STRONG AS THE OCEAN

Women's Work in the Newfoundland and Labrador Fisheries

Frances Ennis and Helen Woodrow, Editors
This book is a special project of the Newfoundland and Labrador Women's FishNet, which was formed in 1994 to make the concerns of women in the fishery known to decision-makers and to the public.

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Harrish Press
18 Leslie Street
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Phone 709-753-8815
Fax 709-753-8856
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Foreword

This project began in the spring of 1995 with the idea of producing a book on women's work in the Newfoundland and Labrador fishing industry. Even though the industry has changed considerably over the years, many believe the roles and economic contributions of women have never been fully understood or acknowledged. The Newfoundland and Labrador Women's FishNet set out to collect stories about the work women do, and the work women used to do. We wanted the book to resonate with the voices of shoreworkers and shore skippers, brokers and buyers, trimmers and cutters, supervisors and owners, filleters, floor ladies and fishers. We hoped to learn about all the telling moments for women in the industry. Above all else, we wanted this book to celebrate rural women and their contribution to the fisheries.

The more we talked, the bigger the book got. Finally we realized no single text could accomplish the goals we set; there was a limit to our resources and the time readers had to invest. When we stopped dreaming we stopped agonizing about what we couldn't do, and began searching for women who would be willing to share their stories. We called women we knew or knew of, and talked with staff of government departments, processing companies, unions and the media. We asked them to suggest names of fisheries workers.
Louise Belbin and Violet Green

Louise

Jacques Fontaine was me home. Years after, I was here in Grand Bank and went working at fish down on the beach. I was married and had children then. The whole 14 years I was on the beach I was a piler. Everybody couldn't make the piles, but I was used to the fish before I come to Grand Banknot on the beaches, but on the flakes. You had to go on the beach to earn a few dollars - do the best you could to make ends meet. I wouldn't like to ever see it come back again. That was in the depression years, and we knew it was a depression too. Some hard going days them times, but I conquered the big battle to be alive like I am today, 98 years old, and got me right senses. I got a lot to be thankful for. The dear Lord was good to us, we hold our health.

My husband was a skipper. We was married a month and a half when he went away, and I never see him no more for 11 months. When the schooner was going, he had to be gone. The first five years we was married, I hardly see him much at all. One time the doctor come over because one of the children was sick. He asked where me husband was to, and I told him. He said, "You're the mother and father of a family, your man away like that."
Lilian Day

I was in the plant for 16 years. I was cutting, trimming, skinning, packing, weighing and on IQF (individual quick freeze). There was only one job I didn't do and that was unload the boats. I said to them, "Now, the only place I haven't been is out in the cold storage." That's where they keep the fish when they take it out of the draggers. But they wouldn't let women out there.

I found cutting was a bit hard. I'd be all day working to get 100 and 103 and 110 - scattered time I would get me 133, but it would be a good day or we'd have good fish. Sometimes they'd unload it with those old suckers and it would be all beat up and it was hard to fillet. If you got good fish - firm and fresh - it would be a joy just to cut it. We'd get some more and the bones be sticking out of it. In terms of pay, though, the cutters would be paid the most per hour. The trimmers would get roughly the same as the skinners, and the packers would get paid the least of all.
Bernice Duffett

I started off down at the plant in 1972 and I tried almost everything. Once I got so much seniority, I could try for a different job every week if it was posted. The last five or six years I was down there I worked as a janitor. I was after going right through the plant and had a crack at it all - trimming and packing and weighing. The only thing I never did was cutting.

When I used to work as a janitor I had my name in for the watch house too. They needed an extra one on the weekends, so if I was on day shift I used to go in the watch house on Friday and Saturday night. I'd work from twelve in the night till eight in the morning. I was the first woman that ever worked out in the watch house, but I had to fight to get in there. I had to put in a grievance because they wouldn't let me in there at first.

I worked two years in the watch house and the money was good. If the plant didn't close down I don't know if I'd still be there. I'll tell you the truth, it's an awful lonely place for a woman, and for a man too. The other night attendant told me he used to take a stick with him because he was nervous. I was too. You had one night attendant down on the trawlers and one up in the watch house for eight hours, and you would probably never run into each other. You had to go right through the plant and there wasn't another soul there. In the meal plant there'd be cats up on the rafters and everything. There was times I was frightened to death.
I know a woman who's been involved in an abusive relationship for years because she didn't see nowhere else to turn. They makes you feel like you're so low that you can't do anything. It's self-esteem. I know she thought that she was worthless, and she didn't think that she could do anything for herself. But since the moratorium she got one college course done and passed with honours, and now she's going for another one. So you know, a lot of those women, you've just got to build them back up, because they were down so low they thinks that there's nothing else for them. I think some even thinks they deserves it.

There's not a lot of people around here to talk to about anything like that. We got the Shantymen here - that's like a counselling service. But if there was someone in an abusive relationship and they wanted to get out, where are they going to go? There's no transition homes here, the closest one is in Gander. And it's not everyone who's going to pack everything up and go to Gander. There's a big step just to walk out through the door, but when you gotta walk out through the door and there's nowhere to go, what do you do?

I went to a conference in Stephenville in October. They got a women's council down there that's been going for ten years. So now we're going to see if we can get some kind of women's council or steering committee and see what we can get going in this area.
Louisa Flowers


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Nellie Croft

I first got into this work when my husband Ray went as captain of a 100-foot boat with Universal Fisheries in 1986. He was the first Canadian to fish the Virgin Rocks. He used to make two trips a week, and brought in about 120,000 pounds of cod each trip. When he'd land and the time came to settle up for the cheques, I'd pass in the declaration, the list of crew members, and the social insurance numbers. And when they'd get their cheques, if there were any mistakes the wives would call me. I'd have to go back to the company and have the problem corrected. I wasn't getting a salary, but I did it because it took a lot off of Ray.

And then we went into our own boat, a wooden 65-foot longliner. We formed our own company, Sea Voyager III Fisheries, and I took over running the business on shore. When Ray went on the water, I'd have a list. I would have to pick up webs and ropes and make sure there were enough nets made to replace those that were torn up each trip. Any ropes that were chafed had to be repaired and new rope put in. I did the bookkeeping and made sure the grocery order was filled.
Lil Clarke

Sure I was only a child when I went to work in the plant. I went down with a friend of mine to National Sea Products on the Southside in St. John's. She was looking for a job, not me. He offered me a job and I just went in with a pair of sandals on. When I went to work in '72 it was for $1.25 an hour. You'd get $1.50 if you weren't a student and weren't planning on leaving in August. They wouldn't believe that I wasn't going to go back to school, because I was only 15. When they all went back to school and I stayed, then they upped my money. We'd work six days and you had to work three nights - Monday, Tuesday, and Thursday and you'd clear $107 a week. A lot of money. We'd be tickled to death with that.

When I went there I just went right into the packing. From that you were moved around. They'd have you trimming and grading and on the boxes, so you got a lot of experience. One time they come down and asked us did we want to go filleting. There was only men up there. Don't know why. There was fish come in as big as us -steak cod, right - and sharp knives and stuff, so maybe they just figured it was men did it. We went up and some stayed. I didn't. I think it made a lot more sense to move people around, because I know in the smaller plants that I worked in, the trimmers only trimmed. Now, the trimmers often been waiting on fish and the packers would be up to their ears, and none of them could come over and help you. They had to be paying them money to do nothing, where if they had been experienced at it all, they could've been at it all. I've never had a bad word to say about the people at Nat Sea because they involved the people, they trained them. When you come out of that plant, you knew what you were doing.
I graduated Grade 11 back in '73, when I was 16. Then I went to Springdale to do a mechanics course. I was the first woman in Newfoundland to be accepted and graduate from that program. There's a lot of my mother in me. She's a very strong-willed woman. She went through a difficult divorce, raised eight kids on her own. She went from being a self-employed woman to being on Social Services. Then she went back to school and graduated as a registered nursing assistant at age 50. She takes everything in her stride, so I'm glad that I'm like her.

We have two boys, Graham and Leander. Graham was born in October of '77 in Springdale. Leander was born April, 1980 in Manitoba. He was born with club feet. We found out about an orthopedic specialist in Gander, so we came back home, mainly for Leander to get more medical attention.

