

Interviewee Name: Krista Tripp

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

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Date of Interview: March 2, 2018

Interview Description:

Krista Tripp

Spruce Head, ME

Commercial Lobsterman

Interviewed by Matt Frassica with Teagan White

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

Collection Description:

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Transcription by: Teagan White (College of the Atlantic intern)

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KT: Krista Tripp (Interviewee)

MF: Matt Frassica (Interviewer)

TW: Teagan White (Student intern)

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MF: So, can we start by just, can you say your name and spell it?

KT: My name is Krista Tripp and it's spelled K-R-I-S-T-A T-R-I-P-P.

MF: Okay, and where are you from?

KT: I'm from Spruce Head, Maine.

MF: And where do you live now?

KT: Spruce Head, Maine. [Matt and Krista laugh].

MF: Alright, and what do you do?

KT: I am a lobster boat captain.

MF: How long have you done that?

KT: Uh, well, I've worked on boats basically my whole life and um, I started I'd say probably around the time I was 13, that's when I got my first official job with my grandfather on his lobster boat. And um, you know, I

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KT: did stern for him for like a year and then when I started high school, me and my brother got a boat to share, so we each had 150 traps, and we would, you know, fish out of the same boat and sometimes I would go stern for him and he would go stern for me, and I mean he brought his friends sometimes too, and you know, as did I. But, uh, yeah. I did that all through high school and that is what you would call the Apprenticeship Program. So we would each have to log our hours and, you know, amount that we hauled and what we caught, poundage wise, and then, yeah. Well, unfortunately I went to Massachusetts and you know, went scalloping a little bit and I didn't get my paperwork in on time. So, um, and I just kinda left it up to my parents and they, you know, they're kinda old school. They didn't take me seriously because I am a woman and um, so they didn't really think to turn my paperwork in. Well, I was definitely serious about it [KT laughs], so I was kinda upset when I came home and realized that I

had missed the

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deadline and my brother got his license and I got put on the waiting list. But, you know, I was able to, you know, learn some stuff and, you know, come back home and still work on boats but um, just recently after being on the waiting list for 12 years [KT laughs] I just recently got my lobster license and um, I'm so grateful that at least I finally got it and I've been um, the first year that I got it you're only allowed 300 traps, so I would

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go sternman with David Cousins who is the president of the MLA, well, actually he's now retired as of today. [KT laughs]. But, uh, he, he's, you know, been great to work with and I've been introduced to a lot of people through him and, you know, he's, I've learned a lot from him. So that's always been good so, you don't really know what's gonna happen in the future, so. I fished with him while I was captain of my own boat that year and the year after. And so this year I've worked my way up to 500 traps, you're allowed 100 each year, so I started at 300 and last year was 400 and then this year is 500

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until you reach your trap limit which is 800. And, um, so this year I'm going on my own so it's really exciting and, you know, I'm sure it's a little bit different than when I used to fish in high school because I'm fishing, you know, in deeper water and stuff and I have a bigger boat. But it's, it's really exciting because I actually ended up with my grandfather's boat and he, um, he passed away a couple years ago at the time that I was getting my license, so it kinda worked out really funny. You know, and by the Grace of God everything kinda fell into place and I ended up purchasing his lobster boat so I've been able to keep it in the family.

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

KT: Yeah I really do think he was open to it because not only did he take me as his sternman but he took my aunt who was also a woman, and actually my cousin who never really grew up in the lobstering industry, you know, he brought her onboard just to show her the ropes and he worked with him a year before he passed. And, and then I was able to take her sternman with me for a year, but um, she went off to college and, you know, found a job and what she was interested in doing. But it worked out kinda funny, so yeah. He was definitely open and um, you know, my parents have come around now, now they're, I

mean you see, when I was younger you never saw any women really working on boats, you know?

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I mean our family, that's all we did, so it was just the norm for us and, and I don't know if I was just, you know, really sheltered and didn't know of other women in other areas fishing, but you know. I certainly felt like, you know, the oddball, you know. In my school and growing up in my area so, it's really great to see a lot of more women getting into the industry and it's really cool.

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

KT: Um, I kinda always knew that that's what I wanted. I really enjoyed it when I was younger and [KT laughs] I would actually stack my study halls at the end of the my day in school so that I could leave school early and go to haul.

