

The Catch

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Editor's Note		1
Tide of the Darkest Night Sharon Bray	<i>poetry</i>	3
Rainbow Smelt CPR Rob Rich	<i>nonfiction</i>	5
After the Splash Leslie Moore	<i>poetry</i>	12
Homecoming Ron Beard	<i>poetry</i>	13
Cormorant Judy Kaber	<i>poetry</i>	14
Churn and Break Judy Kaber	<i>poetry</i>	15
Awakening Angela Waldron	<i>nonfiction</i>	16
Nightlight Naphtali Fields	<i>poetry</i>	19
Little White House Lawrence Conrad	<i>poetry</i>	20
The Mackerel Fishermen Avery Booth Stone	<i>poetry</i>	21
Notes on Contributors		23

Editor's Note | *Leonore Hildebrandt*

The Catch features writings inspired by the fisheries and coastal heritage of Downeast Maine, and in this issue in particular, these two themes are tightly interwoven—the people who have made their homes near the coast have acquired traditions which enable them to care for fisheries and to protect wildlife. But our needs also put pressure on the fragile web of life, and our inherited knowledge is not offering ready-made ideas of how to relate to a changing natural world.

In her poem “Tide of the Darkest Night,” Sharon Bray powerfully captures the tension between the natural force of the tide and man-made floods. One may understand the darkness as belonging to the season, but also as a dangerous time in which “lost toys and tires / drift in with the new year.” The poem finally understates this danger when it concludes that the increasingly powerful tide “rearranges bricks and boulders.” Rob Rich seems to share the sense that the foundations are being “rearranged.” In his essay, “Rainbow Smelt CPR,” he looks at the smelt fishery, wondering whether “people overuse, and ultimately degrade, the natural resources they hold in common.” His writing is wonderfully rich as it evokes Downeast landscapes, the fish, and the smelt fishery, and in the end we have to agree with him that here “people depend on each other,” that neighbors and their places may engender local stewardship, and that a smelt fishery helps us protect the smelt.

Knowledge of the natural life, routed in a community's attention, is crucial for protecting both wildlife and a resource-based way of life. Leslie Moore's “After the Splash,” Ron Beard's “Homecoming,” and Judy Kaber's “Cormorant” all comment on the speaker's relationship to birds and fish. While these poets observe carefully, they are humble, and they don't overestimate their knowledge. The bald eagle “doesn't need me,” says Moore. Beard's osprey “knows” fish routes, and “salmon, too, perform some alchemy, / to return to their spawning river.” However, they are not unlike the speaker finding the “landscape of my familiars” as he journeys north. Kaber's cormorant “chooses” to swoop down, to “ride the pulsing rush of waves low / to the water, throb of drops against webbed feet.” The animals, here, are depicted as sure of their inherent elegance, their power. And in “Churn and Break,” the ocean, too, is evoked by a language both muscular and musical, when the “hard fists of white sea” are surging.

In “Awakening,” Angela Waldron evokes the past in a memoir of lobstering as a teenager. Here, too, we see how intimately people, land, and sea connect. To give names to features of one’s home signals the beginning of this lasting relationship. The place names Waldron so aptly includes speak volumes: “Whitehead,” “Two Bush Islands,” “Spruce Head Harbor,” “Home Harbor,” “Mussel Ridges,” “Owls Head Light,” and the “Rockland Breakwater.” These names help orient us both in the story and on our coastal landscape. Similarly, the naming of places in Naphtali Field’s hard-scrabble “Nightlight” creates a sense of neighborhood with its “Senior Center” and “Sipps Bay Cafe.” And in Conrad’s “Little White House,” neighborly feelings span all the way across a bay. Avery Booth Stone’s tribute to “The Mackerel Fishermen” concludes this issue of *The Catch*. We are reminded, the sailors depend on one another in the face of a storm, strangers may bury the dead. Finally, “All is quiet / The Island cemeteries / are soft beds for sailors / of the Great Mackerel Fleet.” The sailors and their past struggles shape our traditions, our heritage. It is up to us to protect it.

Tide of the Darkest Night | *Sharon Bray*

Tide of the darkest night
fills the Penobscot river channel—
a cleansing tide
a bringing tide.

Icy salt water and stiff wind
move out drift trees—pine, oak
and indeterminate after an uprooted year
floating, rubbing rocks, catching the shore.