My husband Edward bought his first tractor trailer, and I went to work with my mom for five or six years. Edward enjoyed being on the road, but it was interfering with our family life. Something had to be done. In 1987, after taking a family holiday at his father's cabin, he came up with the bright idea that there must be some kind of business we could do as a family, something dealing with the outdoors. He always listened to CBC's Peter Gzowski when he was trucking, and he heard this interview with somebody that was into mussel farming. So he phoned me and asked me to check with the Department of Fisheries and see if there was anything going on in Newfoundland about it.
Agnes Pike

No matter what I did it seemed like I always ended up back in the fish pile. It seemed like fish was such a big part of my life from growing up, and I spent so much time around dad and the outdoor life and the fishery, I think it's a part of me. Something that I'll never probably shake, in a sense of getting away from it totally, but that's where I feel most comfortable.

I have a lot of fond memories of growing up in L'Anse au Diable. There was only eight or ten families living there. I can remember when I was five or six years old, we would play a lot down on the beach when the caplin rolled in. I used to sneak a knife from the kitchen, one of the table knives - the case knives we called them. There was always a bunch of kids around me. They called me the splitter. We'd pile up the caplin and I'd try to split it. We'd have rows and rows of caplin along the beach like you would salt bulk fish, and we'd pack them up on the beach. There was a sandy beach in L'Anse au Diable and hemlock grew up along the shoreline. We'd salt the hemlock with sand too.
In the end, ten women worked with us to develop oral histories about their life in the industry. Helen interviewed Lillian Day, Agnes Pike and Lit Clarke. Frances worked with Louise Belbin and her daughter Violet Green, Louisa Flowers, Bernice Duffett and Rose Furlong. Fellow FishNet member Jane Robinson spoke with Denyse Sheppard and Nellie Croft. Strong as the Ocean does not tell the whole story of women and their work in the Newfoundland and Labrador fisheries. But the stories that are told here - of cold November days on the beach, rough seas at early morning and tired feet at shift end - teach us about women's endless days of work in the industry, at home, and in the community.

In this book women are historians. They reflect on their own work environments, and how their labor is valued. The women analyze the relationships among managers and workers, and between husbands and wives. They consider society's view of women's work, and of fisheries workers. Many critical themes emerge from their chronicles.

Some people have asked us about the steps we took to prepare the stories for publication. First we talked with each woman to establish some background information about her work. Those conversations helped provide the focus for an audiotaped interview. We usually prepared for the interview by thinking about four or five broad questions that might capture a woman's story, but more questions always emerged as we probed for details. We had decided to use lots of photographs in the book, so all the women agreed to have their picture taken and to search through their family albums.

After each interview, the tapes were transcribed. The transcripts often consisted of 45 pages of text, and we had planned for an average of nine pages per story. It was always a challenge to pare down the pages. Sometimes we cut information or anecdotes at the request of women; sometimes we suggested text that could be deleted based on the needs of readers. So though the text has been abbreviated for a variety of reasons, we were guided by our belief that each story belonged to the storyteller; it was her voice. When we edited the text, transitional words were added, repetitions deleted or sentence structures altered only when it was vital to meaning.

Sometimes a speaker was unhappy when she saw her "dialect" in print. This created a dilemma for us. Oral histories are celebrations of a speaker's life and language. They are not told in standard English; oral language has its own unique grammar, communication patterns and organizing devices. Though it might be possible to transform a book of oral histories from rural Newfoundland and Labrador into conventional written form, that wasn't the book we had set out to do.
However, the final authority on the text was the storyteller. At each stage - first draft, edited version, and chapter galley proof - the women were asked if they wished to make any changes. This process gave them control over their text. It also allowed us to clarify essential details - for example, whether the speaker was referring to pounds or pots - and to check our spellings of family names and local place-names.

Many people contributed to this book and we would like to acknowledge some of them here. First we would like to thank all the storytellers for working with us over the last year. We also thank their families and friends for taking telephone messages, receiving faxes, reading chapter text and searching through boxes of photographs.

We would also like to thank the members of Newfoundland and Labrador Women's FishNet, in particular Martha Muzychka, Lana Payne and Barbara Neis. They helped us set the boundaries for the book, read a draft of the work, and offered advice when we sought it. Lana also suggested the title, a phrase from the song Woman of the Island, written by Delores Hynes of Calvert.

A number of people assisted with the photographs. Ann Devlin-Fisher helped us find photographs at the Provincial Archives of Newfoundland and Labrador (PANL) and made sure they could be published in this book. Bruce Wareham, Vice-President of Newfoundland Operations at National Sea Products, gave us permission to use pictures taken in the company's plants by photographer Don Lane. The Fish, Food and Allied Workers Union provided pictures from their collection. We had the good luck to find Dr. Elmer Harp Jr. of Hanover, New Hampshire who, without hesitation, offered us all the photographs he had taken on his first trip to the Labrador Straits in 1949. Carol Brice-Bennett of the Labrador Institute for Northern Studies gave us photographs from her personal collection. We first saw the handsome front cover photograph proudly displayed at Bidgood's Supermarket in the Goulds. Jennie Bidgood let us borrow the picture so we could make a copy.

About forty men and women involved in adult literacy and basic education programs helped us field test the text; they read some chapter drafts and gave us many helpful suggestions. For working with us on the field test, we would like to thank Jeanette Winsor and participants at the FFAW Education Centre, Bonavista; Velma Pittman of Eastern College, Bonavista and her daughter Gwen; Pam Rideout and other people at Teachers on Wheels; and Doris Hapgood and participants at the Rabbittown Learners Program.

Finally we would like to thank the National Literacy Secretariat, Human Resources Development Canada. Their financial support made this book possible.

Helen Woodrow and Frances Ennis
I was 25 when I got married, and I had three children when I was working on the beach. I could work with anyone, but in the morning sometimes I sat on the bed and my legs be that stiff and tired I could hardly get my stockings on. 'Twas hard managing it. I used to have short nights. I had to be up every night to do for my children and the house 'cause when it was daylight I was not in the house. Then every night, stars in the sky, you'd take your two buckets and bring in a barrel of water for the next day. I used to set my gardens too in among that.

Now there was no odds how much food you had in your house, you wouldn't be able to get many days long enough to cook. You had to go early in the morning, and you'd come home, get a lunch, and go again. 'Twas hurry up and boil the kettle, and go again so quick as you could get there when you had the two lots of fish come the same time. I'd be trying to stir up the fire to get the kettle to boil, put tea in steep, going about the house with my overall jacket, sunshade and all on.

When we had two lots of fish, you'd come 11:00 and get something to eat to go back again noon, and be there the rest of the day. There was no supper hour. I used to have food put out for the children to eat till I get back. That's what you had to do 'cause you had no set time to get back. It might be dark. We often come home 9:00 when we had the two lots of fish going. I mind one evening I come and the three of them was sat down. When I come in 'twas getting dark in the house. They said, "Mom, we didn't think you was going to come home tonight."

When I was going to have Emma, I was on the beach all that summer. She was born the 10th of October and I was off the beach no time when she was born, perhaps two or three weeks. I tell you, I used to be miserable sometimes. The man loading the cart would say, "Don't give that woman a big Baffle of fish like you carries in. You got better sense than that." 'Cause he see I was carrying a baby; hard to work on the beach like that, so much bending over. I always thinks that's the reason Emma was the shortest one in the family.
Violet

When we were teenagers we used to work on the beach in the summertime. That's what the girls done. There'd be beaches from the bridge right down along the shore that was all spread out with fish, both sides of the road. And down where the museum is now, that was all beaches and that was spread out with fish. The high part of the summer was what they used to call the caplin scull, and the fish were plentiful in the caplin scull.

You'd have to go about eight in the morning and you'd be there then till dark if the crowd was there. We didn't pile, now, the older people done that - the girls only just carried it in and then pass it to them. We could do the faggots, but not the piles. 'Twas hard on your back 'cause you were bent over most all day at fish.

We used to work all summer and earn about $40 or $50, but that was a lot of money then. When we finished up at the end of August to go back to school, we went over and settled up, and they used to give us money. So I suppose by that time 'twas changed. Oh, we liked it all right when we were youngsters. You'd buy your bit of clothes for school, or your books, whatever you needed like that. You didn't waste it, that's for darn sure. You didn't buy nothing silly.

And I remember mom being on the beach. I wouldn't say I was very big because Mabel was old enough to look after us. She's not that much older than me, only six years, but 'twas enough that it made a lot of difference. Back them times when kids were eight and nine years old, they were quite grown up. The biggest ones looked after the youngest ones and that was the way it was.

