The Catch

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The Catch: Writings from Downeast Maine Volume VI 2018

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Welcome to Volume Six of The Catch: Writings from Downeast Maine!

This journal was launched in association with the Downeast Fisheries Trail, a maritime heritage education initiative in Downeast Maine that features 45-plus sites of historic and active fishing interest. The trail celebrates and shares fisheries stories past and present.

This volume of *The Catch* in particular shows this then-and-now focus, while also revealing the tensions that exist when present situations change how we think about the past.

"Rosie Wallace is a Seal" is Robin Hansen's second story set in fictitious Ice Harbor, Maine. Both it and its predecessor, Ice Harbor Mittens, bring north Atlantic folk legends to life on the modern coast of Maine. Sadly, the modern coast is a place where entanglements in fishing gear are a serious threat to the endangered North Atlantic right whale, as presented by Hansen and echoed by Carl Little's poem, a tribute to Spinnaker, a humpback whale that died on the rocky edge of Mount Desert Island.

This somewhat dark beginning continues with poems about cold and storms, drunkeness and death. The coast of Maine is not always the happy, sunny, summer place. Sometimes it is miserable and dark. Matt Bernier has written a thoughtful tribute to Jed Wright, a U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service ecologist who took his own life in October 2017 following a struggle with severe anxiety. Bernier, who also works in habitat restoration, contemplates the loss to the habitat conservation community and specifically endangered Atlantic salmon, finding hope in Wright's legacy that can be found in any of Maine's salmon rivers.

Bernier brings us out of the dark with his second poem, with a play on words that transitions well to Aliya Uteuova's essay on the Shakespearean saying "The world is your oyster." Uteuova is a new writer to *The Catch*, as are Robin Hansen, Mary Lyons, and Christina Gillis. This volume also introduces two new features: a profile of an individual working in Downeast Maine fisheries (an interview with Robin Alden) and an oral history. Patrick Shepard's experience and wisdom demonstrate the importance of talking to fishermen about the past in the present, so that we might have a better future.

We end on the side of joy, as Gillis answers where the blueberries are, and Pat Ranzoni exalts in the possibilities of restoration and re-creation. I hope you share some secret knowledge and myth, and find your own blueberries this summer. And remember to revisit to this volume in the fall when the days again get short, dark, and some cold.

- Catherine Schmitt

Rosie Wallace is a Seal | *Robin Hansen*

“Rosie Wallace is a seal,” Josiah Eldredge’s cousin Sam said as they walked up the road from the wharf. It was three weeks after school let out. Sam was fishing full time, and Josy was his stern man, filling bait bags and banding lobster claws.

They’d just sold 80 pounds of lobster at Clint’s, mostly one to one-and-a-half-pound shedders, the soft-shell lobsters the summer visitors liked. It was a record day for the Lily Mae. Sam had hauled traps, emptied them, and sent them flying off the stern of Lily Mae all morning. Josiah had filled bait bags with chopped pogies and banded lobsters until his arms felt like he couldn't lift one more full bait bag and his hands could barely squeeze the banding jig. He was pretty wrung out and looked forward to eating dinner and lazing for an hour or so.

Out on the water that morning, they'd seen a little harp seal on a rock with its tail in the air, the way seals set out on the rocks, and they'd started talking about seals. And seal people. Selkies.

When Josy first saw it, Sam joked, “Maybe it’s a selkie.” Josy thought he’d said, “Cell key,” and asked if he meant a password and didn't understand how a little seal could be a password.

When Sam explained, Josy didn't know what to think. Sam said selkies were seals who landed on beaches in Newfoundland and Labrador and took off their seal skins and became people, who danced in a circle on the beach. If a fisherman liked one of the women, he could steal her seal skin. Then she’d have to marry him and stay with him. Unless she found her seal skin, put it on, and returned to the sea as a seal. “You mean you never heard of *selkies? Seal people?*” Sam said. “What do you *do* in winter? Watch TV?”

“No-oh,” Josy drawled and stuffed pogie chunks into a bait bag.

“Don't your part of the family get together to tell tales and all?” Sam asked.

Josy shrugged and put some more fish into another bait bag. “ ’Course we do,” he said. “Just never heard about seal people, that’s all.” He pulled the drawstring on the last bait bag and tied it firmly. “Not sure I believe in it anyways.”

They stopped talking about seals then, because Sam had an idea to put traps in a new spot near the harbor. When they reached the spot, they found out their uncle had beat them there with traps of his own. His white and black buoys dotted the water around the point.

“Shouldn'a mentioned it out loud,” Sam grumbled and gunned Lily Mae's engine off toward the Ledge.

But coming up from the wharf later, Sam had said that: “Rosie Wallace is a seal. You know that, right?”

“Aunt Rosie?” Josy was astonished. Rosie was his Uncle Elmon Wallace’s wife and wasn't from Ice Harbor. She was from way up north but she talked close to right, like Ice Harbor people. Uncle Elmon always said he picked her off a rock near Newfoundland. Josy had always imagined her standing there in her dress and apron, kind of like she might be when he was coming in from fishing, and waving to Elmon, maybe calling to lure him in. But now Sam said she was a seal. So she had probably been naked, since where would a seal get clothes? Probably not from Walmart.

“Yup. Uncle Elmon stole her sealskin, so she couldn't go back to being a seal, and he loved her and brought her home. They got married in Canada, on account of her being a seal, she couldn't get married in the church in Ice Harbor. Because seals ain't Christian. That’s why his parents hate her.”

“They hate her? Because she’s a seal?” Josy said, amazed again. He knew there was something different about Aunt Rosie. She didn't look like everyone else with her straight black hair that she wore in a knob on top of her head. Sort of like an Indian, but not. But that was how she had always looked. Josy had never given it a thought.

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At supper, he asked his mother. “Sam says Aunt Rosie Wallace is a seal. A *selkie,*” he said.

“That’s what I heard, too,” his mother said and scooped some more fish hash onto his plate.

"Does that mean she's not normal? That she can change back into a seal and swim away? Back to Newfoundland? What about her kids? Can they do that too?"

"I don't know, Josy. Their two older kids are from Elmon's first wife, but Elise looks a lot like her mother. The way the story goes is that Elmon hid her sealskin away, and if she found it she'd put it on and become a seal again. And swim away. That's the story anyhow. But she knows where her sealskin is. I think Rosie likes living in Ice Harbor with Elmon and raising his children. Once she showed me her sealskin. She keeps it in a big, plastic trash bag in her closet. It's a real seal skin and she knows where it is, but she stays here. I think she loves Elmon as much as he loves her."

Josy chewed on fish hash and that idea. *Maybe she can change any time she wants,* he thought. *Maybe that little seal out there on the rocks was really Aunt Rosie Wallace in her sealskin. No, it was way too small….*

"Why don't you ask her yourself?" his mother asked.

Josy shrugged.

"She likes to bake cookies for you kids," his mother added. "I don't think she'd mind telling you about her people."

Josy flushed hot and shook his head hard. He wouldn't dare ask Aunt Rosie about her being naked on the rocks off Newfoundland.

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Another day, Josy took his clam rake and walked down to the mud flats at low tide, thinking to dig a mess of clams for their supper.

Aunt Rosie's daughter Elise was already there. She had a pail brimming full and was working on a second.

"Hi, Josy. How are ya?" she greeted him. "You digging?"

"Yup."

"Clams or worms?"— although she could tell easy enough if she looked at his rake, which had longer tines than a worm rake and a shorter handle than a quahog rake.

"Clams," Josy mumbled, looking sideways at Elise. *Why'd Sam have to go and start something like that, about seals?* Now he couldn't even dig clams with Elise without wondering if she had a seal skin tucked away somewhere, or if she had something about her that was seal-like. Maybe flippers instead of feet. Or whiskers around her upper lip. She was two grades ahead of him in school, so he never really looked at her closely. Maybe she could—

"It's all dug out where you are." She broke in on his thoughts. "Come on over here, and there's quahogs and clams. Razor clams, too."

Now that he looked at the mud instead of at Elise, he could see that it was dug out. But he felt stupid doing what a girl told him to do, so he drove his rake into the mud where he was, and tipped it back, driving one tine through an undersized clam and turning up a scattering of baby clams, tiny as grains of rice.