Old river-driven logs,
pieces of winter-ravaged docks,
pieces of lost toys and tires
drift in with the new year.

River bank clay washes away monthly
adds to gooey mud flats
takes out steeply leaning trees
rearranges bricks and boulders.

Rainbow Smelt CPR | *Rob Rich*

Ice-out in Maine's Pleasant River estuary means smelt fishing is on. At least the commercial variety, the kind that comes as a net-gripping counter to winter's release, yielding such abundance, all-at-once, that it's fearful. It's fearful because Downeast Maine's smelt runs are among the largest and the last on the whole Atlantic coast, and nobody knows how long hauls will come. Plenty of smelt are taken recreationally through winter, plunked one-by-one with hook-and-line from dark holes, augured through ice. These harvests are a time-honored rite with their own story, offering a hard-earned reward for many a fisherman's family. But for non-fishing commoners, ice-out means that winter is over, and the promise of an overflowing gillnet is near.

For Maine's coastal communities at this seasonal brink, no other creatures have been so numerous and nourishing. Long before European settlers chanced upon the Pleasant River's fertile estuary, the Passamaquoddy people knew the smelts' annual return as a door to survival, opening to spring. Ever since, ice-out has been a phenological event that locals have hungered for, and climate change has made it a worthy one to record. In 2012, the March 13 breakup was nearly a month ahead of average, but it could not have come earlier for Columbia Falls' legendary smeltman, Sewall Look. As the ice lurched, drivers slowed through town with rubber-necked gazes cast down to the shore. There was no accident. Like the sign of a newly elected pope, they sought the smoke from Sewall's smelt shack, a sign that his wheeling-and-dealing had begun.

With ultra-thin scales and soft, tender bones, smelt are fast-food, Downeast style. After a beheading and quick ventral gutting, the whole body can be fried and devoured, tail and all. My grandfather ate smelt this way in Maryland, though by his Depression-era childhood the best smelt habitat was being polluted or ripped or dredged out of existence. The Chesapeake Bay had been among the smelt's southernmost ranges, and my grandfather's came in boxes on ice, most likely railed in relay from small towns along the Gulf of Maine.

When I came to work for the Downeast Salmon Federation (DSF), I had no idea the obscure little smelt would so dominate my early spring days. At a mere 6-8 inches, rainbow smelt (*Osmerus mordax*) rarely give cause for "big fish" stories, despite the tiny sharp teeth that try to make them bigger. In fact, when fattening on smaller fish, shrimp, and tiny crustaceans just

off the coast from May to November, smelt are nearly forgotten. But come winter, they congregate below estuary's crust, swirling in wait. And then, finally triggered by the early spring freshets and the cover of night, they throng streamward in mighty surges, thousands upon thousands of bodies pulsing just above tideline, to the oxygenated rush of riffles and the rest of still pools. There, on cobbles shaded by a tree-lined shore, their adhesive eggs will cling.

DSF came to realize the smelt were part of a story – a big one – that overlapped with the salmon they had formed to conserve. The story lay in the fact that, aside from their own carnivory, smelt are a forage fish, one of nature's eaten. While juvenile salmon swipe a few smelt in their months of freshwater growth, smelt are vital for post-spawn adult salmon returning to sea in the spring. Having not fed since entering freshwater the summer before, then spawning, then wintering over, these famished "black" salmon turn voracious as days lengthen and temperatures increase. In the estuaries, they too find smelt to be a first food, numerous and nourishing for a journey as far as Greenland.

Sensing these connections, I flinched at the way our organization condoned – and joined – the harvest, fearing our takings would drive both salmon and smelt to the coast's long list of loss. Even though Washington County had 63 percent more terrain than Rhode Island and three percent of its people. Even though our six tidal rivers were some of Maine's healthiest, lacking major pollutants or large hydro dams. Even then, I feared. The recreational smelt fishery remained open throughout the Gulf of Maine, and the commercial season stayed open in our far corner. My boss Dwayne had petitioned for the Downeast exemptions, even after the rainbow smelt became a federally recognized Species of Concern in 2004. While this term suggested the species was declining and at risk of endangerment, it lacked any formal protections, and I didn't quite feel the concern in it. But in its silence, Dwayne believed that *only* a fishery – a relationship with the fish – could sustain them. A fishery would prove that Downeast Maine was different.