They used to have dolls then used to say, "Mama." That was something else, them dolls. Mom said to me, "If you look after Stell while I'm on the beach, come Christmas I'll buy you a mammy doll."

So I said, 'All right, I'll look after Stell."

She was only about a year old and you had to watch so she didn't fall out of the carriage, and push her about. That old carriage went everywhere, and we weren't very big.

Come that Christmas I got me mammy doll all right, 'cause if mom promised, you got it. We used to go out and play in our old store, and I suppose me and my sister got into a little argument and she jumped on my mammy doll and broke her. Well, I nearly died 'cause I worked all summer for that doll. But mom replaced it anyhow. Funny how little things like that stick in your mind.
I left the fish plant because you were working under a boss, and some of the bosses wasn't too easy to get along with. I'd be on the skinner and in four or five hours I'd have my 133, which was 100 percent plus your 33 percent - you get full bonus. I'd always get 133. And then I'd probably be up on the weights helping, and I'd do a few pans for the other skinner. I'd say, "Pass us over a few pans, b'y," or I'd say to the weigher, "Mark down a few pans in her name." We always tried to help everyone get the 133. I couldn't make another cent. I just had to punch time. They get hard on you if you're the one they can depend on, seem like that's the ones they push the most. They weren't satisfied, if they thought they could get 333, they wanted that out of you too. You'd prefer to keep yourself busy helping somebody else rather than working for the company. Once I just went on and I got 230 and that didn't make sense. And here is the next person scrambling and hardly getting 100 or really having it tough to get 133. You know, you get those old flounder, those yellow tails, they were hard to separate.

I used to say to Gerald, "Suppose if I quits the plant and goes out in the boat? If I can't do it, I'll gladly go back in the plant and step out of the boat again just as fast as I got in." That was up in the early part of the '80s.

He said, "I don't think you can do it. I know it's not hard work for me, but I think it would be a bit strenuous for you."

At that time we had to haul our lump nets by hand. I said, "I can give it a try - the most I can do. I can get back in the plant tomorrow."

I can remember when Gerald and his brother was at it, they used to haul 18 nets. They didn't have a lobster licence, they just had groundfish. They'd haul 18 lump nets and it would take all day to haul them. It was always three or four lump coming over the gunners all the time. I used to work the night shift, and in the daytime I'd get up and take off; we used to have to truck our fish then. We'd truck it to Grand Bank and some years we'd truck it to Fortune, depending on the prices and things like that. They'd come in dinner time, they'd probably have 1200, 1300 pounds. I'd take that to Fortune and by the time I came back it would probably be 3:00 or 3:30. I'd get the kids, get their suppers, and then be off to work at the plant soon as he come through the door. I wouldn't get home till 5:30 or 6:00 the next morning, go to bed for a couple of hours, up at 9:30. It wasn't easy.
"Well, what's the good to jump inside, you know, the lobsters is not in that far yet?"

"Well, why don't we give it a try?"

But if I want to do something, if I think we should go in or go off, well, we'll weigh the facts and think where's best. We work together pretty good. He doesn't grumble. He was kind of glad that we did end up together 'cause we can work at our own pace. If we want to be out there all day, we can. When you go at the pots in the morning and you go at the lump nets in the evening, we've even been Saturday as high as 7:30 in the evening, nonstop.

My husband don't believe in coming in with the first little bit of wind. He likes for the wind to really drive him in. We were out there a few times and it was a bit rough and we had the lobster pots. We were in close to the land and I used to say, "No, I think you better leave them b'y, it's too close, you know." With the waves and everything, the way the wind would pick up, I used to think to myself, "What in the name of the world am I doing out here today?" I should have been in the plant, you know, 'cause at least I wouldn't have been out here in all this rough weather. But I wouldn't go back to the plant now. I wouldn't think about it. It feels good when you're out there on a good day. Just the same as you're in heaven, you go out and there's no wind, you can work away and you can give a bit of speed to her. You haven't got to worry. And I haven't got that boss running down me neck, saying "Come on, you got to get back to work." You get up early in the morning and get out there and it's beautiful. You can see the sun rise and sometimes we're out, you can see the sun setting. I'll say to Gerald, "We've went on the water with the sunrise. Now just look at it, it's starting to set."
The union talked the company into giving us a radio in case anything happened. If one of us took a heart attack or fell down going through the plant, you'd have to be there till the next morning when someone come in. The first night they gave me the radio I had it shoved in a pocket and I forgot about it. I was going through the meal plant about two o'clock in the morning, and the trawler night attendant called out over the phone. When the phone came on I jumped right off the floor forgot about the radio. Jeez, soon as I heard that voice I thought I was gone, what a fright!

A few years ago, during the dispute between UFCW (United Food and Commercial Workers) and FFAW (Fish, Bood and Allied Workers), I went on a leave of absence and worked with the union as a business agent. That is the years that count for TAGS (The Atlantic Groundfish Strategy) eligibility. That is the reason I'm going to be cut off. I was down at the plant for 23 years and that's all I ever done, but I gets cut off on my TAGS May 1996. And there's people have only been there five or six years that's good till '99. So it's not a very fair system. I've been trying everything to get that changed, but they wouldn't even look at it because the main goal is to get people out. If they can see a loophole to get you out they don't care if you spent 23 years or 55 years, you're going anyway. The thing is, it's common known practice that the union representatives have a lot of time away from the plant on union business. We have never had any problems getting leave of absence. At that time I went as the business agent for the UFCW, I was still dealing with the people and I was in the plant. It's just that I wasn't out working at the fish.

I was 17 when I got involved in the union. I used to see a lot of things going on. This was a favourite: if there was any overtime or something extra, it seemed like it used to always go to somebody who was related to the foreman, or somebody he knew. So I just wanted to get involved and speak up. I don't think I was in the plant any more than a year when I decided to run for shop steward. There was a shop steward for every department - packers, trimmers, boners, clobbers - about six, seven different departments, and then you had stewards on different shifts. I started as a shop steward for the packers on my shift. If they had any problems with management or anything concerning work, they called me and I'd go to the office to fight for them. It was just more or less somebody to speak up to the company if they weren't being treated fair, say, if there was work in the night and someone should have got called in.
I know a woman who's been involved in an abusive relationship for years because she didn't see nowhere else to turn. They makes you feel like you're so low that you can't do anything. It's self-esteem. I know she thought that she was worthless, and she didn't think that she could do anything for herself. But since the moratorium she got one college course done and passed with honours, and now she's going for another one. So you know, a lot of those women, you've just got to build them back up, because they were down so low they thinks that there's nothing else for them. I think some even thinks they deserves it.

There's not a lot of people around here to talk to about anything like that. We got the Shantymen here - that's like a counselling service. But if there was someone in an abusive relationship and they wanted to get out, where are they going to go? There's no transition homes here, the closest one is in Gander. And it's not everyone who's going to pack everything up and go to Gander. There's a big step just to walk out through the door, but when you gotta walk out through the door and there's nowhere to go, what do you do?

I went to a conference in Stephenville in October. They got a women's council down there that's been going for ten years. So now we're going to see if we can get some kind of women's council or steering committee and see what we can get going in this area.
The men went to work in the spring of the year as soon as the weather was fit, usually around the first or second week of May. They'd get the schooner painted up and get everything ready for fishing on the Labrador. The cook always went to work at the skipper's home when the crew started, because that was where they had their meals when they were working. It was a help and experience to cook and clean for the men then - the skipper's wife was there to help and give advice. We worked together and it meant a lot for me when I left on the voyage.

There was always a trip to St. John's, Carbonear, or Port Union - wherever the merchant was that the skipper dealt with - to get supplies for the voyage. There was salt, food, and whatever provisions we needed for the voyage to be loaded. The girl usually went along on the trip to cook and get some experience for the summer. After returning home the crew would get the cod traps, ropes, and grapelins ready for fishing. They would bark the sails for the schooner, and cut firewood and dry it in the sun because that was the only source of heat we had for cooking and baking during the summer.

Most all the schooners left home June 24 or shortly after, unless ice was reported along the coast. Sometimes you met the ice and couldn't get any further until there was a change of wind. If there was no ice around and there was a favourable wind, the trip could be made after a week or ten days leaving home. There weren't any engines in the fishing schooners then so you had to depend on sails and the wind.

