Interviewee Name: Joanna Fogg

Project/Collection Title: Bar Harbor 2019 Collection.

Interviewer(s) Name(s) and Affiliation: Galen Koch (The First Coast)

Interview Location: Bar Harbor, ME

Date of Interview: October 22, 2019

Interview Description: This is an interview with Joanna Fogg, the owner of Bar Harbor Oysters in Bar Harbor, Maine. She discusses how she started and runs the company, the cultural differences between aquaculture and fishing, and what it's like to live in Bar Harbor year-round. She is optimistic about the future of aquaculture in Maine, especially when sites are carefully selected and well managed, and hopes to see a more balanced tourism industry on MDI.

Keywords: oysters, Bar Harbor, aquaculture, fishing, year-round community, tourism

Collection Description: Interviews with Bar Harbor community members from The First Coast's residency in October 2019. Transcripts by the Mapping Oceans Stories Project.

Citation: Fogg, Joanna, The First Coast 2019 Oral History Interview, (October 22nd, 2019), by Galen Koch, 19 pages, Maine Sound and Story. Online: Insert URL (Last Accessed: Insert Date).

Transcribed By: Hallie Arno

GK: Galen Koch
JF: Joanna Fogg

[0:45:59.4]

GK: [00:00] Yeah, so I work with COA [College of the Atlantic] students. I don't know if we're going to get one of them to come with us. It kind of depends on how many people you can accommodate on Friday.

JF: I can take up to – I mean, I can take up to four or five, really.

GK: Okay.

JF: Yeah, especially if I know. It's just a matter of life jackets. We've got the boat space. It's fine.

GK: Okay, cool.

JF: Yeah.

GK: I'll just have you say your name.

JF: Okay, Joanna Fogg.

GK: Joanna, are you just like –? What are your gigs? Are you doing Bar Harbor Oyster exclusively, or do you do other stuff too?

JF: Yeah. Currently, I am the owner and operator of Bar Harbor Oyster Company and a mom. Those are the two things that I do. The company is a little bit multifaceted. Mainly, we're a farm, but we also are our own wholesaler and dealer, so there's a fair bit that goes into actually having those licenses. We distribute all of our own oysters, so we do all of the relations with the restaurants that we work with, and we're still a pretty small boutique farm, so we know where all of our oysters end up and get to pick and choose where our product is. We also do some shucking of oysters and parties and things like that. So, we seed them from tiny baby oyster seeds all the way to the tables most of the time.

GK: [01:20] Cool. What's your history? How did you –?

JF: I grew up on MDI [Mount Desert Island], here on the island, and I've always been interested in being on the water and working on the water. I didn't come from a line of people who have been really on the working waterfront so much, but I started as a stern woman on lobster boats the summer I was seventeen, I think, and fished for six seasons and then got tired of that and started working on private yachts and did a fair bit of sailing as a chef and deckhand on private yachts for several years, seasonal stuff, some here and then some all over, in the Caribbean and a little bit in the Med [Mediterranean]. About six years ago, I was looking to do something that involved being on the water but that I could do from here. My husband grew up lobstering here and has always been working on the water. He graduated from Maine Maritime Academy, and he is currently working as a chief engineer on a longliner in Alaska. I was sailing in the Caribbean, and he was in Alaska, and I was like, "How are we going to find something we can do at home – I kind of want to start a family and be there – that involves being on the ocean and something that we can really get behind. We knew nothing about oyster farming, but it seemed like a good fit. It was something we could do. We could work for ourselves. We could be on the water. Oyster farming is amazing for the environment. We just knew we could get behind it, so

we just dove in. Literally and metaphorically, we just got our feet wet and tried to figure out how we could grow oysters here.

GK: [03:02] Crazy. What years were you working on lobster boats? What was the scene like when you were –? Was it different?

JF: Different from what it is now?

GK: Yeah.

JF: I think there was a little bit more hope in the lobster industry, at least. I was completely new to it and was more of a seasonal worker. I was never fishing offshore in the winter, but the catch price was good, bait prices were still relatively low, and fuel prices were still relatively low. Bait was still available and more readily available. I love lobstering. It was fun. It was new to me. I felt like I was learning a lot about what was coming out of the ocean and just basic oceanography and boat handling skills. But it got pretty cold, and things are definitely shifting in that industry. I worry about its future, as does my husband, and it was time to move on to something new.

