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HEDY BENNETT

THE FISHING INDUSTRY IN NEWPORT, RHODE ISLAND, 1930-1987

INTRODUCTION

The Fishing Industry in Newport, Rhode Island, 1930-1987, an oral history project, was implemented under the auspices of the Newport Historical Society and the University of Rhode Island Sea Grant Program.

Through question and answer format, the tape-recorded transcribed interviews document the fishing industry from the point of view of its complex traditions and changes. They provide a body of unedited primary source material focusing on priority issues of local concern and those beyond the geographic area under study.

Interviews were conducted by Jennifer Murray of the Newport Historical Society and were transcribed at the Center for Oral History, University of Connecticut. Narrators include representatives of the floating fish trap industry, the inshore and offshore lobster industries, the inshore and offshore dragger industries, the swordfish industry, the wholesale and marketing sector, and fisheries conservation and management.

Oral history enables us to learn about our heritage from those who usually don't write about it. It supplies what's often only hinted at in written historical documents. Readers and researchers using these oral history memoirs should bear in mind that they are transcripts of the spoken word and that the narrator, interviewer, and transcriber sought to preserve the spontaneity and informality inherent in such historical sources. The Newport Historical Society and the University of Rhode Island are not responsible for the factual accuracy of the memoirs nor for the views expressed therein; these are for the reader to judge.

Copies of tapes and transcripts are available for research at the Newport Historical Society. Copies of transcripts are also accessible at the library of the University of Rhode Island, Narragansett Bay. As stated in the release form which accompanies each transcript, the memoirs are to be used for scholarly and educational purposes only.

HEDY BENNETT

Hedy Bennett is the wife of offshore lobsterman, Paul Bennett, who was also interviewed as part of this oral history of the fishing industry in Newport, R.I. Mrs. Bennett is the land-based partner in the work and way of life she and her husband share. She conveys what it means to be the wife of a commercial lobsterman and describes what makes the family life of a young fishing family both special and demanding.

Mrs. Bennett delves into the many changes that have taken place in the offshore lobster industry since she's been involved in it. She also expresses concerns about overdevelopment of tourist oriented businesses along Newport's waterfront that have had a negative impact on the fishing industry.

Tape I Side I

Biographical interview
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    Her land-based responsibilities
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    Hedy Bennett's involvement
    Problems having a boat built
Bennett's trips on offshore lobster boat, Iron Horse
    Female crewperson, Muriel Mack
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The kind of person who likes offshore trips
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    Safety precautions
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    Worries when her husband is out on a fishing trip
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    Waiting with the children at Castle Hill
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    Bennett's husband at home more now than when they were starting out
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    Close-knit circle of wives and girlfriends
    Not many fishermen's wives involved in their husband's work in this day and age
Her life and husband's occupation closely intertwined
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Tape I Side II

Family life, contd.
Home life different from non-fishing families
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    Demanding lifestyle
    Importance of being independent
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    Tilefish longlining
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    Fishermen who don't know what they're doing
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    Owner-operated boats
    Restrictions, size limitations
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    Skepticism regarding government involvement
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Concerns about Coast Guard cutbacks
Tourism, development and the fishing industry in Newport
    Newport does not support the fishing industry
    Concerns about overdevelopment in Newport-- too much emphasis placed on tourism
Perceptions of fishermen by people outside the industry
What the fishing industry has to offer Newport
Future of the State Pier in Newport
Where Bennetts would go if State Pier were developed for tourism

Tape II Side I

Biographical interview, contd.
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Hardest part about being the wife of a commercial lobsterman
Best part about being the wife of a commercial lobsterman
Family's perception of her marriage to someone in the commercial fishing industry
Change in the size of the commercial lobster fleet
    Big increase in number of boats for many fisheries
    Larger boats
    Increased number of pots
    Gear conflicts
    Competition
Many new boats in the offshore lobster fleet in Newport
    Increase in size of boats
    Financial difficulties experienced by some investors
    Absentee boat owners
    Investment groups
Perceptions of being part of an occupation that's very old

Role of women in the fishing industry
Political involvement of fishermen in fishing industry issues
Positive aspects of living in Newport
Aquidneck Lobster Company
Biggest concerns about the lobster industry
Banks and the fishing industry
Positive aspects of being part of the lobster industry

Tape II Side II

Perceptions of occupation
Learning about weather conditions and what they mean

Interview with Hedy Bennett for the Newport Historical Society, Oral History of the Fishing Industry in Newport, Rhode Island, by Jennifer Murray, January 27, 1988.

MURRAY: It's January 27, 1988. I'm talking with Hedy Bennett for the Newport Historical Society's oral history of the fishing industry in Newport. Is it all right with you if I tape this interview?

BENNETT: Yes.

JM: Let's start out with some questions about you, your parents' names and where they live.

HB: Well, my parents live in New Jersey.

JM: Where in New Jersey?

HB: They both live in Red Bank. My mother's name is Helga Stewart, and my father is Henry Stewart.

JM: Did you live in that area all your life?

HB: We've lived in Rhode Island and New Jersey equally. My dad worked for a company in Pawtucket [Rhode Island], Cumberland Engineering. We would spend four or five years in Rhode Island, and then we would move to New Jersey and spend four or five years in New Jersey. Then we moved back to Rhode Island and back to New Jersey, back to Rhode Island. Actually, we lived in Woonsockett [Rhode Island] and then Barrington [Rhode Island] twice. I was born in New Jersey, but my brothers were born in Woonsockett.

JM: How many brothers?

HB: I have twin brothers.

JM: Are they older or younger?

HB: They're thirty. They're younger.

JM: How about school? Did you have to switch around a lot?

HB: I did the majority of my schooling in New Jersey. It just worked out that my primary years were spent in Barrington, and High School was in New Jersey. I went to college in Virginia [chuckles] -- in Lynchburg, Virginia. I stayed there two years. Then I took a semester leave, and I lived in Europe for nine months. Then I moved back to Barrington, because at that point, my parents had moved back to Rhode Island, and lived at home and completed my schooling at Roger Williams.

JM: What did you major in?

HB: Political Sociology -- a real worthwhile [chuckles] topic and did not get me real far.

JM: When did you and Paul meet?

HB: Well, after I graduated from Roger Williams, I worked at Courtney's as a waitress. That's where I met him. He came in there one night -- actually, it was the first night that I worked -- and he came in with some of his friends who were lobstermen at the time. Paul was living in Point Judith. He was on a dragger. He had known these other men from a previous job where they had all been fishing together and the boat had sank. These guys had all kept in touch. I don't know whether it was that

survival that brought them together or whether they were all really good friends to begin with, but he was visiting them. It was funny, because I remember the first night I met him I can still remember what he had on, and I was just attracted to him. I didn't really talk to him other than to say hello. At that point, it was late January and it was cold. Nobody else was in the restaurant but these guys, and they were being nice to me. Of course, this was my first night, so I didn't really know what I was doing. That was basically where I met him. A couple weeks later I had gone to the movies or something and had gone to Courtney's after to have a coffee, and he was there with one of his friends again, and he asked me out. That was the beginning. [Chuckles]

JM: Did you stay there working?

HB: Did I stay there working? Not very long, no. I went from there to New Visions. Actually, that was when my degree helped me, because it was in social work. I was an employment counselor. I stayed there for a year or so.

JM: Then how long before that, before your children came?

HB: Oh, let me see. I stayed at New Visions. Then I worked for a lawyer for two and a half years, I guess. Paul and I were married in 1977, and Brenna was born in 1980.

JM: So before the children came, Paul was lobstering

already.

HB: He started lobstering in -- I think it was 1976 he came over to Newport and lived in Newport.

JM: Did you work with him at all?

HB: At that time?

JM: Yes.

HB: Not really. He was working for somebody on a boat, and he was a crew member, and there wasn't really much for me to do except see him when I could see him. Other than that, he was busy. He was either working, or he was out fishing. So I didn't really help him at that point.

