

## Making Ends Meet : The Way of the Prince Edward Island Fisherman's Wife

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Article abstract

For the fisherman's wife the problem of making ends meet is cast in a cyclical time frame, tied to the ends of the seasons of the year and the seasons of fishing. Added to the problem is the risk and uncertainty prévalent in the occupation of fishing. Making ends meet involves distinctive ways of subsistence provisioning rather than total dependence on cash income; and, as well, adaptation to the technology and economy of mainstream culture. This article describes the strategies for making ends meet used by a sample of Prince Edward Island women, wives of *bona fide* fishermen.

# MAKING ENDS MEET: THE WAY OF THE PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND FISHERMAN'S WIFE<sup>1</sup>

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Just as artefacts of material culture, song, dance, and stories arise out of the daily life of the folk, so the pattern of this daily life is also an expression of folkways. For the last few years I have been studying the way of life of Prince Edward Island fishermen's wives. Theirs is a distinctive living culture, growing out of the past and retaining some of the old, but constantly changing and adapting to the new.

In fishing as a way of life, making ends meet involves much subsistence provisioning rather than total dependence on cash income. It involves also, for those in Atlantic Canada as elsewhere, adaptation to the technology and economy of mainstream culture, adaptation of old ways to new, and for some newcomers to the lifestyle, adaptation of urban to rural ways. In common with fisherwomen around the world, it means living with the risk and uncertainty prevalent in the occupation of fishing.

My personal interest in women in the fishery goes back many years. I have always lived near the sea. Through my experience as a Home Economist and provincial Red Cross nutritionist visiting rural schools and communities in Prince Edward Island and later teaching daughters and sons of fishing families in high school, I became even more interested in the women of these families. Then, after the Kirby Task Force Report on the fishery<sup>2</sup> in 1984 totally ignored the role of women and women's work undergirding the fishery, it seemed time for women in the fishery to be acknowledged.

Most fisheries research has been concerned with questions arising out of economic theories or, on the more human scale, with lives of the men of fishing crews and their work. Women have been omitted in studies, decisions, and policies relating to the fishery. Focusing on this problem, in *To Work and To Weep*,

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1. This article is based on a paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Folklore Studies Association of Canada in Moncton, N.B., May 1990. Research was supported by grants from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada and the Senate Research Committee of the University of Prince Edward Island.
  2. M.J.L. Kirby, Chairman, *Navigating Troubled Waters*. Report of the Task Force on the Atlantic Fishery, Ottawa, Minister of Supply and Services, 1983.

Nadel-Klein and Davis have gathered together papers concerning women in the fishery in twelve locations in various parts of the world.<sup>3</sup> These papers and others<sup>4</sup> examine the various roles played by women and their contribution to the fishing industry. Poggie and Gersuny<sup>5</sup> and Danowski<sup>6</sup> in their Rhode Island studies describe the constraints imposed on women's lives by their fishermen husbands' work. Janet Finch terms this the "incorporation" of a wife in her husband's occupation.<sup>7</sup> To emphasize this incorporation, I use the designation "fisherman's wife" rather than "fisher woman" or "fisher".

Not only has the role of fishermen's wives been rendered invisible,<sup>8</sup> but also much of the work of fishing has been devalued, especially that of the inshore fishery in socially and geographically isolated occupational communities. The Rhode Island studies have noted the commitment to fishing as a way of life by fishermen's wives.<sup>9</sup> As another example of commitment, Margaret Clark describes the Fishermen's Wives Association of Gloucester, Mass., who for some 20 years have been promoting an awareness of the fishery and playing an active role in regional politics and fishery management in their attempt to