The men were always up early and gone out fishing long before it was light. You had to be up as soon as they left to have breakfast ready when they got back. Then it was steady go all day. You always had something to do. There was bread to be made almost every morning, dishes to be washed, bunks to be made, lamp to be shined and filled with oil, firewood to be brought down and stored by the stove to keep the fire going, and meals to cook. It was from one meal to the other all day long, because it took a lot to feed ten men and clear up after them.

The cabin had to be kept clean all the time because if any of the other skippers came aboard they were taken down there for a chat. The girl usually slept in the cabin. There was a small place with a door to it where you could dress and undress. I was quite contented there. I had my privacy and when I got in the bunk I usually slept well because I was tired enough after a long day. The skipper, mate, and one more of the crew had their berth in the cabin too, but I was usually turned in before any of them. If
we were under sail, they'd just lay down for a while - it would be one up and one down, the captain and then the mate.
It usually took until late October or early November to get the fish dried and stored back aboard the schooner again. Then you left for St. John's or wherever they took supplies in the spring, to unload the fish and get paid. That would be the first bit of money you'd get since you started in the spring. Then everyone would buy their food and clothing and whatever necessary items they could afford for the coming winter months. Prices were reasonably low then and you could buy quite a lot for a small amount of money compared to nowadays. My pay was always about $45 and I thought it was a lot of money then. I could buy a dress for $2.98, a pair of shoes for nearly the same, and a coat for $15. You could fit yourself out with that much money.

I went to Labrador for four summers as cook on the schooners. The first two summers was with Skipper John Hennessey on the E.J. Hennessey. Then I missed a summer. I worked in St. John's and went home again in the fall. That was during the blackout. The next spring I went with Skipper James Furlong on the L. Morton. She was a bit smaller schooner and carried nine men. There were ten men on the Hennessey.

After that I never went back to Labrador, but did like most other girls - got married and raised my family. That's over 50 years ago. My husband and I often talk of them times on the Labrador. There's not much of it now but the memories and a bedspread I worked on in the few spare minutes I had on my last voyage. I've kept it ever since but haven't used it for years. It's just a keepsake.

When all the fish is gone up in the lake, we start getting ready to come back to Nain. We have to clean every single thing we used all summer because we have to take everything back home. We clean all the nets and put them on the rocks to dry. When they're dry, we put them in boxes to come home.

We clean the land. We dig the ground and put all the garbage into the ground so when we come back next year it's going to be nice and clean. I wash the clothes and everything that we used for fishing by hand, and fix all of our stuff nice and neat. We gather some food ducks, caribou, and char. We clean them and put them in the fish box and when we come back home I put them in the freezer.

Back in Nain I go berry picking and mussel picking and rock cod fishing. They are like codfish, but a little bit different. I make pitsik out of them. We have enough food in the freezer until spring comes. Then in the springtime we usually start ice fishing. We go up in Nain Bay on skidoo and when we're tired of fishing, we look for partridge or we go outside to look for seals and goose.
Ray would call me and say when he would be landing. It might be two in the morning. I'd have to have someone from the fish plant on the wharf when he landed. The first job was to have the boat off-loaded, then repairs done, boat fuelled, and groceries put on board. Everything had to be checked over. Any repairs that needed to be done to the boat or engine, I would have to drive to St. John's to pick up the supplies to have there on the wharf. The boat would be ready for sailing again within 24 hours.

My mom, the Lord have mercy on her, used to look at me and say, "My God, Nell, are you sure you can do this? Can you handle this? How long more are you going to be able to keep going?"

And I'd say, "Yes mom, I know what I'm at. I'm able to handle this."

I was running everything ashore. I was doing the paperwork, picking up supplies, and whatever you're expected to do. Ray said to me, "Nell, if you weren't running the business, I'd have to have someone else to do it, and I'd have to pay them a salary." So that's what I done.

In 1989 I went on the payroll for a salary. I filed up for unemployment when the fishing season was over. I did get my UI that year and the year after.

When the cod moratorium came in 1992, we were just after taking delivery of a new 65-foot steel boat, worth $1.4 million. We had steady trouble with her for the first two years. We were in a difficult financial situation, with only a groundfish licence which was no good and a supplementary crab licence to survive on. So we geared the boat up for scallop, which got us through a couple of hard years. It's not easy to come up with $130,000 a year principal payment and interest, plus $25,000 for boat insurance, then fuel and maintenance, and trying to pay the gear suppliers. The bank manager was calling and I was the one who had to deal with it all. It was all on me the house and the kids too.

The stress of getting through the first few years of the moratorium took its toll. Last Easter I ended up with serious blood pressure and medical problems. The doctor said to me, "Nellie, I don't know how you kept going as long as you did." I decided I needed a rest, so I went away to Vancouver to visit my sister. Until then, there was never anything that got to me. But I found out there's only so much you can take.
And I said, "What do you mean? When the time comes to settle up, is it going to be $7.10, $7.20, or $7.25, or what's the price going to be?"

"Oh well, we'll pay $7.30 too."

And I said, "Okay. You can have it."

I love taking up tasks like this because the tougher it gets the more determined I get. It's a full-time job. Where we're an independent operation and not backed by a large company, it's an uphill battle the whole time. I've had to go to the loan board and speak with the chairman and put my point across. I've had to deal with lawyers and bank managers. The only support we had was the union.

But I'd like to speak about what women like me have to go through - you're nothing when it comes to the workforce. UI turned me down this year because of the "arm's length" policy of Revenue Canada. Women are discriminated against by being in business with their husbands. Ray could have hired an unrelated person for the same length of time and paid them the same amount for the same work, and they would qualify for their UI. The work I did was essential to the business. There's more women like me. All the shore skippers were dropped by TAGS, like I was in 1994. I went through two appeals with TAGS and lost both. Now I'm appealing this UI ruling, and I'll go to an independent judge if I have to.

There's times we get ourselves into situations and we wonder why we ever got involved in the fishery. There's no family life when the fishing season begins. It's a constant struggle to keep the business successful. The fishery has its ups and downs, but I think our hard work will pay off. I always said when the children got old enough I was going to go and do my nursing. But I got involved into this business and I enjoy it.

We're in it for the long run, and this is going to be our business now for a good many years. I think this is why you're so determined to make it work. We've put all our life earnings into it. We're one of the bigger enterprises and we're one of the ones that's after surviving the moratorium so far. It's going to be another rough year now that we have invested in freezing equipment. We'll be able to freeze fresh fish at sea and it will mean hiring more crew. But after next season, hopefully we're on the road to recovery.
St. John's is the port for many fishing operations
Deboning fish

Nat Sea was a union plant right from the start. Seniority was a big thing. Right off the bat they would go by seniority. I was third on the senior list because I went there as soon as it started. So when new packers were hired and they needed training, I was always asked. The other two ladies that was first and second didn't want to get involved in that.

I was never involved with the union. I felt some of it was okay, more of it I didn't. They come down riling people up and starting strikes and walkouts and they didn't care if you could afford to be locked out for a number of months. One strike went on in May and didn't end until December. That's a long time for people. That plant was made up of a lot of husbands and wives, a lot of families too. So one couldn't help another. You couldn't go to a brother or sister for a loan of a few dollars because their families was in the same situation. The good part about unions was they kept the plant running so that no one could outfox the other person or anything like that. But lots of times I just paid my dues and I knew they were there if I needed them.
He laughed. He said, "Yeah, right."

I said, "I am. I'm going fishing with you."

And he didn't believe me till the day that I didn't go back to the plant. We only had one arrangement, and that was he did not leave me to walk through the stage myself. I was more afraid of walking through that big long stage than I was of getting out on the water. I could picture the rat running out between my feet. I used to get up a half hour earlier 'cause he didn't eat and he used to have his clothes laid by the bed -two seconds he could be out. It used to take me a half hour to dress, I used to have that much clothes to put on, layers and layers of clothes. He said, "If you ever falls overboard, you're not coming back up." I figured I could always take some off, but if I didn't have it with me, it wasn't a place that you could sing out. So by the time the sun would come up, I used to start taking off a few layers.

I got in the boat and I'll never forget, we were going out through the harbour the first morning and I was trying to be right good and wouldn't dare argue or say nothing. Then when we got out, he got out of the little house,

and I says, "B'y, what do I do?"

He said, "Stay in there till daylight."