Without knowing why or how it came to be so, the few tourists bold enough to go beyond Acadia National Park could tell you that. When I drove out my first autumn, I felt the difference too; in the pink granite darkening to gabbro, the crimson blueberry barrens rolling on, and on, and on. The land was exposed, yet inviolate, dented only by erratic boulders and towns quarried out of fresh glacial remnants. The stands of spruce and fir were sharp, piercing the sky. If the sky donned cobalt, the rent clouds refracted green on the sea; if gray, nor'easters could fester and whip froth on the clefts. It was all new and old at once, with an elemental palette shading a land

more raw and defiant and pure than I had ever known. But at first I could not fathom the strain its towns called normal, or how they would treat the smelt any differently from the salmon. Or the diverse stocks of groundfish – haddock, cod, flounder, and hake – that had been decimated more than 20 years ago, and had stayed decimated, on the coastal shelf nearby.

I'm sure Dwayne knew I smoldered with these thoughts when, in my first season, he walked me down to Sewall's shack. Sewall's was among the few shacks remaining, and standing upright, from the old pictures I had seen. Coupled with the brand-new one that DSF had just built the year before, the suite of cedar-shake huts bore a nostalgic, postcard glint. "Rob's here to count your fish," Dwayne said as we arrived, ushering me into the dark, smoky hovel. "Brah, they're already dead," cackled Sewall. But Dwayne just warned him not to give me too much trouble, then brought out the egg-slimed, scale-stuck plywood board I'd use to measure Sewall's catch. It had a crook where I'd notch the smelt's nose, then look down the embedded ruler to the tip of the tail. Easy enough. But the shack was tight, and Sewall also wanted to ensure I didn't clog the path for his periodic customers. There were wizened old ladies who extended cash from arthritic hands, but just as many hard-handed townsmen who shook on barter or just came to talk trash with Sewall. As I drew fish after fish after fish from the blueberry totfules on the doornside bench, I could hear everything but the numbers I tried to record. Every tale between Vietnam and the latest through-the-ice mishap coursed through ears, plus the sporadic grief I got for making the shack too hot. "It's like hell in here," Sewall would holler from his ratty, singed chair by the stove. "Can't you widen that door!"

I didn't remember this being anywhere on my job description, but perhaps I should have taken the hint when, during my interview, I'd been asked about how I would handle a flat tire on a rural night road in a blizzard. "Cell phone service doesn't always work for emergencies out here," Dwayne had added. I muddled through with something about the way my runner's endurance could get me to help in the worst situations, but in the shack there was no running away. I felt accomplice to what Garret Hardin predicted in "Tragedy of the Commons," the seminal 1968 article that proffered how people overuse, and ultimately degrade, the natural resources they hold in common. According to Hardin's logic, freedom was the culprit; rational people try to maximize their own self-interest, but in doing so are blind to the collective ruination they bring. I thought his example of graziers on a pasture was not far off from our

smelt fishermen, each hoping for the big haul, the big sale. Once, I tried to hurl sass back Sewall's way, asking if he worried about depleting the smelt of the Pleasant River. "Aww, she'll never run out," he threw back. I gulped, and kept counting my dead.

There were 80 pounds of smelt that first day. In handling each and every one of Sewall's even 200, I couldn't help getting to know the fish better. When fresh, Sewall told me "they smell like cucumbers," and sure enough, they did. The haul was about seventy-five percent males, the "roughbacks" with stubbly, olive dorsal sides. But that would change in the coming weeks, when more of the females came in – longer, softer, shinier – packed with pasty, mustard-grain eggs. Two of the fish had lamprey lesions, circular suction wounds pocked out from their sides. For the longest fish, I was told to take a few scales from just below the dorsal fin; with a microscope their rings could be reckoned, like a tree's, to track age and condition. But I took far more scales without wanting them, for they clung onto nylon worse than burs onto wool. And some of the eyes popped out in my counting, quicksilver sequins leaking black humor.