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3. Jane Nadel-Klein and Dona Lee Davis (eds.), *To Work and To Weep: Women in Fishing Economies*, St. John's, Memorial University of Newfoundland, ISER, 1988.
  4. For examples see Ellen Antler, "Women's Work in Newfoundland Fishing Families", *Atlantis*, 11, Spring (1977), p. 106-113; Cynthia Lamson, "On the Line: Women and Fish Plant Jobs in Atlantic Canada", Unpublished manuscript, Halifax, 1984; Marilyn Porter, "'Women and Old Boats': the Sexual Division of Labour in a Newfoundland Outport", in E. Garminkow et al. (eds.), *The Public and the Private: Gender and Society*, London, Heinemann, 1983, p. 91-105; Richard Dixon et al., "Fishermen's Wives: A Case Study of a Middle Atlantic Fishing Community", *Sex Roles*, 10: 1-2, (1984), p. 33-52; Patricia Connelly and Martha MacDonald, "Women's Work: Domestic and Wage Labour in a Nova Scotia Community", *Studies in Political Economy*, 10 (1983), p. 45-72.
  5. John J. Poggie and C. Gersuny, *Fishermen of Galilee*, Kingston R.I., University of Rhode Island, Marine Bulletin 17, 1974.
  6. Fran Danowski, *Fishermen's Wives: Coping with an Extraordinary Occupation*, Kingston R.I., University of Rhode Island, Marine Bulletin 3, 1980.
  7. Janet Finch, *Married to the Job: Wives Incorporation in Men's Work*, London, George Allen & Unwin, 1983.
  8. Nadel-Klein and Davis, p. 41, Helga Jacobson in *Speaking from the Shadows: An Introduction to Feminist Thinking in Anthropology*, Ottawa, CRIAW/ICREF, 1989, p. 17 states, "In our society work is the substance of the public world. It defines and is defined as the occupation and careers of men. What women do fits in behind this world of men's work as its support; women enable men. The domestic or private world as we understand it is defined as an adjunct to the public world and less consequent than that world...the tasks they [women] carry out are less visible and less valued". Dorothy Smith in contemplating this power inequity speaks of "the relations of ruling" of the public world rendering the "extra-patriarchal" or private domestic world invisible: *The Everyday World as Problematic: A Feminist Sociology*, Toronto, The University of Toronto Press, 1987.
  9. Poggie and Gersuny, p. 85-88; Danowski, p. 31-33.

make visible and protect their way of life.<sup>10</sup> Like folklore,<sup>11</sup> Home Economics is concerned with understanding, describing, explicating meanings and discovering the intentions of social actors in doing what they are doing. If these social actors such as fishermen's wives are invisible, then they must be given an opportunity to speak, for after all, "People who live their lives with the issues are the experts".<sup>12</sup>

The Prince Edward Island study began in the summer of 1984 with a visit to fishing communities across the Island to talk with fishermen's wives, 17 in all, whose names were given to us through personal contacts. Following this pilot study we conducted a telephone survey of 111 fishermen's wives, randomly selected from a list of names of licensed *bona fide* inshore fishermen, i.e. captains who own their own boats. Some of the 300 fishermen on the first list had retired, a few were deceased, some had no wives, some had no phones. A few of the wives wouldn't talk on a party line and a few wouldn't answer surveys of any kind.<sup>13</sup> Overall, 80% of those eligible, that is, married to a *bona fide* fisherman and having a listed phone, did talk to us.<sup>14</sup> The following summer 30 of these women participated in personal open-ended interviews, free-flowing conversations in their own homes, followed by further mid-winter telephone interviews. We also interviewed several older women from 70 to 95 years old and a few older men, to provide a picture of the past. Then, since lives are lived in the context of material and human environments, the research includes a study of the characteristics of each of the major fishing communities.

In its natural environment, economy, traditional culture and ethnography, Prince Edward Island differs from other parts of Canada outside the Atlantic Provinces. Its wealth is in agriculture, fisheries, and tourism, all of which are cut short by the long severe winters and late spring. Wages are low,

10. Margaret E. Clark, "Managing Uncertainty: Family, Religion, and Collective Action Among Fishermen's Wives in Gloucester, Massachusetts", in Nadel-Klein and Davis (eds.), 1988, p. 261-278.
11. Richard S. Tallman, "Folklore Research in Atlantic Canada: An Overview", *Atlantis*, 8: 2, (1979), p. 118-130, emphasizes the importance of historical context and points out that "much remains to be done in the folk traditions of the inshore and offshore fishermen".
12. D. J. Gamble, "The Berger Inquiry: An Impact Assessment Process", *Science*, 199, March 3, 1978, p. 951.
13. Initially contact was made with the Evangeline (francophone) region of P.E.I. and with the Micmac reserve on Lennox Island. Neither of these groups wished to be included in the study and our limited resources would not have allowed us to do justice to their cultures.
14. To respect the confidentiality of information from the participants, we have given each person in the telephone survey a code number and removed all the names from the list. When we report personal interviews, we use pseudonyms, and do not give information such as home address that might identify that particular person. In this way we are able to tell their stories in their own words without revealing the identity of these fishermen's wives. We believe that all this information is really theirs, given to us on loan. Now I am returning it through a series of letters reporting the findings of the study to them before publishing it further.

unemployment is high. Some 20,000 people, about one-sixth of the population, look to the fishery for their major source of income, while about twice that number are directly or indirectly involved in the fishery. The fishermen have a short season, roughly from the end of April until November with the height of activity tied to the 10-week lobster season. They fish lobster, scallops, ground-fish, tuna, and mackerel, or gather mussels, oysters, and Irish moss.<sup>15</sup> Some fish the spring lobster season and some the fall.