She said, "I know your mom — "

Josy looked up sharply. What did she know about his mom? Would she witch his mom? What could selkies do to you? They must have magic powers. If her mother was a seal, then she was half seal. If that stuff was true. Which it couldn't be.

"— she likes razor clams for chowder. Come on over here. There's nothing over there."

As she spoke, a razor clam in her clam bucket jumped a good foot into the air and landed in the mud about three feet away.

"Losing your razor clams," Josy said. He sploshed over and grabbed the long shell before the clam could burrow into the mud. "You're going to dig razor clams, you need a lid on your clam bucket." He said, dropping the clam on top of the others in her bucket.

Since he was there already, he thought it would be all right now to dig some clams. Now that it wouldn't look like he was doing what she told him to.

And she was right. There were lots of razor clams, with their slit-like breathing holes. His mom *would* like them for a chowder. Of course, now he

wondered: *Does she know about this spot because she's part seal? Or because she digs clams a lot?*

He tried to figure out how to ask her about being a seal and what it felt like to have a mother who could turn into a seal. Or if all that was true at all. He finally thought he would say, "Have you ever tried on your mom's seal skin?" so it wouldn't sound like he was accusing her of anything, but then maybe she would talk about it a little bit.

When he looked up to say that, she was climbing the path up the cliff with her two buckets of clams. "See ya!" she called down and waved, her reddish dark hair flinging around her shoulders as she turned away.

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Sam didn't seem to care that Elise might be something magical, something other than a girl in eighth grade. It was about a week later that Sam and Elise were walking down to the wharf together when Josy caught up with them, carrying his dinner pail with a lobster sandwich and a thermos of leftover razor clam chowder.

Sam joked, "Well, lookahere. Looks like little Josy didn't sleep in after all. Guess you can't stern for me today, Libs."

Josy went hot in the face and looked at the clock on the general store. He wasn't late.

"He's just messing with you, Josy," Elise said. "Sam invited me to come along today."

"You're going out with us?" Josy asked, astonished.

Sam was looking a little goofy and acting even stranger. Josy figured it was something that he wasn't sure he wanted to deal with. So he didn't. Though he sure couldn't figure out why Sam would act out in front of Elise.

Well, maybe it would be helpful to have a seal on board if they ran into trouble. Maybe she would …

He glanced at her sideways: She didn't even have a dinner pail, so she couldn't possibly have her seal skin with her. If she even had one. Yeah, the whole thing was all foolishness.

When Josy got in the dory, Sam took the sculling oar and set it in the notch in the transom. "*I'll* get us out there today," Sam said.

"But *I'm* — " Josy started, but Sam interrupted him.

"You sit up in the bow to balance her." By her, he meant the dory, not Elise, who was seated firmly on the bench at midships.

Sam always sat on the midships bench and watched while Josy sculled out to the mooring where Lily Mae lay in the morning calm. Josy knew then that he'd been looking forward to being the oarsman, showing off a little to Elise that he could handle a sculling oar even though he was only in fifth grade.

That was how the morning went. Sam showed Elise how the hydraulic winch worked to haul up the traps — like her father wasn't a lobster fisherman, which he was — and how to set them on the side deck.

Elise kept smiling and nodding and saying, "Mm, hm. Yup," softly, over and over. "Oh, yeah? Mm, hm. Really?" But Sam didn't get it and kept on telling her things she probably already knew.

Sam stood proud as he gunned the engine and yet another trap flew off the stern to splash in the wake of the boat.

Sam showed her how to measure the lobster's carapace to decide whether to keep it or throw it back. "From behind the eye to the back of the shell," he told her. Smaller than the short side of the gauge was too little — a "short" — and went back to grow up. Longer than the long side it went back too.

Like she'd never sterned for her father. Which she had.

"And if it's got eggs all over her like this — " Sam turned a female lobster over and spread the tail so Elise could see the green-black eggs it held there — "you can't take her. We're supposed to notch her tail, so the next fisherman who pulls her up can tell she's a female." Sam took out his knife and cut a little notch in the she-lobster's tail, pushing Josy out of the way a little to use his work table.

Josy noticed Elise's lips were moving as Sam spoke. She was saying the same thing at the same time as Sam. She knew all about lobsters. "Really? I'll be careful then. Of the Mama lobsters," she said. She smiled and looked at Sam all googly-eyed.

When Sam set a couple of lobsters on the tray for Josy to band, he said to Elise, “Josy can show you how to band the claws. Josy, show her. Let her band a couple.”

Josy wished he could head home right now and forget today. Trouble was, he wasn't the skipper and didn't get to decide.

Elise rescued him. “It’s okay, Josy. I know how to band lobsters.” But then she made it worse. “Want me to give you a hand?”

Josy was already hot in the face in spite of the brisk breeze out of the north. He was so hot he felt like his eyes were about to pop out. “No,” he muttered.

Then, louder: “No. Thanks. I'm good, ’Lise. But thanks for asking.”

Elise was fine with that and stepped back, watched lazily as Sam hauled in the second in a string of traps.

“Thought Clyde Wallace asked you to check his gill nets. Since he’s sick,” she said, just soft enough that she could be heard over the scream of the winch.

“Yeah. When I get a minute,” Sam said, settling the trap on Lily Mae’s sidedeck and opening its kitchen door. He tossed out a sea cucumber and a six-inch-long tinker mackerel, then fished a lobster out.

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“Sam?” The concern in Elise’s voice made Josy look up. “There’s something floating in the water over there.” She pointed out to the south of the Ledge. “It’s — it’s huge. It's covered in barnacles. Maybe somebody’s boat keeled over.” Elise was pointing off to where Clyde’s gill net was supposed to be. She bounced on her toes. “Sammy! It's swimming! It's a whale. I think it’s a whale.”

“Little close in for a whale.” Sam measured and put the lobster on Josy’s table. “You sure?” He looked where she was pointing. “Gory. It is. It’s a whale. A huge one. And where’s Clyde’s gill net? It should be right there. Do you see his buoys?”

Josy looked up too, wanting to see the whale, but what he saw was the top of a whale, lying still in the water. It wasn't huge. What he could see was about the size of his father's pick-up. And it wasn't moving. "Looks dead," he said.

Elise saw the small whale too. "There's a baby!"

"The other one must be its mom," Sam said, and shook his head. "The little one must have got tangled in Clyde's nets and drowned. Tough."

A great "whooosh," came from beyond the small whale, and Josy saw a V-shaped spout of steam shoot up. It was the other whale, closer and bigger than any animal he had ever seen. It was like a submarine.

On the tail of the "whooosh" came another smaller "whoosh," from the whale Josy had seen first.

Elise laughed. "It's alive! The baby's alive."

"Probably not for long," Sam said.

"One of Clyde's buoys is under the little one," Elise announced. "The baby's all tangled in the net. Can you get closer, Sam? I think I can see the other buoy, up by its head."

Sam was edging Lily Mae up to the little whale. "Don't want to get tangled in his nets, too" he muttered. "That must be its mother, over there. Minding her calf. She's going to be mad if we get in too close to her calf. Clyde's going to be hopping mad, it messing up his gill net like this."

"My mom can fix his nets, no problem," Elise said. "But can we help the baby get untangled?"

Sam shrugged. "I bet Clyde'll want to shoot it. Drag it in, butcher it, and freeze the meat." Sam said. "It's against the law, but he'll figure it'll pay for his nets."

"No-oh! Sam!" Elise cried.

Josy had seen whales before, from a distance at sea, but also in their science book at school. He could see the look of it now. "Look at the shape of it. It's all head. It's one of them migrates outside the islands. It's a right whale. They're endangered. There's only 485.5 left in the world. He can't kill it."

Sam snorted. "You dork. How can there be a .5 whale?"

"I don't know. Sounded good. 485.5. Like a real number. A statistic. Maybe it's only 485. I don't know."

But Sam was thinking. "So it's a right whale. Which means it's a wrong whale. The wrong whale to kill, anyways."

"Please, Sam! You wouldn't kill it? It's a baby. With its mother right there, watching?" Elise begged. "Let's go get my mom. She'll know what to do. She can talk to whales. And she can fix the nets afterwards."

A thrill ran up Josy's back and he thought: *Aunt Rosie's going to turn into a seal and go untangle the nets. She's going to do it! I'll be able to see it happen.* He felt like he had when he first saw his compass mittens light up in the fog to show them the way home. To see a selkie change from a human back into a seal! That would be something to tell. Forever. "Yeah, Sam. Let's go get Aunt Rosie."