Given the state of the smelt, our commercial season was only two weeks long, and that was just fine with me. In addition to counting Sewall's fish, I rowed Dwayne about in his dory to set our own gillnets, listening to him wax poetic about experiments for the perfect mesh-size to reduce bycatch. Catching non-target species is one of the biggest issues any gillnet fishery must face, and there is no doubt that close attention to smelt behavior and size would inspire better nets, used better. These were things I'd always wanted commercial fishermen to do, and I'd come thinking my work for salmon would make "them" do it. But to my surprise, I *was* a commercial fisherman, helping unroll a net that could end hundreds of lives. And I was a pathetic oarsmen for the task, crying my embarrassment into the biting March wind. I wasn't sure if I could handle it, morally or physically, much longer. We were the only nonprofit conservation group I'd ever known to catch fish with a commercial license for our community fundraiser, a smelt fry.

It was this strategy, this conserve-the-declining-fish-by-eating-it, that left me feeling like a ludicrous hypocrite. But something brought me back the next morning, if not to count, then to pick from the ice-crusting nets on the winding loom. Slowly, my iron purism began to crack. "We can't save 'em if we don't know 'em," Dwayne would say. I could not argue with that, but did we have to kill them? To take them out of the food web forever? I couldn't garner the courage to ask these questions directly, but it was clear that Dwayne didn't see our work as total removal. His attitude was more about the subsistence of communities – both human and fish – and at times,

when I'd watch his beaten brow curdle and his steely eyes soften, it bordered on sacrament. One early morning, net-picking in our smelt shack with volunteers, Dwayne drew out a bucket. He told us to squeeze the eggs and milt together, the swirling mass like a punctured omelet, over-easy. "I'll put it back in the river," he said. "Maybe, it'll do some good."

If Downeast communities wished to save their smelt and eat them too, I started to see – in that place, at that time – Dwayne was right: they would have to be different. People would have to believe the river can do good, and believe that if they pay attention to the river, they can be part of its good. In assuming his protagonists were "rational" Garrett Hardin failed to give them feelings or neighbors or places. But the complex weave of the Downeast smelt economy is not solely a "rational" affair. People depend on each other, and such nested knowledge exists because they *care* for smelt that long have been – and still are – a first food of spring. There was a time when packers shipped smelt southward, but most markets gave up on smelt when flashier items like boneless chicken breasts entered the scene. And now, unlike the trophy tourism of Atlantic salmon or readily exportable, renderable groundfish stocks, a smelt fishery might thrive within the seasonal, local fidelities that lose meaning elsewhere.

In 2012, Elinor Ostrom died. Three years earlier she had become the first woman – and remains the only woman – to receive the Nobel Prize in Economics. Ostrom was no more for big governments than Sewall, but she was an unflagging champion of adaptive governance that empowered communities to make decisions that assured their future. And not just for people, but for the diversity of interconnected resources by which they are sustained. Ostrom won the prize largely for her studies of common pool resources (CPR) like fisheries, forests, or water. Unlike the detached metrics of traditional economic analyses, Ostrom drew heavily on case studies, conversations, and direct inquiries asking questions like "How did you come to establish that limit on the fish catch? How did you deal with the fact that people might try to get around it?"

While Ostrom touted examples of CPR management from the pastures of the Swiss Alps to the forests of Indonesia, she also celebrated Maine's lobster fishery as a success in co-management. U.S. lobster landings had bottomed out at 5-7 million pounds per year in the 1920s and 1930s, and after some restrictions, the annual catch hovered around 20 million pounds until the mid-1990s. The complex scheme of CPR stewardship began to yield inconceivably, peaking at 123 million pounds per year in 2012. Lobstermen had realized their livelihood depended on

how well they could compete *and* cooperate with each other. Drawing upon the best available science, they self-restricted entry into the industry, replaced dredging with traps, prevented sale of reproductive females, and protected both juvenile and old lobsters with strict size limits. But most of all, they established a competitive system of zones that each lobsterman felt compelled to steward and protect. If a lobsterman fished their zone too hard, it would not be possible to be legally re-licensed to a new zone, the lobsterman would have to join the 12-20 year waitlist.

Maine's lobster fishery does not hold the answers for the concerns of the smelt. Ostrom knew that the only thing that never works all the time is a panacea. Lobsters are relatively stationary and graspable, and unlike a gillnet smelt, they can be tossed back if too big or too small. But in all their celebrity at high-end restaurants, we forget that the lobsters' success is also their vulnerability. Historically, lobsters played a far lesser role amidst more diverse fisheries and ecosystems, and their populations have also soared because their groundfish predators have been largely eclipsed. When we forget that fish have lives that are apart from our own, there are times when fisheries must be closed. But when we forget that fish have lives that are a part of our own, there may be cause to keep them open.