Many Islanders seek and find security and satisfaction through subsistence provisioning strategies and the informal economy to provide food and shelter. Families are interrelated and extended families are plentiful. Their style of life is not considered by Islanders to be "simply romantic ways of being poor with dignity",<sup>16</sup> nor do they consider themselves poor cousins waiting for a handout. They simply survive in the face of statistical evidence. This way of life is somewhat precarious: it is out of step with big corporations and bureaucracies and in many ways out of step with North American society. It requires support such as some type of equalization payments and unemployment insurance, and a fair price for fishery products for fishing families.

The women who took part in the survey live in 74 small rural districts that merge into one another. Many of their family histories record two centuries of life in Prince Edward Island. Our sample reflected the Island's historic ethnic range with approximately 1/3 of respondents being of Scottish origin, 1/4 Acadian and French,<sup>17</sup> 1/3 English, 1/10 Irish, with a small number of German and "other". Ninety-one percent were born in Prince Edward Island, 4% in other Atlantic Provinces, 4% in other Canadian provinces, and only one percent in another country. Almost 3/4 of the women and slightly over 4/5 of their husbands grew up in a rural community either farming or fishing. Religious affiliation is split equally between Roman Catholic and Protestant; a very few claim none.

All but 12 families had at least one father or father's father who fished. Husbands had been fishing for about the same number of years as they have been married — from one to 48 years. Many of the fishermen's wives and their husbands belonged to large families with as many as 16 children, but most of them have only two or three. In age, the women ranged from a few in the early 20s to a few in the late 50s and early 60s, with the largest group between

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15. Kennedy Wells, *The Fishery of Prince Edward Island*, Charlottetown, Ragweed Press, 1986, p. 23-25. This book gives a non-technical overview of the fishery of Prince Edward Island, its present state, its history, and a chapter on women in the fishery.

16. Ralph Surette, "In Pursuit of Alternatives", *Atlantic Insight*, 11: 9 (1989), p. 43.

17. This represents the sum of two designations given by the respondents. Our assumption is that "French" designates francophone, probably from Quebec.

25 and 35. Two out of five have completed high school and one-third have some post-secondary education.<sup>18</sup>

Some of the questions asked in the telephone interview were simply to provide background information. Some were about the material aspects of everyday life: food, clothing, shelter — and money; about people and relationships: husbands, children, friends, family, and the community; and some to discover ways of managing work and play, health and sickness and stressful events; and how satisfied fishermen's wives are with their lives. In the winter we asked questions about changes and the seasonal pattern of life for the fishing family.

To organize the large amount of detailed information from the study, we have constructed a broad conceptual model following that proposed by Bubolz, Eichler and Sontag<sup>19</sup> based on the concept of the family as an ecosystem.<sup>20</sup> "The world we live in is a series of interdependent systems — the paradigm is ecological".<sup>21</sup> In our model, one's life situation is depicted as being made up of four basic components: work/play, family/social relations, material/non-material resources, and worldview.

Each part of this model plays a role for the fisherman's wife concerned with making ends meet. For this paper I have selected excerpts from interviews relating to work and play, especially household work, that "non-work" rendered invisible in our society; the use of resources, and imagination and resourcefulness in their use; and human relations which are intertwined with provisioning, with everyday action in making ends meet.