Sam fiddled with the engine control, gunning it in little growls, then began to back the boat away. "Could be dead before we get back," he said flatly, then looked at Elise and smiled. "We can try though."

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Josy hadn't seen Aunt Rosie since he heard she was a seal, a selkie. When they got to her door, she was mopping down the kitchen floor and listening to the radio.

But when Elise told her about the trapped baby whale and its frightened mother, she turned off the radio quick enough.

"Oh boy, oh boy-o," Aunt Rosie said. It was something she said when she was worried. She shook her head.

"Momma, can you help them? Can you do something? Can you talk to the mother whale? and get the baby untangled?"

"Oh boyohboy," Aunt Rosie said again. "My father and my uncle hunt whales. And they sings to them to tell them that we honors them. I don't know the songs outright. And they does other things too, the day before, to honor the whale. I haven't been home in years. I wouldn't know how — "

"Maybe if you dress in your sealskins and sing them a song telling them to be calm and you'll help them, they'll recognize who you are and let us cut the baby free," Elise pursued. "Nobody else can do it, Momma."

"Seems like I heard of a lobster boat leading a whale out to sea playing music," Sam said. "That whale liked classical music best, they said. Mozart."

Aunt Rosie nodded. "Yup. 'Twas right here in Lowell's Cove. But you say there's a baby. And it's fetched up in Clyde's gill nets." She emptied her cleaning bucket into the sink. "So that's different. 'Lise can probably get the little one out of the gill nets if he'll stay quiet for me. Don't tell Clyde, though, till it's done, or he'll have my skin."

Josy thought, She must mean Clyde Wallace would want her *seal* skin. Then she would be his, like she was Elmon's now. So it must be true. "We won't tell anyone, Aunt Rosie," he said. "Can you do it?"

She was already pulling a black plastic trash bag out of the bedroom she shared with Uncle Elmon. "Oh, boyohboy. Sure and I'll give it try. Long as that momma don't get upset. We uses your dory, Sam? You tows it out there with your boat and turns it loose. We doesn't want to use an engine any more than we gots to. Then I gets in close to the little fellow. If I can talk to the momma."

Aunt Rosie in her sealskin parka looked like an Eskimo, more than Josy had ever noticed. He wondered when she was going to change into a seal, but didn't dare say anything. He also noticed that she had her skirt and shirt and her shoes and stockings on underneath and wondered how that would work. Would her clothes disappear?

They piled into Elmon's pickup, Elise and Josy and Aunt Rosie in the cab and Sam in the truck bed. Aunt Rosie drove them back to the wharf. She frowned at the road ahead.

Josy finally dared, squished in between Aunt Rosie and Elise, who were both pretty solid people. "Can you really talk to whales, Aunt Rosie?"

"Anybody can talk to them, Josy. Question is: Does they listen? Does they answer? My uncle and my grandpa and the angakok talks to Whale Man and the whale does what Whale Man says. They say that's true." She laughed and nodded. "That *is* true! And they sings to the whale when they hunts it so it

will give itself to them. But this is different. Maybe I can be polite and tell Momma Whale not to worry." She laughed gently. "If we're not too late," she added and nodded again. "Oh boy."

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They were not too late.

The baby spouted as soon as they came in sight of the mother.

Sam motored up to the whales as quietly as possible, directed by Aunt Rosie from the dory. Elise and Josy were in the dory with her.

Elise said, "She's getting nervous, Sam. Don't get too close. No closer."

Sam cut Lily Mae's engine until it was idling, like when he hauled traps.

The big whale went under, then came up beside the lobster boat, so close that Sam reached out to touch it, but couldn't quite.

"It's okay, Mom," he said softly. "Go talk to Aunt Rosie."

Instead, the whale bumped against the lobster boat, nearly knocking Sam down. It slid underwater again.

Aunt Rosie suddenly started talking. Talking loud. And what she was saying sounded different from anything Josy had ever heard, soft and rolling and clicking.

At first he thought he'd somehow lost his place in her words, but then he realized he didn't recognize a single word of what she was saying. Then he caught an "Oh boy" in the middle of Aunt Rosie's speech. She might be talking seal-ish or whale-ish, but she still said, "Oh boy."

Elise was grinning her face off. "Way to go. Momma!" she said.

"What's she saying?" Josy asked.

Elise grinned some more. "She says, hello, Momma *Arviq.* Hello! I know you and you know me. I'm one of the seal people. She's saying that her people honor the right whale, *arviq,* and that her people and the right whale have lived and died together since time began. That when they're hunting, the men call the right whale *taklaingiq*. That means 'He who must not be named,' because it's bad luck to say the name of the animal they're hunting, but today

nobody's hunting and we're here to help, so she calls her Honored Mother Arviq.

"She's saying that she's a mother too, and she knows that Mother Whale — Mother *Arviq* — is scared for her baby. She says — " She cocked her head. "— the boats are here to help her baby, and that if she'll be careful and calm and not hurt the boats or the people, we have hands that can use a knife to cut her baby free from the terrible net that's trapped it. And she should tell her baby to be calm too. That we won't hurt it."

Aunt Rosie turned to Elise. "Stop your jawing, darling. Put on your snorkel mask. Get out of them clothes. Get ready." She nodded as Elise started peeling off her shorts. "Sam! Turn us loose. And move your boat away. Careful-like."

Josie lifted the sculling oar and took a stance in the aft end of the dory. He dropped the oar into its notch in the stern as the dory's painter line, tossed from Sam's boat, landed in the bow.

Aunt Rosie pushed back the hood of her sealskin parka. "Too awful hot!" she murmured, and continued talking in that same Seal language, calmly and steadily. Josy could feel the calmness pouring off her, as if she was talking to a little kid who had just skun his knee and was screaming with fear.

She didn't seem to be changing into anything but herself, but the mother whale surfaced again a little farther away and sent up a V-spout of steam that rained into the dory and all over him.

An awful smell like filthy people flooded the air, and he gagged.

"Gross!" he croaked as the wind carried the smell away. "Whale boogers!"

"Work in close to the baby, Josy-boy. The momma's moving off a tad. It's a little boy calf."

He could see the whole length of the baby now. He wouldn't have called it a little boy. It was longer and slimmer than his dad's pickup, but that was huge for a baby. It was dark reddish brown all over.

Elise pulled on her snorkeling facemask and reached out for Josy's bait knife. He leaned toward her with it, still hanging onto the oar.

Something slammed the bottom of the dory. The boat jerked heavily sideways.

He grabbed for the gunnels.

Missed.

He was in the water, struggling.

His boots didn't let his legs swim.

His jacket didn't let his arms swim.

He couldn't swim.

Go under! He remembered from swim lessons at school. *Get rid of your clothes.*

He ducked his head under and opened his eyes. The water was cloudy, but he was right beside the baby whale. Baby Arviq. It loomed in all directions and the sunlight through the water dappled its reddish skin and his own brown hands. He could see Clyde's gill net wrapped right around its body, pinning its flippers close to its sides. Clyde's orange buoy was under its wing, so to speak.

He wiggled out of one boot, lifted his head, gasped air, and kicked with his free foot.

And tangled it in something fine, like long grass. He tried to kick free, but whatever it was only tightened around his ankle.

It began pulling at him.

He began to slide down through the water.

…Down…

…Down…

… Fumbling for whatever had caught around his foot.

And then my slicker, he thought. *Get…it…off.* Everything was slowing down. The water glowed green in the sunlight. He had to breathe!

Something moved up under him. He grabbed for it.

It was an animal of some sort, under him, lifting him up. A seal. A big gray seal, pushing up under him. *Aunt Rosie!* he thought. Then: *I missed it happening.*

He tried to muckle onto it, but his hands slipped over the surface. Dimly, beside him, he saw a little naked boy come corkscrewing through the water like a seal, but it was a boy.

The little kid's hand gripped Josy's own bait knife. He grabbed at the netting around the baby whale with one hand and began cutting through the nylon meshes.

The kid's nostrils were closed like a seal's.

The seal kid turned and with a swing of the bait knife, sliced the netting around Josy's foot and freed him. Then, still in the water, it laughed with a rising, repeated song, "Hwee! Hwee! Hwee!" over and over and over.

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Josy coughed, and spit up water. Sam was thumping him on the chest and crying, and Elise was kissing him on the mouth. It was embarrassing. He choked, and spit more water, and pushed at Elise's face.

