

Life as a Fisherman's Wife

Collector: Ann O'Brien

Contributor: Kathleen Cabot

Ann O'Brien:

Today is September 29th, 2009 ah... Kathleen Cabot is going to share a story with me ah...about her life..ah...as a fisherman's wife. Okay Kathleen.

Kathleen Cabot:

Yeah, my name is Kathleen Cabot and ah... I ... we was married in 1962, I married Jim Cabot. And we was married in February and that year in May he got a job at Wabush and ah... so he went to... the first thing he had to do was go across the Straits in boat, because there was no ferry or anything on at that time. And ah... roads on the other side, was only down so far as Shoal Cove East so when they got across the Straits then, they had to go up so far as that in boat and then they got aboard of a vehicle and drove to Corner Brook. They had to go to Corner Brook then, to get their medical before they went into Wabush to work.

So at that time, there was no phones either, so when he got into Wabush nobody knew if they were there or if they wasn't. Not like today when they got text, and cell phones, and pick up the phone and phone at any time. Anyway by... had to wait then until about June when the coastal boats ran to get a letter from him. And I remember that when the boat did come that ah... most everyone else was away, their wives got a letter and I didn't get either one. So I thought he must have forgot me. (laughs) But what did happen, my letter came up to Blanc Sablon, so when the ... somebody was going back and forth then and to the hospital, I had my aunt Mary Letemplier ran the post office there. And she sent down the letter. That's how we got.... lot of difference then and now.

So when he... he came home in October, next year he went fishing so. He fished by himself in the small boat and ah... I would go and help him at the fish. He would split the fish and I would head the fish and gut it for 'em. So then at that time we didn't have a truck the first couple of years, we was married, and he'd leave in the morning and he'd walk out across the brook to go fishing and he may not get home before 10 or 10:30 that night. And when I ... the only time I would see him through the day, if when he came in, I would go over and help him at the fish.

Ann O'Brien:

Did you have children at that time?

Kathleen Cabot:

Ah... well ah.. oh yes, I had one then, first when he started fishing but ...anyway later on through life when I was having my third child. I remember she was born on the ... on July 10th so Saturday I was over working at the fish with him and Sunday the baby was born.

Ann O'Brien:

Where did you go and have your baby?

Kathleen Cabot:

Oh. I went to Long Point that's where my four children was born; Dr. Marcoux borned four of them.

Ann O'Brien:

And ah... you said you had to go out across the brook but ah... so where were you living?

Kathleen O'Brien:

I was living in across... we called it... in across the brook and that. When I was living in there, first when I built the house there was no one living there, only just my sister Margaret, she lived ah...just next door almost to us, but now its certainly built up there different today.

Ann O'Brien:

And ah, did you have to get a babysitter now? or

Kathleen O'Brien:

Oh, yes. When I was ah... in the summer time, well my ah.. niece would baby sit, Loretta, Jim's sister, she would ah... baby sit. Take care of the kids.

Ann O'Brien:

So ah... every year then you would help Jim.

Kathleen O'Brien:

Yes, every year until...then he got a longliner and after they got the longliner well then I would... by that time I was working in the fish plant and he would be fishing home for short time, he'd be fishing in Blanc Sablon, Black Tickle and so....I helped him until that time.

Ann O'Brien:

So how many of them, had the longliner?

Kathleen O'Brien:

Ah.. four of them, him and his four brothers. They had a longliner called the Cabot Brothers and ah... so after that now you went to work in the fish plant.

Ann O'Brien:

So after that, now, you went to work in the fish plant.

Kathleen O'Brien:

Yes.

Ann O'Brien:

Who was running the fish plant?

Kathleen O'Brien:

When I went to work in the fish plant, ah... Gilbert and Ken Fowler was running it, the same ones that are running it today.

Ann O'Brien:

And what was the name of the fish plant?

Kathleen O'Brien:

Oh... I'm not sure, the name of the fish plant. Northern Fisheries, yeah, was the name of the fish plant at that time. Hmm.

Ann O'Brien:

So did they buy it from them, or did they just run the plant for them?

Kathleen O'Brien:

Who's that?

Ann O'Brien:

Ken and Gilbert.