JM: When did that start, your helping him?

HB: He worked for this person for, I guess a year he was on the boat. He was offered the job as captain running this boat for -- it was a corporation. I started to help him a little bit then, because he had a lot more responsibility and a lot more obligations on land. Even then, I really wasn't that involved in his life as far as his job went. This person that he worked for did all the -- made sure that he had his supplies and ordered his bait and those kinds of things. So I really wasn't that involved. I didn't really get that involved until we bought our own boat in 1978. Paul was still working for this other company, and he bought this other boat. We hired somebody to run the other boat. At that point, then I really became involved.

JM: Was that the Anna Fee?

HB: Yes, the Anna Fee. Paul was fishing all the time on the boat he was working for, and then this person, Tommy Kroger, worked for us on the Anna Fee. It was up to me to make sure that he had checks when he needed checks. I did all the payroll, paid all the bills and basically ran the company from shore -- made sure that he had his needs. Then we decided we'd build our own boat. I was very involved with Paul building his boat. He had in mind really what he wanted to do, but it was a matter of getting it on paper and talking with surveyors and marine designers and finally picking a yard where it was going to be built, which was in Snug Harbor. It was Rhode Island Marine Services. He was still working at that point, because we obviously needed an income. A lot of times he would call me from offshore with a message to go over to the shipyard and make sure that they were doing what they were supposed to be doing, or maybe there was a change at one point. But I was over there not as much as him, but a lot, making sure the boat was progressing in the right way.

JM: You must have learned a lot fast.

HB: Yes, we learned a lot. Well, I'd been around the boat now for -- Let's see, the boat was done in 1980. I'd been around boats since early 1975, so I was aware of what was going on. I'd gone out

fishing with Paul a few times. I'm a terrible fisherman. [Chuckles] I hate being offshore. But I had gone out. I did have somewhat of an understanding of what we were doing. So it wasn't all that different. The biggest problem we had was dealing with the man that was building the boat, as you might imagine, just like having a house built. You know, you want something done according to your specs, and they don't always do it that way. So that kept us very busy, plus I was pregnant at the time too.

JM: Was that the Hedy-Brenna?

HB: Yes.

JM: How big is that?

HB: It's seventy-six and a half feet.

JM: That isn't the boat you went out on then?

HB: No. The Iron Horse was the boat that I had gone out [on]. I have been on this boat -- not a full trip. We've taken the Hedy-Brenna to Block Island and, you know, out and around and all, but I haven't actually been on a trip.

JM: Were there any other women on the Iron Horse then?

HB: There was, Muriel Mack. She was the bander, and she had been around the boats for a long time. She banded when my husband was working for the other captain. When he was a crew member, she was there. She was also involved with the captain, so she was there, but I don't think she was actually working

when my husband was on the boat.

JM: She just went on the trip?

HB: She didn't go on the trips when he took over. She pretty much -- Well, she was, like I said, involved with this other captain, so she pretty much stayed with him.

JM: What time of year did you go out?

HB: Both times I went out it was summertime.

JM: What's it like?

HB: [Chuckles] Well, I was scared. Part of the reason was I'm not used to being in a situation where I can't see other things. I mean, there was nothing. You get out there, and you're totally isolated from everything. There's no birds. There's no other boats. All you see is the horizon and that's it. That to me was very unsettling, because I have never been in a situation like that, and I don't really enjoy it. I also had difficulty being seasick. So that and this other feeling kept me pretty much in the bunk most of the time. [Chuckles]

JM: How long of a trip was it?

HB: The first time, Paul was a crew member I think. Yes, he was, because I was in his bunk, and it was down below, and it was about four or five days. Then the second time he was the skipper, and he had a stateroom, and that was above the water. So I had a window and everything. That was about the same amount of time -- about five days.

JM: Where were you?

HB: Where? You mean in location?

JM: Yes. How far out?

HB: Probably about 120 miles.

JM: So out on the continental shelf.

HB: Yes, yes, on the continental shelf. The weather was actually very nice. I did manage to go on deck for an hour or two at one point and help them band the lobsters, which was really good for me, because it took my mind off other things. But I just was not comfortable in that situation. Till this day I don't think I would want to go again. I would go -- As we said before, we used to take the boat -- Over the years we've gone to the Cape with a couple of other fishing boats, and it was really fun. Everyone would bring their family. So every boat had a lot of people on board -- families. It would be sort of a caravan. Qe've gone to the Cape, and we've gone to Block Island. That doesn't bother me, because I can see land. And you know, you're kind of working within the islands, and there's something. But the offshore thing just really unsettles me.

JM: What kind of person do you think it takes to do that?

HB: Somebody that loves the serenity of being alone and is not afraid of the elements. I think Paul looks at it as a challenge. He enjoys that kind of a

lifestyle. I think to be a successful fisherman, you have to like it. We've had many people work for us over the years that have done it to make money and have been really miserable. It's one of those types of things that you dread going if you don't like it. A lot of people get caught up in that, as I'm sure people do in many jobs that don't like it. But I think to be successful, it's something that you have to like.

JM: What's life at sea like for all those days? What goes on?

HB: I know for Paul it's very routine. They basically do the same thing everyday. I'm a little bit prejudiced in that I think Paul is probably the best captain around and not because I'm married to him. He's very conscientious with safety measures. Safety is always one of the first things that he thinks of. So I think as a crew member, if you're on his boat, you can be sure that you will come home. A lot of boats get very lax in their rules and what's allowed and not allowed and what's expected of you. I think before you leave the dock, everybody on the boat should know what's expected of them and what their limitations are. As I said, every day is pretty much the same thing. The guys are out on deck working, and Paul makes sure that everything's running smoothly, and meals and everything are pretty organized. I'm pretty sure

they have one big meal a day at night. And then it depends on who is doing the cooking, but a lot of times it's every man for himself until that big meal.

JM: How do you feel about fishing as a dangerous occupation?

HB: I think it can be very dangerous. Part of the problem, from what I've seen over the years, is people tend to forget the enormous power of the ocean and take for granted that everything will run smoothly, when a lot of times you're really tested with your ability. I think a lot of peoples' survival depends on whether or not you have prepared for that. Many people take for granted that nothing will ever happen and don't update their life rafts or don't have the proper equipment on board -- the E.P.I.R.B's. (Emergency Position Indicating Radio Beacon) and the survival suits and those kinds of things. As I said before, Paul is really a stickler when it comes to safety precautions and always has things overboard. He's more than careful. He always has a backup system for something that might go wrong. I think he is forever thinking about, "what if?" A lot of people forget that. So it's dangerous in that respect. I've always appeased myself thinking that Paul is going to do the right thing. I feel very confident that he will. Not too long ago, about two or three weeks ago, I did call

the Coast Guard. He had the boat. We have a radio at our house, and we're in verbal contact twice a day. We talk on the radio, as we do with the skipper that runs the boat when Paul is not on it. He has worked out a situation where the person we have hired takes the boat for three trips, and then Paul takes it for a trip. So Paul is on the boat once a month. About three weeks ago, it was that really cold snap, when I think it was below zero. We had a snowstorm, and it was very windy. The next day I didn't hear from him. I tried getting him on the radio. I tried all morning, and I couldn't get him, and I tried all afternoon, and I couldn't get him. I think deep down I knew he was all right, but I started to get worried, because I figured a lot of things could happen. I think at this stage, everybody is still coming off the shock of the Reliance sinking, and that was in the back of my mind. I figured if something was going to be wrong, the sooner I deal with it and get to it and get help there, the better off everybody is. Although I really didn't think that there was a problem. I just wanted to be sure. So we tried -- I called the other skipper. He said, "Well, try calling the marine operator." A lot of times they can get through on a different radio. Their set has a lot more power. They couldn't reach him, and so I figured I'd call the Coast Guard and see if they

could reach him. They couldn't reach him either. I did start to get very alarmed, because it just wasn't like him that I didn't talk to him. There are reasons that that happens. Certain weather conditions prevent good transmission. It was cold and everything. But it was a really clear day. And usually when there's a lot of -- I'm trying to think of what the word is -- things in the atmosphere like rain or fog, that tends to break down the transmission. But it was none of that. It was a beautiful clear day. So then I tried calling other boats that I knew that could possibly have seen him. No one had seen him or talked to him. The Coast Guard, at that point, had started to get more involved. In fact, they called me at 10:30 that night and asked me if I had heard from him. I said, "No." They said, "Well, we will give you till 7:30 tomorrow morning. If you still haven't heard from him, we'll send out a search plane." As I told them, I was pretty sure that everything was all right, but a lot of times the antennas ice up or they make ice out there, and it's difficult for them to transmit or they might have lost power. The Coast Guard knew these circumstances, and they weren't exactly going at it as a rescue. They just wanted to make sure that everything was all right. So that morning I tried on the radio, and --

JM: Did you sleep all night?