"I think he's okay, now," Elise said above him, pulling away.

He was flat on his back on the deck of Lily Mae.

"Aunt Rosie," he said.

"She's right here."

Josy struggled up. "My boot—"

"Got it. Elise dove for it." Sam looked him over. "You alive now? I guess your mother won't kill me after all: me, letting you handle the dory right next to a freaking, live whale. Don't know what I was thinking."

"Aunt Rosie," Josy began again. "She saved me. She turned into a big seal and saved me."

Sam gave a snort. "The whale saved you. She come up under you and lifted you out of the water on her back."

"There was a little selkie boy. He swam like a seal. I was fetched up in the gill net, and he cut me loose."

Sam shook his head and looked at Elise. “You see any seals down there when you was cuttin the baby loose?”

Elise shook her head. “Not a one. Just me.” She raised her eyes, and following her look, Josy saw that Aunt Rosie was right there above him. She was still the Aunt Rosie he had always known. “Did you call seals, Momma?” Elise asked.

“Nope. I was talking to the momma whale. She thought of rescuing Josy on her own. I thinks the little one bumped your dory.”

Josy wasn't hearing them. Aunt Rosie was still Aunt Rosie. The animal underneath him had been the whale. “You’re not a seal?” he asked her.

Rosie looked down at him. “No, goodness, boy! I’m your Aunt Rosie.”

“But you have a seal skin.”

“I has a sealskin parka. To wear in the winter. It ain't never cold enough to wear it down here.

“But — you talked to the whale.”

“I did. You can talk to her too.”

“But I don't know the seal language.”

“That’s *Inuktitut*. That’s Inuit language. That’s the language I growed up with, Josy boy. It’s just words, like French or English. Oh, boy, oh boy! What’d you thinks? You believes all that stuffing that Elmon hands out?”

“I didn't. But—”

“Elmon’s just messing with you with that foolishness about picking me off a rock by Newfoundland. We met in the craft co-op in Saint John’s. He was buying some mittens.”

“But — ”

There was a huge splashing crash off to the south. Josy saw the whale splash down, then rise half out of the water, splash down again.

Then a smaller splash alongside her as the baby whale also breached. And the mother breached again. And the baby whale, again.

“They’s saying ‘thank you.’ ” Aunt Rosie said. “You should tell the whale momma ‘thank you’ too. She saved your life, like we saved her baby.”

"She did. The mother whale, Arviq, lifted me up."

"Yes, she did. Now you tell her 'thank you,' too. For fishing you out the bay," Aunt Rosie repeated.

Josy wondered how to do that. "How do you say it? In Seal language?"

"You can just say it in English. Call it out so she hears you."

"But she likes your language."

"Then you can say, 'Qujannamiik.' That means, 'thank you.' "

"Who-yanna-mick," Josy repeated.

Aunt Rosie smiled. "That'll be just fine. You might toss a plain 'thank you' in there, in case she don't understand your Inuktitut." She laughed, and her face was all kind laughter wrinkles and smiles.

"Qoo-yan-na-mee-ick," Elise said carefully and Josy repeated it again. Better.

He would remember the selkie boy who had laughed at him: "Hwee! Hwee! Hwee!" and cut him free with a single slice of his own bait knife. Or maybe he had dreamed the selkie, and that laugh had been the whales talking. But with his own eyes he had seen the little boy with nostrils that closed like a seal's. Whatever.

"Qoo-yan-na-mee-ick, Whale Momma!" he called out, loud and clear, as both the whales breached again. "Thank you!"

— END —

NOTE and CAUTION: If you see an entangled whale or seal, DON'T approach it!

Call 877-767-9425 (877-SOS-WHALE) or hail the U.S. Coast Guard at VHF Channel 16. Entangled sea mammals are unpredictable and potentially dangerous for would-be rescuers and themselves.

Stay a minimum of 100 yards away. Prompt reporting of injured, entangled and ship-struck whales is the best way to help the distressed animal.

If you are able to safely do so, stay near the animal until trained help arrives.
— National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

The Humpback of Notre Gulf of Maine | *Carl Little*

The massive body
of the humpback Spinnaker
named for the sail-shaped marking on her tail
wedged among rocks at the base
of Great Head on Mount Desert Island

is magnificent in death as in life,
broad flanks striped with ventral grooves,
vast belly open to the sky
as if she had gone to scratch
an itch atop barnacled ledges,

but a more nefarious cause is offered
by researchers who have traced her travels
across oceans (like parents
following the simulation of the flight
carrying their child from Amsterdam to Accra):

victim of entanglements—
not the romantic kind—fishing lines
hindering movement, scarring
skin, despite being rescued
multiple times by watchful human allies

who cut her wing-like fins free,
a mammoth mammal task, tiny boats
maneuvering around colossal creature
with sensitive eyes who struggles,
harried like the humpback of Notre Gulf of Maine,

who once breeched and spouted
as watchers clung to rails,
who lived on krill and other schooling fish,
who might have lived to 100
but died at 11, whose skeleton

may one day bring awe to museumgoers
gazing through her arched ribs, along
jigsaw vertebrae, around the mighty skull
of the re-articulated Spinnaker,
baleen, rorqual, wondrous whale.

—for Allied Whale

Ghazal on a Raw Day | *Gerald George*

Now the rain, now the wind, then fiercely together,
now round, battered stones on the crushed beach.

Now gulls tenaciously over the surf,
beating against the wind and spray.

Now the flickering minnows in the tide-pool ponds
in rock crevasses where the sea reached highest.

Now darting, now hiding, abandoned by the ocean,
each seeking shelter in the least shadow.

Now fractured air and cold, gray waves
breaking over the rock-strewn shore.

Pack up your thoughts, your beliefs, O poet;
Take them to safety inside—now!

[The beach, Roque Bluffs State Park, Roque Bluffs, Maine]

Some cold | *Mary Lyons*

Cold.
Face numbingly
Teeth freezingly
Eyes drippingly

Cold.

Waterfront Uses | *Mary Lyons*

Oakum, cork, decking, netting, rope.
Docks, piers, planking, boards, rails,
And sails.

Turquoise *Marge,* yellow *Betsy Ann,*
Rust-bottomed trawlers, and some
Nameless scruff.

He's drunk and cursing a captain,
On the otherwise quiet
Bus.

Down by the piers he
Squeezes a gull in each
Battered hand.

Flat calms and wild seas
Sunglint, rainpelt, long trails
Of moonlight.

When They Are Gone | *Matthew Bernier*

For Jed

Not all of the Atlantic salmon will return—
in Greenland, where the sea ice cracks
under the pressure of a warming planet,
are the nets and hooks of a hungry people,
and black cutouts of porbeagle sharks
moving through depth and darkness
fathomed only by those who watch
Arctic winter nights lengthen like sadness.

In the end, the cold swiftness of the loss
seemed shocking, and made us wonder:
"If one thing doesn't come back, will anything?"
Stumbling on a rocky shore, unsteady with grief
we were thinking, perhaps, of spring light,
and blue tides surging emptily into estuaries;
we were focused on the ocean, salty as tears,
instead of upstream, in freshwater rivers,

where hope still lies in spawning gravel—
walking through the mossy cathedral
of spruce and fir trees, we arrived
at the chaos of water and boulders
where parr sipped insects and
a biologist tenderly knocked
a tree into its reflection on
a bend in the Narraguagus River
to provide cover, to protect young fish,
their short lives better for this love.

How He Ran Aground | *Matthew Bernier*

One lobster trap hauled in
the morning was empty,
save the bottle of scotch
rattling in the wire cage
like an exhausted animal;
he hesitated at the clasp,
scowling at the horizon
where white triangles
sailed towards Bar Harbor;
he'd heard about these trades:
schooner moored off an island
while the out-of-staters
rowed towards a beach with
piled driftwood ablaze,
pot of "borrowed" lobsters
balanced on plank seat
of the dinghy like
honored, kidnapped guests
of well-dressed pirates;
perhaps he would just
take a closer look,
read the scuffed label
with a name like the sound of
someone clearing their throat;
aged thirty years,
which is how long ago
he'd had his last drink,
the outlines of Scottish hills,
braes, on the label too,
and he reflected how he
escaped the thirst
this many years by
chasing the underwater
hills of Penobscot Bay,
lobsters sulking in dark,
drowned valleys, thinking;
which is what he didn't do
when he placed the bottle

in an honored position
on the transom,
then let it navigate,
and then steer,
until convinced that
Butter Island was
Great Spruce Head Island
and he ran aground on a
tombolo near Barred Islands,
and thus jilted, donned his
survival suit expectantly,
as though dressing for a
fancy ball with a girl
named Destiny
with her hair up;
the survival suit was orange,
and perched on the stern rail,
which became the highest
point of the sinking boat,
he looked like a piece of cheese
on an hors d'oeuvres plate
heading back to the kitchen,
which is how the Coast Guard
found him, sunrise searing the water,
and the officer, taking notes and
having been around the world,
asked "What kind of scotch?"
to which the lobsterman mused
"An expensive one, I think,"
later learning the cost was
ten thousand dollars per bottle,
boat repairs included.

