

Fishtales  
Sunday, September 30, 2012  
Working Waterfront Festival

Interviewer – Patricia Pinto da Silva  
Interviewee – Renee Ruscoe

RR Ok

PP I like to have you state your name and where we are and a little bit about yourself

RR Ok

PP 'Cause it may or may not be connected to your previous story.

RR Ok that's fine. Alright, hey my name's Renee Ruscoe and I am a fisherman. I fished for, I purse seined for salmon off the Kodiak Island in Alaska. This past summer as a matter of fact, I left Kodiak this month. Right now we're at the New Bedford Working Waterfront Festival. It's a beautiful day. It turned out that way anyway, the 30th of September. And I turned fifty years old this month so it was a very big month. But the story that I'm going to tell is about an event that happened while I was on the boat. So to give you a little bit of background, when you fish, when you salmon seine there are either, there's either four people or five people in the crew. We had a crew of four and I was one of that crew. My job specifically was stacking corks as they would come in with the net with fish and I was also the cook. And you've gotta have a cook, so anyway, so the story starts when, ok so the net was all laid out and we were actually pulling the net in which comes in over the power block and then the lead line is separated from the corks and the lead man is stacking the leads and I'm stacking the corks. At one part, at one particular place in that process, the skipper pulls the lead line in so that all the leads are hooked with a ring, with a ring hook and it brings the leads up on the deck of the boat. Thoridically which is a skipper word, never heard it before, but thoridically, that mean's the fish are ours because now they are in the net, the lead line which is on the bottom is on the deck of the boat and so what we have left to do is bring the rest of the net in and roll the fish in. So that said, we were in the process of bringing the net in, we got the leads up, the rings went up and so the lead line or the bottom of the net is on the boat. And something happened and he, the skipper asked the lead man to come forward and help him with something which meant the block was stopped, which meant for the moment I wasn't really doing anything so I walked over to see what I could do to help and the next thing I knew, a big clump of leads and web and everything else dropped down, dropped me to my hands and knees and I proceeded to get completely covered with the net. And so as I'm completely covered with the net, I sort of realized that I couldn't get up, 'cause those things are heavy. So I called out to Dave, and I said "Dave, Dave!" And he kind of looked around he says, "Where are you?" I was like "I'm buried" [laughs]. So he looked at the deck, he looked at the deckhand and he kind of looked around and he says, "Are you alright?" "Well I do have a little space to breath," I said. So and he, I guess, surmised from the tone of my voice that I wasn't hurt. And he looked at

the deckhand and he said, "First the fish, then the girl" Seriously this happened, yup and so he proceeds to leave me under the net while he rolls the fish aboard. So I was under, trapped under the net for several minutes, you know, and I was fine like I said. 'Cause the space that I had to breath actually was from the bill of my hat down to the net that's covered in jellyfish. And so [laughs] so I was trying very hard to you know just kind of keep my face out of the net with the jellyfish and the bill of my hat was all the space I had so anyway they proceeded to get the fish aboard. It took, I don't know, it took another you know few minutes to do that. And so after the fish got aboard, then he did pull the net back and release me from my stranglehold that the net had on me. So what I have to say about that is I got out from under the net, I stood up, I put my hands on my hips, I said, "First the fish, then the girl huh?" And then I looked, and he says, "They were comin' in what was I supposed to do?" I looked at him and I said, "You know, I guess I knew it was gonna come to this!" [laughs] The truth is though I didn't panic, I didn't scream, I didn't you know any of those things, however, I would now like to read you a poem that was inspired by that story. The poem was written by Dave Densmore who is the skipper of the boat, who is also my partner and so it's called "First the Fish". And you guys, uh oh, you guys already know the punch line, but we're gonna pretend like you don't. So:

#### First the Fish

I met a girl who became my lady  
It seemed so natural from the start  
Her enthusiasm for this boat and life  
Just stole away my heart.

So she came north to Alaska  
Where I have a seining boat  
She works the deck and is our cook  
And says she loves this live afloat.

One stormy day the fish showed up  
And we were steadily hauling gear  
The waves were big and the wind was strong  
She just grinned without a sign of fear

We were nearing the end of a set  
And it looked to be a prosperous haul  
When suddenly I heard a high pitched screech  
And a loud, desperate call

(that part is really not true)

I'd been concentrating on getting those fish aboard  
Truth to tell, I'd forgot about my crew  
I was having fun with my job

And they both knew what to do.

But I glanced around and Renee was gone  
And it gave me quite a fright  
But from the volume of the wail  
I figured she must be alright

A clump of lead line and web had dropped  
And knocked her to the deck  
I envisioned her badly hurt  
with broken back or neck

I asked if she was alright  
She said she had a little space left to breath  
But would appreciate it if I would lift the net  
She really would like to be set free

But it was a really good set  
And those fish I didn't wanna lose  
Sorry darlin' I love ya,  
But there's really nothing here to choose

Well I had to get those fish aboard  
And piled on the net  
Told her, nothin' personal  
It's just fishin' and sooner or later around to her I'd get

Yup there she was  
Buried under the web  
But in the net the fish rolled and swirled  
Well hell, first the fish, then the girl  
First the fish, then the girl.

Dave Densmore [laughs] Fisherman Poet. So yeah, that is my story about getting buried in the web.

PP Can you tell us where you were fishing out of?

RR Kodiak, off of, out of Larsen Bay which is a small fishing village, cannery village actually up Uyak Bay, Kodiak Alaska.

PP Great. Thank you so much

RR Yeah thank you so much, yeah.