

“What keeps us going”

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I usually dread the sound of the alarm at 5:30 am signaling the start of another school day. But somehow the feeling this alarm brings is different an hour and a half earlier, and a Saturday no less. It is difficult to pin point exactly what compels me to roll out of bed, most likely because it's different every time. Sometimes the image of the sun, rising over the pines, burning off the fog and igniting the water is enough all by itself. Other times it is the somehow satisfying feeling of pure exhaustion, too tired to venture down and up the stairs one more time for food, but knowing I produced something with nothing but my own two hands and the untamed wonder that is the ocean. Perhaps it is the uncertainty of not knowing what kind of adventure a day on the water will bring, whether it be a mechanical problem, business issue, or conflict with other lobstermen, every day is unique.

Often times lobstering is cold, wet, miserable work, and on bad days, I end up paying to go out and do it. No matter how many times I pay for fuel and stuff the traps full of expensive bait, if I don't bring back enough lobster, I pay to go work. The sound of the trap hauler, bringing up traps as fast as I can work them, is either music to my ears on a day where the catch is good, or on a bad day, the painful sound of my wallet being emptied straight into the ocean, my cash never to be seen again. On what a native lobsterman would call a “Scortcha” the work becomes almost unbearable. The labor seems ten times harder in the heat, and is only made worse by the temptation of the inviting water and the smell of bait, rancid in the warm weather.

It seems that luck is the lobsterman's best and worst friend, sometimes in the same day. Without luck, hours of hard work and sacrifice seem to be all for nothing. But when luck is combined with hard work, the duo is unmatched. After a good day, a feeling ensues, a feeling unrivaled by any I have ever felt. This feeling, shared by all those who try their hand at lobstering, is one of the most addicting I have ever experienced. It's the excitement in every lobsterman's voice at the beginning of the season when they ask another, just off the water, “Have they hit yet?” Before this summer job, I couldn't understand lobstermen. Now, I know the addicting feeling that makes the people who have been fishing their whole life have a certain aura about them that is, while difficult to explain, so noticeable they stick out from everyone around them. From a business standpoint, most don't understand lobstering, and how could anyone expect them to? Even as a lobstermen myself, I have a hard time when thinking about it logically. Why would anyone choose this unstable line of work, knowing there is a good chance you will lose money in doing so?

What keeps us going? It is the gambler in each of us, wanting to believe that today will be the day, combined with the deep love of the ocean that every lobsterman possesses. A certain kind of love that is as much respect as it is admiration. Once this passion is discovered there is no turning back. From my first experience fishing, three years ago, hand hauling lobster traps onto a small skiff in the middle of Casco Bay, I knew of this love. Even if I sold out, moved inland, and never saw the ocean again, that love would always be there. In monetary terms, my summer job would be chalked up as a failure, but I wouldn't trade the experiences I had this past summer for anything.