The world is your oyster | *Aliya Uteuova*

What does it mean to make the world your own?

What does this phrase mean? I wondered as I tried an oyster for the first time last summer.

As with many foreign words and sayings, at first I didn't understand what an oyster had to do with my world. And why oyster? Why not a scallop, or a chestnut? Both have shells that have to be cracked open. So now I'm on a quest to understand what is it about oysters that make them so special.

The proverb first appeared in Shakespeare's play "The Merry Wives of Windsor" published in 1602. In Act II, a character named Falstaff says: "I will not lend thee a penny," to which Pistol replied: "Why, then, the world's mine oyster, Which I with sword will open."

The Oxford dictionary gave the following explanation to this phrase: "You are in a position to take the opportunities that life has to offer."

You can look at this phrase from different angles. On the one hand, this phrase could mean that we, as humans, are blessed with natural resources. We are wealthy and we should be happy with what we have. You might grab an oyster, think of it as a source of food, and if you're lucky, you might get a pearl with it. On the other hand, does this phrase encourage us to take what we want? Is Pistol greedy, or merely opportunistic? Some might say both.

And how can the world be your oyster if someone else took care of that oyster, harvested it, loved it — for you?

The process of growing an oyster nowadays is more thought out, with no room for free-fall. Sure, wild oysters from Shakespeare's time still exist, but they aren't always edible due to pollution and harmful algae blooms. Therefore, in order to ensure safety, you should probably opt for cultured oysters from people who specialize in growing oysters for profit.

"For me, the oyster is my world," said Barb Scully, the founder of the Glidden Point Oyster Farms. "Starting a home based aquaculture business in Maine in the late 1980s was quite a risk. But even more risky was when I quit my real job as a scientist with the State of Maine Department of Marine Resources to jump into my business full time. I had two very young children at the time, so trusting myself with providing all of the income for my entire family based solely on my own hard work and business decisions was a lot to take on. What it essentially meant, was that the oyster became my world, and that of my children as well."

To Dana Morse, also an oyster farmer, this phrase means that opportunities await for those people who take advantage of them and make opportunities for that to happen. "To take the bull by the horns," Morse said using a yet another interesting idiom.

It can take two to three years for an oyster to get from the river to your hand, for you to gulp that slick, salty taste of the ocean. The oyster's rough, rock-hard shell is nearly impossible to open without a proper shucking knife, although a sword might do as well. The gray, unattractive body is delicious and beautiful to those who understand the worth of this calcium and iron rich protein.

I have often thought that the inverse of the phrase "the world is your oyster" has applied to my life. The way I see this phrase "the world is your oyster," is that the the world is only as big as you are. It can only get as big as you want it to, as you imagine it to. And you are a pivotal part of it, the world can only go on and operate with you in it.

When I was younger, all I wanted to do was to grow up and understand this big world. Somehow I thought that all I needed to do to understand was to be an adult. Yet I found that the more I grow up, the bigger and more complicated the world around me gets. We don't magically learn the world around us when we become adults. It gets more complex, more messed up. Yet it also gets more colorful, more exciting, more vivid.

The more an oyster grows, the bigger its shell gets. The world can be as big as you allow it to be, and it can only grow with you in it.

Where the Blueberries Are | *Christina Gillis*

In Maine, they seem to be everywhere. The blueberries I mean. They appear in the fields I know and in the poems I read. Robert Frost wrote about them; Amy Clampitt too. The poets know that specific location is important. Clampitt says the bluberries grow "Away from the shore, [where] the roads dwindle and lose themselves." Frost is more explicit, reminding us in a poem titled simply "Blueberries" that the best berries grow in burned-over territory: "… you may burn/The pasture all over until not a fern/Or grass-blade is left, not to mention a stick,/And presto, they're up all around you as thick/And hard to explain as a conjuror's trick."

So the poets tell us what we blueberry hounds already know: you have to know where the blueberries are. In "Midsummer in the Blueberry Barrens," Amy Clampitt, who summered at Corea, Maine, in the 1970s and 1980s, no doubt knew that the geologic shifts that produced the state's rock-belted islands also produced the treeless barrens that ultimately enabled extensive blueberry production. "Barren" is the operative term for Clampitt—depleted soils, lost communities. For her, the blueberries grow only where the road "dwindles," moving "away from the shore" and the usual settlement we find there; they occupy the places eschewed by seekers of ocean views.

But Clampitt is not writing about blueberries on the small island I know. The only road on Gotts Island, the "town road," is a wide and rutted trail that at the narrowest point on the island "dwindles" into a path. And this is hardly a barren spot. Or at least not now. It was temporarily clear about four decades ago, when a severe winter storm took the trees down. But as ever, the spruce, birch, and alder took over once again, stifling the brief exuberant life—just a few years—of the raspberries that had thrived in suddenly opened sunlight, tangling around the toppled tree trunks.

Nor can the town road that bisects the small island east to west be said to lead "away from the shore." Never lost, it's always heading to another shore, the end mirroring the beginning—to the east the blocks of granite that take the brunt of the open sea, to the west the fields of the old village that slope down to the quieter waters of the Bay.

I cannot say where the town road begins and where it ends, but I do know that it does not lead to the blueberries.

With no far-off barrens to call their home, the blueberries on the island where I have spent all the summers of my adult life are of a much more civilized breed. They like the open fields whose owners keep the spruce and juniper at bay. These small beautiful berries are inextricably linked to the social relations of a small community, woven into the fabric of the place.

This means, as Frost reminds us, that knowing where the blueberries are is not so simple. You have to know the people involved. Frost's community includes both the character he calls Mortenson, the man who "won't make the fact that [the berries] are rightfully his/An excuse for keeping us other folk out," and the indigent Loren family, who are dependent on berry-picking, and hence keep their blueberry knowledge to themselves—leaving Frost's narrator to say rather ruefully, "I wish I knew half what the flock of them know/Of where all the berries and other things grow." Blueberry knowledge is also secret knowledge.

If you know summer on a small island in Maine, you know the people Frost describes. You know that blueberry knowledge never exists in a vacuum. Except for the berries that grow in the beautiful rolling meadow at the north side of the island—from which a lone house was moved more than a century ago—island berries, though growing wild, are, for the most part, property, often much guarded. Two families

on our island engaged for years in a conflict dubbed the "blueberry wars" over who owned a particular patch of ground favored by the berries.

Looking for berries on property announced as belonging to another person can be an invasion. It's venturing into a realm where one has no right to be. Even knowing where the berries are in a neighbor's field can be construed as undue access to some intimate knowledge. A particularly difficult property owner told me that he didn't like my body language when I looked at his berries as I passed along the path by his field. He could tell, he said, that I had blueberry theft on my mind. Since I have ample berries in my own field, I can't imagine why he thought this, but the mindset is noteworthy. When he put up tall ugly stakes in a field that we had always thought was ours, we feared that some shed or other building was planned. But no, the stakes had been erected simply to indicate to us, and to everyone else with a mind for blueberry picking, that whatever berries grew in that bounded space belonged to him and were under no circumstance to be touched (or looked at). Later came the signs—"Do not pick the blueberries"—and still later five surveillance cameras.

Admittedly, this is an unusual level of blueberry paranoia. But these were very particular blueberries. Perhaps fertilized, they grew in large clusters, creating a blue carpet in the field. But daring, despite the warnings, to look more closely, I found something unappealing about this patch. The berries looked unnatural. They were there to be harvested in some controlled manner, offering none of the pleasure in gathering wild blueberries, in pulling aside the grasses and low bushes to find the treasure beneath.