In the beginning and the end, habitat will hold that hope. All talk on harvest means nothing without a home where fish can feed, breed, and find safety. For the salmon and the smelt, this means protecting the ocean, the estuary, the river, the stream, the streambank. And, the connections in these places, the process and function by which our watersheds work. By steadily improving in-stream passage and streamside health, DSF is learning why the smelt keep coming. They come for clear waters with cobbles that riffle the flow. They come for cool waters shaded by streambanks alive with trees (and, because any living community of trees includes the dead, they come for woody debris that offers both riffles and shade). They come for real places, like the run of Redmonds Creek (in Harrington) DSF has preserved for these qualities with smelt in mind. We may always struggle to maximize our needs with resources, but Ostrom would tell us that such complexities need not mean chaos. In watersheds, complexity is good. The trick of our time may be to affirm that resources are not resources after all, but relationships, links of need and love.

When Sewall passed away in 2015, I'm sure he went down proud to be right after all: the Pleasant River has not run out. The fishery outlives him, and his counts have become numbers in history, points in time. Together, they gave DSF a pulse of the river's smelt, and they affirmed

Sewall that we cared about his catch. We cared because we didn't want the river overfished. We cared because we didn't understand all that swirled beneath its surface. We cared because Sewall, in his own way, cared too. I knew it the day I found a single tomcod buried among the smelt of his tote. His singular bycatch was admirable, but I knew – or thought I knew – that Sewall would treat the tomcod again as a "trash fish," worth nothing more than bait. Though I'd seen him barter them off with lobstermen before, I couldn't bear the transaction again. And yet, when I told him I'd take the tomcod home to cook and eat, he gave. He was as surprised by my question as I was to ask it, and I knew then – *we* knew then – that our losses and our lives are one.

After the Splash | *Leslie Moore*

we step to the porch railing—
wine glasses in hand, Scrabble forgotten—
to spy a bird floundering in the cove,
dashing the sea with great, feathered
downbeats, almost obscured by the spray.
It's a bald eagle and my heart thrashes with it.

I'm ready to canoe to the rescue,
my husband paddling, me leaning
over the bow, poised to pluck a frantic,
flapping, full-grown eagle out of the sea
in my bare arms. Its wing span is wider
than I am tall, its beak a scimitar.

But the bald eagle doesn't need me.
It settles onto the water, plump as a duck,
turns beak to shore, scoops the sea with
feathery palms, and climbs out on a rocky
shelf, dragging in one talon a fish,
huge and silvery in the sunlight.

Homecoming | *Ron Beard*

The osprey knows.
Sitting ready in the snag of a pine,
waiting for the return of the herring
from far out to sea, waiting for their blue backs
to sparkle and splash
in the mouth of the stream, pushing
up and through the tumbling standing wave of fresh
mixing with salt, up and over the ledge in fast current
driving through to the first pool.

The osprey knows the herring must return to the same stream
they left as fingerlings. Before
the compass, before we scratched
ink on vellum, the herring used what--
whiff of elements, tang of particles, magnetic pull,
magic-- to call them home?

Not just the river herring,
salmon, too, perform some alchemy,
to return to their spawning river,
generations fighting past harbor seals,
past the nets of fishermen, up stream
to lay eggs, release milky sperm.

I pass under osprey-eyed guards, beyond the jaws
of sniffer dogs, poked and padded, x-rayed,
jammed in too-small seats,
a long night of flight, blinking
in morning light before the journey north,
something calling
from the granite past of these heathered hills,
some scent from wind-twisted pine
marking the landscape of my familiars.

Cormorant | *Judy Kaber*

You stand steadfast when I arrive. Perched
high above the river on overhead wires,
your black backs lustrous, heads alert to
any change of current below. You cling,
more patient than I could ever be waiting

in some interminable line to eat, and survey
the shifting current below. Sea crow
they call you, but there is nothing
of the common cawing backyard tyrant
in you. As still and sure as the prow

of a ship ready to launch, the sea
is yours. When you choose, you ride
the pulsing rush of waves, low
to the water, throb of drops against
webbed feet. Then you dive—straight,

swift. Rise with fish flicking in your beak.
Back on the wire with your fellows,
you spread your wings, preen. Balance
between river and sky, consider me
insignificant with your aqua marine eyes.