GK: [04:04] Yeah. So that didn't seem like the place – when you were making a decision, there wasn't a moment where you were like, maybe we'll go into [inaudible]?

JF: No, the lobster licenses are hard to come by. There's a long list for them, so actually getting one wouldn't have even been possible. I mean, sterning for someone would be doable essentially, but no, it was kind of like – I didn't have a lot of faith in the future of it. I worry about the future of it. I hope that it continues to do well, but we figured it'd be smart to diversify what was coming out of our waters here.

GK: Yeah. Are there other farms, oyster farms?

JF: Yeah. So, a lot of oyster farms are popping up along the coast. I think more and more people are realizing that Maine oysters are delicious, that we can grow them, and that a lot of the skills that we have as traditional maritime people can be transferred into aquaculture. Getting leases can be difficult. There are some obstacles for sure, but more and more people are doing it. I think the Maine seafood industry brand is really strong. I've found a lot of the people who are already in the industry have been very welcoming to us as newcomers, and people have been wanting to lend a hand and share knowledge, which has been a really – it's great to get into an industry where you feel welcomed by fellow farmers, and we always try to do the same for newcomers because I think there's plenty of space here for sea farming, and I think we need to shift the way we're producing food on our planet, and this is a way to do it.

GK: [05:44] Yeah. On MDI itself, do you have –? Are there other oyster farms on MDI? I don't really know.

JF: Yeah. On Western Bay, there are a couple of leaseholders there. There's someone in Trenton who's just right off the island and then some in Sullivan. I've got a girlfriend who's growing out on Little Cranberry [Island] or around both Cranberries. Then there are some people who are doing it recreationally. Those are all of the larger operations now. But the whole coastline is getting more dotted with pretty small – you're talking a couple of people really at most working

for these companies. Most of the time, it's the leaseholder, and he or she is the one person who's farming.

GK: Yeah, I have a couple – I'm from Deer Isle

JF: [06:46] Okay.

GK: And I know a couple of people, two people up there. Do you feel like it's something that there's room for growth? I mean, is that one of the reasons you were attracted to it?

JF: Yes. I mean, it's that there's a finite amount of space that's not already being used by other commercial fishing sectors, but we have a pretty large coastline, and right now, aquaculture takes up a very small percentage of it. I think that all of the leases would currently fit inside Rockland Harbor right now, which is nothing compared to the amount of lobster gear that's out there; it's really a minuscule amount. Even though there has been a large influx of limited-purpose aquaculture sites or new – those are small, kind of temporary leases. Almost all of those people have ties to the commercial fishing sector, and they're all just kind of feeling out whether it's going to happen. So, there are very few massive, large-scale operations in Maine. I think there's room for that to grow as well. But there is still space, and I think that it's smart for us to diversify what we're harvesting from the ocean because if there is a failure with lobster, we've got to have something else to fall back on.

GK: [08:03] Yeah. It sounds like – I mean, how do you feel, being from MDI, and the shift in identity from – this is what lobstermen always are saying. It's like going from the hunter to the farmer from that perspective. But I wonder, as a farmer yourself, what you think about that.

JF: I completely can see both angles of it. I love the idea of eating wild-caught seafood. But, as things change on our planet, I think we have to adapt to new ways. I think that oyster farming, and all shellfish farming, is significantly more sustainable than some of the lobstering that is going on now. We don't buy anything to feed them. We have a smaller impact. We're not killing another species to provide food for them, which I think is something that's – the bait crisis in Maine is something that they're up against. While I hope that lobstering continues to be profitable and a part of Mainers' lifestyle, a lot of people would argue that it's farming, too. You're feeding them. Lobsters get in and out of traps all the time. The romantic idea of being wild hunter-gatherers, while I love the idea of it, when it comes down to reality, we've got to feed our families. If we want to work on the water and keep it beautiful, we've got to find different innovative ways to do that.

GK: [09:38] Yeah.

JF: I hope that we can continue to work alongside fishermen and that possibly fisheries will diversify and rebound in ways that we aren't sure of yet ...

GK: Was it easy going, starting the farm? What was the process?

