

Interviewee Name: Sam Ladley

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

Interviewer(s) Name(s) and affiliations: Natalie Springuel (Maine Sea Grant)

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

Date of Interview: March 1, 2018

Interview Description:

Sam Ladley

Matinicus, ME

Resident of Matinicus

Interviewed by Natalie Springuel

Sam Ladley, who summered on Matinicus, ME, as a child, started to go lobstering with his father and fellow youngsters by the age of 8. Ladley shares stories from his childhood fishing with his family and friends including how he survived a sinking ship accident and how, another time, their boat's engine broke in a thick fog.

Collection Description:

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Transcription by: Natalie Springuel, Maine Sea Grant

SAM_LADLEY_VMFF2018_TRANSCRIPTION

SL = Sam Ladley (Interviewee)

NS = Natalie Springuel (Interviewer)

[0:00:00.0]

NS: And we are recording. Great. So, so I just have to read you a little bit that is connected to the release form. So, Voice of the Maine Fishermen's Forum, and actually, it is not plugged in...

SL: It is not going to matter?

NS: It is not going to matter. Yeah.

SL: Fishing stories, ok.

NS: Yeah.

SL: Ok, then that's a different theme than where I was headed.

NS: OK yes, we are archiving fishing stories.

SL: Good, gotcha.

NS: Yes, so maybe a little bit different than what they are doing in Rockland.

SL: Yes.

NS: Ok, great.

SL: Rather than use of the coast. Yeah, right. Ok.

NS: So let's just, if I could just have you start by saying your name.

SL: Sure, my name is Sam Ladley. L-A-D-L-E-Y. I grew up on - are we on-

NS: Yes.

SL: I grew up in Brunswick, but we had a summer house out on Matinicus, my whole life. Both my parents were professors so, as soon as school ended in May, we both, we spent the summer out on Matinicus.

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SL: So I got a bicycle when I was five, instead of, I mean not a bicycle, I got a boat when I was five, instead of a bike. And I got a second boat by the time I was 7 or 8. And so I grew up with the fishing kids out there in the summer, and everybody on Matinicus was a lobsterman, so the boys out there would start fishing, commercial lobstering around 8, and usually what they would do is their dad would help them build a double ender dory. A Matinicus dory, which is a rowing dory. Lapstrake. And they would build one of those, and then they would borrow 25 or 30 traps from their dad and put them in the harbor and just row around and put away their money and then they'd buy an outboard for the dory, and then they'd get, you know, by the time they were in Junior High, they might have a 25 foot boat and 100 traps of their own, working on a permit off their dad's license.

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SL: So it was interesting to grow up in that culture where the kids knew where they were going to go, and it was all, the while community was oriented towards lobstering. Although back in the 60's, there were herring boats out there, there were halibut boats, there were cod boats. I did a little longlining for cod and halibut. I went purse seining once. I did enough of that to know I was going to go to college and do something else. [laughter]

NS: How far out did you go?

SL: Well for the longline boats, we were out towards Matinicus Rock and Wooden Ball. The nice thing about Matinicus is that, Matinicus is here, so you are already 23 miles out, so you can go, you can be within site of Matinicus and you are 30 miles offshore. So the advantage to the fishing grounds at Matinicus, is you could, you didn't have to go very far from home and you were in deep water. So that's why we, there were lots of longline net boats and all

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sorts of stuff working around Matinicus because it was, yeah, it's an outer island, which made it ideal for fishing. It is still, it's still that way, it is still a fishing island. There are now some summer people out there but there is only a mail boat, there is not a ferry. You have, a plane lands there, it has to land uphill on a dirt strip, and so it's still isolated, but you can see that that fishing community is getting crowded out, even on Matinicus, because there's more people discovering Matinicus and going out and buying houses. Maintenance is tough out there, when my dad offered me our house, when I was about 24, the house needed the roof, it needed windows, it needed paint, and its 23 miles out to sea. It was a big house, it was the Nights of Pythius Hall. It had a ballroom, no electricity, it had an out house. But it had a gas chandelier in the ballroom. And I

said, I don't want to do the maintenance on the house. So we sold it to a fisherman for \$14,000.

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NS: Wow.

SL: Yea, it is on Matinicus. It's, buying a house out there is like the ante in a poker game. [laughter]

NS: And when was that, that you guys sold your house?

SL: We sold the house, probably around '85, '88, something like that.

NS: So at the time, were you living through changes from groundfishing and purse seining and longlining?

SL: Yea, I don't, there were no, at that point there were no line boat, I think Ronny Ames was still running longlines, he was living out at Wooden Ball at that time. I don't think there were any fin boats left out there.

NS: Already by the mid 80's.

SL: Already but the mid 80's. Yea, they'd gone. And by the mid '80's, I don't, in the 70's kids were still building dories, but by the '80's they were buying Carolina Skiffs and aluminum and fiberglass boats.

NS: Uh huh

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SL: And a lot of those, a lot of those traditions of the wooden boats and stuff had already started to go away. Which made the island more dependent on the mainland because a lot of that culture was decided on fixin' stuff for themselves. And now it's, now there is less of that.