Churn and Break | *Judy Kaber*

in response to Churn and Break by George Bellows, 1913

Boots firm on the lichen
rich rock licked with spray,
he pauses before descent,
each step viscous as paint

laid dark in the foreground.
He clutches the panel lest
the wind bind it up and whip
it into sea tinged

with purple, lines of white,
small bit of crimson. Caught
in a stampede of strokes,
the air grows explosive,

a mass of gray. Fish stark
as lost speech. Hard fists
of white sea, tempestuous,
surging. Splayed wet-on-wet

straining to hear the canvas's song.
Wings borne of seabirds. Twelve
nautical miles off the mainland
isolated in this granite torrent

of time. In the background, the sky
grows straight down, drags
of mostly lighter gray
hints of pale pink beneath.

Awakening | *Angela Waldron*

Throughout my teenage years, my principle summer job was going sternman on the *Penny*, my father's 32' wooden lobster boat. The money was good and I loved being out on the water, but going from a night owl to an early bird proved an adjustment for both of us. Although I set my alarm for 4 a.m., Dad usually had to come in and wake me up. Treading cautiously, he'd open my bedroom door so the baritone drone of WKRD's weather report and the smell of freshly brewed coffee wafted in, then he'd give me a gentle prod. More than once, in a last ditch attempt to wake me he'd climb up and jump on my bed, which got me out of bed faster than any alarm simply because he enjoyed it way too much. I'd stumble out of bed and into my work clothes and out to the blindingly bright kitchen to the dining room where Dad would be eating his cereal and toast. I usually drank my coffee in the dark living room and stared at our reflections in the picture window, savoring the ephemeral limbo of the pre-work day and waiting for the caffeine to kick in.

A half hour later, dinner pails in hand, we sauntered down the dark road to the mooring, the air laden with moisture and the smell of brine, wet wood and spruce, the scuff of our rubber boots hitting the asphalt drowned out by the dueling fog horns from Whitehead and Two Bush Islands that seemed to pierce right through the density. After Dad got seated in the rowboat, I assumed my position facing him, crouched down in the bow, already mesmerized by the otherworldly glow of the green phosphorescence that exploded each time the oars hit the water. Well before 5 a.m. we'd be steaming out of Spruce Head harbor headed for Home Harbor over in the Mussel Ridges to the first string of traps.

If we were hauling offshore, I'd climb down in the hold for a quick snooze. Undeterred by the loud noise, vibrations, and oily fumes of the engine, I'd nestle down in the jumble of life preservers and sweatshirts and within minutes be fast asleep. I instinctively woke to the sound of the engine slowing down, a sign that we were nearing the first trap. By then dawn had broken, the fog had lifted, and everything had woken up from its slumber and was clambering to be heard, especially the seagulls—the sternman's nemesis—flying rats we called them, so bold they'd try to grab a bait bag right out of your hand.

I pulled on my damp, greasy oilskins and smelly work gloves and assumed my position. Using the gaff, Dad caught the rope and pulled it and the buoy up and onto the winch, which at full speed yanked the wooden trap up from the ocean bed in a spray of water and the noise of lobster claws snapping and tails flipping and crabs scuttling sideways. It was my job to open the trap, clean out sea urchins, save rock crabs for my mother to boil and pick, remove the old bait bag and using the bait iron, string on a fresh one. While I was doing this, he'd toss the shorts and notched females back in the water and measure the "keepers". In between traps I plugged the lobster's claws with a wooden plug each so they couldn't harm each other, work on filling my quota of two hundred bait bags a day, clean starfish and urchins from the floor of the boat and keep the seagulls at bay.

We'd break for coffee about half way through, after we'd hauled a hundred or so traps, and eat a lunch while idling to the next string of traps. But on this particular day, a peculiar sort of ennui beset us, not so much a lack of motivation, but rather an awakening of a dormant restlessness that plagued both of us. We looked down in the lobster crate, nearly full already, then at the Ritz crackers and peanut butter we kept stocked on the boat and then at each other. Finally, Dad said, "We've got enough lobsters for the day, how 'bout we quit while we're ahead and steam to Rockland for some breakfast? No one will ever know!" With the promise of adventure we switched gears like we did this everyday and headed full throttle for Rockland. I finished filling bait bags in record time and then stood up in the house with him, looking out over the vast horizon, lost in a reverie in the making.