This is the pleasure that the speaker in Frost's poem describes as he recalls blueberrying with his companion in Mortenson's pasture. He knows what it is to crawl around in a field, seeking out the best blue patches, smelling the bayberry and juniper that you hope won't snuff out the berries, knowing that if you cut the field one year, you won't have the wild berries until two years later, and, of course, eating the sweet berries still warm from the sun.

Mortenson's field is open to everyone. All the discussion over competition in the berrying places, fears that the wily, needy, Loren will take all the berries, give way to this: intense pleasure, warm memories ("It's so long since I picked I almost forget/How we used to pick berries…"). Strained relationships are, at least momentarily, forgotten, the human comedy on hold. In looking forward to picking once again, the speaker knows that "We sha'n't have the place to ourselves"; that the Loren family may arrive and be less than happy to see others picking in what they thought their secret spot. But it doesn't matter, he says. "[W]e won't complain." He won't complain because he has seen the beauty of the blueberries, wet with light rain or morning dew, "mixed with water in layers of leaves,/Like two kinds of jewels, a vision for thieves."

No thief can steal the berries that thrive in a poem, Frost's "field," open to all. We come with our baskets and jars; we come with our own memories. The meadow on the north side of our island is like that. It has owners, but they, like Mortenson, are entirely comfortable with sharing their berries. The land, rich with its treasure, slopes gently and gracefully down to the sea. The silence is broken only by the raucous scolding of the odd crow, the crying of the gulls, the irregular chugging of a far-off lobster boat. There are no ugly property stakes here, no knowledge that I want, or need, to keep secret. My basket is soon full.

Reflections on the Water | *Patricia Ranzoni*

Wherever on Earth fresh water joins salt
the people come in promise and praise, as here
where this ancient power flows without end. Here
by the mouth and voice of *Mayne's* greatest watershed
on its race by Katahdin mountain down to this Bay.

Only Here. This Penobscot Place.
This Ancestral Presence with our descendant eagles,
salmon and sturgeon restored in eternal re-Creation.
These visions. These birchbark canoes. These countless
ocean-going vessels again. You. Here. Your heart
riding the tide. This Now. This Tomorrow.

Oh you of this timeless Passage, return!

Catching Up with Robin Alden | *Kathleen Ellis*

What's next for Robin Alden, fisheries advocate and activist, writer, editor, and publisher, Maine's illustrious winner of a 2017 "Hero of the Seas" award, former Maine Department of Marine Resources Commissioner, founder and editor of Commercial Fisheries News, and executive director of Maine Center for Coastal Fisheries?

I first met Robin Alden in 1981, when I was communications coordinator for the University of Maine's Sea Grant College Program. From 1975-1976, Alden was a UMaine student research assistant who had co-founded the Maine Fishermen's Forum with economist Jim Wilson. From 1976-1978, she worked as part of Sea Grant's Marine Advisory Service. Over the years, our communications staff worked closely with Alden on the forum as well as on many other fisheries-related projects. Alden has a long relationship with Sea Grant, (publisher of *The Catch*), and she currently serves as a member of Maine Sea Grant's Policy Advisory Committee.

Now that Alden has retired as executive director of the Maine Center for Coastal Fisheries in Stonington, she could easily rest on her laurels. These include the 1997 Gulf of Maine Council on the Marine Environment Visionary Award and the 2007 Maine Initiatives Social Landscape Artist Awar, received along with her husband, Ted Ames.

In 2017, Robin Alden was a "Hero of the Seas" winner of one of the Peter Benchley Ocean Awards. These prestigious awards are given to "a marine grassroots activist who has made a major and long-term commitment to improving the quality of our seas and the communities that depend on them."

Not only has Alden contributed significantly to building sustainable coastal fisheries and fishing communities in northern New England, but she also spent twenty years publishing and editing *Commerical Fisheries News*, a regional fishing trade newspaper that she founded in 1973.

On her move from Massachusetts to the Deer Isle area of the Maine coast, Alden reflects, "I can't imagine what my mother thought when I called her to tell her I was going to extend my year off from Yale and start a fishermen's newspaper!" How did a 21-year-old medieval history major make the transition from college student to newspaper editor "with a passion to bridge the gulfs that separated fishermen, scientists, and policy makers"?

According to Alden, "*Commercial Fisheries News* was started on a literal shoestring. "My partnership with Nat Barrows, the publisher and editor of the local paper in Stonington, *Island Advantages*, provided *CFN* with an essential publishing incubator." In the beginning, Alden did all the writing, "though we added stringers along the Maine coast." The first issue was published in September 1973.

As with many of Alden's other projects, she attributes sheer determination to part of *CFN*'s success. In 1978, she began to run *CFN* on her own, realizing it would not be sustainable as *Maine Commercial Fisheries*, its original name. She recalls, "The paper rode the wave of large scallop vessel construction in the early 1980s and took us as far as the steel boatyards in Florida selling ads."

For Alden, "Keeping *CFN* alive simply took perseverance and learning—and learning. It was a labor of love, and if I could figure out the business end, then, I, and my wonderful team, could write what we felt needed to be written."

Beyond her work as editor of *CFN*, many in the fishing industry and marine science community were acquainted with Alden's activist/advocate role through her collaboration with UMaine economist Jim Wilson in founding the Maine Fishermen's Forum in 1975. As Wilson's student research assistant, Alden coordinated many of the panels and workshops for the three-day event. Now in its 43rd year, the Forum continues as an event by and for fishermen and the largest gathering of its kind in New England.

Alden met Wilson when she interviewed him for an article about lobster legislation. She says, "*CFN* was, for years, the paper of record for New England fisheries policy, and Jim's rigorous examination—and re-examination—of the theory that underlies policy recommendation influenced my perceptions, my editorial writing, and fueled my interest in how and why fishermen's practical knowledge can improve both science and policy."

Another strong influence in Alden's life and career is her husband and MacArthur Fellow Ted Ames. For Alden, her partnership with Ames has given her "the love of my life and the chance to be a fisherman's wife. It provided me a home in the industry and influenced my perceptions when I had a chance to make policy as DMR commissioner." Furthermore, she adds, "our relationship was instrumental in making the hard, and sensible, decision to sell *CFN* in the early 1990s."

"Over the years, Ted and I have had the privilege of a life where ideas and perceptions of our common goal—how to further sustainable fishing and fishing communities—are completely interwoven with our friends and family life."

Referring to the many honors and awards Alden has received over her career, she is candid. "Awards seem to come at the end of episodes in one's career," she says, "and most of mine have come in the last few years, so they didn't have a direct effect on most of my work."

However, Alden does believes her awards have helped the credibility of the Maine Center for Coastal Fisheries. "Until about six years ago, I had the naïve idea that I would solve the problem of sustainable small-scale fisheries and then step aside." After facing "the reality of my own age, my major purpose became building a sustainable organization and a staff of people who would keep the work going long into the future."

So what does the future hold for Robin Alden? Currently, she is "taking a 'year off' to decompress from so many years of carrying the final responsibility for an organization."

"As the year goes on," this Hero of the Sea reflects, "my interest in writing is re-emerging. I don't yet know the form this will take. During this reflection time, I am acknowledging and connecting with the perspective I have gained over the years on the quest to set the conditions for community-scale fishermen to continue to fish forever. Writing always clarifies my thinking, and I look forward to using writing to both distill what I have learned and to share it."

On How a Fisherman Supports Fishermen: Oral History with Patrick Shepard | *Natalie Springuel*

Patrick Shepard, 30, grew up in a fishing family in Stonington, Maine. He graduated high school in 2006, went to college and returned home to work for Maine Center for Coastal Fisheries. This interview was recorded in March 2018 at the Maine Fishermen's Forum, part of a project of The First Coast, Maine Sea Grant, and College of the Atlantic. Pat Shepard was interviewed by Galen Koch and Matt Frassica with help from intern Katie Clark. Natalie Springuel

I was born and raised in Stonington. Well, I wasn't born there. I was born in a hospital. But I was raised in Stonington in a fishing family. My father is a fisherman, still is a fisherman. His father was a fisherman. His father before that, and so on. I think, so my brother and I started our first fishing business when we were eight and nine. And we were fifth generation fishermen at the time. So I worked for my brother basically all through my childhood. We were business partners, you know. And before we turned ten years old we were working with each other. We started out with I think three traps apiece and by the time we graduated high school we were working from our third boat. And had eight hundred trap allocations between us.