HB: No. [Chuckles] No, I was up all night, because I tried calling him during the night. In the morning I got up, and I still -- We have this sort of a code where you whistle into the radio. A lot of times you can hear a whistle before you can hear a voice. So I kept whistling, and I could hear someone whistling back. And I figured, oh, that must be him. But then I thought, well, you never know. It could be -- There's other boats that monitor our channel. I thought, well, maybe it's somebody else. I kept asking him questions. "If that's you, whistle twice. If you're all right, whistle three times. If there's a problem, whistle once." We got everything down, and I called the Coast Guard, and I said, "I've made contact, and I think everything's all right." They were ready to launch the plane. So it was one of those experiences that makes me realize how quickly something can happen. On the other hand, it also made me realize that I need not worry as much as I do.

JM: Easy to say that after it's all over.

HB: Easy to say.

JM: What happened?

HB: They had made ice on the antennas and had lost radio contact because the ice prevents a lot of the transmission. The sea conditions offshore were much different than they were inshore. They had had

these little snow squalls and had bad weather. Paul wasn't alarmed at all, because he thought it was normal. Where on my hand, I'm saying, "It's a beautiful day. Why can't I transmit?" It was one of those feelings that sort of snowballed. I really wasn't that worried at first. I talked to this other skipper, and he said, "Just to be sure, you might want to do this." So we started going through the motions. When the Coast Guard called me at night, I said, "Wow, this is really -- You know, maybe this is much worse than I thought."

JM: It's worse at night.

HB: Yes. But it is dangerous. It's a dangerous profession, for sure.

JM: Do you worry much when he's out there?

HB: Yes. I find now that he's kind of gotten out of it more and he isn't continually offshore, I worry more when he goes. I shouldn't, because he does know what he's doing. But it's just one of those things.

JM: Are you pretty relieved when he comes home?

HB: Very. We always are. When the kids were younger and he was fishing all the time, we always would go out to Castle Hill and wait for him to come by. I've always been in radio contact with him. Even when he was on this other boat, he would call me through the marine operator, which is very expensive.

JM: How expensive is that?

HB: It's probably about $10, $15 a call. When we moved to our other house, we got our own radios. It helped a lot too, because we still had the Anna Fee. I could be in radio contact with him also. But it's sort of an indication of Paul's whole operation. He's very cautious and, again, requires a lot of safety precautions to begin with. The fact that he likes to be in radio contact with the boat twice a day, if there is a problem, he's on top of it immediately. He does have all the latest equipment on board and the E.P.I.R.B.'s and a back up battery. As I said before, when you work for him, you can be very confident that you will come back.

JM: After what's just happened, that's saying a lot. [recent sinking]

HB: Yes. There's so many different theories about those kinds of things. But I'd like to think that if we were in that situation, maybe something could have prevented . . .

JM: You have the one boat now?

HB: Right.

JM: How has it evolved over the years? Have you become more and more involved?

HB: At this point I'm less involved. Since Paul's on shore a lot, he handles the business almost entirely. I don't really have that much to do with the actual day to day operations of it. I still order equipment. If he calls me when he's out

fishing -- he needs the trucks down the dock or he needs something repaired or something picked up -- in that capacity I'm still involved with it. But it's basically his operation at this point, since he is onshore a lot.

JM: Do you think that commercial fishermen's wives are more involved in their husband's occupation than other people?

HB: It depends. I know when we first started fishing, when Paul was working with this other corporation, we had a close knit circuit of wives and girlfriends of husbands and boyfriends that were out fishing. We would get together regularly when they were out fishing, like over one of our houses, or we would go out to dinner or something. Of course, that was all pre-children. It was very easy to drop everything and go out the door. So we did have a lot of contact. At this stage, I don't really know anybody. I mean, I still know the wives, as I said, Jeanne Palombo, but I very seldom get in touch with any of them. I do get calls frequently when the boat's out.

JM: From wives and girlfriends of the crew?

HB: Yes, regularly. From mothers and all kinds of people. We get pretty strange phone calls. But I don't think at this day and age there are many women involved. Jeanne Palombo is really one of the few I know that's still very involved, and of course, not

by choice.

JM: Right. How intertwined with your life is Paul's occupation? Is there much separation?

HB: There's no separation, because our lives depend on the boat and the schedule of the boat. No matter what we do, it's always hinging on what the boat's doing, when the boat's going out. Paul, when the boat is in, is very uptight. He has a lot of things that he likes to get done when they're in. And his primary objective is to get the boat back out. So usually, when the boat's in, we're all pretty tense, because there's things that have to get done. Usually when the boat is out, he's much more relaxed.

JM: He's home when the boat's out.

HB: He's home when the boat's out. He's able to give us more of his time. But we don't plan anything until we know what the boat's doing.

JM: Is that hard sometimes?

HB: Yes. It's frustrating. My kids get very frustrated by it. Simple things -- we want to go to the movies in the afternoon to a matinee, but we have to be home by four o'clock, because that's when Paul calls the boat, when he's not on the boat. Or the same thing for me. If he's out fishing and I'm home, I have to be home at the time that I told him that I will call him on the radio. Otherwise, there's no contact there. It still revolves almost entirely

around what the boat's doing.

JM: So you don't have any regular schedule that you can count on?

HB: No. We can never make plans in advance or -- I know his mother -- I think she's finally understood it, but she's invited us to family functions, and we've said, "Sure." Then at the last minute we can't. Usually every year we take a winter vacation to someplace warm. The boat's slack time is usually this period of time. However, lately it's been pushed back, because the kids now are older, and we really have to go on their vacation time. But a few years ago we had everything planned, everything paid for, and two days before we were supposed to leave, the skipper that was running the boat had a personal problem. He couldn't leave, so Paul had to stay home, and I went with the kids. I got a girlfriend to go, and we went. That's basically because the boat comes first -- not in a bad way. It's just that that's the way our life is.

JM: Does Paul get much free time?

HB: He does. He's very conscientious. He's the type of person that if he does something, he's going to go all out. So he makes his own free time when he has a chance. Over the years this is probably the most free time he's had because we only have one boat, and he's not on it all the time.

JM: What was it like when he was on it, when you didn't have that skipper to take the boat out?

HB: It was very difficult. My kids were very young. They were really, you know, two -- actually, right from the beginning. In fact, when Brenna was born, the boat was eight months late. We were frantic by the time it was finished just due to bills and our schedule was eight months off. He had quit his other job so he could concentrate on the final steps of the boat. From the time we got the boat till probably she was about two, I very seldom saw him. He was totally engrossed in the boat. And we still had the other boat, so we were very busy, very consumed. Just since he's gotten this other skipper, which I think it's about three years now, it was like that. The boat forever consumed us. And at this point, we're getting to the point where we're somewhat normal.

JM: Was that hard to adjust to with the new baby?

