



Islander

Living There, But Not Being One

[Michael Brunk](#) | 30.03.07

Eben Cole is a lobster fisherman, like his father and grandfather before him. Home is a small island off the coast of Maine where everyone knows everyone else. He puts in long hours working to support his wife and daughter, but he doesn't mind. Being captain of his own fishing boat and working at sea is all he's ever wanted out of life.

It's getting harder making ends meet, though. The catch is shrinking and competition from encroaching "mainlanders" is cutting into limited islander fishing grounds. With a reputation as a hothead already, it's no surprise that Eben chooses to take action against the threat he perceives. As the situation escalates, a horrible accident occurs and a young man winds up drowning as a result of Eben's actions.

Eben winds up in prison. Five years pass before he is released to return home. He rapidly finds out that things have changed while he was gone. He's lost his boat, his traps, and even his family. In this close-knit community he's now an outsider, shunned by those he once worked beside.

With that opening act, the stage is set for the meat of Ian McCrudden's *Islander*. This independent production is a dramatic and often moving look at island life, and its effect on a man attempting to put his life back together. The movie focuses closely on the consequences of Eben's actions and the lessons he learns as he chooses to return home, struggling to set things right.

Islander is very much a character-driven film. You'll find no big-budget action sequences or twists and turns in the plot. It's a very straightforward, honest, and therefore refreshing drama. The setting on



real-life Vinalhaven and the strong performances by this eclectic cast draw us into this story.

Thomas Hildreth plays Eben, and also co-wrote the story with McCrudden. His performance is strong, breathing life into this pivotal role. Strong performances are also turned in by Amy Jo Johnson as ex-wife Cheryl and Judy Prescott playing Eben's love interest later in the story. Philip Baker Hall appears as Popper, a crusty but charming old fisherman who helps put Eben back on the right path. You'll also find a number of locals and unknowns rounding things out, and they do a fine job.

At the end of the day, *Islander* is a story about normal people dealing with problems that, sadly, normal people often have to face. I found it a powerful reminder that often what stands between us and redemption is our own stubborn pride, and maybe a helping of fear. Eben could have stayed on the mainland and lost himself in the crowd. Instead he returned to this small island community in humility. He faced the stares and whispers, and came out stronger for the experience. It's a message I appreciated.