I said, "Okay, I won't argue, I'll sit down." And the old boat started to go when he anchored. I started to feel sick and I said, "I got to get out of here, you got to give me something to do."

And he said, "Get down there."

"Not likely," I said to him. "I'm not going down there."

"You got to, this is my spot," he said. "I'm in this spot 10 years."

Then I said, "Well, buddy, you just lost it. I'm not going down there." It's just like you're right out in the water, in the end of the boat the water was so close to you. But where he was to was by the house and it was right comfortable. So he had to move. And, of course, all the men tormented him about that. "She come out and got you out of your spot," they said.

Oh, I loved it. I said, "How foolish was I all them years in the plants, working like a dog for somebody else. You're out there in the fresh air." Now lots of days it was really rough. One day, I cried and I laughed that much that I pissed in me oil pants and everything. Rough! Frightened to death! We were right up around Bay Bulls fishing, the
water used to come down and over us like nothing. I never thought we were getting in. But still it didn't frighten me enough that I wouldn't go back.

The big difference from working in the plant was being on your own. At that time I was smoking - you couldn't have a cigarette when you wanted to have it. They told you when you ate, they told you when you smoked, they told you when you could go to the washroom, they told you when you were going home and when you were going to leave your home. Even though you're out on that water 2:00 in the morning, that was your decision to do that. You could've said, "Well, I'll wait till 3:00," but you decided to go at 2:00. And it was you decided when you were coming in.
Department of Fisheries put us in contact with a company called Atlantic Ocean Farms - they're from Cottrell's Cove. So we went and spent the day with them. They farm and process mussels. After the trip we decided, okay, this is what we're going to do. We went back home and everything was set in motion. We said we'll move back to Springdale, which is a seafront. That meant we would have to sell our home, pack up the kids, and sell the trucks. Actually we kept one truck. My husband trucked until November and then took the Long Line Mussel Culture Course at the Marine Institute in St. John's.

We started with Salt Water Pond in 1988. That summer we spent four weeks living there in a tent. I don't know why, but every time I came to the area, it was like I we. coming home, it was so nice, so peaceful. I'd get there and wouldn't want to leave. My father was adopted, and when I did some research on his side of the family a couple of years ago, I found out that his mother was born and raised in Little Ward's Harbour, where we started our first farm. At one point there was almost 100 people living there. The graveyard is up on the hill and the gravestones are still there. One dates back to the late 1700's.

Cultured mussels start with a wild mussel that spawns 25 million eggs. That larvae is floating in the water for about three weeks, just floating in the tide. You can't see it. At the end of three weeks it has to land somewhere and grow. So what we're doing is providing the place for it to land and grow. In Newfoundland we use what they call long line mussel culture, same as Prince Edward Island and the rest of Atlantic Canada.
The man looked at me and he said, "I guess I just blew it."

I said, "Yes, you did."

And the same thing when I do some of the marketing. But in the States it's different because the States accepts it, no questions. When my husband took over after I went back to school, the guys from the States would phone and say, "I want to talk to Denyse."

He'd say, "Well I'm sorry, Denyse has gone back to school. Can I help you?"

"No, when is Denyse coming back?"

It seems to be more accepted from the Americans than from the Canadians.

Within the next year we will be expanding. We're looking at secondary product or just upping our production level. We may get into smoked, or it could be bottling, or it could be just something done into a vacuum pack.

The down side is that it's very hard not to talk business when the family is together. There are times when you have to separate the two. Business can't be everything. Not only just for me, or my husband, but the kids need it too. They've got a life too that we've got to be part of. And of course, the other down side is financially.

Nothing is easy, and it's all uphill. Hopefully one of these days everything will even out.
I wasn't very old when I started cutting out sounds off the bones and taking all the black off them. As soon as you were old enough that they could trust you with a knife and be safe with it they had you doing it as your chore. I'd pack them in the wooden boxes they used to have from the Purity cream crackers. You'd pack those boxes full and put them in dry salt. Sometime in the winter you wanted a meal of sound you'd take them out of the dry salt, shake the salt off and soak them overnight, the same as the salt fish. My mother used to make what we called sound hash, a stew, and that was excellent. It was one of the prime meals for the winter.

I was no more than about 10 or 11 when I was in the stern of the boat with my dad. I wanted to get in the boat and there was no way to keep me out. I wouldn't get in early in the morning when they'd leave to haul the traps, but when they went back out I'd be jigging while dad would be hauling his trawl. I had 9 quintals of fish that summer. I probably salted about 15 barrels to get 9 quintals of dry fish out of it. I kept my fish to myself and sold it. I was always an entrepreneur, you could say. I'd look around and find a spare tub or barrel, and I'd salt my fish. After eight or nine days I'd take it out of pickle and pack it up in a pile. I made sure I found a space to get mine out first. I think I got $7 or $8 a barrel for it when it was dried. I remember having $67 or $68 the fall. It was great.

Mom was in charge of everything on shore. She never ever fished, but she did practically everything. I don't think she split, she always used to gut or head. But her big job in the fishery was to salt. I look back at that and think about the way that she worked, having a family and working in that stage. She was having a baby every two or two and a half years. She was out of the bed at 4:30 or 5:00 in the mornings trying to get that bit of extra work done in the house and a bit of clothes washed and one thing or another before the boys and men came in with any fish. I'd see her come up from a stage in the night time and get a lunch, a wash, and many times fall asleep on her knees, saying her prayers to the couch. You'd have to call her to go to bed. Beat tired, see. Nobody works like that today, I tell you. I don't think we could stand it anyway. Life was totally different.
Sometimes we went on the beach in March. There was patches of snow we'd have to walk between. I know what 'twas like on the beach Good Friday. Poor old Mrs. Matthews up the brook used to say, "The bells is ringing and only the good ones is going to church," and we was all on the beach at fish.

One year we got clear the last of our fish just before Christmas Eve. It was late in the fall - in October - when we got the last fish from Labrador. The schooners brought it in and they wanted to get it dried out. 'Twas some cold in November and December out on the open beach. And we only had an overall jacket to wear on over our clothes, 'cause they was stronger than our rubber clothes, and a pair of low rubber boots. I had the sleeve wore right out taking the fish they used to bring in to me.

One time when the schooner come in from Labrador with the fall fish, I said we should've had more for to suffer the cold. And I said, "Come on, Jenny Grant, I'm going over to Mr. Carr."

"No," she said, "I'm not going."

"Nobody going to come with me, what's wrong with you?" I said, "I'm going."

So when I went in the shop, I said to the girls, "Is there anyone in the office with Mr. Carr?"

And they said, "No." I had on me beach clothes, see, and me sunshade and they thought there was a stir up over on the beach.

I said, "Can I go in and see Mr. Carr?"
I worked most of the time with one boss. She was a hard old soul to work with, but we didn't care. We worked on and didn't take notice to her. She wouldn't let me stand up long enough to wipe me nose. Oh, she was a hard old ticket. She used to say, "Look at Nell over there laughing. The young girl's telling something now. Look, they're laughing now. Look." She watched every move. You had to laugh sometimes. Somebody would bring up something that would make you laugh, however tired you was. I used to always have two young girls, Jane Hickman and Elsie Crowley, bring in me fish and they was the real charmers, you know. Oh, how I used to laugh at they two.

The boss would get $10 more than the women that were working with her. The last summer I worked on the beach, I made over $100. Not very often I made $100 in the 14 years I was at it, and they'd only give you $10 cash. You had to take up the rest of it in their store. Only $10 and a paper - what they used to call a credit note. Every time you want something to their store, you had to carry that paper. That was the wrong part of it. 'Twas not even a fair play 'cause they had two prices. If you went in with $1 you got a different price than you would if it was on your credit note. That's the way it was - two prices. It was hard for your work, 'cause you wanted to get what you could for every dollar and stuff used to be expensive. They wouldn't get that to work today on people, no my dear.
I'm from over by Marystown, a place called Creston South, which is not a long distance from Garnish, but it's two totally different communities. My great-grandfather used to fish in Mortier Bay, but my dad never fished - he used to be in the lumber woods. The only time we used the boat was to fool around. When I quit the plant and got into the boat, the first day we had a big wind. When we were coming up there were big waves and the boat used to go up and down, and up and down, and you had to just hold on for dear life. When I came in, Gerald's father looked at me and said, "Did you get sick?"

I said, "Sick, what for?"