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So I guess just knew then that I really enjoyed it and that's what I really love doing.

MF: Yeah. So there was never really another option for you.

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

MF: Yeah. Do you wanna talk about where you go fishing? Because we have these charts here...

KT: Sure!

[0:07:55.5]

TW: Here, we'll get you a drastically different color then... well, maybe drastic isn't the right word. It's kinda hard at this point.

KT: Yeah, okay, so I fish, this is the Mussel Ridge Channel right here... so, so here's South Thomaston and Spruce Head is, this is the Gig River right here, so this little island right here is called Spruce Head Island, there's Spruce Head and then there's the little bridge right here that connects you to Spruce Head Island, and uh I live right here. So these are the Mussel Ridge Islands so I fish, you want me to mark this map? Oh, okay. [KT laughs]. So the line probably goes from here, through here, and there's some areas here around these islands which you can't fish because only the island can fish. And um,

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so the line kinda goes out like this, and then this is Spruce Head bottom and although I live on Spruce Head, this is South Thomaston bottom and I fish South Thomaston because that what my family always did. And I actually had the option to fish Spruce Head because I live there, but I talked to my dad and he just didn't think it would be right for me to do that, whereas, we, all of us fish South Thomaston. So that's what I've been doing. Let's see, here's Matinicus, here's Large Green (?) Island so, it probably, this is not a perfect line, but it comes out to about here, and on this side, let's see, here's the can...

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well it's kinda like this. And this is kinda our area and in a round about way. It's not perfect. Sometimes you can fish, there's a 3 mile line right here and um, and then you have Matinicus Bottom and Criehaven, my dad just recently when my grandfather passed away, he bought my grandfather's house. My grandfather fished Criehaven, so my dad's fishing Criehaven now and he fishes in federal waters as well, and so does my brother. Um, so I'm kinda actually left alone [KT laughs], I mean my uncle and my cousin's husband fish there but uh, yeah. [KT laughs] I wished more family was still fishing around me, but hey, it's okay, I'll figure it out. And this island here, is Tommy's island. This is where I grew up in the summers. My parents built a house out there

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and that's where, this is called Tommy's Island, we own this island, our family owns it. My grandfather had a fish weir that he bought into years ago. He went in on it with two other different people and they always kinda made, you know, a deal with each other that they would, if one of them wanted to sell out they would have to sell it to one of the other people. So one person sold out, my grandfather bought his share, and um, that other person decided to sell out as well because as you know, fishing industry is always fluctuating and there's things that happen and he uh, bought out the other person's share as well so ended up with the island there, so he was a very smart man. But that's where I grew up in the summers and this is the island that I used to fish out of when I was a young girl.

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And so now I'm fishing out here and it's a little bit different. I still have some of my gear inside there but, uh, you know it's a little bit of a different scenario then when I was in high school.

MF: So you fish this year round?KT: Well, um, mostly. Someone asked if I was gonna keep my gear outside this winter and I was thinking about it, ultimately because they were going to do a story and then because I didn't sell to Red Lobster, who is sponsoring the story, they decided to find somebody else because, you know, I didn't sell to Red Lobster. [KT laughs] So um, I was like,

well, you know, maybe I'll haul my traps up and I'm kinda glad that I did because it was a really harsh winter and in the future I do plan to leave some gear in the winter, um, but you know, it didn't work out this year, so.

MF: Would you consider fishing further out?

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KT: Yeah! Oh my God, yeah! I would absolutely love to be like, you know, like the first federal water fisherwoman. I think that would be so cool, it'd be great and not only that but I'd be with my brother and my dad and um, I think that would be really great and really cool. Um, yeah, absolutely.

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

KT: Um, it definitely helped, I mean a lot of people say that the fishing industry is kind of, um, you know, cut throat and I did have someone tell me, I'm not gonna say names, but they told me that a lot of people, you know, might not like the fact that I'm fishing because, you know, my dad was a great fisherman and but, I really don't think that people, [KT laughs] think of me as

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posing a threat, so that's, you know, great and I have had a lot of fishermen that are very, you know, have been very helpful and very supportive so, um, that's actually wonderful. So I haven't had any trouble with other fishermen, um, it is territorial but I'm not fishing outside the territory or anything so I don't have anything to worry about. But my dad has given me some tips and advice and other people have given me some tips and advice, so, it's been really awesome.