To define the locus of the study we use Thompson's conceptualization of two contrasting domains: the *oikos* protected by Hestia, the Greek goddess of the hearth, and the domain of the *polis* under the god Hermes.<sup>22</sup> In early Greek

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18. Since there is a wide range in age for these fishermen's wives, we need to keep in mind that the school system has changed and was quite different for a woman going to school forty years ago than today. For a comparison with Island women in general, see, Women's Division, Province of Prince Edward Island, *Women and Education in Prince Edward Island*, Fact Sheet 1, March 15, 1988.
  19. Margaret M. Bubolz, J.B. Eicher, and M.S. Sontag, "The human ecosystem: A model", *J. Home Economics*, Spring (1977), p. 28-31 show a family or an individual in a family embedded within three interested environments: the "human behavioural environment", the "human constructed environment", and the "natural environment".
  20. Nancy C. Hook, and B. Paolucci, "The family as an ecosystem", *Journal of Home Economics*, 62 (1970), p. 315-318.
  21. Doris Badir, "Home Economics Research: Developing the Parameters of a Discipline and the Tools of a Practitioner", in *Home Economics: Proceedings of XVI World Congress, International Federation of Home Economics*, Paris, 1988, p. iii.
  22. Patricia J. Thompson, "Home Economics and the Hestian Mode", *Illinois Teacher of Home Economics*, 29:1 (Jan/Feb 1986), p. 87-91; and Patricia J. Thompson, *Home Economics and Feminism: The Hestian Synthesis*, Charlottetown, Home Economics Publishing Collective UPEI, 1988.

mythology the fire of Hestia's hearth was never allowed to go out, and was moreover carried from the domestic hearth into the *polis* to the heart of the city. Hestian then is a metaphor for that cluster of traits of the household and family and its near environment, the community, to designate what some term "domestic", others the informal economy. This does not mean advocating a closed family structure with rigid gender roles within which women are confined and powerless: rather, Hestian/Hermean refers to a division of philosophy or world view. The Hermean is the dominant world view and is patriarchal in our society: the Hestian is suppressed. Inequality is a dilemma for the fisherman's wife as for others whose value system is oriented towards the Hestian, but whose lives are lived at the interface of the boundaries of the two unequal systems. Our research is focused on the *oikos* or household with its Hestian aspects of domestic life, care and connection, rather than on the *polis* or Hermean world of public life, competition, and control.

Making ends meet within this way of life for fishermen's wives results in distinctive folkways, patterns in the Hestian domain and ways of dealing with the Hermean domain at the interface, for providing the everyday necessities. The women's stories show awareness of these distinctive ways, how they organize their lives to accommodate the occupation of fishing and how they define being a fisherman's wife. Each of the women interviewed is unique, regardless of whether descendant from a long line of fishing families or a newcomer, she learns the typical ways of the fishing occupation.

Although in many respects their lives are similar to those of other Prince Edward Island rural women, their stories show their recognition of a distinctive way of life. For example:

There's a lot of misconceptions by people that don't know anything about the industry. And then it causes hard feelings. It's too bad, because they get an impression that's not a correct one. They spend a lot of their time all winter on their gear, getting ready. They're not slack — they don't have a great deal of free time- some of them maybe do but not a lot of them. And you know you have to always keep in the back of your mind — you might have broke even or got a little ahead this year, but what's next year going to be like? You have to keep that in mind.

From now until he starts scalloping we have no money coming in. That's when you have to think ahead and you have to say, "Well, we'll allow this much — " you count up your dollar bills and get everything straightened out and then see what you have left over.

My husband does all his own construction. He built the shops himself. He's done everything little by little. If you don't have to get tied up into a mortgage it's better. We grow a big garden. My father-in-law has pretty well taken that over this summer. And we used to have our own beef — but we still do up two calves.

I think we have had success. We're not wanting. We'd like a new home but we'll get it. That's our goal. It may take a little longer than if we went the mortgage route, but we'll do it. We're quite happy. We're kind of getting ourselves out of the hole. That's about all you can ask. Everybody's healthy. We don't have any big expensive desires

or anything like that. As long as everybody's got what they need we don't want a lot of money. And the independence — he could be making tremendous money if he'd stayed in the States, but then the more you make the more you have to spend. But he's probably got what a millionaire would have down there. The land is unbelievable what it costs down there to have 20 acres. To have the peace and quiet and security — sometimes you take it for granted. You have to kind of remind yourself that the world out there isn't like our own little spot down here.

For the fisherman's wife the problem of making ends meet is cast in the cyclical time frame of the year. This is clear in Pam's story and is repeated over and over again — a litany of the seasons.

He usually works in the barn for the winter and I help him. I'd rather do that than work in the house. It's company and a help for him. In the spring when he's cementing the traps I help him.