HB: Yes, it was. I don't know -- Paul wasn't -- He didn't enjoy -- I shouldn't say he didn't enjoy. He wasn't comfortable around infants, and I think he was kind of relieved that he didn't have to deal with it. I didn't really mind it. My daughter and I were very close, and I loved it. I always brought her wherever I went. When he was at home, we were always together. Wherever we went, we took her along and took trips to New Bedford. Most of the supplies

come from New Bedford, so if he really needs something, we have to go to New Bedford. And we always went with him. It was hard, but there were fun things about it too. Nowadays we pretty much go in our own separate directions. It's not that common that we all climb in the car and drag the kids to New Bedford. They're just not into that anymore. When they didn't have a choice, it was easy, but now they don't like it.

JM: Do you like the spontaneity of not having a schedule?

HB: It doesn't bother me. We've adjusted to it. It's certainly not something that I can't live with. I have to say I'm much happier now that he's home. I think the children are too that they have him around and he can take them places and be there for them -- not just me. I think for awhile the kids looked at me as their primary parent and that Paul really had very little contact with them for the first couple years of their lives just because he was out fishing all the time. When he came home, he was exhausted. The last thing you want to do when you're really tired would be spending time with a toddler or an infant. He would be always thinking about the things he had to do and the next trip. So he wasn't available to them. But nowadays, it's fine. We don't have a problem. And the week that he goes once a month,

[end of side one, tape one]

it really isn't that bad. We adjust to it, and we go out to McDonalds.

JM: So your routine is different when he's not home?

HB: Yes, a little bit. As the kids get older and the fact that I have my own commitments at this point other than my family, it's not really that much different now when he's not there. I try to keep the family pretty structured. We do always sit down -- whether it be at McDonalds or at home -- we do have a definite dinner hour, and we get up every morning around the same time. Our routine tries to stay the same. I would think if I didn't have kids, it probably wouldn't. But it's one of the things that I've always felt was important, that the kids have a routine that they know.

JM: So you don't feel that your home life is different from non-fishing families?

HB: It's different in the way that it's difficult for us to plan. As I said before, the boat always comes first. That can be difficult. We try to keep it as normal as we can for the children so they don't have that constant upheaval when he goes and when he comes back. But they've pretty much adjusted to it.

JM: What effect would you say fishing has on family life?

HB: It can have a devastating effect, I think, if the family isn't willing to cooperate with the demands

of fishing. It's a very demanding lifestyle at times, especially if you're involved, as our skipper is -- he has a family, and his children are young, and his wife is alone a lot. It can be very demanding. I think you need to be a very independent woman to be able to deal with that and also very flexible, able to adjust to the situation. Because not every day is the same. There's been many days where we've walked around on eggshells all day because Paul was going to go fishing, and then at the last minute, the weather has changed, and he doesn't go. So then we do it for a couple more days. When he goes out fishing, he gets himself in sort of a mind frame, and you can't really talk to him about anything else other than what he's doing, because he really gets consumed by it. I think if you're not flexible and you're not willing to be cooperative in that situation, it could be very difficult. I think both people involved in a family have to realize that it's a two-way street and that there is a lot of giving involved -- giving to Paul's schedule. I try to help him in every way that I can. I've never really fought him as far as his job goes, and he knows that. If he needs something, he knows he can always ask me. So it's fine. This year, since I have another responsibility other than to my family, he's had to give a little bit back. I think it's really helped him to be more

a part of the family than sort of a visitor. And it's been great. I'm not sure he would agree with it, but I think it's been great for him.

JM: When did your job start?

HB: I was doing it last year a little bit. But this year it's been pretty much a full time commitment. It started the last week of September.

JM: How many days a week to you have to work over there?

HB: I have to be over there three afternoons a week from four to six and quite a few Saturdays -- a couple of weekends -- a whole Saturday and Sunday -- which makes him responsible for homelife. I have had babysitters on occasion, but I like to give him the first shot at it. I think it's good for him to be involved with the kids and the day to day of it rather than having the kids -- "Here, they're all dressed. They're all fed. You can take them to the movies." Let him get involved with the actual, you know, the crummy stuff.

JM: Does that help you feel like you're more willing to hear what he needs, too, if that's being given back to you too?

HB: Well, as I said before, I've always been very accommodating to his needs, and I'm sure he would tell you that also. I think maybe it makes him appreciate me more, that I do have other things to do rather than cater to his needs. I've been really pleased with it. There are times when he hasn't

been too happy about it, but I think it's been really good for him to be really involved in the kids. They're older now too, so it's not like you have to change diapers and they're on a feeding schedule or anything. They're pretty much independent in that they can dress themselves and tell him when they're hungry and those kinds of things. So it's been good.

JM: What exactly is the job that you have? You described it, but --

HB: Oh. I coach the swim team at the Y.

JM: I just thought we should have that on the tape.

HB: And it's not a real demanding job. It's not a very stressful job. But it gives me the sense of me. Since my kids are in school and everything, I felt that it was time that I had my own identity, even if it's only a few hours a day, that I'm not somebody's mother and I'm not somebody's wife, but that I'm somebody totally different when I'm at the Y. I've really enjoyed that.

JM: What is your children's perception of Paul's occupation and of this whole lifestyle that you have?

HB: I don't know. I'm sure they think it's normal, that everybody lives like that. They don't really spend that much time at other people's houses. They might go over after school a little bit, but they're not really that involved with other kids. They're still

relatively young in that they don't spend a lot of time away from home. So I'm sure they think everybody lives like that.

JM: What's it like when emergencies come up and he's not there and you've got two kids?

HB: I am very fortunate that I have a neighbor next door. The house that we're living in was her husband's family's homestead. They built this house next door for her and her daughter. She's in her seventies, and she's wonderful. I can always call her in the middle of the day, in the middle of the night, whenever, and she will drop everything and come over, and has helped me out on quite a few occasions when I was stuck. Other than that, I've been very fortunate that I haven't had any real drastic emergencies when he's been gone. I think in the long run I tend to handle emergencies a little bit better than he does, because he gets very frantic. The few things that we've had happen have been minor, and it was probably better that he wasn't there. [Chuckles]

JM: What would you say the worst part of the separation is for you as a family, or are they not that bad?

HB: I don't see them as that bad. Maybe I'm a bit of a romantic, but I find the separations kind of thrilling in a way. I always look forward to when he's coming in. When he was fishing continually, it was difficult. But there was still always that

thrill of when the boat would be in. I always would go down to the lobster company. I don't think there's ever been a time that he's come in from fishing that I haven't met the boat. I think it's kind of nice for a relationship that you are separated a little bit. It tends to make you not take one another for granted. The only bad part about it would probably be the worry that everything's all right. I feel pretty independent and that I can pretty much handle things at home and that kind of thing. I don't look to Paul as, "I can't get along without him." I like being around him, and we have fun together. When he's away, it sort of strengthens that bond, and I look forward to spending time with him. Our house is never really routine, so I can't really say that there's bad.

JM: Do you think that his doing what he does has made you become more independent, or were you always that kind of a person?

HB: It's made me independent. My family was pretty supportive of me, although I was always pretty independent. My dad was a salesman and was always away, so my mom was pretty much in the same position that I was in. As a child, I always remember saying to her, "I never want to marry somebody who's away all the time." [Chuckles] And I find myself in the same situation. So I must have been groomed from the beginning that it was my fate. So I don't

know. I guess it certainly made me independent. I mean, when I have a problem, I don't immediately think, well, I have to ask Paul. I can certainly stand on my own two feet. But I think that comes with age too, not necessarily my situation. You know, the older you get, you become more confident in yourself, which I think makes you more independent.

JM: Yes. Who can you count on for support?

HB: Emotional support?

JM: Yes.