"Well," he said, "you never got sick today, you'll be all right."

A friend of mine, she's fishing from Point Rosie, which is three miles down from us. Her husband was fishing with his father, so when his father gave it up, she went with him. And she used to work in the bank. Seems like most of the wives goes out now in Garnish. Most all the boats, women is out on them. It was a shift for the better 'cause we weren't recognized. You were always on land, like Gerald's mother and them - they tended the flakes, but they've never been recognized in the fishery. The women had to can the salmon, can lobster, or dry the fish, and look after the children besides, and the men went out on the water.

In '93 his brother decided he would sell the longliner, he was getting out of the partnership. Of course, Gerald bought his share. And then that fall, I think, we got a lobster licence. That was a big turning point financially Here you were with four people and now we're doing much the same thing with two. We don't have to split the money, it's only one household.
In the spring we find it tough because we got our lump nets and lobster pots out. Then you got to put your crab pots out. We've had a crab licence for years - ours is supplementary, 150 pots. You got 25 set in a fleet, with 20 fathoms between each pot. Crab fishing is one of the hardest jobs in the fishery. It's continuous - while you're steaming to another fleet you're trying to get rid of all these crabs on board. You got to measure all the crab and then you got to heave a lot overboard, the small and soft crab.

The 55-footers is all in here with us, they only got to go out and set their pots. In one haul they got their 25,000 pounds. This year they had a line drawn so the bigger boats went into area 10. We were in area 11 and the boats had 96,000 pounds to catch on Friday, but we weren't allowed to go out because they overfished in area 10. The union and the fishermen is trying to work together to see if DFO (Department of Fisheries and Oceans) would set up an individual quota system. If you had IQ inside the 46 line and, say I'm guaranteed 22,000 from the 46 line in, if they opens that on May 15, I got until May 25 to put my pots in the water. Plus, instead of do or die, if it takes four weeks to get my 22,000, that's okay. If I'm getting time to catch me 22,000 pounds inside the 46 line, well, at $2.50 a pound, you're talking $50,000 or better. At least you'd be guaranteed that, but the spring, with the troubles we had with the longliner, we only had 3,500 pounds.

Gerald had the crab licence in his name, so when he wanted the lobster licence he had to pass the crab licence to me because he had a boat over 35 feet. They say we got 90-odd crab licence holders in 3PS fishing zone. It's only me and another woman that attend the meetings. Last week they said, "Now this little lady, she better sit by the door."

And I said, "Well, it doesn't matter. What's the difference in sitting up here?"

They said, "Yeah, but tempers is going to fly one of those days and I'm going to tell you, you don't want to be stuck in the middle."

Well, b'y, that don't bother me.

Gerald was pleased with me in the boat, we get along good together. I'd say, "I thinks we should go inside."
Then later on I ran for chief steward and I held that position for five years. Chief steward is more or less over all the stewards, a little bit higher position. If there's a problem in the plant, instead of having to go to your vice-president or your president, you'd go to your chief steward. If I'm a steward and I had a problem that I couldn't get settled at the office and I knew I was right, then I would get the chief steward. He or she had a little bit more of a voice. The chief steward ran things if the president and vice-president was gone. And there is more involvement in the higher parts of it - labour management meetings, grievance meetings, and negotiations. After that I was vice-president for about five years and then I ran for president in 1990 and got it, and in 1992 the plant closed down.

It wasn't just a nine to five job. I used to start in the morning at seven o'clock and I'd work till five in the afternoon. I might be just getting home and sitting down to my supper and there's a phone call. There's something going on at the plant that the stewards can't handle. I've been having to go off three and four o'clock in the morning - someone got fired or something like that. I'd say that's the major thing we used to have in the plant.

When somebody got fired, most people would be outside the gate. If the workers thought it wasn't just cause or wasn't a good reason, they thought they'd help by walking out, but most times that didn't work. Then you'd have to get them back, because it would be illegal. When I ran for president I think I only had the position for about a week when we had a major walk-off. A fellow got fired. Everybody in the plant was out in the parking lot and they weren't supposed to be out. I'm gonna tell you, I was really, really nervous because the last thing people wanted to hear from the president was, "We want you to go back to work." When I went out at least I had the promise that we were going to have a meeting the next day in St. John's. Anyway, I went out and talked to them and I couldn't believe my eyes, people went back to work.
It would be better if somebody come out and say, "Look, you're never going to work no more." They're talking about some kind of board is going to say what plants is gone and what plants is going to stay open. It's time for them to do this, because as long as I'm in Catalina - and a good many more like me - if nobody says your plant is never going to open, you're going to hang on to this little bit of hope. Until somebody tells you different, you got to.

There's a lot of problems around here and most of it is money. You turn on the news and you hear about all the money the people are getting on TAGS. But not very many of the plant workers are getting a high rate on TAGS. A lot of people were getting their cheque, but there wasn't enough money to go around. Their bills were more than their cheque. So there was a little bit on this and a little bit on that, and all of a sudden everything was adding up and they couldn't make ends meet. We were successful in getting a personal credit counselling service set up in Bonavista, and there's a lot of people taking advantage of that. We worked long and hard to get that set up.

We're after dealing with a few women who were abused that didn't have anywhere else to turn. Maybe they came here because I am a woman and I am with the union. Just a while ago this girl let me listen to a tape of a call that came to her house three o'clock one morning. I didn't know who it was, and I'm going tell you, the hairs stood up on me arms. It was just like I was sitting down in the kitchen of this man and honest to God, it was unreal. And I was thinking, "How much of this is going on that you don't know about?" It's only the scattered one that you knows about, because it takes a lot for somebody to tell you about this. Most people hides it.
We had no fridges in them days, which meant there were only certain things could be kept. The meals were usually beans, fish and brewis, salmon, fish stew, pea soup, fried fish, meat and vegetables, corned beef and salted cabbage, and dumplings or pudding. There weren't many things to change around the meals, but I did the best I could. There were a few times when it was rough and dinner was cooking - I'd have to lash the boilers to the stove so they wouldn't slip off. It would be a bit scary, especially when you had a boiler full of pea soup with dumplings or meat and vegetables. You didn't want to lose all the dinner.

The way it was, you had to find out what would be going on and then you got into the routine of things. When the men were out fishing you had to be watching for the boat to come. You'd have the meal cooked, but you wouldn't put the tea in steep until you saw them. You'd never know how long they'd be gone - might be an hour or two hours or ten minutes. If they had fish,

they'd work at it, and if not, they'd be gone again to haul their traps. There was usually two splitting tat going all the time, one on each side of the boat. The would be times, probably in the afternoon, when h the crew would go out and haul a trap and the other would stay in to finish off the fish. Sometimes I'd up to get cleared away from dinner to have a spell them for a good laugh. I might prong a bit of fish d in the hole to the fellows salting it.

One summer the fish had "broke off up the shore," they used to say. Then the skipper decided to go tic shore to find the fish. It was getting up to about Au 20th. There was this place where there used to be

fish to be got a bit late some years. We got there in evening and the next morning they went out with trap. There was no other schooner, only ourselves, see this boat coming. I had the water boiling and t! teapot ready, but I wouldn't put the water on the te, went up again on deck to have a look out and I sad' myself, "Sure there's only one person to be seen in Well I began to shiver and shake, and I went down the forecastle. When the boat came to the side of t schooner, I could hear someone tying on and getting I could hear every sound. A man came to the scull sung out, "Anyone down there?"
So I said, "Yes, sir."

He said, "Where's Skipper Jim?" So I told him. He asked me where we came from and how much fish we had. I told him handy about as I could. Then he passed me the mail. He said, "When Skipper Jim comes in you tell him the fish is at the Queen's Lakes now. It's very good fish too. Tell him that if he was there now, he'd just about be in time." When I told the skipper, he never said anything. He had his breakfast and the next I knew we were getting on our way. We never stopped until that evening. The next morning they were up and set out the trap, and ten days from that they were finished.

You usually got back home from Labrador the middle of September. Then the fish had to be taken out of the schooner and washed and dried in the sun. There were lots of flakes to spread the fish on a sunny day. All that work was done by the crew, which meant there was plenty of work for the cook. She'd go to the skipper's house to cook the meals. His wife helped out and we usually decided between us what we were going to have for the meals - you worked to and fro like that.