We started out in a twenty-one foot Privateer, outboard. My father paid about $7,000 for it when we were eight. I was eight, my brother was nine. We had paid him back by the end of the summer. And that wasn't atypical. Kids in my generation, when we were growing up at the time, you started off working for your father. In our case, we skipped that step and went straight out on our own. But it was pretty typical to get into the fishing industry early at a really young age and have your own checking account when you were eight years old. And managing your own business and finances. It's pretty cool. It's one of the cool things about being from a small town, sort of learning the value of a dollar at a very early age. I think it's something that the rest of America, urban America, misses.

My parents would write sick notes and we would go fishing. And when we came to school the next day, the teachers would ask how much money we made the day before. No, it wasn't like that every day. But some days in the height of the season, especially in June, and definitely in September, my dad would write us a sick note if we wanted to go tend our gear. Didn't happen very often, but once in a while he'd throw us a bone. But definitely when we got out of school in the afternoon, we'd go haul a few traps and then head home for supper. Definitely on the weekends. And then we'd fish all summer long.

My mom that first year when we were eight, eight and nine, my mom went with us just to be the safety, be a parental figure sort of on the boat. And she used to sit on the bow and read magazines. And after a few weeks of her going with us, we woke her up one morning and she rolled over and looked at us and she goes, "You know what? You guys are prepared to handle anything that would happen out there a lot better than I can, so just go."

I remember the first really foggy day that we went in the skiff, my brother, we were leaving the dock. And I was asking my brother, I was like, "We can't see anything." We didn't have equipment like what exists now. We didn't have radar and a chart plotter and three different GPS machines. We had a compass and a depth finder and a steering wheel. And we were leaving the dock, and it was so foggy out that we couldn't see sort of the last row of boats in the harbor. It

was just pea soup. We could barely see the bow of the boat. And I remember asking my brother, I was like, "Matt, we can't see anything. How are we going to do this?" And he said something like, "Don't worry about it. Get back there where you belong." And I remember leaving the harbor and my brother had a compass bearing for his first string of traps. And we steamed for a little while, didn't turn, and just ended up landing right on the end buoy. And we hauled through that string of traps, and he took another compass bearing, and we ended up right on the end buoy for the next string. And we did that all morning long. And by the end of the day, we had hauled through all of our gear in pea soup fog with no equipment. And it cleared off, and it was the most beautiful ride home. [Laughter] But, you know, we didn't have equipment like we have now. And you had to learn. My dad had taught him how to navigate without any of that stuff, so he was comfortable. And it was then that I learned that I would never be a captain. [Laughter] My brother's always had a knack for it. And I could definitely do it, but I chose a different direction in life I guess.

Now, I am a sector manager for a group of groundfish fishermen that operate from, well they hold permits from Jonesport, Maine all the way to Cape Cod. We're one of 18 groundfish sectors in New England. We have 33 permits in our sector. Most of them are lobster fishermen who hold groundfish permits in hopes that the groundfish resource will rebound in eastern Maine so that they can have the opportunity to go [fish] again.

I'm 30. In my lifetime, I've witnessed an entire coast full of fishermen, boats of all different sizes, fishing for all different kinds of things, fishing for scallops and groundfish and herring and shrimp. My dad would fish for lobsters in the summer and fall. And then he'd re-rig his boat for scallops in the winter, and he would drag for scallops all winter. And then he would take the scallop rigging off and he would go either seining for herring or groundfishing in the spring. And then he'd roll right back into lobstering. And that was what you had to do to make up an income. You were a diverse fisherman and you had licenses for all these different things to fish. And in my lifetime, over the past 30 years, we've been condensed to just one fishery here on the coast of Maine. And lobster is king and we don't really have access to much of anything else.

So, I think, and this is the reason I do what I do, I see a lot of value in having a diverse set of fisheries to go after. And I think the ecosystem benefits of having a diverse set of species out there that have sort of all intermingled. And the benefits to communities to having a diverse set of resources to process for infrastructure and shore-side businesses. We need to get back to that.

You know, fishermen are incredibly intelligent. They will figure out how to do things more efficiently. They'll figure out how to catch more fish with limits and regulation. That's what they do, they innovate. They're constantly innovating to try to run more efficiently and make more money and catch more fish. And that's the beauty of what they do. But unfortunately that also causes some problems, right? We see innovations and technology that allow us to catch more fish. We develop these 3D scanning sonars that allow us to see fish in the water column. We have 3D depth finders that show us the exact contours of the bottom of the ocean. And fishing, through these technological innovations, has become a video game. Anybody can jump on a boat with a wheelhouse full of equipment and go find fish or lobsters or whatever it is. Technology, I think, has been one of the demises of a lot of the fisheries that we've lost. So, we need to figure out how to use the innovation and creativity of fishermen to start to restore some of the fisheries

we've lost and start to sustain them over time. Sort of harness the incredible ability that they have to innovate and use that to our advantage.

I think in some fisheries, yeah, it means being able to make a profit off of less and less fish. Or less and less product. The groundfish fishery used to be, in its heyday, 10,000 pounds in a day trip. Just going out, setting the drag, loading the boat, coming back home. And that's not what it's gonna look like in the future. It's gonna look like, how do I make the most amount of money on 1,200 pounds of fish, 1,000 pounds of fish, 800 pounds of fish. And we have a fisherman in our sector who's starting to figure that out. [He has] a 36-foot boat and his average catch for the day is 1,200 pounds. And in order to make a business work on that few, on that little amount of fish, he's had to innovate in the market place. So he markets his catch directly to restaurants instead of selling to the traditional auction-style fish houses. And because of that, because of his fishing methods, he fishes with all rod and reel, hook gear, he's able to preserve the quality of the fish and sell his story to the people who are buying them.

We need to figure out how to either aggregate and transport to places like [Portland, Boston…], or figure out how to consume that in our own communities. And I think that latter part is going to be even more challenging. You can get your product to, you can ship your product off to a place where there is a population of people who appreciate it. Or you can teach the people in your own backyard how to appreciate it. And I think that's one of our big challenges.

We want our food, we want our seafood, we want it portioned, packaged, vacuum-sealed, frozen with a YouTube video on how to cook it. And, you know, everything short of somebody picking up a fork and stuffing it in your face. It's pretty ridiculous that we don't know how to cook whole fish anymore. And that's one of the things that we're trying to do with the sector is educate people on how to prepare a whole fish in their homes. It's pretty easy when you start to learn how to do it. Even filleting. If you wanted to fillet a whole fish. I could probably count on two hands and a half a foot the number of people from here to Eastport that can fillet a fish. That's pretty staggering. Probably the same amount of people who could tell the difference between a haddock and a cod. So we need to educate our neighbors on how to handle this stuff and capture that value in our own communities.

Well, unfortunately, the way [change has] happened in the past is through a major crash. A species will just take a digger. And we have to figure out, okay this resource has all but collapsed. If it's starting to come back, we need to limit the amount that we're taking and we need to figure out how to make a profit from that. Some of these other species like lobster. We have an amazing resource in lobster. Is it going to take a crash in the lobster fishery to start to change people's minds about the volume that they're bringing in? I hope not. I hope we can start to figure that out.

Shrimp, the same story. The shrimp fishery crashed in the state of Maine. We may or may not be seeing that resource come back. There is some talk of maybe having a fishery next year. But it's going to be very limited in scale. And through these species crashes, we've figured out how to innovate. And some of the best ideas, actually probably all of the best ideas, on how to capture the value of a limited amount of resource have come from fishermen. And that's been pretty cool to watch.

We saw it in the scallop fishery along the eastern half of the coast of Maine. Our organization held I think over 125 meetings with scallop fishermen as the resource was starting to come back. At each of those meetings, we said, okay, it seems like there might be something happening here with this resource. Anecdotally, we're seeing things start to build back up. How do you guys want to manage it? And in eastern Maine, we heard a resounding opinion of the fishing fleet that wanted to try out this rotational style management. So fishermen got together with each other. Basically divided the whole eastern coast up into big sections. And said okay, based on what we know about the biology of the animal, they should be either two or three year rotations. So we designed this three-year rotation, rotational area management for the eastern half of the coast. And I think we're seven years into it, six or seven years into it now. And we've seen the most boats that have participated in that fishery in the past ten years, just sort of bounce right back. It's not perfect. It's got its issues. The management structure has its issues. But we've effectively figured out how to harness the knowledge of fishermen in order to preserve a resource and make it more sustainable. And guys are making a little bit of a living in the wintertime. Which is a pretty cool success story.