HB: As a friend? My closest friend lives in Portsmouth. She and I lived together when I first moved out of my family's house after I lived at home with them. I've known her about fifteen years. If I really have a problem or an emergency, I wouldn't hesitate to call her. As I said, my neighbor is very close to me. We've become very close friends even though she's in her seventies. It's one of those give-take relationships. We always make sure that she's supplied in as many lobsters as she wants. We plow her driveway when it snows, and we help eachother. I have a few friends in Newport that I'm very close to. So I guess if I really needed somebody, I would look to my friends. Paul's family, I'm pretty close to also. They live in Warwick. One of his sisters and I are pretty close. We don't see each other very often, but if it was a real emergency, I would

call her.

JM: What do people like you do -- especially when Paul was out a lot -- for a social life?

HB: Well, I was busy with my kids. We're not that social to begin with. Both of us are on this crazy schedule that, I would say, nine times out of ten we're in bed at nine o'clock, and we're up at six. I've always been an early riser, and I guess Paul has too. So we really don't have much of a social life. We do get together with friends, and we'll go out to dinner, but very seldom are we out late. When we first lived on Gidley Street, when he was still a crew member and didn't have the responsibilities, we would have people over to play cards and things. But we really don't have that big of a social life. I'm not that kind of wild and crazy . . . . I'm not a big party person. I'm a real dud at a party. I don't like to drink, which is something that, unfortunately, the fishermen seem to get caught up in. It's a tragic situation, because many, many people fall into that rut of the alcohol. It's, I guess, a good release. Many guys will come in from fishing, and the first thing they do is roll into the bar. They have a few dollars in their pocket and have a tendency to abuse it, which we've seen over the years quite a lot.

JM: Are these married men or the single guys mostly?

HB: Some of them are single. Most of them are single --

young single, early twenties. They have the capacity to make quite a bit of money. Unfortunately, they don't know what to do with it, so it winds up being spent on drugs or alcohol. It is a high stress job. I mean, you're out fishing for five or six days just seeing the ocean, being with four other people. I'm sure the first thing you want to do is let go when you get in. It gets to be sort of a routine type of a thing. I don't know any married men at this point that are involved in that. There are quite a few recovering alcoholics at our stage. We've been involved in fishing now fifteen years. Paul probably has been longer. Most people that started when I was involved in it, when I first started, have families of their own, and there's really not much room for alcohol when you have a family. I can't really think of any of the fishermen that are in our age group or started when we did that abuse it at this point. I think most of them have had that in their past and have worked through that.

JM: What would you say the major changes are that have taken place in the lobster industry since you've been involved in it?

HB: Just the competition, if nothing else. As with every other industry, the technology certainly has improved tremendously -- the kinds of equipment that they use and those kinds of things. The competition

also has really increased from a handful of boats to numerous, the amount of pots that they fish. It certainly lengthens the amount of days that they're out fishing. Initially, I think they started with a thousand pots, where most boats nowadays fish at least two thousand.

JM: Is that how many you have? I know Paul told me, but I forget.

HB: Yes. I think it's about two thousand -- in the water. We have a field full of pots, but at any one time, there's probably at least two thousand pots.

JM: What about alternative fisheries?

HB: We have rigged out our boat for longlining. This week Paul's going to put the net drum back on. So he does have an alternative if the lobster industry doesn't pan out. Last year he found that the amount of times that he went fishing, it wasn't that great, and he really could make more money lobstering than fishing. But as I said from the beginning, Paul loves the ocean, and it's an interest of his that -- it's forever feeding his interest as far as what he wants to do, and he likes to get involved in different areas of fishing, not just lobstering. So it's been sort of fun for him too.

JM: The longlining was for tilefish, wasn't it?

HB: Tilefish, yes.

JM: He's going to try that again this year?

HB: Yes. I think he's putting on the net drum this

week. I'm not sure. He's asked me three or four times whether he should. He does always ask me my opinion, which I think is really funny, because I'm certainly not an expert. But we always discuss his business moves.

JM: So you're pretty tied up in his job satisfaction. It's yours too.

HB: Oh, definitely. If he's happy, I'm happy. It makes life so much easier.

JM: Yes. What would you say the future of the whole industry is here?

HB: The lobster industry?

JM: The lobster industry in general.

HB: Well, as any fisheries, I think one of the things that we're going to have to certainly watch out for is overfishing and the abundance of the catch. It will come to a point eventually where no one will be able to make a decent living. The actual fishing will be overfished and every boat will get a little, but nobody will get enough to survive. I still think there will always be boats that will do well, people that have been in it for awhile, and I'm confident that Paul will always do well. I just think that he's studied it and certainly knows what he's doing. It will weed out the people that really don't know what they're doing. They had a period of time in the past where there were a lot of people getting involved and investing in boats. There'd be five or

six investors in a boat, and they would hire people to run it. But the personal interest wasn't really there. It was the situation that Paul was in initially when he first started -- where there were six investors in this corporation. I mean, they didn't really care. It was a tax write-off for them, and they just wanted to fish this boat. Paul's the type of person that, as I said, really wants to do it. If he's going to do it, he's going to do it to the max. There are not many people around like that, and certainly not working for someone else. So those kinds of people usually work for themselves. I think with the industry going the way it is, it'll weed out those situations, because they won't be able to survive. I don't know. It's hard to say. They have imposed stronger restrictions, size limitations and all, but it always amazes me how many lobsters are down there and how long that'll be that way. You know, when you think about how many thousands of pounds are landed every year, and how long can that go on for before there is a drastic change in the production of lobsters? It takes seven years to produce an edible size lobster under the law. It's almost seven years before a lobster is within size limitations. So you figure . . . seven years of this creature to exist without their own problems. They have to worry about other predators and the

conditions of the ocean and all these kinds of things. I always wonder about how long it'll last.

JM: Yes. And I would assume that people who have corporations like you were talking about wouldn't care too much about conservation.

HB: Well no, they don't. Unfortunately, these people get out there, and they put their gear down. They don't know where they're fishing, so they take up space that could be utilized by somebody who does know what they are doing. A lot of times these pots are just left there, and there's lobsters that get trapped inside. As I said before, the catch just gets spread out more and more in a less concentrated area so that everyone's catching a little, but no one's catching enough. I really don't know what'll happen.

JM: How do you feel about government involvement in the industry?

HB: Skeptical. I'm not real trusting. My own experience with government is, usually there's so much bureaucracy involved in the simplest tasks, that it gets lost in the paper work. The point that they're trying to pass really gets lost. By the time they're actually dealing with the problem, it's gone past so many desks and takes so long that I just wonder. Plus they don't really enforce it either. You know, you wonder how well they're able to enforce it. One of the things I'm really

concerned about is the Coast Guard cutbacks that they've been dealing with lately. That's a scary thing and not just for the fishing industry, but for everyone. Certainly in an area like Newport, where the town gets most of their income from the summer sailing population and that kind of thing, I think that the Coast Guard cutbacks can certainly hurt the area. In fact, I heard last night that Senator Pell was up in arms about it and trying to change it. Those kinds of things are things that worry me.

JM: How do you feel about all the development and the tourism along the waterfront in relationship to the fishing industry?

HB: I'm a bad person to ask, because I'm not objective about it. I get somewhat bitter about the whole fight -- actually, the plight of the fishermen. Over the years, there used to be a time when the fishing industry was the lure that brought people to Newport -- that it was a fishing town and the sea shanties and all that kind of thing. Over the years, what's happened is the town or the city or whoever seems to think that the fishermen are a threat to tourism and that we're taking away space that could be used as dock space for somebody's sailboat. Unfortunately, I think they are shortsighted in realizing the amount of income that fishermen bring to the area year round, where the sailboat industry really is a couple months in the

summer. Realistically, most people that come in on boats have most of their food. They have their clothes. They might go out to a shop and buy something or go out to one meal or whatever. The fishermen bring in a large income to the oil industry, the boats need to be fueled up, Almacs with the groceries. An average grocery bill for our trips is somewhere between three and four hundred dollars. That's on a weekly basis. The bait industry -- we buy a lot of bait. Not only that, on most of the boats, where the fishermen do well and are successful, their incomes are rather large, and these people can afford nice houses or, in turn, spend their money back into Newport's economy. I just don't think that the town is in support of us at all. Unfortunately, as the years progress, a lot of the flavor, I feel, of Newport is really getting lost in the development. That Marriott Hotel or whatever it's going to be is just so monstrous. It's just this huge monstrosity that's going to provide what? Bring conventions to Newport? I mean, what's that? I'm not a big supporter of change, I suppose. I must be one of these staunch New Englanders who don't like to see things change. I don't think it's for the benefit of the area that all this development is taking place. I think that Newport is really going to see the effects of that in the next couple of years. Just riding around

town, there's many empty condominiums. There's many empty storefronts and shops. These little shops downtown, they change like the weather. You can go down one week, there's a shop, and the next week it's gone. I just really don't think that so much emphasis should be placed on the summertime clientele.