All winter they're so relaxed, just taking it easy and sleeping in in the mornings. But in the spring they get so anxious — anxious to get on the water and get going. One year he even spread his traps on the front lawn because there was less snow there. I said if you just wait another week the snow will be gone. Then he poured the cement and it went through on the lawn and hardened, and then when you go to cut the grass — I growled all year about it. He's not [so] bad that it bothers me. But don't ask to go anywhere! That's unmentionable. The first of April it starts and the middle of April it gets worse.

I enjoy being a fisherman's wife. I have complaints once in a while — the times — it's not regular hours. It's long days for them. They get up early. He usually gets up around 4:00 I used to get up the first couple of years we were married. If I don't make his lunch the night before, I might get up now. He can cook as good as I can. He goes out about 4:00 and gets home any time between 3:00 in the afternoon and 6:00 in the evening.

It's a great life around here in the summertime. We're lucky — it's such a healthy place to live. I hope it stays that way. I like the feeds of lobster. It's nice to have fresh fish. It's healthy too. It's a good living. I think I'd much rather than a 9 to 5 job for him. He loves the water and I think it keeps him healthy — nice clean air. I think it keeps him young. The fishermen — it's in them all their life. Even the older fishermen after they're retired, they still go out. It's a good life as long as it keeps on that they can sell their products. They need to have a good market for them. A lot of people depend on their two months for their living for the year. It's just that much time.

I have a garden — just small. We bottle the vegetables. They seem to stay fresher. I leave the pickle making up to Mom. We usually end up buying a pork and a beef from Daddy. Families are a good help around here. They help each other a lot.

I used to knit heads.<sup>23</sup> I'm busy in the winter. I have a lot to do. I quilt. I learned to crochet. I'm active in sports. I play softball in the summer, broomball in the winter. But I'm not one to get involved in meetings and things.

I do his books. I have it all down but we get someone in to do the Income Tax. He got a new boat — we probably could have used a new car better — it's so rusty. But he figures you can't make a living with a car and we make it with our boats.

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23. Cotton mesh is attached inside traps to prevent lobsters from escaping.



In order to have a healthy marriage I can't imagine not being involved in fishing. When they come home and they've had their problems and they've had a bad day and you have supper and talk about it, I can't imagine not being involved. It's nice for him to have support. He needs a lot of perking up. He needs your confidence in him. It's the same thing with my work, if I come home and I've had a bad day and I talk it over with him. If he said, 'Oh I don't want to hear about it —'; but he's interested. It works both ways. I feel good about being able to help him and working with him.

I have to be really stuck before he'll help me with the dishes. But he's very good around the house. He's not that tidy but he's very good to keep things up and look after the place. We did a lot of work on the house ourselves.

During the fishing season "It's a long day —". The men and often the women are up very early. They describe, besides lobster fishing, mackerel seining — "I've seen cooking at 11:30 at night". Or moss<sup>24</sup> "Up at 5 o'clock in the morning and you don't get home until 10 o'clock at night, sometimes with still two tubs of wash to do". But, as they say, "It passes. It's only for a couple of months and then he's home again for the winter".

A very, very busy life. I do everything from painting the boat and painting the buoys, helping with anything mostly. I've gone out on the boat for the last two or three years. You have your certain job and you do it. You don't have to do it all. In the summer when you're working so hard in the heat [at the moss on shore] you get bogged down at the last of it. You don't feel good. But I like going out on the boat now. We get up really early- around 4 o'clock. We get in maybe 7 o'clock, 8 o'clock in the evening. We're out that long. We go pretty far. It's a long day. In late fall it's dark when we come in.

I like the winter better than the summer. I don't even mind those big storms that we have. I like to read those books about history — what those people had to go through!

I wouldn't move away from the water. I just love it where I am. You can see the water. I guess it's your life. In a way you get all the sunshine and things. People in the city have it best, but they don't get all the beautiful sunshine. And when fishing gets along a bit if you want to take the day off, you can.

I love to cook and put up. Twice a year I put up lobster and I put up salmon and pickles. I pick berries and put them up. I make freezer jam now.

This cyclical pattern takes place within a context of high risk — risk to boats, gear, and human life from the sea itself, intensified by the additional risk to their livelihood from bureaucratic decisions and unpredictable fish stocks. They recognize the risk and have their ways of coping with it:

He was fishing with his father. My father was a fisherman. It's kind of exciting I think — a fisherman's life. Like listening on the two-way — how they're doing and all that. And then you worry about them out there too — the storms. A lot of drownings lately. My son went overboard, I think it was two years ago, but they were lucky. They saved him. It's kind of scary but you can't dwell on it. There's no way my husband

24. Irish moss which is gathered, dried, cleaned and sold by many fishing families either as their principal source of cash income or to supplement other income.

could be in a nine-to-five job. He'd go crazy. It gets in their blood after they're fishing for awhile.

