



**NOAA Teacher at Sea  
Christopher Harvey  
Onboard NOAA Ship OSCAR ELTON SETTE  
June 5 – July 4, 2006**

**Date:** June 13, 2006

**Time:** 5:00 PM Hawaii

**Location:** Floating in the Pacific Ocean!

**Entry**

Today was the longest day of hauling traps since we have been out here. I guess that is partly due to the fact that the wind picked up this morning and made the ocean very choppy. We have been experiencing swells of around 5 feet for the last few days. But with the wind cutting into them, the waves smashing into the boat have the strength of the swells but the misdirection of a thousand firecrackers. It made navigating the ship very difficult for the bridge. If our winch (Yes, the Captain corrected me on my use of the word “wench” in a previous entry. A “wench,” he said was a servant girl of the Dark Ages. A “winch” is a machine used to haul lines up and down.) receives the trap strings at angles larger than about 30 degrees to the ship, it is very difficult to use.

A second reason why we had such difficulty hauling the traps this morning is that we set them on coral heads at the bottom of the ocean. The traps are made of sturdy, yet flexible plastic and are connected to each other with rope about a half inch in diameter. Further, there is a fair amount of rope between each trap, which is left to float and dangle in the current, frequently catching itself in the coral and making our job of hauling the traps to the ship extremely difficult.

Twice today the coral won decisive battles against us, and forced the rope to break. We lost a total of 7 traps to the ocean. Bob says that this is a minor loss. I wonder what is to become of the traps once we are gone. Yesterday we lost 9 traps while setting them because instead of attaching a float to the end of a string of eight, a crewmember attached a ninth trap. Instead of having a buoyant float to mark the string of eight traps, nine traps sank quickly to the ocean floor. There was talk this morning of diving the site to retrieve the floats. Then there was talk that the traps were expendable, and that the risk of shark attack was slightly too high. So after today, there are 16 traps on the bottom of the Pacific, full of bait, lobster, sharks, hermit crabs, eel, or anything else that had the misfortune to crawl inside.

I presume that I am supposed to remain objective about this, since I am technically just a guest aboard the ship. But it is disturbing me the more and more I think about it. I have been growing more and more troubled by the methodology of the science of the cruise, and it seems today is right on par to my expectations. I am still greatly enjoying the people. And the sunsets here have been some of the most amazing things that I have ever seen. Even the “full” moon rising the last few nights has left me in pure awe of the world and all its wonders. Last night, while sitting on the deck outside of the bridge, Sarah, an Ensign officer, showed me the Southern Cross rising in the horizon. She also pointed out

several other series of constellations that I had never been aware of before. My father warned me about the beauty of the stars in the open sea. He was certainly right. Constellations that I could never begin to see back home in Jacksonville stuck out in the night sky like the ancient sailors' visions of old. But even with all of the constant beauty of nature around me, I still wake up each morning with apprehension over what my work will bring.

I must move forward, regardless of how I feel towards the science--or rather methodology of the science. And maybe that is what I am supposed to learn through practice over the next three weeks. Usually when I run into something that tastes bitter at first bite, I back away from a second bite. I cannot back away from future bites in this situation. So I will be forced to move into a new realm of patience, perseverance, understanding, and personal growth. I have already given up on the thought of eating fish and lobster anytime soon. Lobster has never been a favorite of mine, but after spending the last four days staring into their fearful little eyes while I pull them from traps, or spread them across a table to take measurements, I have come to love the lobsters for their simple, yet perfect existence.

I hate reaching this point, where I feel as though I am guilty for being part of the human race. I am not about to make such a leap as in *Walden*, and presume that humans are supposed to act in such a small part in nature as everything else. I know that there is something special about us that gives us the right, perhaps out of desire rather than necessity, to remain at the "top" of the food chain...for now (I say "top" because as soon as I fall into the water during shark feeding time, I guarantee I am NOT at the top of the food chain anymore!). Still I feel as though part of this mission is to see how the lobsters live without the interaction and interference of man in their natural habitat. Then we come along in our ship with our traps and our scientific instruments and rip them from their homes, probe about them for a while, throw them into a bucket with so many of their likes that they would probably not have ever come across on the ocean floor had we not caught them in our traps, toss them back into the sea in a different location from where we pulled them, and then expect them to grow and multiply. I am sorry for the analogy, but in the tradition of practicing perception from different perspectives on this cruise, as I was probing lobsters in the wet lab yesterday I kind of felt like I was an alien in a space ship scooping up human beings, performing horrific torture on them as I took my measurements, and then throwing them back down. In a sick kind of way, I hope that aliens do come along some day (if they haven't come already) and abduct some of our scientists. I don't mean them any harm, but sometimes I feel very guilty for our egocentric belief that we can are supposed to analyze and break down everything in order to "fix" nature.

I am afraid that I am getting a little deep in my thought, and its not yet time for sunset (my drug of choice for inspiration while onboard the ship). I think that there are a lot of things in nature that we can seek to understand. But I think that we should take hint after hint from Mother Nature as she continues to bombard us with hurricanes in the Atlantic, volcanoes in Indonesia, and the melting of the icecaps in Greenland and Antarctica (and so on, and so forth of course!). Yes, it is truly wonderful to be a human being instead of

a fat moo-cow! Do not get me wrong about that! But maybe a fat moo-cow doesn't suffer so much as it goes about its life because it never thinks that it can control the type or amount of grass it eats, the temperature in which it lows each night, the cleanliness of the water that it drinks, and so forth. It just does what it is created to do, and offers its life as a perfect sacrifice to the Great Beyond by doing this most simple task to the best of its ability.

Moooooooo!