JM: What kind of sociological effect do you think it has for something like the fishing industry to have less and less area that they can occupy?

HB: I think maybe it's a traditional Newport outlook, but a lot of people have the impression that fishermen are dirty and hang out in the bars, and [are] drunks. I think most people would just as soon see them not here at all -- they keep pushing them away into one corner that gets further and further away. Again, I just think the town's really missing out on a lot -- not the fact that ourselves are being hurt, but I think the town is. The fishing industry has a lot to offer the city, and they should really be taking advantage of it rather than trying to cover it up.

JM: Do you think many people have much concept of what the industry is all about?

HB: No, I don't think so. I'm sure they like to eat fresh fish and have lobster occasionally and that's about it. But a lot of people are really surprised when they meet Paul, that he's a fisherman, that my

husband is a fisherman. You know, most people give you that kind of a side-eyed look like . . . I can't really say that there's been prejudice against him, but I think most people would think that the fishing people are not low life citizens, but they certainly aren't in the same echelon as the doctors and the lawyers. And maybe I'm wrong, but it just seems over the years, that's basically the feeling of the town.

JM: So the perception is based on a lot of ignorance?

HB: I don't know. Maybe I'm wrong. Again, I don't have that much dealing with the public. The people that I know, they know us, and they like us for us, I guess, and not necessarily what my husband does or whatnot. I just think the way the city has pushed the fishing industry into the corner, speaks loud enough. All the hotels and the condos -- I just think it's crazy. I mean, how many condos can you support? How many people want to be in a timeshare in January in Newport? Realistically, they had the opportunity to build the fishing industry as Point Judith is certainly a harbor for fishing boats. I'm not saying that they should have made Newport that way, but certainly made it a little easier. In the summer there's many times where it's so difficult to get into Aquidneck Lobster because there's sailboats blocking the way and nobody really cares. It seems more of an inconvenience to everybody that the

fishing boats are there. I think people forget that. So I don't know.

JM: What do you think the future of the State Pier is? Do you think it's going to stay?

HB: I don't know. It's difficult to say what'll happen. Hopefully it will stay that way, but they might decide that we need another restaurant in town. I really don't know. I think about it a lot, because I don't know where we'd go otherwise. I'm sure we could always go to New Bedford. I don't think Paul would want to go to the Point (Point Judith). There are other options, but it certainly would cramp our style to have to move the boat that far away.

JM: Sure it would.

End of Interview.

Second interview with Hedy Bennett for the Newport Historical Society, Oral History of the Fishing Industry in Newport, Rhode Island, by Jennifer Murray.

MURRAY: I wanted to ask you what your maiden name is.

BENNETT: It's Stewart.

JM: Where are your parents from? What are their roots?

HB: Both my parents were born in Germany. My mother was from Berlin, and my father is from Eastern Germany.

JM: Did they know one another before they came over here?

HB: No, they didn't. They met in New York City.

JM: What brought them to the United States?

HB: I know with my mother's family, they were caught up in World War II. At the time, Berlin was not the kind of place that you wanted to live in. She was twenty when they moved to the United States. My dad came over -- He's not very open with his past. He's a difficult man to talk to. The only historical information that I've gotten from my father is through his sisters, and I don't get to see them that often. So I really don't know much about my father's past.

JM: Does your mother talk much?

HB: She's very bitter about the War. Neither one of them are very open about Germany. There's a lot of mixed feelings about Germany during World War II. I think a lot of people have a really guilty

conscience about Hitler and the persecution of the Jews. It's not something that either one of them are open about.

JM: Who were you named after?

HB: [Chuckles] I can't believe you're asking that.

JM: You don't have to answer. [Laughter]

HB: Well, they wanted to name me Heidi. Apparently, they were living in an apartment, and the people next door had a german shepard named Heidi, so they felt that they didn't want to name me Heidi. Hedy Lamar, at that point, was popular, and they figured that was a nice name, and they wanted something with H. My father's Henry, and my mother's Helga, so they figured Hedy would fit the mold.

JM: I thought maybe you were named after a relative. [Chuckles]

HB: No.

JM: Now how did you happen to come to Newport? Your father had been working in New Jersey and in Rhode Island. Had you spent time in Newport at all?

HB: I went to college in Virginia for two years, and then I went to Europe. What was supposed to be a summer job waitressing in Switzerland turned into almost a year. I was very unhappy in Lynchburg College and looking for a way out. My dad was insistent that I continue. Once I got to Europe, I figured it would be tough for him to get me back to Virginia. When I came back home, I was living with

them at home in Barrington and going to Roger Williams, because again, he was very insistent that I finish school. I was living at home with them for a year, and it really got to be stifling after being on my own. I decided that it was time that I moved on. I came to Newport, looking for a job. I figured I could get a waitressing job, even though I realized that it would be too far to come from Barrington. I was applying for a job at the Sheraton Islander as a waitress, and the girl sitting next to me was applying. I was saying, "Well, this is great -- now I have a job and no place to live." And she said, "Well, I have an apartment, and I'm looking for a roommate." She said, "It's a really tiny room though." And I said, "Oh, I love tiny rooms." The next day I went to look at it, and the next day after that I moved in. She's my closest friend to this day. She's a really, really nice person.

JM: Oh, that's nice.

HB: Yes.

JM: Thinking back, is there any one experience or person that had a particular influence on your life as far as your ability to be so independent with this lifestyle you're leading?

HB: Probably my mother, just because she did the same thing. When my dad was traveling, she was always alone. Looking back on it, it wasn't something I

was aware of. She certainly didn't influence me to think, oh, I want to do that when I grow up. In fact, it was more the opposite. I always used to say it was something I didn't want to do. Yet, here I am, in very much the same position. Although at this point, as I said before, Paul's only gone a week a month. It's really not the same as it was with my family and my dad. He is around a lot. There are many days where he doesn't leave the house -- not that he doesn't do anything. We have a lot of things to do at our house. He has a workshop, a big garage, and it's set up to build pots. We have a big barn that he has his equipment in and a lot of his supplies. Now he's into his computer. He's not the type of person that will sit around and do nothing. In fact, it's very rare that he sits down during the day.

JM: What are some of the adjustment problems you see for yourself and for other people involved in the fishing industry as far as marriages go?

HB: Adjustments while they're fishing or when they're not fishing?

JM: Both.