I love picking berries and going to the beach. And going fishing. I love it. It's so nice and peaceful up there. I just go up through the woods there. When I go fishing I don't really go for trout—I go for Mayflowers.

Cash income is not dependable year round. The boat and fishing gear are usually financed, creating a demand for regular cash payments from a generally modest income. For 1985 the net fishing income reported to us showed fewer than 10 families over \$30,000, and the same proportion under \$8000, while approximately 1/3 cleared less than \$16,000.<sup>25</sup>

They have their own interpretation of the cash flow problem. For anything other than the boat and fishing gear, as Vicki says: "You have to wait".

And this year we're putting in things like a new flue because there was never one in this house and there were never closets or any place for storage or cupboards or inside window frames or walls in the bedroom. So you have to put a lot of money into that.

But he doesn't really like to do anything like that anyway. Or to have bills. You have to wait until you have the money. I find you have a real flurry when fishing starts when you go out and maybe buy wallpaper and things and try to get it on fast. Then you have months when you don't have any because you have to leave that money in the bank to pay bills or boat loan or your truck loan or whatever and you have to have your money there for food and just general things until December. In December they get Unemployment.

It's a very different way of life because I was always accustomed to having a pay coming in every second week. I notice with a lot of people that they buy up groceries to have when there's no income. Even this bit about living in the country in the winter and how they stock up in case of storms.

She recognizes that she doesn't have highly honed skills yet still subscribes to this do-it-yourself, pay-as-you-go policy of providing and caring for shelter.

I've never done this type of thing before — painting and papering. I'm starting to get there but you don't have a lot of time because you have to cook meals for the fishermen and sort of be here when they come in. Right now if I could ever get the house all cleaned and straightened around and new walls and the yard all cleaned up that would be success. But there isn't time. I think something like that takes a long time anyway. Then if you start into something yourself, you find that you have to do it two or three times before it's done properly. Like I wallpapered the bathroom five times. I never had to do things like that because when you have an apartment in the city it's all done.

With this type of uncertain cash income, these fishermen's wives have developed many distinctive strategies. Ruth explains:

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25. The mean income in Prince Edward Island for those employed is about 85% of that for Canada as a whole: 10% more employed Islanders than all Canadians have an income of less than \$30,000 while 10% more in Canada as a whole than in the Island have incomes over \$45,000. The number of women in the labour force counted in the 1986 census shows an increase of 86.4% over 1971, with a total female participation rate of 56.4% for the Island. (From applicable 1986 *Statistics Canada* census reports.)

All through the summer when there's cash the women start to stockpile groceries to have later when the cash is gone. The women here are all moss harvesters — every one of them. The Irish moss is the main thing here. Women go right out on the boat and rake with their husbands or work at the shore harvest or look after the moss at home. It's quite a bit of work- a lot of hours and very low pay when you figure out the number of hours. Our summers are very busy.

Another common practice, like a ritual, is to preserve the last catch of the season for their own winter use. It is a common story, this "putting up" for the winter, not only fish but vegetables and fruit as well. Whether or not they do these special tasks themselves, they are resourceful in finding non-cash ways of getting them done. As Pam said, for example, "I leave the pickle making up to Mom". Good food is important. In their own words, "The best thing about fishing is that you can get your own living. Have a garden ...".

As a strategy for making ends meet, most of these women have worked at a paid job, usually part-time and seasonal. Ellie, a nurse, shows how it fits together:

Married to a fisherman you can't work shift work. He's gone at 4:30 in the morning. It's easier in the winter until April. He's quite capable of making meals for him and the children if I'm working.

April is getting ready month. In April the bookkeeping picks up too. It's a long day. I do all the outside work from the spring on. He helps me when he can with the garden, but I do a lot.

Our families are close and they help us out. Two of my brothers are involved in fishing and most of his — six men and three sisters in the fish plants. They talk fishing all winter long.

Others also state: "Families are a good help around here". However, a newcomer to the industry and to the Island draws a contrast: "That's a bit hard. The other fishermen always have a brother-in-law or a father helping them build the traps. And the women have their mother where their kids can stay." Nonetheless, she too appreciates the benefits of the way of life and has learned the same ways of coping.