Kathleen O'Brien:

Ah... well Pat Cabot was the first fellow that had the plant going. Him and his sister Agnes, they was running it for Northern Fisheries and I think, I'm not sure what did happen. If they gave it up and Pat ... and Ken and Gilbert took it over from them.

Ann O'Brien:

Hmm. And as the years go.. went on, ah.. was there ah.. an up... ah.. you know, did they build up the plant more?

Kathleen O'Brien:

Oh yes, the plant is there now, wasn't ... is not the one that ah... I worked at the fish in the first. The first plant they had was, they had more stages that ah..the fisheries use to ... the fishermen home, like they use to have their own places to salt their fish. And after that then, they got ...bought that from them to turn it into a fish plant. But now its last, I'd say I suppose fifteen years, ago maybe, they built this new plant that is here now and they called it The Labrador Fishermen's Union Shrimp Company plant. That was the new company that took it over.

Ann O'Brien:

And when you started at the fish, was it fresh fish or salt?

Kathleen Cabot:

Oh no, no. When I ...first when I started at the fish, ah... it was salt fish, yeah. But after that they went more into the fresh fish.

Ann O'Brien:

And ah.. so The Labrador Fishermen Union Shrimp Company, they did all fresh fish?

Kathleen Cabot:

Yes. Yeah. They done all fresh fish, and they did scallops and then they got into other species after that.

Ann O'Brien:

Such as what?

Kathleen Cabot:

Well they had shrimp, not much shrimp was done in the plant, we use to unload, some of the boats use to come in there and unload and they use to do some shrimp, but mostly was scallops and ah... cod and herring, and capelin.

Ann O'Brien:

And did it employ ah... a lot of people.

Kathleen Cabot:

Oh my yes. They had... use to employ a lot of people, I guess. We use to have two shifts that ah... at that time, when I was working there and I would say there was about a hundred and twenty five people working on a shift. That's ah... in the inside plant and the outside plant, all together.

Ann O'Brien:

And was that people from all along the coast.

Kathleen O'Brien:

Yes, that was people right from Red Bay to L'Anse au Clair.

Ann O'Brien:

No doubt... as you started first, now, your pay was what, about????

Kathleen O'Brien:

When I started first, the pay was about a...\$5.50 and then when I was finished ah...that was about, I've been finished, well that was ten years ago since I retired, and then it was up to ah... \$9.75.

Ann O'Brien:

And what was your job there?

Kathleen Cabot:

At first, I was a cutter and then I went packing.

Ann O'Brien:

So what do you have to do their filleting now, was there three ways of cleaning that fish.

Kathleen Cabot:

Oh yes, well we use to fillet the fish first and then it'd go through and we'd skin it and de-bone it. Go through a skinner after it was filleted and the workers would de-bone it and then it would go to the packers to pack.

Ann O'Brien:

Oh Okay. And ah... well Kathleen that's, that's about all you.

Kathleen Cabot:

Yeah, I think that's about my life story.

Ann O'Brien:

... your story. Yeah.

Kathleen Cabot:

A lot of big changes.

Ann O'Brien:

Big changes for sure.

Kathleen Cabot:

Yeah, big changes, yeah.

'Cause first started working with my husband, well I was heading fish and gutting fish and then I went to work at the fish that we use to salt and from that then we went to the fresh fish. 'Cause first now when the fishery started like, there was no ah... money, like you would go at the fish, fish all the summer and you wouldn't get no money until you'd sell it in the fall. And then when you went into the fish plants and took it over, every week you was gettin' a check so it was a big difference then when I started.

Ann O'Brien:

Made a big difference in your living.

Kathleen Cabot:

Oh, yes. Made a big difference in your living, yeah.

Ann O'Brien:

And I guess ah.... ah... in the stores and even restaurants and whatever ah... like everybody profit.

Kathleen Cabot:

Yes, everybody profit because ah... before that back in the '60's well ah... there would be no profit until in the fall. I mean, if you wanted some... no odds what you wanted, you'd just go and get it. And the merchant... mark it down to the merchant and they'd settle up in the fall and then maybe you would have enough of money left to buy your food for the rough food for in the ... for through the winter.