HB: Well obviously, when they're fishing, one must learn to be very independent. One of the things I found initially was that I was waiting for Paul to do a lot of things. If there was something I wanted to do, I would wait for him. Throughout the span of

his intensive fishing, I realized that I had to do my own thing. There would a lot of occasions that we would be invited to weddings and birthday parties and family occasions that I wouldn't go if he was not available. Then I realized, I'm going to be sitting here alone, letting life pass me by, and that I had to get up and do these things on my own and not wait for him. He's independent in that way also -- he does his thing. I try to accommodate him when he's available, but yet, I realize,too,that I have to live my life and can't wait on him all the time. As far as when they're inshore, I think we went into this a little bit before. When somebody is in that kind of a lifestyle and they're fishing continually -- where they're out fishing six days, they come home for two, then they're gone again for six -- those two days in between are usually not much fun. They come home very tired. A lot of times they just want to relax and unwind, and of course, once you have a family and there's children involved, they want to be with their dad, and they want to spend time with him. That can be a little frustrating, because I realize the situation that, say, Paul's tired. Yet on the other hand, I realize also that the kids really want to spend time with him. That's an adjustment. Now that he's home a lot, it's made a great difference. He's only gone for a week or six days at the most, and I talk to

him twice a day on the radio. When he's out fishing, we have a pretty loose schedule. We go to McDonalds for dinner and do whatever we pretty much feel like. We're not really on that structured type of situation. Yet, I shouldn't even say that, because when Paul's home, he's very easy to get along with. He's not one to demand a three course meal. As long as something's on the table at six o'clock, he's pretty happy regardless whether it's TV dinners or American Chop Suey [chuckles]. But I know people, friends of mine, that have had a big adjustment with their husbands being off the boat.

JM: Really.

HB: Yes. Just in that when someone is out at sea or, in this particular case, when her husband was out at sea, she would do whatever she wanted and have baby sitters and pretty much live her own life. Now that her husband's home, she has to work around him, and I think that was difficult for her. Paul and I like to be together. It's only in the past couple years that we've sort of gone our separate ways a little bit more, him doing more things that he likes to enjoy and me doing things that I like to without him there. And that's okay. It's good, especially when he's home a lot. I don't think being on top of one another all the time makes for a very interesting lifestyle.

JM: When people call you when the boat is out on a trip

-- wives or girlfriends or mothers or whatever -- is there a lot of strain with them in coping with this?

HB: Sometimes there is. There have been times when they've been worried or they don't really know the schedule. Sometimes Paul will tell the guys they'll only be out four days, and it'll turn into five days. Normally, people are concerned. We really haven't had too many frantic calls. I think most wives that are involved with our boat have seen the boat and realize that it's a well kept boat, and it's not the kind of situation that they really have to worry about. I have gotten a few frantic calls when it's been stormy out, and I've tried to reassure them. As I said before, I speak with him twice a day, so I always tell the people that call that I just spoke to him. Everything's fine. Normally they are fine.

JM: What would you say is the hardest part about being the wife of a commercial lobster fisherman?

HB: The worry of it, the worry for their safety first off. I think I said last time we spoke that it's very difficult to make long range plans. That can be frustrating after awhile. It's hard to plan something. For us, it's eased up tremendously since we're not under the constant -- the boat has to go out. It still has to go out, but Paul doesn't always have to be on it. It's very frustrating when we're invited out to dinner, and I can't -- Well,

when he was fishing, I couldn't give somebody an answer till an hour before. That can get old after awhile. But oh, I don't know. I guess worrying about their safety would probably be one of them and being alone a lot.

JM: What's the best part?

HB: If they're on a good boat, the income normally is substantial. And again, I think most people that are really into fishing aren't there for the money. It's certainly an attractive part of it, but it's the love of the sea that moves people out there. I've been very grateful that Paul found something that he really liked. I know many people that are in jobs that they hate. I was always really happy for him that he found something he really enjoyed doing. I think that's important, that people are happy with what they're doing instead of having to be in a suit and tie every morning at eight o'clock and being at a desk where you really don't want to be. There are many miserable people out there at jobs that they really, really dislike.

JM: What was your family's perception of your marrying him?

HB: My dad was worried that it would be the same situation that I grew up in that my husband would be away a lot. Before we got married, he took me on this little boat trip, the two of us, and we had this talk. He told me that he had nothing personal

against Paul, but that he really wanted me to think about the kind of life that I would be living with him away all the time and if that was something that I really wanted. I thought about it, but I knew that Paul was the person that I wanted to be with and that again, as long as he was happy, I figured I could live with it. And that's most of it. I think him being happy makes all of us happy. To be married to somebody who's miserable, I can imagine, would not be much fun. We've learned to live with it. You know, as I said before, my kids don't know any different. Now that he's around a lot, they're spending a lot more time with him. But when he goes fishing, they're not particularly upset about it, and they look forward to seeing him. They talk to him on the radio, and he tries to spend time with them when he is home. We just go about our business when he's not there and look forward to when he's coming back.

JM: Has there been much change in the size of the offshore lobster fleet since you and Paul have been involved?

HB: It has fluctuated. It seems it's certainly increased. The size of the boats has increased tremendously, and the amount of pots that they fish has definitely increased. The competition obviously has increased also. There seemed to be a time -- and I can't actually remember how many years ago --

when the Decco fishermen were in town, and they weren't necessarily lobstering, but they were in areas that the boats were trying to lobster in. At that point, there was just an overwhelming amount of new boats and bigger boats. The whole situation seemed to be getting out of hand. At this point, everyone seems to be sort of in their own territory, although Paul talks about different boats coming into his area, and, you know, there is that competition there. It definitely has increased.

JM: How about right here in Newport?

HB: Yes. Again, there's a lot more new boats. The size is certainly -- I think the average size when we first started was 60, 65 feet. In fact, Paul's boat was probably one of the first boats that was larger than most of the other ones. There are boats nowadays that are 90 feet. So all those things have changed. One of the things that has kept the numbers down is, it takes somebody who knows what they're doing to keep the industry flowing, to keep their income going. You can't just get a boat and go out there and make it work. There have been a couple of boats that have gone under and have sold out. But it's definitely increased.

JM: Who are the new boat owners? Are they people from around here?

HB: Yes, some of them. There are a few situations where they're absentee owners, in other words, people that

aren't necessarily fishermen. They own the boat, but they hire somebody to run it. I'm trying to think -- I don't know where this one boat, where the owner is. Another boat, he runs the bait business, and he owns two or three boats. So they are around here. They're in the area.

JM: Are they younger people or --

HB: No. I think there's still some investment groups where there's maybe four or five different owners. It's a corporation, and four or five people are involved, and then they hire a skipper, which was the type of situation that Paul was initially involved with. I'm sure that there is still that situation now. There are quite a few boat owners like Paul who have someone else run the boat. I don't consider Paul an absentee owner, because he's very involved in the boat. When he's fishing, obviously he's on it. But even when he's not, he's the one that prepares the boat -- makes sure that they have the bait, and makes sure that they do the food shopping, and makes sure that the repairs are done. So he's hardly somebody that gives the responsibility to somebody else.

JM: It seems like there are, you'd almost call them sagas of people who have come here and owned boats and gotten out of the industry. Are there any people that are particularly memorable to you?

HB: Yes, but I'd rather not go into it. [Chuckles]

JM: Okay. You and Paul are involved in an occupation that's very old. It goes back as far as time. It's one of the oldest industries known to us. Do you have any feeling about that?

HB: I'm excited that he's -- Again, I keep saying the same thing. I'm sorry. But I'm excited that he's doing something that, first of all, is not hurting the environment. He's very conscious of lobster size and restrictions with the pots and making sure they have the escape -- I forget the exact terminology -- lobsters that are undersized can get out. I'm proud of him for that, that he follows those guidelines and he's adamant about preserving the industry. It's just like a farmer. It's another industry that people can really reap from the land and yet put something back into it. So I'm happy that he's doing that. And again, I'm very happy that he's doing something that makes him happy.

JM: You had said when we were talking once, that it's in his blood. What do you mean by that?

HB: It's an industry where you have to enjoy being offshore, isolated from really anything else. And there are times when you -- as a fisherman -- you lose contact with shore. Someone has to be comfortable with that feeling of being isolated from everything and enjoying the sea -- there's a lot, I'm sure, that's great. Paul has talked about the

sunrises. Some days you can look out, and you just see forever and see nothing. I, myself, find that not that relaxing. But many people do. I think it takes that kind of a person that appreciates that.