She, like the others, wishes for improved housing. There's the need for making work a little easier and more manageable. And there's also the satisfaction many feel when the house is fixed up the way they like it to be. The stories of their kitchens seem to symbolize their lives. There's a lot of waiting involved.

I know now my priority in life is happiness. It's not money. So as long as we have enough money to have good food, which is another priority, and to be happy — that would be successful. We have dreams of a bigger home and all those things but they're not a priority. We redid our kitchen this winter. We thought we had enough money to do that and it turns out we didn't. Especially the sink. So anyway I'm trying to cut down and save money on everything. You can manage if you work a bit more at it. I figure that's part of being a housewife, to save money on trying to get local food. I love gardening.

The lifestyle for a fisherman's wife in P.E.I. is that you have your husband home all winter which is really nice. He works and builds the traps in the shop, but he's home and he spends a lot of time with the kids. Through the fishing season that's the hardest part. He's not there. But it has its rewards. Until the gear is paid for we would surely be in a jam if we didn't get the unemployment. But we're trying to plan to do without. Eventually we'll do without.

We listen to music. I read when I get a chance. I like to sew. I like to knit. I like to garden. I like to do all those things but I don't have as much time recently. My activity for fun is likely baking. I like to bake and that's a necessity but since I enjoy it I take it as a hobby.

When he has the time, when he's around, he doesn't mind helping. He's real good. For a while he was unemployed and I was working and he did the cooking — but needs a recipe book and all that. It comes a lot easier for me.

We really wanted to be out in the country. We never get tired of the beauty of the Island. We feed the birds all winter.

The same pattern prevails for clothing as for food and shelter — low cash expenditure and where possible, do-it-yourself. Donna described the process of how she learned to be the wife of a fisherman. She knew something about the fishing life. Her father had done some lobster fishing in the summers while holding a full-time job. But it was only after she married a fisherman that she felt the full impact of being married to the job. She told us that there were lots of shouting matches with her husband before she began to understand the reality that designer jeans belong in another life. For the fisherman's wife, it's strictly department store jeans.

But they also have their own way of keeping up with the latest fashions. Jane told us when she was invited to a wedding this summer, she had put forth her best effort to be stylishly dressed. She told us about walking with a friend who was all "oohs" and "ahs" about her outfit and asked, "Oh, where did you get it?" Jane whispered in her ear, "SA", and they both laughed. Jane added that her husband was furious that ANYONE knew she got her clothes at the Salvation Army's second hand clothing shop!

Fran found a way to fool the public, with her streaked hair:

People say to me, "How did you bleach your hair?" You know, that new kind of hair treatment. Everybody thinks that's what it is. I don't know whether to tell them the truth or let them think I'm a fool. It's from out fishing on the water in the sun. It's the part that's not under my jacket. But it gets really dark in the winter. I was blond as a child.

Kim, who also fishes with her husband, tells about her "Florida tan":

In May and June it's not hot! I remember going up some mornings and having to shovel snow out of the boat. That's another misconception that most people have — "Oh, you're getting such a nice tan!" And it's not tan — it's windburn. They think you're out there in a bikini!

For these fishermen's wives, often their free time for "play" is also productive as they knit, sew, crochet, quilt, and do other craft work. They agree that they are probably happiest when their hands are busy, for example, "I don't like to be idle" and "[I made] a crocheted table cloth this winter — something to take in my hands when I went out somewhere". One has a knitting machine and made 17-20 pairs of socks. Another with the help of her sister made her daughter's graduation dress.

There is also an element of sociability to much of this work/play. Quilting provides a good example:

This year the WI decided they'd do a quilt so I helped them. It was one stitch at a time — the first time I ever did it. I enjoyed it. I don't know if it was the quilting as much as the afternoon out. I was no great shakes at it but it was fun. The older women used to fix up some of my mistakes. They'd look underneath and there'd be a whole bunch of threads- but they'd put up with me!

The expertise of their wives in making ends meet is acknowledged by the men. A fisherman husband, who came along to comment during an interview, said:

Well, the fishermen's wives pretty well run the business I would think — all the financial part of it. Most men are no good at that. It keeps the headaches down for the men if the women are good at it. Some wives are no good at all and it brings an added burden.

