is just every time I get underwater there's that moment of being really really really damn cold and then it just kind of disappears and as you descend you are just descending through this kind of soft, green, greenish-brown glow, with maybe a couple pieces of seaweed floating by.

[0:18:02.9]

PJ: and then you, you never know, well you're always surprised when the bottom shows up um and you know maybe you land on some ledge. These huge you know these ledges that we see on the coast of Maine, those extend down into the ocean and that's what the underwater world looks like and they're covered with seaweed and they're covered with sea urchins and they're covered with sea stars and there are little cunners swimming around or you might just land on sand, straight up sand, with all these crazy ripples that are made from the current flowing over them, um you know with scallops places so evenly and beautifully in these little pockets as far as the eye can see or maybe there's nothing or maybe you land on a bottom that's just full of shell hash and so you have all these, you have inches deep of like old mussel shells and old well old mostly mussel shells and scallop shells, but mostly mussel shells, just these crazy expanses of mussel shells.

[0:18:59.6]

PJ: Um or maybe you land on mud that you can stick your arm into right up to your shoulder and so it's just it's it's just magical under there and I love, I love diving and there's not one experience that yeah that that I regret getting in the water I just, it's amazing and I would anybody who has the opportunity to even snorkel or dive or engage with the environment in that way, do it. Do it now. It's awesome.

RCU: Any final thoughts, maybe the fisherman's forum, the couple days that you've had here?

PJ: I love the forum. The forum is one of my favorite events that I've ever been introduced to since moving to Maine in 2003, think it's amazing. I think there are so many amazing brains here, so many amazing fishermen, so many amazing scientists, so many amazing collaborators and communicators and people wanting to make change and do what needs to be done to sustain this state as it is, to sustain the fishery as it is, the industry as it, the fisheries as they are, the industries as they are, and the communities as they are and continue to keep lines of communication open so that we can make the change that we need to in the future. I love it, I think it's awesome. It's badass.

RCU: Yep Yep

[0:20:42.0]

End