JM: What about the role of women in the fishing industry? Are there any women that you've known who have been part of it as far as working?

HB: Yes. There have been women through the years that have been the banders. Not to sound chauvinistic certainly, but I think it would be difficult for a woman, unless she was physically built to lift 100 pound pots all day long. And the elements -- there's not too many women that would enjoy that. It's certainly not a glamorous life. You're out there with rotten smelly bait, scary weather conditions, no privacy and you're on top of everybody all the time. So it's not a very glamorous situation. The attractive part of it would be the love of the sea and the income. But I have known a woman that was involved in it, and her skin is really wrinkled at this point. [Chuckles]

JM: I'll bet -- all that weather.

HB: Well, the elements. I mean, you're out there in cold, zero degree weather, and you don't have time to run in and put skin cream on your face. So it's something that you're going to have to realize down the line. I know it sounds silly. I'm certainly not one to fuss with my appearance, but it just

seems that it's a hard life.

JM: Yes. How about politically? Do you see women becoming more involved politically?

HB: Not offhand. That's not to say they're not. I can't think of anybody offhand that I know of that's politically involved. Maybe there are women out there. I just don't know of them.

JM: How about the fishermen themselves? Is there much banding together here for political purposes?

HB: They have organized the Atlantic Offshore Fisherman's Association -- fishermen and lobstermen. They do a lot. They were the ones that pushed for the 200 mile limit and [limiting] the foreigners too, and [regulations on] the gear and the grounds. They have done a lot of good. There was a time where it was the local fishermen that organized the State Pier and those kinds of things. So they are involved. I think a lot of the fishermen nowadays are educated. Most of the boat owners have graduated with degrees either from the Fisheries Program [at the University of Rhode Island] or Mass. [Massachusetts] Maritime [Academy] and realize that as much as they'd like to pretend it's not going on, they really do have to band together and lobby for what they want and go through the system.

JM: So you have a sense that that's happening here?

HB: Yes. In fact, this coming weekend is the Fishing Expo at the Sheraton. It's a big deal for the

fishermen. They enjoy going, and they have a banquet. It's a time where everyone gets a chance to come together. We know most of the lobstermen -- at least the men that have been involved in the industry for as long as Paul has from on the Cape and in the Boston area, and have many times visited these people. On our little excursions to other places, we've dropped in on people. So it's nice to see these men in a social atmosphere. I have to say, most of the men that I've met that are in Paul's position, that are boat owners, I really admire them. They're very smart individuals. They really impress me as being a knowledgeable group.

JM: You mentioned last time that if anything happened -- that the State Pier couldn't be used anymore for the fishing industry or if the industry got pushed out anymore than it has been or squeezed off into a corner -- that you'd have to consider going elsewhere. Where would you go? Have you ever thought of that?

HB: We have thought of it. I think Paul's first choice would probably be the New Bedford-Fairhaven area. There is some dock space available in Tiverton, but it's a very closeknit group. I'm not sure whether they would be very welcoming to somebody new. Paul has a lot of ties in Fairhaven. A lot of our hydraulics people are there and the electronics people. We usually haul out at Kelly's, which is a

look into.

JM: All in all, what would you say the hardest part about being involved in the lobster industry is for you and Paul?

HB: I'm not sure what the hardest [part is]. I know that one of our biggest headaches is the help, the caliber of person that we seem to attract. Unfortunately, it's not the kind of situation college educated people tend to gravitate towards. That's not to say that you need a college education to be a good person. What happens a lot of times is that the people that we do get are sort of the low lifes -- people that don't know what else to do with themselves and fall into that. They don't have any other skills, and this is a way they can make an income. There's quite a few people that we've had over the years that have had an education and have really enjoyed fishing. But as with most jobs, those are the kind of people that get their own boats. So the help problem is certainly one of the biggest. Again, the competition of it -- the resource -- how long will the resource be there is another problem. The insurance is continually climbing. Every year it just keeps jumping up higher and higher. It's a scary situation that if there is a problem, hopefully the insurance company would cover that. Most of the time the injuries are relatively minor, although it is rated as one of the

most dangerous jobs. Of course, that shoots the premiums up really high. So that's another difficult area -- the expense of it all. It's amazing. The initial expense to get involved in the industry is unbelievable. So, you know, those are the kinds of things that are difficult.

JM: Roughly, what would you say the initial expense would be now? Do you have any idea?

HB: Oh, my God, I would think for a boat and pots would probably be a million dollars, just to get going initially. That's a lot of money to start a business. It would certainly take somebody who knew what they were doing.

JM: Are the banks getting any easier about helping people out?

HB: I don't know. Fortunately, we haven't had to deal with the banks since we've had our boat built. They weren't that accommodating when we started. They certainly put us through a lot of stress. We didn't know "someone." We were speaking about that yesterday with a friend of ours. They were saying that there's a certain sort of, I don't know, certain sort of game you have to play with the bank. We didn't know the game when we started. We started at the bottom line and had to work our way through the system. According to this friend of ours, if you know somebody in the bank and you can skip all the initial paper work and everything, that it's

much more helpful. But I'm sure, like any business, like a restaurant business and all, they're watching things very closely. I don't know what the start up cost for a restaurant is, but I imagine it must be pretty high also.

JM: Yes. What would you say the best part is for you two being involved in this industry?

HB: We get to eat a lot of lobster. [Chuckles] Oh, the best part . . . . I don't dislike the fact that we're in the fishing industry. No, I like it. I'm proud of it. I know when Paul told me he wanted to name the boat after me, at first I was kind of not necessarily embarrassed, but I wasn't sure whether it would be something I really wanted. The more I thought about it, I thought it was great.

[end of side one, tape two]

JM: Not many people do have a boat named after them. Can you think of anything you get from being involved in this lifestyle that you couldn't get if you and Paul were doing something else or if he was a nine to five kind of a guy?

HB: As I said before, when we initially started, we spent a lot of time together working on ironing out things, and it's <u>our</u> business. I mean, he's part owner, and I'm the other part. We own the business together, and it's something that we do together. I have been somewhat negligent in the past year with my end of things. One of the reasons is that Paul

has much more time to put into the areas that I was working on with the books and the payroll and those kinds of things. Plus I'm involved in doing my own thing at this point a little bit too, so we haven't spent as much time in the business together as we did in the past. We still talk. When he makes a decision, he always asks me first what I think. I'm certainly not an expert on the weather or business, but basically, we do discuss everything before we make a major decision.

JM: Have you learned a lot about things like the weather and how the earth works?

HB: Yes, especially the weather and what situations are treacherous, what situations are nice. For instance, today it's really cold out. One of the concerns about fishing in the cold is that the boat makes ice; then the equipment ices up, and you lose radio contact and those kinds of things. But if you take a fair wind out, that doesn't happen. There are a lot of things that I'm sure most people probably don't know and that I wouldn't know either, that I just take for granted.

JM: How would you feel if your children got involved in the fishing industry in some aspect?

HB: I wouldn't mind. Again, as long as they're happy, that's the main thing. If it's something they both feel they would like to do, then I would support them. It's certainly not a situation where I don't

want my children involved. I'm proud of what we do, and I enjoy being involved in the lifestyle that we're in. And it's not bad. It's great! I would hope for them, if that's what they wanted to do, it would be good for them too.

JM: Well, I've asked all of the questions I had planned. Is there anything you'd like to add? I'm sure there are a lot of things I neglected to ask you.

HB: Not really. You've asked me pretty much everything that I can think of. I don't mean to make it sound like everything's wonderful all the time. There certainly are times that I've thought, "Why did I get into this?" But I'm sure most people think that about everything. When you get up in the morning, there are days that it's a lot easier just to go back to bed than deal with it. But, overall the industry has been very good to us. We've been very fortunate in that way. I hope it continues.

JM: Well, it's been a real pleasure talking with you, and I really want to thank you.

HB: Oh well, thank you, Jennifer.

End of Interview.