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POP ART WITH LOBSTERMEN

By Allen Wolfe

AN imaginative nine-year-old Maine island boy, on the way home from a picnic, looked at a heap of emptied lobster shells on the deck of the boat and began wondering what he could make out of them. Eric Hopkins of North Haven first fashioned a dog; then he experimented with the image of a man and today — eight years later — the seventeen-year-old senior at Rockland High School has to hire his father's spare time services to fill the mushrooming orders for his "lobstermen."

The ingenious, Disney-like figures have comic heads, formed from lobster claws, bodies made from lobster backs and tails, arms and legs that once served the same purpose for the sea creatures, and feet fashioned from tail fins. Eric mounts his lobstermen on seine corks and adds hair of Old Man's Beard, a type of lichen found on Maine trees, and a coat of lacquer as a bonding agent. The lobstermen are rigidly supported by two dowels inserted through the legs and running the length of the body. All parts are glued with pins to fix perman-

ently the eyes and limbs.

Through the years, a good many of Eric's creations were snapped up by souvenir hunters from his mother's summer gift shop on North Haven. Early this year Raymond J. Kerr, a manufacturers' representative from Portland, purchased one lobsterman as a sample and, within a short time, sent back orders for 150 more. That's when Eric tapped his father, Rockland High School teacher William Hopkins, as a summer employee.

The shells are acquired at the Sail Loft in Rockport, where Eric has a deal to pick out lobster meat for the restaurant's use and retain unbroken shell segments as payment for his labor — a satisfactory trade for both parties.

Then comes the painstaking task of cleaning the shells — a job which father Bill performs in the Hopkins kitchen at North Haven for the modest wage of \$1.75 an hour. Meanwhile Eric assembles the figures in a converted carriage house on the Hopkins shorefront. He can assemble a lobsterman in ten minutes, but he tries to make each one unique, so that — counting the time taken to prepare the shells — the total man hours per lobsterman can exceed two hours. Since the figures retail in gift shops at \$5.95, and Eric sells them wholesale, it is obvious the handmade characters repay their maker as much in creative satisfaction as in hard cash.

"Sure, the money's fine, but if I didn't like to work and express myself, it would be foolish to make the lobstermen at all," Eric says. He hopes next year to enter the Rhode Island School of Design and ultimately to earn a bachelor of arts degree in sculpture. His lobstermen should help greatly to pave the way, both as evidence of talent and a means of partially paying his expenses through summer work. If Eric's distributing agent should continue to provide an increasing volume of business, there's a likelihood, too, that young Hopkins may be moved to raise his father's wages.