Eventually, he handed over the wheel and stood beside me for the next hour as we passed the northern tip of Monroe Island, then close by Owls Head Light and the Rockland Breakwater. We tied up to the float at the Rockland public landing and walked up Park Street to the Wayfarer in our cut-off flannel shirts and high rubber boots.

For those of you who don't know, the Wayfarer East was for many years a Rockland institution situated at the corner of Park and Union Streets. It was a combination hotel/restaurant with a dark shabby bar that smelled of stale cigarette smoke when you walked in, but put on a good

feed served by career waitresses who knew each customer by name and their order. Francis was working the room, per usual, a neighbor quite unlike any of the other lobstermen's wives I knew, hair teased high, red lipstick and painted nails, large hoop earrings and sparkling rings on each finger, chewing gum. "Well, if it ain't a couple of Spruce Headers, ain't you supposed to be haulin'?" Dad replied, "Jeez Frannie, just had to come to town and have breakfast, don't tell on us!" Sitting in the Wayfarer, mid-morning during the work week eating scrambled eggs and sausage felt downright naughty, like playing hooky from school, and the fact that we were in it together made me a proud partner in crime.

We drank coffee and ate and chatted with Francis, who'd stop by in between tables and give us warm-ups and ask how the family was doing and wasn't fishing just awful right now. We agreed because no lobsterman will ever disclose how good the catch is. Knowing how well the season had been going with record numbers of lobsters being landed and the very reason we knocked off work in the first place, I just nodded my head in agreement. "It's been just terrible, really."

Neither of us wanted to break the spell, but we had to get back to Spruce Head to sell what we had already caught, so we said goodbye and left, feeling full, free, and happy. What had started out as just another predictable day lobstering had assumed an idyllically illicit nature that showed me at that young age that even responsible adults with adventurous spirits can endure and even thrive on hard work and routine as long as they are flexible enough to seize the moment and allow the momentary lapse of reason and duty needed to see serendipity through. Turns out we are a lot alike, he and I.

Nightlight | *Naphtali Fields*

When Daddy went tipping,
came home with the first money
since the woolen mill closed
Mama didn't smile.

She's got her shift at the Senior Center
and then the Sipps Bay Cafe
so I make dinner now,
Campbell's soup, grilled cheese, cut off the crusts.

And it was me home with the little boys
the day Daddy came crazy-spinning-tires up the road.
Door cracks like a shot
and he's laughing, dumping out a box on the ground.

"Get extension cords, Annie!"
And I do, stretch every one of 'em out
even the twisty blue one
that keeps the living room lit.

"Well looky there" and we look,
Bo's nose runnin' and Ezra in socks
but the trailer is glowing
a dance of rainbow lights.

And it doesn't matter that we blew a fuse
and Ms. Packer complained about the bright
because when Lynn dropped off Mama that night
she held her arms to Daddy and smiled.

Little White House | *Lawrence Conrad*

It's there every morning
When I get up
And sit in my favorite chair
To read and drink my coffee
Except when it's foggy
Then it's not there
The little white house
It sits on a hill
Surrounded by trees
Across the bay
Framed like a photograph
By the trees on our side
Too far to see any people there
But I can imagine them
Every morning
Sitting in their little white house
Drinking coffee and reading
Looking across the bay
At our little yellow house
Framed like a photograph
By the trees on their side
Except when it's foggy
Then we're not there

The Mackerel Fishermen | *Avery Booth Stone*

New England mackerel fishermen they were
Tall rigged, fast and able
fishing off Prince Edward Island
In the Gulf of Saint Lawrence
Off The Labrador

When that tell-tale ripple of their finny
prey ruffled the water's surface
They crowded on all sail
flung the seines over
And sailed into the schools with
deadly course and steady hand

But quick as they were these schooners were no match
for the great wind that swept down from the north
They felt the danger
Felt the awful seas begin to build
Shortened sail and flew to the nearest harbor of refuge

Wheeling around to plunge through the entrance they tacked about
 Looking for room to dock along the shore
 for room to anchor among the fleet of schooners
 already moored

Helpless as wind dismantled them and
 flung them high upon the strand

Outside the harbor all along the Island shore
 was a forest of masts askew
 tatters of sails clinging to spars
 broken backs and shattered hulls
Spewing their crews into sandy surf to their deaths

All is quiet
The Island cemeteries
 are soft beds for sailors
 of the Great Mackerel Fleet
Laid to rest by strangers who knew them not

Respected as men of great courage
 men of great faith that their strength
And the wonders of their schooners
 would keep them alive
 would make it all right
 would see them through the night.