Through the years fishermen fished, fishing families survived, and women held the fishing enterprise on their shoulders. Yesterday it was by running the farm and doing that work when the men left home to live "at the shore" for the fishing season. Today it may be by using a paid job to supplement the meagre cash supply remaining after fishing expenses are paid. It takes two to make ends meet if the family occupation is fishing.

There are differences between yesterday and today. Modern technology lightens the nature of work both at home and on the fishing boat. The older women have seen many changes from former years. Several told of the great luxury of acquiring running water in the house and indoor plumbing and electricity. For some this was as late as 1947. Modern technology applied to fishing has also had its impact on women. As one of the older women says, "The boats are so nice now. I can remember when the toilet was a bucket on the deck". Economic dependence and high risk were prevalent yesterday and still are today. Yesterday the fisherman depended on the truck system and fish merchant companies,<sup>26</sup> the fish stocks, and the politico-economic system. Today the players have changed — it is government regulations for fishing and unemployment

26. For an introduction to the question of merchant credit and the truck system see Rosemary Ommer (ed.), *Merchant Credit & Labour Strategies in Historical Perspective*, Fredericton, N.B., Acadiensis Press, 1990, p. 9-15.

insurance, and the processing corporations; but the constantly changing fish stocks, the politico-economic system, and the worry and uncertainty remain.

In spite of the risks, the financial uncertainty and worry in making ends meet, these fishermen's wives value and enjoy their way of life. Their pleasures include country living, "We never get tired of the beauty of the Island;" the winter, "I like the winter better than the summer. I don't even mind those big storms that we have;" the water, "I wouldn't move away from the water. I just love it... I guess it's your life;" berry picking and trout fishing, "I love it. It's so nice and peaceful up there — when I go fishing..."

Just as these pleasures and satisfactions — sun, space, good air, peace, good food, happy husbands — are an integral part of their way of life, so are the risks and worries: the need for enough cash to meet the demands of boat and fishing gear expenses in today's technological world; the demands of bureaucratic regulations; the management of fish stocks; protection of the environment. Added to these demands is the discouraging attitude that fish, rather than being valued as food, is being treated as a market commodity where packaging and advertising take the biggest share of the price leaving little for the fisherman. Both yesterday and today the response of the fishermen's wives has been to provide food, shelter and clothing as much as possible outside the formal economic system and with the least dependence on that system. It is not designer Jeans for the fishing family; but build your own house and gather the wild to follow the way of life you have chosen. Whether as a response to merchant credit and the truck system or to today's system of bureaucratic government regulations, this way of life, through its survival tactics, enables and supports these systems. It is economically precarious, yet its very subsistence nature provides a buffer against disaster.<sup>27</sup> In many respects the fishing lifestyle with its emphasis on sustainable subsistence work and play is more attuned than most to the natural environment.<sup>28</sup> The fishermen's wives in our study fear that "their way of life will be gone", that the activity and decisions of those who hold power will take away their right to choose, and force them to leave their homes beside the water with the sound of the sea always in their ears. Very early in this research, I

27. "The strategies of the women's world are more often than not aimed at minimizing disaster", Ursula Franklin, "Will Women Change Technology or Will Technology Change Women?" in *Knowledge Reconsidered: A Feminist Overview*, Ottawa, CRIAW/ICREF, 1984, p. 84.

28. Two authors who reflect upon the advantages of a more self-sufficient subsistence mode of life rather than seeing it as an anti-progress anachronism are Thomas R. Berger, *Village Journey*, New York, Hill and Wang, 1985, p. 48-72, and Rosemary Ommer "Merchant, Community and Subsistence Production", Paper presented at 9th Atlantic Canada Workshop, Halifax, September 1989. The former describes subsistence provisioning as a highly valued cultural characteristic of the way of life of the Native people of Alaska; and the latter, from a pragmatic economic point of view based on an historical look at a fishing community during the depression of the 30's, points out that fishing families were much better able to survive than those dependent on the cash economy.

was given clear direction by these women: “Go tell them what our life is really like”. They have faith that if their stories can be heard and their situation understood, policy makers may be convinced, before it is too late, to take human factors and social values into account. This lifestyle may yet be recognized for its possibilities, although it has not yet, like the fishermen’s wives of Gloucester<sup>29</sup> who entered the public political arena. It’s like a dance in its moves and countermoves, every move in the outside world of economics and politics calling forth a countermove. To survive, these Prince Edward Island fishermen’s wives wish to call the tune now. Meanwhile, they continue their inventive ways of making ends meet.

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29. Clark, p. 261-278.