

Fishtales
Sunday, September 30, 2012
Working Waterfront Festival

Interviewer – Markham Starr
Interviewee – Tammy Frye

MS So I'll start by asking you a couple of questions and then you have a story...Alright so, what is your name?

TF Tammy Frye

MS And you are from New Bedford?

TF Acushnet, but I've lived in Fairhaven for awhile.

MS And you come from a fishing family?

TF Yes. Yup, two grandfathers, both of 'em lost at sea, my brother's a fisherman, my father was a fisherman. My husband's a fisherman. My sons have gone fishin'. I went fishin'. So

MS Fishing family!

TF Exactly. And here's just a little tidbit. Growin' up in a fishin' family, my father would always say to my brothers, "Don't go fishing, get an education, don't go fishin'" And so the first time I made a trip, he came down to the docks and actually, and my father's passed away so I might be a little sad, but he came down and he stood on the docks and he was cryin' and he said, "I never thought I'd have to tell my daughter not to go fishin'" You know, like he was so crushed. But when I went out and I just did it summers and winter breaks to pay for my college education, he ended up bein' so proud 'cause people would be like, "Oh my , you know that girl that fishes on that boat, that's crazy!" He's like "That's my daughter" So it ended up bein' somethin' that he was very proud of. And my sister-in-law fished with us too.

MS What kind of fishing were you doing?

TF Draggin'. We were flukin' in the summers and we used to go for winter breaks flukin' in Boston Harbor which is now closed down. Opened January 1st, everybody else is out celebratin' and we were in Boston Harbor freezing cold. You know you have this stuff wrapped around your face 'cause it was so bitter cold. But I just did it, like I said, to pay for education, so...summers and just my winter break.

MS Where were you goin' to college?

TF UMASS Dartmouth

MS What were you majoring in?

TF Psychology. And I just recently graduated with my masters in education. It took me a little time, but I finished it.

MS Were you fishing on your...?

TF Husband's boat, yeah. Yeah, my husband had a boat. 'Cause he bought a boat, this is probably digressing. He started fishin' and he went to partners with his uncle and things didn't work out so, before, the day we got married, actually that mornin' he went to sign for the boat. So...never had any experience as a captain, so that day, get married, you know, we're at the bank signin' for the boat 'cause we have to put it up. They say never meet each other, never see them on the day you're gettin' married, so we've had some rough times, but we've stuck it through.

MS How big was the boat?

TF That was the, the Creole Belle, I wanna say 72 feet. But then we had the Little Dreamer which was smaller. That was the one that, that's when I found out, we were on that one when I found out that I was pregnant.

MS Is that the story you wanna tell?

TF Well yeah. We could because like my husband still gets seasick. Why anybody would choose to be a fisherman and get seasick is beyond me, right? It's like crazy. But I never got seasick. And we were out this one trip and I was so sick and I couldn't believe it. And he called Nantucket to say we needed to come in. They were like, there was this wicked storm, they said "Well, no, you're gonna have to stay out, the docks are all full with pleasure boats. So I grabbed the radio and I said "Hey listen, I'll spend the weekend in jail, but I am comin' in. I am not puttin' up with this!" I was like, I said, "You can arrest me when we get there, I don't care what you do, but I'm not stayin' out." I was, "I can't believe you would do this, Wayne. This is disgusting. I was like so sick just heavin', heavin', heavin'. We get in and don't think too much about it. Think it's just bad weather. Go back out, come in and I'm still not feelin' well. When we get in, do a pregnancy test, oops I was pregnant! So you think I would stop then, but I actually fished 'till I was five months pregnant. I'd go out, go down in the fish hold, my belly was out like this. I'd be, you know, takin' out the fish, be at the fish houses they'd be like "You got your wife in the hold, what the hell's wrong with you?" He's like "Aw, she's fine. She's fine. It'll make her tough" So I did. And it ended up bein', you know, the son that I was pregnant with, you know, he grew up, he tried fishin' a little bit. He's like "This really isn't for me. He went to a maritime school. So now he has a degree from Maine Maritime Academy. And my youngest one was in the scallop shuckin' competin' against my brother so it's like a whole family that just...so that's just, there's not that many women that do it. My sister in

law fished too. Actually she was like a real fisherman. She did it for like about six years. She'd go off the Gulf of Maine. I was just part time. But...