JF: [laughter] Yes and no. The leasing process is daunting. Right now, I think, kind of on [inaudible]. Right now, it's hard for a lot of people to get new leases because there is this wedge, I'd say, being driven between lobstermen or commercial fishermen and sea farmers. It doesn't need to be there. There is enough bottom. There are ways to work alongside one another. Our

site selection was pretty key. We were fortunate that the site that worked well for us, that was close enough to home, where we thought would be a great habitat for oysters, was not really a place where lobstering was happening. There's some mussel activity, but we found a spot that people weren't really using commercially. Because of that, we were able to get our lease in that area. But it was a three-year process. There's a fair bit of "not in my backyard." A lot of people are concerned about new things changing and their view. I completely empathize with that. But we do everything that we can to be good stewards of our lease, and we feel like we [have] eyes on the ground for what's happening. We care about all of the wildlife that's in the area. Yeah. Three years of applying for our lease and kind of going through different appeals and processes, we were finally able to get it. But I wouldn't say it was easy. I would definitely not say it was easy.

[11:42] We're in a place where there is – I don't know – a fair bit of money and tourism, and some of that ended up having a little bit of weight. People [were] like, "Oh, why can't you just put it –? Why can't you just go Downeast." It was like, "Just put your farm Downeast." Like, "Oh, really? Well, we live here." By the same token, we don't have the capacity to do tours right now. But I can't tell you – at least once a week, someone asks me for a tour of the farm. They want to see what we're doing, they want to see what we're up to, and they want to know how oysters live and grow. At some point, that might be something that we do because people are fascinated [by] it. This generation wants to know where their food is coming from. They want to know that it is sustainable, local, and healthy, and they want to come out on the farm. So, there's also a fair bit of momentum behind that, which is nice – is rewarding.

GK: Yeah. I was wondering if in Bar Harbor – because I know, especially in southern Maine, there's so much pushback on views and who has the right to that. I figured Bar Harbor has a little bit of that, or the MDI area had a little bit of that going on.

JF: [12:58] Well, luckily, this is the part of the island that's a little bit more affordable. It was part of our site selection. We didn't come off of anywhere that has a huge overlook from the park where the summer mansions are. The Department of Marine Resources [DMR] only considers riparian owners as people who are within a thousand feet of your lease site, and there are actually very few of those. That was something that we looked at when we were drawing up the boundaries in our application was how many people will be affected by this, how many people overlook this, how many people might be already using this. So site selection is key, and there are only so many ideal sites where oysters will grow well and where you might not be impacting anyone else, at least in a negative way or to any great length. But I think it's paid off. [laughter] I think it's working. We haven't had any complaints since we've been there. We're quiet. We try to just carry on – do our thing.

GK: [14:05] Yeah. How's it been for you to be on the farm? How do you feel about your work out there?

JF: I love our work out there. I end up spending less time out there than I initially thought because there is a lot that goes into the licensing. There's a lot of paperwork and a lot of talking about oysters. I find myself – I talk about oysters sometimes more than I eat or actually farm them. But that's part of it. I care about this industry, and I want it to be held up in a good light. So that's important to me. We have a lot of good days on the water. We're in a pretty protected place on the island. That was also huge for our site selection. The prevailing winds here are

southwesterly, and we are in the lee of the island nine out of ten days. It's just a big salt pond out there. We're out there with our hats and our sunscreen. In the summer, we swim every day at lunch break. Yeah. We love what we do. [laughter]

GK: [15:06] Yeah, it's idyllic.

JF: Yeah, it's good. It's good. It's good.

GK: And how did you –? I mean, did you break in –? Are you able to sell in restaurants in town? Are you having success with that?

JF: Yeah. Our first year, I was new to the sales game thing, and I was apprehensive about getting our product out there, but our oysters are delicious; everyone loves them, which is awesome. They pretty much sell themselves. By the time I went and made my first rounds after the first year of having market-sized oysters, I've had a waitlist. Ninety percent of our product stays on the island. I deliver a little bit further sometimes, but I don't have to. We're sold out before we get off the island most of the time. We harvest and deliver same day whenever possible. I've got a lot of people looking for oysters, wondering if we'll ship them, and I just don't have enough. So, we can't grow them fast enough.

GK: It's such a cool model to think that you can create that business and then have it be so localized.

JF: [16:13] It's great. Yeah. At some point, we might reach market saturation on the island or a little bit beyond, but this is [a] tourist haven. So many people come here. We're a relatively seasonal business, but there are so many people that were coming to the island that we don't have to ship much beyond. Bar Harbor Oyster Company's selling Bar Harbor Blondes in Bar Harbor. [laughter] I don't have to work very hard. And they're good. They're amazing. Yeah, that's going well. It would be nice to be a little bit further just to expand some, but I do believe in eating locally, so I don't want to pay money to fuel a truck or wrap my product in Styrofoam and overnight it somewhere if I don't have to. And I don't have to. Most of the time, I can just sell it to my neighbor. It's great.