NS: Yea. So what was it like as a kid? You said you spent your summers out there

SL: Yea

NS: fishing with your family

SL: Yea, I was always sorta the summer kid, there were a couple summer kids that really fell in love with it and ended up getting their own fishing boats, [Buzzy

Geits?] and a couple other kids. There were summer kids that broke into the gang, or the culture or whatever you want to call it, and were allowed to get their own boat and fish. I was always gonna be a summer kid. So, I could stern on boats, or I could crew on boats, but it woulda been, and wasn't really interested in commercial fishing all the time anyways. So I was always sort of an outsider from the real fishermen on the island. I had a lot of friends who were fishermen out there

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SL: and there were a couple summer kids that broke in, but it's, you really have to be dedicated, and you also have to sort of be adopted, but especially out on the islands, you have to sort of be adopted by the people to go, to be, to get involved seriously.

NS: What are some of your big memories, some of your time fishing?

SL: I remember one time I was with Warren Ames fishing, and we were in between Matinicus and Criehaven hauling traps and, I don't know, we must have blown a plank in the stern somewhere, all of the sudden, all this steam started coming up through the deck, the engine, you know it was in the water. Opened it up and it was filling up, and we called shore, it was a beautiful sunny day, mid summer, and you, Matinicus was maybe a mile away. And the boat started to sink, and we called to have other boats come get us and we both climbed up on the top of the deck. Warren, he was much older than I was, we didn't say anything. We both sat there, looked at the island, and we both knew that

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SL: neither one of us could swim. Swimming out, it is funny on Matinicus, swimming is a sign of bad seamanship. Nobody swims out there. But we didn't say anything. We didn't have any life preservers on the boat, we just waited. And somebody came.

NS: And somebody came [laughter] in the nick of time.

SL: In the nick if time, I remember another time I was out with Mark Ames on his dory, but at that point he had an outboard. So we were probably 12, maybe 10. We had gotten, we were way out by Seal Ledge, always out of the harbor, out over here, and fog rolled in thick. And we continued to run pot to pot and haul traps in the fog and he knew, he just went right to em, in thick smoke fog, couldn't see a thing. Went right pot to pot and then we just, and the engine died.

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SL: I don't know why. And he just pulled out the oars and started rowing. And it was just a wall of fog, couldn't see a thing. and I never saw anything, I never saw the breakwater as you went by, I never saw the mooring fields, as we went into to he harbor, and we were, it was miles, and took a long time. The first thing I saw was the ladder on the side of the pier, coming in out of the fog, in the inner harbor.

NS: Wow.

SL: I have no idea to this day how Mark did that in the fog. Just growing up on the water.

NS: Really knew the area.

SL: Not just that, how to read the water.

NS: Yea.

SL: Yea,

NS: How many traps did he have? At that time?

SL: At that time? I don't know, we were probably fishing 100 traps. We were kids. Yea, but then, Mark got bigger and bigger boats, for a while he was fishing too many traps. He got in some trouble. [laughter] But there are a lot of stories about him. But when we were, even when he was young,

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SL: being able to read the water and ride through fog. I remember another time, I am trying to think, it was in the '80's there was a tugboat that was running, I don't know if it was running out of Searsport, Belfast, but somewhere along the coast there was a tug boat that was passing Matinicus on its way back to Portland, in an ice storm. And the tugboat crew kept having to go out on deck, because the problem is the spray when it's cold out. The spray hits the boat and freezes to the boat. So you have to go out with an ax and chop off the ice, or the weight of the ice will sink the boat, and sometimes if it gets really bad, it's too dangerous to go out on deck and chop off the ice and at that point, you're just racing against the ice to get back to shore before the boat sinks. Well the tugboat sank just off of Matinicus and Dick [Moodey?] at the time was the pilot boat for Matinicus. Big ships coming past there, Dick would help them get through the ledges out there, so he was the local pilot and he got his lobster boat and went out to where the tugboat said they were

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SL: and the boat was gone, and the crew were in their orange survival suit, frozen stiff, they were just floating in the water, one of the guys had a hand held flashlight that had frozen to his arm, and Dick saw that swinging back and forth in the water. And he is a big boy, I mean when he got a fireplace for his house out there, he picked up and carried it up to the house. He just reached in and pulled them up on to his lobster boat and saved that crew. I think he got a medal from the Governor. He went out in a lobster boat in that storm that sunk a tugboat,

NS: Wow.

SL: And found those guys in the water.

NS: Yeah, that far out, they really had to be self-sufficient.

SL: Oh yea.

NS: And look out for each other.

SL: Oh yea.

NS: Yea. What made you decide to get of fishing?

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SL: Well as I said, my parents both worked in colleges, and I always been on the water, I still work on boats but I went, from fishing I learned that I could deliver people's yachts for them, up and down, going south, so one of the ways, when I was in College, I made money was delivering yachts, and I was working towards a 100 ton master's license and working on tour boats in New York Harbor and I still crew on tour boats and cruise ships and stuff. So now you know, I still like being on boats, but fishing is awfully hard work.

NS: Yea. [laughter]

SL: And I found ways that I can be on boats and get paid to be on boats and not have to work quite so hard.

NS: Yea

SL: You know, it is not, and still to some degree be independent. Because I can, I freelance, so I decide where I want to work. Not quite as independent as a fishermen can be, but also I don't have a lot of the risks they have.

[0:12:00.6]

NS: Right. Great, any other stories come to mind.

SL: No that's good.

NS: Great, super, thank you.

SL: Sure.

[0:12:08.3]

END