[…]

What do I value about our community? Well, I mentioned that my brother and I started our own business when we were very young. Obviously, that's something I value about Stonington and places Downeast. Our kids are our most valuable asset. And to be able to provide them the opportunity to get into fishing work for a living, transferring our knowledge to them, I think is pretty important. Finding, listening to our kids, this is one of the coolest things about one of the things that we're doing, the Eastern Maine Skippers Program, is engaging elementary and high school kids in projects that will sustain fishing.

And some of the coolest ideas have come from these high school kids that have an idea about something and want to go pursue it. I think the first year that the Skippers Program had started they had built and designed winter flounder traps to try and catch winter flounder. So they designed this whole project themselves with a little bit of help from community members and teachers. They wanted to try to take what they could learn about the species and design a trap to be able to go catch it. And they sort of realized along the way that you can't just design a trap and go set it in the ocean. You need a permit to be able to do that. So they learned the process of applying for a special license to start a new fishery. Not only apply for that special license but design a research program to be able to gather data from what they were doing.

And the commissioner of marine resources, Pat Keliher, sort of kicked off the whole project by coming down, meeting with all the students, and saying, you know, "You guys are at the helm here. We've got this winter flounder resource that may or may not be coming back. I need you guys to figure out how to do it." And the kids were just jazzed right up about it after that. I didn't know who the commissioner of marine resources was when I was in high school, 10th grade, 11th grade. These guys have his cell phone number. You know, they call him up and it's the coolest thing to be able to connect those kids to a management agency in that way and sort of bridge that gap at a really early age. Because it's the most important thing that they'll ever learn, is how to interact with the science community and the management community in order to start a fishery.

I mean, not a whole lot of kids come back [after they leave], right? We send them off into the world, and they learn what they want to learn and become who they want to be. And oftentimes they'll just stay away. And we lose a lot of kids in our community, I think. Sometimes they come back. Sometimes it takes them an entire career and they come back here to retire.

I was one of the ones who came back fairly early, I think. You know, we came back to our hometowns because we value the place that we're from and we want to make a difference and hopefully make it better. And I hope my daughter does the same.

Kids are going to end up being the entity that finally makes change. I don't think I've seen so many rattled politicians. And it takes kids to do it. You know, you get a bunch of adults in a room and they can't get along with each other. And then a kid comes up with a good idea and they're like, "Oh, maybe we oughta listen." And, you know, we're seeing it on the micro level in the Eastern Maine Skippers Program. A kid comes up with a cool idea and all the adults are like, "Holy shit, he's pretty smart." So, just allowing our kids to have that kind of creativity and freedom to say, "Oh, okay, I can affect national policy or state policy." Whether it's fishing or guns or whatever it is. Allowing them the ability to do that and to know that they can do that and empowering them with the tools that it takes. It's pretty exciting.

I created my own job I think wherever I've gone. That's actually a cool segue into a story that I wanted to tell. It seems like every other week I get the question, "Why didn't you become a fisherman? You're from a fishing family, you're fifth generation, your brother fishes, your father fishes, why didn't you fish?" And you see what has happened in the lobster fishery. Yeah, so people ask me all the time why I didn't follow in my family's footsteps and become a fisherman. You know, my brother's a fisherman, my father's a fisherman, and his father before that and so on. I sort of took a little different career path, and I keep finding the answer to that question for myself and the work that I do.

I was sitting in the stern of a boat the other day with a fisherman that I work with really closely. And he said, "Pat," he goes, "I got to tell you something that I haven't told really many other people before." And I was like, oh no, what's coming. So, he said, "Have a seat. I want to tell you something." And I was kind of nervous, and I sat on the stern. And he said, "Pat, I don't think you realize how important you are to me and to my business." And I said, "Okay." And he said, "Before I started fishing in the sector, my house was in foreclosure. My wife and I had lost both of our vehicles. We were getting ready to move in with my parents. I would leave on a fishing trip and know that my family had 60 bucks to live on for the week." And he said, "After joining the sector and working with you folks to develop my business plan and to build up my business, today I made the last payment to bring my house out of foreclosure. And I just put a down payment on a truck."

And that, just solidified for me, how important it is to do the work we do. You know, that sort of made it rock solid in my mind. That this is what I need to be doing. It's pretty cool. I have a really good relationship with the guy and I didn't know that I had that much of an impact. Stuff like that keeps me going.

- *Interviewed by Galen Koch and Matt Frassica, March 2018*

Notes on Contributors

Matt Bernier is a civil engineer who works on restoring sea-run fish throughout the Northeast. He lives in Pittsfield, Maine.

Kathleen Ellis is a poet and a member of *The Catch* editorial board.

Jerry George has published two books of poetry: *Figments* (Piscataqua Press, 2014) and *Imitations of Indonesia and Other Poems* (Chestnut Hill Press, 1997). His poetry has appeared in several anthologies as well as *The Café Review, New England Poetry Review, Potomac Review, Saranac Review, Spoon River Poetry Review*, *Visions International,* and *Wolf Moon Journal*. He is the recipient of the Donn Goodwin prize for poetry in the Irish tradition. He lives in East Machias.

Christina Marsden Gillis has a Ph.D. in English and taught and published in the field of eighteenth-century literature before moving into humanities administration and ultimately to California to become associate director of the Townsend Center for the Humanities at the University of California, Berkeley. She is the author of *Writing on Stone,* illustrated with the photography of Maine artist Peter Ralston, and *Where Edges Don't Hold: A Small Island Miscellany*. Her essays have appeared in *House Beautiful*, *Island Journal*, *Hotel Amerika, Raritan, Southwest Review, Women's Studies*, and *Bellevue Literary Review,* and been selected as "notable essays" in *Best American Essays.* She spends every summer on Gotts Island.

Robin Orm Hansen was born in Maine, raised everywhere else, and returned to Maine fifty years ago. Hansen is a folklorist known for oral history research of traditional knitting in Maine and Atlantic Canada, but, she says, “legend and folk tales have always seized my heart. It is my hope to find and write more stories based on north Atlantic legend.” Hansen lives in West Bath.

Carl Little is a poet and art writer. His poems have appeared in a number of publications, including *The Island Reader* and *3 Nations Anthology: Native, Canadian & New England Writers*, and been featured in *Maine Sunday Telegram*’s Deep Water series and Maine Public Radio’s “Poems from Here.” Two books will be released in summer 2018: *Paintings of Portland* and *Philip Frey: Here and Now*. Little is communications manager at the Maine Community Foundation. He lives near Echo Lake on Mount Desert Island.

Mary Lyons is a poet who has been published in several small magazines. She lives in Kennebunk.

Patricia Smith Ranzoni is the great granddaughter of Captain William L. Snowman (1858-1911) of Orland who shipped fish, lumber, and household goods aboard the schooner *N.E. Symonds* out of the Nicholson Building in Bucksport. Her documentary poems have been published across the country and abroad, most recently in the anthologies *STILL MILL, Poems, Stories & Songs of Making Paper in Bucksport, Maine 1930-2014* (North Country Press, 2017), which she also conceived and edited; and *3 Nations Anthology* (Resolute Bear Press, 2017). In 2014, the Bucksport Town Council named her Poet Laureate "for as long as she shall live."

Catherine Schmitt is managing editor of *The Catch*. She directs communications for the Maine Sea Grant College Program at the University of Maine.

Natalie Springuel is a marine extension associate with Maine Sea Grant based at College of the Atlantic, where part of her work includes coordinating the Downeast Fisheries Trail. She is a member of *The Catch* editorial board.

Aliya Uteuova graduated from the University of Maine in May 2018 with a degree in political science and journalism. Her diverse experiences include working as science communications assistant at the Darling Marine Center, an editor with *The Maine Campus*, and a host on radio station WMEB 91.9. Her honors thesis addressed the issue of declining journalistic freedom, and she plans to attend law school and practice immigration law. Her favorite tree is red oak, "for it can withstand the strongest of winds and turns the brightest of reds in the fall." She is from Astana, Kazakhstan, second coldest capital in the world after Ulaanbaatar, the capital of neighboring Mongolia.