GK: That's great.

JF: It's great. Yeah.

GK: Did you have a period –? So you had times where you left and then came back to work on boats and stuff.

JF: Yes.

GK: Are you living in a family house? Was housing hard?

JF: [17:16] Housing was kind of an issue. My family is all from here, but we ended up – we were able, because we were both shipping and my husband is still shipping, to find a house when the housing market was – it was right after everything crashed, interest rates were really low. We weren't able to buy. I grew up in Seal Harbor, which is a town that I don't think most normal people can afford to live in anymore. But we found this property that was on this side of the island – I live two and a half miles from here – that I was worried about being able to afford, but

interest rates were low, and we were both working really hard. We didn't have any kids, and we just still dove on it when we could, and still shipping – my husband's still shipping out to afford it and kind of supporting our oyster habit with Pacific cod right now. It wasn't so much of a problem for us, but it is a problem for help for sure. I mean, we're lucky that we're able to find a house, but we've got a couple of crew, and housing them or seasonal workers is a huge problem. It's a huge problem on the island for everyone.

GK: [18:24] Yeah. Somebody had mentioned someone on your crew as someone who'd be cool to talk to. Maybe Mark?

JF: Mark, yes.

GK: [inaudible]

JF: Yeah. You should get some sound bites of Mark, actually. Good luck with that, though. [laughter] We were actually just talking. He's out on the farm now. Marky grew up here. Marky grew up fishing here. He's got a wicked accent, and he likes to –

GK: Nice

JF: – and he chews tobacco. You might get a lot of sound bites. [laughter]

GK: That's hilarious. I've just been thinking a lot too about what – I don't know. Growing up in Stonington – Bar Harbor is just so different, the town of Bar Harbor, in the sense that it's so saturated with tourists, but there's still that undercurrent of like – but the tourists even – so many still want to see a lobster trap on the side of the road. They still want that authenticity, if that's what you want to call it. I don't know. Yeah. I just wonder what your feelings [are] about the identity of specifically Bar Harbor, or MDI, if it's changed?

JF: [19:46] I mean, everything is changing. Yeah. I think it is changing. I think we see more and more people here. I love Acadia National Park. I live here because I am in the park almost every day on my bike or hiking or running with my daughter, with my dog. It's a beautiful thing that a lot of people come to see, and I think more people are coming to see it. We have more and more cruise ships coming in, which really does flood the town with people. I think that's changed the dynamic some. And I think the energy that's created by all of the people who are here, this massive influx of people who are here in the summer, ends up kind of depleting us a little bit in the winter. We all work our tails off in the summer because the days are long, and that's when money is to be made, fishing a little bit more in the fall when the lobsters start to move offshore and shed. But I do think the amount of people that are here on the island now is changing the identity of the people. I think you find some people who are kind of closing up and being more tucked in and sometimes more bitter about the visitors who come here. And then I think it kind of depletes us so that in the winter we have maybe less of a fabric to be knit together because we're all just hunkered down in the dark, [laughter] most of us drinking. I feel like it's hard to find that balance as you see more and more things happening and taking off in the summer. I think it's harder for the community to just actually be well-rounded and healthy.

GK: [21:26] Yeah, it's almost like you're binge – there's a social binge that happens in the summer.

JF: Yes. A social binge and an economic binge, for sure. The sheer energy of the number of people on the island is crazy. [It] makes working really close to home nice. I've got a four-minute commute from my house to this boat launch, then a ten-minute boat ride. It's beautiful.

GK: Yeah, that's great. Does Hadley Point get busy? Is it ever crazy?

JF: Yeah. It gets busy, but it's not like Sand Beach. It's not like downtown Bar Harbor busy, no. People definitely are more and more so, but not like downtown for sure. Everywhere is more crowded, though. I think everywhere is more crowded. It seems like it's got to reach some sort of tipping point. It seems like we've got to hit some saturation [where] people are like, "Oh, man, I don't want to go there. Too many people." But I think a lot of people are used to a lot of people. Just not us. You're from Stonington, right?

GK: [22:29] Yeah, I know.