So it was a big difference from that then what it was when you got a check every week.

Ann O'Brien:

Now Kathleen, every day, your daily chores was... what?

When you'd get up in the morning, now you had, of course, so much to do...

Kathleen Cabot:

What in the summer?

Ann O'Brien:

ah.. yes.

Kathleen Cabot:

Yes. Oh yes, when you get up in the morning, then you'd get up early and you'd try to get your ah.. the children took care of and try to get your work done for when you'd get a call to go to work.

Because first when I went to work, there was no set hours, like.. it was in the end, you know, you might get a call eleven o'clock in the morning and then you'd... be working for a few hours and then you would have to ah.. go home again and wait until the other boats come in. Then you'd get another call. So it wasn't no set hours until the ... the Fishery's Union took over and then well we had our hours from in the morning until...from eight o'clock , maybe until six and then we'd go on night shift from six until two or three.

Ann O'Brien:

And when you started to helping Jim, when he started fishing ah...what time would you go out to help him at .. to put his fish away.

Kathleen Cabot:

Well I would usually go out around probably... if he'd get up early and go out he'd be back around ten.. ten thirty and then we'd put that fish away and then he'd get his dinner and then he'd go out and haul his trawl again. 'Cause it was mostly trawling then, and jigging and then he'd come in again probably around three or four o'clock and you know

he'd go at that and maybe he'd go out again after supper. All depend on what the weather was like. Some nights, you'd probably be at fish 'til ten or half past ten in the night.

Ann O'Brien:

Did you have an automatic washer, at that time?

Kathleen Cabot:

No. I never had no automatic washer that time. We use to have gasoline washer. Wringer-washer with, like with ah... you'd start the motor and burn gas and ah.. the wringer, like the old type wringer, you know, he'd go around and spin your clothes or dry your clothes.

Ann O'Brien:

So you'd get up in the morning and then get your children ready and what else?

Kathleen Cabot:

Oh, yes.

Ann O'Brien:

Get breakfast, wash dishes,

Kathleen Cabot:

Oh yes, wash your dishes, wash your clothes and cook dinner and ...

Ann O'Brien:

And would you mix bread in the morning or in the night then.

Kathleen Cabot:

Oh, yes. You'd mix bread in the morning then. Yeah.

Ann O'Brien:

'Cause before that....

Kathleen Cabot:

'Cause before that, when I was younger and before I got married well we use to mix bread when I was living home, we had to mix bread in the night, on account of the yeast was different, hey. Took longer for it to rise, but when I got married and was having my kids well you'd get fast yeast and you'd mix it in the morning.

Ann O'Brien:

So would your babysitter bake that for you.

Kathleen Cabot:

Oh yes. Yes. She baked the bread and .. yeah and take care of the kids.

Ann O'Brien:

And how old was she?

Kathleen Cabot:

She was about ah... fourteen, fifteen. She was still in school. Yeah. She was a good ah... good housekeeper. Really, Really good with the kids.

Ann O'Brien:

And ah.. so okay Kathleen throughout the ... your week... now what would your menu be now for everyday. You didn't make up a menu but...

Kathleen Cabot:

No.

Ann O'Brien:

What would your meals a be?

Kathleen Cabot:

Well usually on a Monday, well like Sunday we'd have a hot dinner and Monday for dinner, you'd have leftovers from Sunday and probably Tuesday you might have a hot dinner again, then fish. Mostly fish. Wednesday for sure was fish and Friday was fish and probably throughout the week you'd have fish for supper. Especially in Summer time, when you'd be able to get ... 'cause in the winter time, you wouldn't be able to have no fish only salt fish. Because you didn't have no ah... fridges then first when I got married, but after that years went on.. well you had your fridges was good. But first along you'd have to ...you'd have fish and capelin often through the summer.

Ann O'Brien:

So everybody was ah... about the same.

Kathleen Cabot:

Oh yes, everybody was about the same maid. Everybody enjoyed it I guess when they got the fresh fish.

Ann O'Brien:

Oh, for sure.

Kathleen Cabot:

Yeah. And the kids all liked it too.

Ann O'Brien:

Yeah. Well thank you Kathleen very much for sharing that story with me.