MS So your husband's still fishing?

TF Part time, yeah. There's been a lot of, the industry hasn't been all that good to him.

MS Now when your son was born, did you stay at home when he was fishing?

TF I tried one trip, right and I cried the entire time I was out. My husband said, "You can't do..." My sister in law watched him, and she's like, "Wow, I can't do this, this is crazy." And then when he got a little, like when he was five and he wanted to go out, I went out with him, you know and we made like a little family trip, we tried it that way. And we did that a few times. Then my younger son wanted to do it. I mean, I have pictures of them when they were like two years old down here in their oil gear. We have stuff all around the house. You know it's cute, but I don't think you push your kid into being, actually my youngest son, Hudson, he really loves fishin', you know. He wants to be a scalloper...he has his own lobster boat, and you know works on his gear all the time. And people keep tellin' him, "You can't be a fisherman. That's crazy, the industry's bad." But my thing is, you gotta do whatever is gonna make you happy. If fishin's gonna make 'em happy, then do it. Would I like him to go to school, sure. But you know, you have to make these decisions so...

MS And do you know how your grandfathers died?

TF Oh I do, I do. Actually, it's kinda sad. Ok, my biological grandfather, which was my father's father, my father was only ten when his dad was lost at sea. And you know, it was really hard. I might cry, I'm sorry. Because my grandma had a really hard time with it. The boat, he was on the Paolina. The boat was supposed to come in. It was actually his birthday, February 14th. My grandmother, and you know these were just stories, 'cause my dad was only ten, that I had heard. She had the cake sittin' on the table, waitin' for him to come home. And days go by, a week goes by. And he still hasn't come home. And then she smashed the cake against the wall and said, you know that that was it. She says, there's no God. My father locked himself in the bathroom and the fire department had to come and try to get him out. So, he had a very difficult childhood. But all the wives on that boat stayed together. They were a really good group of women. 'Cause there was no insurance or anything and each one would help out. My grandmother was in a better spot because her husband saved every nickel that he made. Her house was paid for, this was back in 1952, I think. So she took care of all the other ones. And then, when I was twelve, she remarried. And she married another fisherman who I adored, Pappy is what we called him. And when I was twelve, his boat went down, the Eugene H. So, her second husband she lost at sea. And I remember, because they were hit by a tanker. And three of them went down, and then three were left clingin' to the debris and he was one of 'em. But he had this thing where somethin' in his throat would close up so he was talkin' to the guys, hangin' on the debris and it was, The Justice was the name of the ship that hit 'em, and then he ended up goin' down. But my grandmother had me so convinced, "He's probably

on an island..." At twelve, you wanna believe that. Right? So "Aw he's comin' home, he's comin' home," but he never did. And then when they had the service, I remember just feelin' so sad because, this is hard, at the Seaman's Bethel, my grandmother just like totally lost it and she was screamin' about "There's no God, if there was a God, he wouldn't have done this to me twice." And I remember just thinking, like holy mackerel how can you, you know I was a combination of bein' sad, bein' almost embarrassed by it, but later on I thought, she had a right to do it. Right? If you lost... and it was hard. You know. When we were little kids, my father would never go out fishin' in February 'cause that's when his father, February 14th, so he would always take off the month of February, like 'cause he had this fear that he was gonna be lost at sea. He always thought that's where I'm gonna die. I don't wanna, he never wanted to. He did though. He died young of a massive heart attack doing something he enjoyed though. He was walkin' in the woods, lookin' at birds. So at least you have to be happy for that. But I think I've talked too much.

MS No that was great. That's probably enough...it's sad.

TF Yeah I know. It's sad and so people will say to me, "Oh my god, you lost, you know we lost other close friends at sea too, like why would you want even let your kids go, first of all you don't make that choice, they make that choice, but you know what, when it's your time, would I want, I'd be distraught if my kids were ever lost at sea, but I'd be distraught if they were killed in a car accident, I'd be distraught if somebody murd [ered them] right? So you have to let them decide what they want to do with their life and just support 'em. And seein' that my oldest one, you know grew the first five months of his development was at sea, it's almost like in his blood right? So that's it.

MS That was great, wonderful.