JF: I'm like, "Oh, there's a lot of people. People got to stop coming because, shit, there's a lot of people here." But actually, some people are just used to a lot of people.

GK: Totally. And what you say, too – I really resonate with that thing because it is true that in the winter – or what has happened in Stonington, I think, that's been shocking – because I grew up there and lived there until I was twenty-two. I live in Scarborough most of the time now at a beach rental because it's cheap and sweet.

JF: It works, yes.

GK: But my friends – I go home. I used to go to Deer Isle in the summer all the time, right? And now I go in the winter because the summer – none of my friends can hang out, No one can hang out.

JF: Yeah, right. You show up, and [they're] like, "What? You're on vacation? You want to hang out? It's summer. What?" Yeah. Some of my friends come from away. I'm like, "What? You want to go on a hike? It's two o'clock on a Wednesday? No."

GK: Yeah, no way. [inaudible] Even [inaudible] I've started saying to people, "Don't come visit me in August." It just doesn't make any sense.

JF: [23:32] No, it's true.

GK: But that's new. Even though I've always – these places – Stonington was always a tourist place. It seems like in the last ten years, things have just gotten –

JF: Yeah, what is driving that? I don't know. I don't know what's driving that. I don't know why everyone's coming here. It's the [oysters]. Laughter.

GK: They say it's the baby boomers

JF: It's the baby boomers, yeah.

GK: But I wonder – there are these opportunities for this kind of business, though, that you guys have, which is really cool, thinking that you can sell all of your oysters, right? That's a perk.

JF: Yeah, yeah.

GK: We'll talk more, too, when we're on the boat, but if you had a vision for the town, what do you hope happens?

JF: [24:33] Oh man. It's really on the spot. The pressure. If I have a vision for the town?

GK: Don't worry. You don't need to –

JF: I'm not running for mayor. I'm just trying to farm some oysters. [laughter] Are you going to air this? Where's this going to go?

GK: No, no. These are just questions that I always ask people. You don't have to have an answer.

JF: I would like to see more year-round establishments. I would like to see more food raised locally and served locally. I would like to see healthier biking trails and networks that connect our communities so that we don't have to get in cars to get everywhere. We have this amazing, beautiful energy center. Why are we all getting in our cars to go everywhere? We can connect this island with beautiful trails. I would love to see that happen here. I think that visitors coming to enjoy this space – that needs to continue to happen. I think there maybe has to be some kind of shift in [the] management of that. I don't know if a cap, a number, or something. I just feel like the quality of the experience for the visitor is diminishing as more and more people are coming. I don't know how that could be managed. I have no ideas on how to make that work, but I feel like there needs to be some kind of management so that we can keep the quality of the people who come to this island – the quality of their experience high.

[26:09] Also, to not interfere with the really authentic ways and lifestyles that we use the water and live on the water. Like you said, people come for Maine lobster. People come; they want to see us fishing. They want to see us working out here. I hope that there are ways that we can actually continue to maintain that lifestyle that are harmonious with all of our visitors and ideally create some kind of balance so that – our season's getting longer. Our shoulder seasons are longer. The summer starts sooner and ends later. The fall foliage has just been amazing this year, and there are still tons of people around to see it. I don't blame them. I want to look, too. It's gorgeous. I really don't. But my vision for the island would be that we can either tone back some of the visiting or maybe make it a little more even throughout the year.

GK: The winter tourists

JF: [27:11] There are. There are more and more – actually, no, don't come here in the winter. It's awful. You will not like it. The snow is ugly. The mountains are hideous. Don't even come here in the winter. It's awful.

GK: There's absolutely nothing to do.

JF: There's only one pub open, and that is true. So, don't come here. You'll have to cook for yourself. It's going to be awful.

GK: What's the place that's open in the winter?

JF: Actually, I don't even know. There's one place at a time, generally, maybe two. The Thirsty Whale's open. They close for a couple of months, but then maybe McKay's will open up. They take turns so that there's usually at least one place open. One. That's it. [laughter]

GK: Do you guys get to go –?

JF: They don't deliver. [laughter]

GK: Grubhub. [laughter] Do you guys get to go –? Do you go away?

JF: Yeah, go away. I do. We go away every winter, which most people, I think, try to get away, of course, financially if you can. We go somewhere and generally thaw out. Although more and more lately I've been drawn – I want to go to Iceland actually. I want to go to – I've done a lot of Caribbean beaches. I've done a lot of warm places, and I'm more interested in visiting landscapes that I'm afraid are disappearing. I want to see some stuff that might not be there in thirty years. So yeah, I'm going to check out some glaciers.