I learned how to clean the sealskin and furs and make sealskin boots from my parents, and I was teaching that two years ago in the school. In the springtime we had to take 12 students up to Nain Bay for two weeks and teach them how to be outside Nain, how to pick the dry wood, hunt for animals, and look for the tracks.

When the collector boat comes, we send a lot of seal meat to Nain to share with other people, mostly the old people. We put it in the fish boxes in a lot of ice so it won't spoil. The collector boat always takes ice to us. But sometimes it's really hot and the ice melts, so we look around to see icebergs and we take little pieces and cut it up and put it in with the fish.

I like going up to Okak when the char is coming out from the lake. When it's low tide there's a lot of fish for rodding, so just for fun we go rodding. We save the big ones for selling and I make pitsik out of the small fish. Sometimes when there's a whole lot of fish and the collector boat is not coming for a few days I make pitsik out of them.

I learned to make the pitsik from my mother when I was small. You cut the meat off, then take the meat and cut little lines across it so it will dry faster. If the fish is small you take the knife and from the head you cut it down the middle, take the bones out, clean it, and dry it in the sun. If I make pitsik with big fish I cut the stomach away because the stomach part is very oily. Then I take the bones out, cut the lines, clean it, and hang it up until it dries in the sun. If it's very sunny and kind of windy, it can dry in one week. Same way with the caribou meat and the seal meat, I make nikkuk out of them. You take all the big muscles off the caribou meat and you take the fat off the seal meat. You cut the meat really thin. Some people make thick ones, but I make mine thin to dry fast. I hang it up on the stick and turn it over and over until it's dry. You can put them on top of the rocks and turn them over in the sun. You have to watch it all the time because it can stink. The nikkuk is really good when it is fresh. It can be fresh about six months if you keep it in a cold place or in the freezer.
Last year, in 1995, Ray made a couple of trips at the scallop before the crab season opened. The crab price was really good. It gave a boost to the fishermen and boat owners. After the crab, the boat went to Baffin Island to fish for turbot. Usually they'll be north from mid June to mid October. The catch for an eight- to ten-day trip is about 80,000 pounds. The fish is off-loaded at sea, from the Newfoundland Mariner and the other boats, onto a collector boat, which transports it to fish plants in Newfoundland. It takes about seven days for the collector to make a return trip.

If I needed Ray, I had to go through the Coast Guard. And if the Coast Guard couldn't pick him up they went through Montreal, and then they would call me back. I could be hours just waiting for Ray to call me if there was an important message that I had to get to him.

When our boat was north fishing for turbot, we had some problems with the hauler. They had to leave the gear in the water - 500 turbot nets - and sail for Nain, Labrador. Ray called me and said he was going to come up on the collector boat. He asked me to see if I could purchase a hauler. There wasn't one in St. John's and nothing in Nova Scotia. I could get one through from Quebec, but it would take six weeks.

I called a fisherman from this area. He had a deep water hauler he wasn't using and it was identical to the one Ray had. I asked him to bring it in to a company in Donovans. The head had to be taken off to fit it onto a small plane. But they couldn't get the top off of the hauler. Then I had to call another fisherman. He had a hauler in Bonavista and he said Ray could have a loan of it. I had to pick Ray up in Dover when he arrived on the collector boat. Then he drove out and got the hauler in Bonavista, and took it to Springdale to be flown to Labrador. All in all it cost us over $2,000 for labour on the two haulers, not owning either one of them. And it cost $3,600 to fly it down on a private seaplane.

One of the things I like about this work is talking with the buyers. The first year we went at the scallop, one buyer was paying $6.50 a pound for shucked scallop, another was paying $6.95. I called a company in Nova Scotia and they offered me $7.30 for it, not even seeing the scallop. A couple of companies here started calling me to see if the boat was in or when it was landing. I asked them what price they were willing to pay and they said $7.00. I said, "Sorry, I can have a truck on the wharf and that scallop aboard when she lands at $7.30 a pound."

"Well, we'll pay in between $7.00 and $7.30."
But in the small plants you wouldn't get enough people to stand together to say the rosary. People were afraid to organize. We often been down there you couldn't get a break. It was like you owed them your life because you were there. In most cases they were damn lucky to have the workers that they had. If they had a handful more outspoken people like the few of us that were there, the plant would've been on the rocks. We just had to quiet down because there was no one there to stand with you. We said a lot, but there was a lot that we couldn't say. But if the manager had to have a handful of stronger women there, they wouldn't have gotten away with a quarter. And then again, they might have been the type that it wouldn't matter how many were speaking out, they still wouldn't bend an inch.

At one plant we got blamed for trying to get a union in because we were the outspoken ones. They figured we were the only people would do the likes of this. To this day I don't know who did it. I only asked for a day off and they let me go. I asked for a Saturday off two weeks in advance and he gave it to me. And when I come back, there was no work on Monday, and Tuesday my foreman called me and said, "Lilly, you don't have to come in no more."

I said, "Am I fired?"

He said, "No."

"Is there work tomorrow?" I said.

"Yes," he said.

"Can I come in?" I said.

"No," he said.

"Well, I'm fired," I said.
At another non-unionized plant I worked in they treats us like gold. I went to work up there packing fish and I had to start at $7.25 an hour and the rest were getting $7.50. That was for the first month. I didn't mind that. You were just starting off, but when I got up there, I w, doing three to their one. So I said, "No, I'm not doing this. I'm not doing three to their one. I'm not getting paid less. I don't want no more, but I wants to be up where they're to."

And she said, "We can't do that."

"Well, I won't be back tomorrow night," I said.

And when we went in the office, the manager said, "Okay, pay her." That was no more than he should do, really. I was doing more work, I should at least get pal what they were getting paid.

In 1991 we worked that long of hours and I was that poisoned with working night shift and my husband coming in as I was walking out, I sent in for a fishing licence. To my surprise, they sent me back one. And so I just said to my husband, "The last of July, I'm quitting the plant."
To put out a main line you drill holes in the rocks on shore and put in anchor bolts and cement those in, and then the main line attaches to these bolts from shore to shore. Attached on that rope is a collector rope, and the mussel spawn attaches to that. When a year is up, the collectors are ready to strip. And there are always new collectors ready to go back in the water. It's an ongoing cycle.

When you strip the seeds off the collectors, you put them through a socking table. This table is water-fed, and the mussels are forced down a tube into a "grow out" sock. That's like a long sock made of plastic web. For every foot of sock, I believe, it's 250 mussels. The grow out sock is reattached to a main line that is strung from shore to shore. And they're on this line for another year, maybe a year and a half, depending on the growth rate. Then we harvest them. The mussels that are too small for the processing plant, we resock them and put them back in the water, give them maybe about a year and reharvest them. So actually there's very little waste coming out of the plant.
If we have an order for, say, five or six thousand pounds for tomorrow morning, I'll order the raw material from the farm and it'll be in about an hour before we start processing. The girls will come in and get ready to process, which means getting the packaging ready and getting the plant ready. The mussels will arrive and then we'll start processing, so it's out of the water, packaged, and boxed within 24 hours, so the shelf life can be maintained. But if it's sitting on our floor for two or three hours, then you're losing a lot of water content.

One time the truck was coming at 4:00, and at 2:00 the equipment broke down. We've still got another two thousand pounds to go and I'm saying, okay, pull the side off the equipment. What's wrong? Chain's broke. Okay, come on, let's get it fixed. So I go downstairs and get the toolbox and fix it. My training as a mechanic is very useful. It helps me think about how the equipment works, what could go wrong, and then try and get it fixed.

Sometimes we have our product being bumped in Halifax when it should have already been in San Francisco. Passengers and their cargo go first. Moose season is famous for having our product bumped. Once a buyer in San Francisco phoned and said, "Product got bumped again, did it?"

And I said, "Yes. You know, if you keep your guys in moose season, we'll be all right, because it's you moose getting us bumped."

Or somebody phones and says, "Okay Denyse, I need a couple of thousand pounds, what's the price you can give me?" I mean you've only got seconds to say, this is the price, and hope that you're not over, because the competition is stiff, especially from Prince Edward Island.

I am dealing in a man's world, and it is very frustrated. There was one guy who came in looking for work at the plant. He wanted to speak to the manager, and I said "Yes, can I help you?"

"No," he said, "I want to speak to the man manager."