Notes on Contributors

Ron Beard works with the Downeast Fisheries Partnership and finds inspiration from the persistence of wild creatures in their various seasonal migrations. His poem was written at Moniak Mhor, in Scotland, his ancestral home, and where salmon still swim wild.

Sharon Bray lives on family land in Orland, Maine, beside the tidal eastern channel of the Penobscot River. She is a journalist and poet with experience in science writing, newspapers, and journal publishing. She currently freelances for Penobscot Bay Press. Her poems have been published in *Bangor Metro*, *Puckerbrush*, *Echoes*, *Wolf Moon*, *Take Heart*, *Book of Tentacles*, *The Wildest Peal*, and Maine Poets Society anthologies.

Larry Conrad is originally from Columbus, Ohio, but is now a resident of Florida with a summer home in Downeast Maine. He retired in 2008 after working thirty-nine years for the Department of Defense. He holds both bachelor's and master's degrees in business administration from Ohio University. His poems have been published in *Echoes* and *The Quoddy Tides*; his work in this issue is from his book *Musings of a Waterside Poet*.

Naphtali Fields recently moved to Downeast Maine and has been struck by the generosity and friendliness, despite sometimes difficult economic circumstances. Her poem was inspired by a cold evening's walk around her neighborhood in Eastport.

Leonore Hildebrandt is the author of *The Work at Hand* and *The Next Unknown*. A third collection, *Where You Happen to Be*, is forthcoming with Deerbrook Editions. She has published poems and translations in *Cerise Press*, the *Cimarron Review*, *Denver Quarterly*, *Drunken Boat*, *The Fiddlehead*, *Poetry Daily*, *Poetry Salzburg Review*, and the *Sugar House Review*, among other journals. She was nominated twice for a Pushcart Prize. A native of Germany, Leonore lives "off the grid" in Harrington, Maine. She teaches writing at the University of Maine and also serves on the editorial board of the *Beloit Poetry Journal*.

Judy Kaber was born in Brooklyn, NY, grew up on Long Island, but has spent most of her life in Maine. She taught elementary school for 34 years and is recently retired. Her poems have been published in *The Guardian*, *Off the Coast*, *The Comstock Review*, *Wolf Moon Journal*, *Eclectica*, and *The Café Review*. She won the Maine Postmark Poetry Contest in 2009, the Larry Kramer Memorial Chapbook Contest in 2011, and, most recently, earned second place in the 2016 Muriel Craft Bailey Contest judged by Marge Piercy. She lives in Belfast.

Leslie Moore is a poet, printmaker, and pen-and-ink artist. She lives in Belfast, Maine. "After the Splash" was published in *Take Heart: a Conversation in Poetry* (2014) and in *Take Heart: More Poems from Maine* (2016).

Rob Rich is a naturalist and writer exploring where people connect with land, water, plants, and wildlife. In addition to over a decade of nonprofit conservation experience throughout New England and the Pacific Northwest, Rob has taught field ecology and writing, grown native plants with Fourth Corner Nursery, and banded birds with the US Fish and Wildlife Service. A

former contributing editor-intern with *Camas* and *Bellingham Review*, Rob has also published with *High Country News*, *Northern Woodlands*, *Earth Island Journal*, and others.

Avery Booth Stone lives in Belfast, Maine. This is her first published poem.

Angela Waldron has a bachelor's degree in anthropology from the University of Maine. Her writing is inspired by her heritage; ancestors who worked as fishermen, lobstermen, and in the granite industry; and her love of adventure and travel. Her work has appeared in *Down East*, *Kindred Spirit*, *Knives Illustrated*, and *Renaissance*. She has won numerous awards from the *Writers Digest* annual competition. She is currently working on a book about traditional occupations and the institution of the trade guild in Turkey. She lives in Union, Maine.