GK: [28:41] Yeah. Do you feel like on Bar Harbor and MDI –? Do you think that there's more of a "climate change is happening" understanding, or is it still pretty divided?

JF: I want to say that most people know climate change is happening, but it is still divided. I'm sure it's divided. I mean, Mainers are tough as boiled owls, and they are stuck in their ways. You know, you're a Mainer. So, you're not going to tell somebody – if they don't think climate change is happening, you're not going to convince them. So, I think it's still a mixed bag. But in general, I think most of the island community is pretty progressive. Also, even those who are conservative are in tune with nature. I think we know what's going on with nature, and we can see patterns changing and shifting. I think some of the hardiest folk who might not consider themselves progressive might know enough about their world, their natural world, to see that something's happening.

GK: [30:02] Right. Yeah. That's one of the things that I am so drawn to – I've always just been drawn to hanging out and interviewing fishermen and people on the working waterfront because it's almost like they're naturalists or something.

JF: Yeah. The ones who are really – I've fished with some guys who would've thrown a piece of plastic overboard, and then I've fished with guys who would see a bumblebee that was blooming on a tree, and they'd be like, "Now I know the shad are running, and we're going to be able to find bait there." They knew that because they just knew that the synergy of that environmental little experience was happening, and they understood it and how it applied to their world. They knew everything was falling in place and where you would fish because of that bumblebee that went by. And they were right. That was a really beautiful thing, that kind of connection.

GK: Do you think that those kinds of fishermen are not as around as much?

JF: [31:05] Are they dying off? Are they dying off?

GK: I hate to say that. Yeah, I hate to say it, but – I don't know

JF: Possibly. Possibly. Yeah.

GK: It's a different game.

JF: Yeah. Yeah. I hope not, but I think that – I think that a lot of people who work in the natural world are not a dying breed but an aging breed. It's one thing that makes me excited about aquaculture because I think it's something that younger people are getting into, and younger people need jobs here. We need families on the island. We need not just people who are coming to have their second homes so they can summer here. We need year-round, hard-working people with good ideas.

GK: Yeah. With the COA crowd, you're seeing students who are excited. Do you feel like there's a lot of excitement around what you're doing?

JF: Yeah, there has been. It's amazing. Social media has changed so much, too. Everything is so connected, which is sometimes overwhelming and exhausting and other times really exhilarating. People are calling me from – I don't know where – from Wisconsin, asking about oysters and how they grow. People see you on Instagram, and they just are curious, and there's a lot of energy around. Oysters have been hot for the past few years; they still are. The local community is interested in it. Like I said, I probably talk about oysters as much as I am on the farm. Seriously. I'm a board member of the Maine Aquaculture Association. I'm on the Marine Resource Committee in town. I'm a Frenchman Bay partner. I've done TV shows and interviews. I do tours. I want people to know about this. I want other people to be invested and to care about its future. I care greatly about the future of our working waterfront and this body of water that sustains us, so I'm generally happy to talk about it. And there is a lot of energy behind it. It just kind of comes with the job, I guess. For some of us, it comes with the job.

GK: [33:16] Yeah. You have to be your own spokesperson.

JF: Yeah. It is one thing that I feel is a little bit different from – A, I didn't imagine it, and another is different from lobstering. I mean, at the end of the day, when I was done fishing, you were done fishing. You were tired, and you were done, and you just made dinner and got the coffee ready for the next morning, and you got up early and did it again. That's a beautiful thing, and that industry is grandfathered into our state, so no one questions it. So, trying to create our own way with sea farming is a little different. Yeah, you got to be your own advocate. And we're everybody else's advocate. We are great friends, like I said, with all of the other farmers that we know and try and lend a hand to our neighboring farms whenever we can.

GK: We'll stop soon because I know you've got stuff to do. It's probably like three.

JF: I've got time.

GK: Okay. It's just an interesting thing because I almost feel like oysters are catching on from the south, and then it's like this ripple effect. Because in Portland, everybody – well, Portland's so different, but all the restaurants –

JF: [34:35] It's shifting.

GK: – even locals are like, "Yeah, Maine oysters. Of course, Maine oysters." Everybody knows that those are the best oysters, and then you come up, and people are like, "They grow oysters in Maine?