MF: Are there any other, uh, kind of obstacles you think you've faced specifically being a fisherwoman that your brother didn't face or, you know, your dad, or grandfather didn't face?

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

MF: So, I'm curious about how it when you want to join, when you want to sort of, start finishing an area that your family has fished traditionally and you've gone through this apprenticeship as a teenager, is there like, we've heard about the kinds of, uh like hazing or whatever that goes on when you're first starting out, like getting lines cut, getting traps cut and that kind of thing.

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Is that something that happens or is that something that you've experienced or did you have an easier entry?

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

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MF: What are some of the things that you're concerned about looking forward, like as somebody who is just starting in their career?

KT: Um, some of the things that I'm looking forward to, or?

MF: That you're looking forward to or that you're worried about.

KT: That I'm worried about... things that I'm looking forward to... Well, I look forward to getting my full trap limit. Obviously that's like a big thing. The things that I'm worried about are changes in the fishing industry, I just sat in on this meeting that had to do with, you know, Right Whales and you know, I can totally understand why they're um, concerned about their livelihood and wanting to work with us, but it can be really, you know, really expensive and if it is not affective then it's, you know, us fishermen that suffer and we're the ones that take the,

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you know, the, we're the ones that are paying for it ultimately, so I think that it's not a bad idea to think of ways to try to save the whales. I'm for saving the whales but I just know that this such a huge industry and we are all interconnected and, you know, it's so so big and world wide that it would affect, it affects us and therefore it affects everyone else, you know? So that is definitely a huge concern, especially where I'm just getting started in the industry and so late, you know.

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MF: Late how?

KT: Late as in, well, my age, [KT laughs] most people, they do the apprenticeship program and then they get their license, like my brother did and he's way head of me. He's got a federal license, he's fishing offshore, he's

fishing offshore, he's at his trap limit, he's got way more experience than I do because my years of working on the back of a boat have been just that. You know? You don't really have to think too much about what you're doing you're just working and when you're captain you have so many more things to think about. You know, not setting on people, and the tide, and you know, all sorts of different things so, um, it's kinda unfortunate but, hey, at least I, at least I'm starting now, so. [KT laughs]

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MF: Yeah. So what about, are you concerned at all about the ways the lobster population might change with the way that warming, the warming water might affect your livelihood?

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

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because we don't know, we don't know what's going to happen. We can speculate all we want but we just don't know.

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

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

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

KT: Inside. Inside. Years ago, I don't think a lot of people know this but um,

years ago people would just fish in this inside channel here, and my father actually was one of the very few that would, that started fishing out here to get away from all the other fishermen because there was a lot of traps and it was affecting his catch so, when uh, you know, people started finding out that there was lobsters out there and there was a lot of lobsters out there [KT laughs] then people started fishing out here and in the outside channel.

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So, and same thing with the federal lobsters now. Now, you know, a lot more people are finding that there's lobsters way offshore so they're getting bigger boats and they're getting the equipment needed to go fish offshore because there's a lot more lobsters but definitely the location of the lobsters are, you know, have definitely, you know, shifted. So I don't know, who knows if they were always always out here or if they just stopped coming in or if they, you know, if global warming is affecting their patterns, or what.

MF: Yeah.

KT: I don't know. [KT laughs]

MF: You decided to stay in the place you grew up, what is it that you value about your community?

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

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

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

MF: Yeah. And that would obviously affect everything about the community.

KT: Absolutely, because what would we do? We're all built on lobstering. At least since I've been around, you know. So, yeah, it would really really be sad. [KT laughs]

MF: Yeah. Alright. Well, thank you so much. This has been really great.

KT: You're welcome.

MF: Unless, is there any issues or topics or stories you came in wanting to talk about that we didn't get to?

KT: Um... No. Not that I can think of. We covered quite a bit. I came in here thinking what am I going to say and it all just flowed very well, so. [KT laughs]

MF: Well thank you so much.

KT: You're welcome, it's been great talking to you.

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

[Recorder was cut off then back on]

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

TW: I am pretty excited that you came in.

KT: Yes, well I am glad that I came in and thank you for having me.

TW: yeah

MF: tell other people!

KT: I will.

[0:27:16.0]

End.