

Coastal Life

Story by LYNETTE RAE McADAMS



"Every Boat Has a Wave" tells the breathless tales of peril, heroism, and all too often, tragedy.

Just in time for Christmas, catch the FisherPoets anthology at a bookstore near you:

Columbia River Maritime Museum, Astoria

Godfather's Books, Astoria

Cannon Beach Book Company, Cannon Beach

Reading Frenzy, Portland

\$12.95 per volume / \$75 per set

Also available online at inthe tote.com

Save the date!

The 2015 FisherPoets Gathering will take place Feb. 27 to March 1

Visit fisherpoets.org to learn more

Submitted photos

"Making Waves," one of the seven volumes of "Anchored in Deep Water: The FisherPoets Anthology," is a chorus of women's voices, breaking down gender barriers.

They are gillnetters and trollers, seiners and set-netters, long-liners, trawlers and crabbers alike. They are husbands and wives, daughters and sons, cooks, cannery workers and neighborhood fish-mongers — all men and women whose lives intertwine to create the community that is the heart of the commercial fishing industry. Though much of their time is spent scouring the seas, chasing the fish that nourish our tables, for one weekend each year they cast off their Xtra-Tuffs, spruce up their Carhartts, and stand on small stages all across Astoria, offering salt-laden words to an ocean of listeners, who happily swallow their rhymes — hook, line and sinker.

If you've ever attended the annual FisherPoets Gathering, now on the cusp of its 18th year, you know it for what it is: a three-day festival steeped in authenticity, that celebrates — through original poems, stories, and songs — the timeless work that is done in pursuit of fish. Emulating the industry of which it sings, the Gathering happens simultaneously, with performances each night at six different venues throughout town. Before packed audiences, fisherpoets share their tales of fortune and loss, courage and defeat, of broken boats and broken backs, and the watery world that, either in sorrow or in awe, regularly brings them to their knees.

And like any healthy fishery, no matter how hard you try, you can never catch them all. But fortunately, that's about to change.

Newly released, in a

magnificent, seven-volume set, "Anchored in Deep Water: The FisherPoets Anthology," captures the myriad voices that rise up from the Gathering, then sets them back down in the beautiful permanence of paper and ink. A collaboration between award-winning artist Chelsea Stephens and writer, photographer and veteran fisherpoet Pat Dixon, each 50 to 60-page paperback volume combines superb design and stunning illustrations, with some of the finest, fishiest words you'll ever read.

With brilliantly-rendered cover-art, reflecting layers of meaning, the books are categorized by theme and titled individually: "Family Dynamic" focuses on the blood-bound relationships between fishermen, who often work as family units; "Gathering" embraces the many forms of community within the industry; "Mending Holes" traces the lines of fishing's history; "Illusions of Separateness" navigates the turbulent waters of politics; "Making Waves" is a chorus of women's voices, breaking down gender barriers; "For the Love of Fish" illuminates a love/hate relationship with work on the water; and "Every Boat Has a Wave" tells the breathless tales of peril, heroism, and all too often, tragedy.

Though the idea for the anthology was originally Stephens' alone, it was quickly apparent that the scope of the project

would require more hands, and almost immediately, Dixon came aboard as editor. Wanting to mirror the same kind of inclusiveness that presides over the Gathering, the creative duo put out a call for submissions, deciding on two things right away: To be considered, participants must have performed at the Gathering before; beyond that, the only governing rule, according to Dixon, was that "everybody gets in. No matter what, anybody who wanted to be in it, could."

While many an editor would warn strongly against such a tactic, in this case, the end result is nothing short of fantastic — a collection of voices that ring with beauty and honesty and know well the stories that they speak.

"This whole thing has been an honor to be involved with, right from the start," says Dixon. "The way people were ready to participate, the way they trusted us with their words, knowing they'd be treated with care and respect, how everyone muscled through the hard work of revisions so willingly — it's felt like way more than a collaboration between just Chelsea and me. It's been everyone in support of everyone else."

Hearing his own words, Dixon admits such a sentiment seems only right: "It's funny," he says, his low, easy laugh rising to the surface, "that's just how commercial fishing feels, too."

Available now, the anthology can be purchased in individual volumes or as a boxed set, coming wrapped in an exclusive, origami-style sleeve that unfolds to reveal a splendid surprise. Be advised: copies are limited and won't last long; letting this one slip away would be an act you'd soon regret.

(And that, my friends, is no fish story.)