JF: “They grow oysters?” Yeah. Oysters are native to Maine. The Native Americans were definitely eating them. But we rarely see sea temps high enough for them to spawn naturally up this far. We’re starting to see that. I mean, the reason it’s taking off more and more is because the Gulf of Maine is the fastest-warming body of water on the planet. We can grow them here. It takes less time, so the bread basket where oysters are growing is slowly shifting north just like I think lobsters are slowly shifting north, looking for – I think the lobsters are looking for colder water, and we can grow oysters here because the water is warming up. I mean, they’ve been in the Damariscotta for decades and growing really well there, but they see, in the Damariscotta River, significantly warmer sea temps than we do, or river temps. The water is warmer. But we're seeing that more and more here, and I think that there is a little bit less trust of the southern oyster as more northern growers are kind of popping up. Like I said, I think the Maine brand is really strong. I think cold water seafood is known for being exquisite. Lobsters kind of paved the way for some of the branding. I also think that some – I mean, every Hurricane season, I get calls from wholesalers in Boston, restaurants in New York, people who want Maine oysters, people are calling me looking for oysters because hurricanes are ripping through the Carolinas and the breadbasket down there, and they can’t get out to their farms because the Hurricane came through. I think as the climate continues to change and we see more of those extreme events, people are going to be looking for other bodies of water to get their seafood from, and we're it.

GK: [36:33] Yeah.

JF: Yeah. The water warming up is advantageous to a sea farmer in Maine. It’s a sad reality that we are trying to make the most of.

GK: I don’t know. Just basic economics of it – is it something that lobstermen have a hard time shifting towards because –? I mean, definitely, some have, right? There are some women and guys who are like, “Yeah, I do both,” or “I’m dabbling,” or whatever, or throwing out the boat and getting an oyster farm? But is it not the same –? Can you not make the same amount of money? And you don’t need to –?

JF: I don’t think it’s that. I think one of the things – and I get this point. I mean, if you grew up – my husband grew up lobstering. His father is a lobsterman. If you grew up doing that, there’s something so quintessential and romantic about getting up and the wild catch. I think that one of the reasons fishermen have a hard time with aquaculture now is they see us as buying up the ocean, which should be everybody’s property. But in reality, we’re leasing a body of water or a space in the same way that a lobsterman is using that space for his or her gear. In a sense, we’re actually constricting it less because we don’t have buoys scattered across an entire thoroughfare that people might be trying to go through; we’re just contained to one little area. We have to renew our leases, and it takes a very long time to get our leases, and we pay a pretty penny for them. So, while I don’t like the idea of anyone owning the oceans, the truth is the ocean is a resource that we’re all using. But I think that’s the disconnect, or the hurtle, is this, “Oh, this farmer is trying to own this water that we all share,” just because the way we use it looks differently.

GK: [38:46] I feel like most of the farms are a little closer to shore, but is that not necessary? Or is that just like an access thing?

JF: Sea temps are warmer the closer you are. Access is – less rough weather. I mean, everything is – you're not going to burn as much fuel to go further out. Generally, you're going to find it's more hospitable to the oysters that you're growing, and it's a lot easier to access, so it just makes the most sense. I wouldn't want to drive twenty miles offshore to water that's ten degrees colder to grow my oysters. It's not what I – plus, you got to anchor all that. The deeper you get, you got to anchor everything somehow. So, if you're in really deep water, it's going to be a lot harder to do, and you're going to see worse weather no matter what.

GK: Yeah, it just seems like – I only ask that because it just seems like such a sort of splitting hairs thing to be –

JF: Oh, the view, yeah.

GK: Well, the view, and then people being concerned about you taking up that space when it's just not prime – it's not prime time. It's not very much space a lot of the time.

JF: [39:56] Yeah. And a lot of the time, the same bottom or area that oysters are going to do well in or bivalves are going to do well in is not good fishing bottom. Or it might be good fishing bottom for a couple of weeks out of the year. I think there are creative ways that people who want to do aquaculture and fishing can work around leases and areas. But I'm not going to volunteer to move my site offshore. [laughter]

GK: What kind of bottom do you look for?

JF: Well, for us, we looked for muddy bottom. I mean, it's not the best for sinking our cages, but there was very little life where we actually – I mean, there is some bloodworms, probably some clams, some kelp, some mussels, some green crabs and starfish, but not a lot in the way of lobster. I think all of the mussels had already been pretty well dragged out of the area where our lease site was, so the bottom was pretty much vacant. We had to leave the channel. Our lease is divided into two plots, and we left the deep-water channel in between the two plots open for navigation. Aside from the view, no one really had any – there really wasn't much else going on there. I mean, people kayak through there, but people can kayak through our lease easily, and we do a fair bit anyway. So, we were looking for bottom where there just wasn't much happening. We found it.

GK: [41:20] Yeah. Not as hard to find these days. I've had so many conversations with people talking about what the bottom used to be like. I don't really remember. I'm thirty, and I don't really – I remember picking mussels up off the – in Deer Isle, you could go and get mussels on the rocks and stuff. Just these old guys saying like it didn't used to be muddy.

JF: Yeah. No, definitely, it has shifted. There are still some fair bit of wild mussel harvesting on the islands near where we are. That's actually a mussel farmer. That big rig there is a mussel farmer. They have a lot of lease area here. They collect wild spat, seed the bottom, and then drag for it. But they are, I think, very – their boat is called *Stewardship*. They definitely are into best management practices of their resource. There are some wild mussels around, just not directly underneath us. But yeah, the bottom is changing. The clam population – we don't really know what's happened to that, but it's really diminished. Some people think it's pH. Some people think it's green crab. It's probably a combination of all those things. We think that because we throw – there's a mortality rate on the farm, and we discard most of our shells overboard – that

we'll be creating a substructure and changing that bottom that we hope will rebound life there and make things a little bit different. We are finding that we do see a fair bit of mussel spat on our gear. We haven't seen any eelgrass yet. You actually can't have a site where eelgrass is already established, but there used to be eelgrass beds in our area. We're hoping that through filtering the water, there will be more sunlight that gets to the bottom. And between that and the substrate of all of the oyster shells that we throw over, we might change it in a positive way. I mean, there'll be some impact over time. Maybe it won't always be just mud. But right now, there's not a lot in the mud.

GK: [43:25] Yeah. Yeah. It's like a silty, thick –

JF: Yes. We see bloodworms. We see tunicates. We see some sponges, stuff like that.

GK: Do you have anyone going out and doing –? Do you have to do water tests and stuff?

JF: We do not have to do water tests unless there is a – actually, we never have to do water tests. The DMR site actually that does the testing for us is in that white building over there.

GK: Oh, cool.

JF: We are currently under a closure for harvesting for ASP, amnesic shellfish poisoning, which is caused by a biotoxin released by the phytoplankton *Pseudo-nitzschia*, so I donated some animals today to be tested. But we're not required to do anything like that. We do keep logs. We monitor water temp, mainly because I feel like someone should be, and we're out there, and having too much information is never really a problem or a bad idea. But we're not required to do anything like that.

GK: [44:29] Yeah. But you've been doing some of that.

JF: Yes. Oh, yes. And we take a lot of photos. I mean, iPhones – we take a lot of photos of stuff we see out there. We know when things show up. We know when the mussels spawn and when all of that is on our gear just so that we have an idea of when things happen every year. We know if we are – if we have a huge influx of green crabs, we know our mortality rates when we raise our stuff in the spring. Yeah. If there's anything bizarre or dead, we log it just so we have an idea. It's just the first time we see the eiders show up this week.

GK: Oh, wow, little guys. They're so cute.

JF: Yeah, they're fun.

GK: Awesome. I have to get to another interview here kind of soon with David Paine, the owner of Jordan's.

JF: Oh, right. Yeah. Well, tell him I said hi. His son Dean works for the same company that my husband's fishing for right now.

GK: Oh, cool.

JF: Yeah. Jordan's is one of the places that is maybe open – well, I don't know. They're not open all year round. I wasn't counting breakfast places when I was [inaudible] [laughter]

GK: [45:36] Yeah, they're maybe closed for a month, but everybody's got to close at some point.

JF: That's a good ear to get. That'll be fun.

GK: Yeah. But if Friday morning still works for you, that's great. I'm just going to have this rig and will ask more process [questions]. It'll be more like, "Describe what's going on."

JF: Cool. Yeah. If you need any more follow-up, I don't have a –

----------END OF INTERVIEW----------

Transcribed by Molly A. Graham 8/23/2023

Reviewed by Molly A. Graham 8/26/2023