I called my husband up, and he said, "You were already talking to the lady that does the hiring."
Most of the things that I learned in the fishery I just picked up from watching other people do it. Grandmother Louise Cabot was a left-handed splitter and she taught me how to split fish. I was splitting very young - I can remember standing on a tub to be to the table. By 13, I was pretty good at it. I remember grandmother saying lots of times, "You're going to be a better splitter than I am." When the men came in at six in the morning with a load of fish from the trap, you had to get up and get on your clothes. In the mornings, a lot of times I can remember it would be all women and girls.

In the fall of the year, in the month of September, time come to make the fish. The older men kept on fishing. It seemed like they used to keep on the herring fishery after the caplin was gone off the bar - they'd keep trying to get a few hauls in the day off their trawls because it would be very good fishing then. Some days we'd have a couple of hundred quintals of fish out to pick up. You'd come out of school at 3:30 in the evening, grab your slice of molasses bread, change your clothes if it was good clothes you had, and go for the flakes. From that till 5:30 or 6:00 everybody was going full tilt bringing fish in and yaffling up fish. We had fish everywhere. When I was only about 13 my brother got a pony for me and he had a wagon with it. I used to do a lot of hauling the fish around. I was right in there headlong.

It wasn't salt bulk in those days, it was light salt fish; you didn't put so much salt on it. For dad and them, 350 or 400 quintals was a half decent summer - it was five and six of them in a crew. You'd pick up a fish by the tail and he stood out right straight, I mean that was like a shaving, there was no weight left into it. You had to pile up the handbarrow forever to break weight on it for 112 pounds of dry fish. You was packing it up till you got sick and tired of packing it up.

It was a lot of good memories of growing up there, the fish in the store and the store lofts and one thing and another. It was right from spring until fall - every day had its own chores and it was never a boring time.
"Yes," they said, "you can go in."

I went in and I said, "Mr. Carr, we got a lot to face now for the time of year coming on, fall of the year and that wet fish. Can't we have a little raise in our pay, 'cause we needs more now for to wear in the cold weather than we did all summer, and we needs better boots. It all takes money and we haven't made much the summer."

"I must say, you're right," he said. "Yes, I will give you a raise."

When I went back I was going to clap me hands at them. "Guts enough for nothing," I said. "I went over to Mr. Carr - he's only a man like our own men. You got to have a bit of gum into you to get through this world."

Well, I thought 'twas right when I made the move. We got the raise 'cause we did deserve it. I don't think I done wrong there.

When you got off the beach, you didn't know the first thing to do - housecleaning and doing things for Christmas, and then doing work all through the winter until the time you went on the beach again in March.

You were steady going. Sometimes the boss woman would come down to the house. She used to say, "What's news Louie?"

I'd say, "I been nowhere since I come off the beach, only at me work."

You never had time. Your time was occupied by your family and your home.

_Louise and Violet_

The first thing, the fish was brought out from the schooners and washed clean. Now that was what we called "water our fish." Men and boys used to wash the fish. That was what they called the green fish, 'cause 'twas wet. Then all the women would work at putting it on the beach to dry. It was a long time drying a load of fish in them days 'cause people had a lot of fish.

You had so many women working at dry fish in piles and so many working at the green fish. There was eight and nine and sometimes ten women - that was the crowd for the beach. One of them was a boss. She would tell you what to spread and how much.
We spread it out if 'twas fine enough and then put it in faggots - that's like small piles. There'd be five or six or seven fish in a small faggot. They were spread up and down, heads and tails, not around. We spread fish every day till you get it dry enough to start making big round piles. You couldn't pile green fish. I suppose it'd be in faggots a week sometimes and when it'd get a bit nice and dry, then you'd start piling it.

Those piles were round and we took pride in the shape of the pile. When it got up so high we used to make it up almost like a sharp roof, like a peak on a house. This was a real art and had to be done just right or it didn't suit.

There'd be several pliers - the boss would be a plier too, and there'd be two women bringing fish into each Filzer. You'd grab up a Raffle, maybe a half-dozen fish at a time, and put so many fish all around and go around and around. They had to be perfect. It would be up so high and you gradually come out a little bit. It was a nice bit bigger on top than when you started on the bottom. It'd be perfectly round. They had to be done right or you wouldn't pile the next day. Somebody else would take over. They were quite particular over the shape of those piles.

We used to have sails tied down with rope to cover the piles and you'd have to take the sails off every day to keep it from getting damp or mouldy. If we didn't, it would sweat under the sails and brown specks used to get all over the skin of the fish. 'Twas like smutty stuff and they used to have to clean it off. They wouldn't sell that as first-class fish. That would be seconds or thirds.

Most every day you spread the piles - carry the fish out in armfuls and spread it. Unless it was a day that you didn't know if it was going to rain or shine or what, then you just take the sails off and let the air get at it. But if it was good weather it got spread every day.

When you had big fish, and there used to be some awful large fish them days, you had to have your pile out bigger. It'd be hard on the tails of the fish if you didn't have your pile big. They had to be flat 'cause the way they were flattened out, that's the way they would dry. To get number one fish they had to be right straight and nice. Everybody was after number one fish - you'd get more for making number one fish than you would for the seconds.

There used to be a man come around to see the fish. He'd be around on different
beaches every day, examining the fish. And the boss used to say, "I believe we'll soon have a lot of fish to go now." She was the boss and what she said went.
Right here we got a lot of shoal water. You can go off a long ways and still only get 10 or 12 fathoms. On the other side of the bay you get deep water. For groundfish you got to go off a ways. We used to be in 160 to 230 fathoms of water. The deepest water in Fortune Bay is 299 fathoms and that's over there to Belleoram, up in Belle Bay we calls it. When we had the cod fishery open we used to be down in the bottom of the bay, down around Rencontre. We'd also be off of Belleoram, on the other side of the bay to fish for turbot. We used to leave around 2:30 in the morning to have two or three hours steaming in the longliner. And we used to go down around Grand Jarby, which is almost down to Bay L'Argent. We used to be down there for flounder. You wouldn't get much, but you'd end up with a day's pay.

When we go at the lobsters, the first day you would do good, you'd probably get, say, 250 lobsters. Everybody loves to get out and haul because you know you're not going to get another haul like that. When it comes to June, you're down to 100 or less a week. The middle of June, if you can get 50 for a week you're doing good. We sets our lobster pots in fleets, eight to a fleet. You're going to be a lot longer hauling individual pots than you are by fleets. A lot of people don't know what you're talking about when you tell them you're setting in fleets. Seems like the first week you be's tired, but after that it's just as easy as hand over hand with your rope. When we come down to camp we have them half hauled and sometimes we come in for a cup of tea, just take off the oil jacket, go on in pants and rubbers on. And then you come out and haul the other ones. The first part of the year, the first few weeks, you'd probably finish 11:00 or 11:30 a.m. 'cause you be trying to get back into the rhythm and finding out exactly where the lobsters is. That takes a little bit of time. When you get them hauled, then you just go in for a lunch, and you'd go off then to your lump nets.
That was just once. Most times when they're out you 't get them back. I tell you, it was easy to get people t, but there was something else getting them back. metimes we used to have them out there for two and three days. You had court injunctions and everything. Butt after two or three days people was ready to go back.

It could happen very easily that a person would get fired, and it could happen to the wrong person. FPI (Fishery Products International) got their rules up, and one rule is about flicking fish. If somebody flicked a small piece of from the tip of a knife, it would go so fast you could hardly see it. And that's very, very dangerous because it could get in someone's eye. So if somebody got caught flicking fish they knew they were going to have to pay the price. They would probably get suspended or fired. A while ago there was this one young fellow, and I'm not sure if he got suspended or fired for flicking fish. But it was a big confusion in the plant because he did not do it. The foreman was walking through the door and somebody flicked fish, and he just took it for granted that the young fellow did it. We had three or four different witnesses come up and said they knew who did it.

Most cases if somebody got fired it would have to go through arbitration. No matter how much you fought, the company wouldn't change their mind until it went through the arbitration. That's more or less like court work. You got a lawyer fighting for the company on one side and then you got your union fighting for the worker on the other side. They'll both get up and present their case and then they give their closing remarks. Then the arbitrator makes the decision and that's it, you gotta live by it. We did have some people that went through arbitration that never got back, and we did have some that did get back.
I don't think the walkouts affected negotiations, because with FPI they're not just negotiating our plant. One time we had 13 different plants that negotiated the same time. There used to be some things different for the seasonal plants and the bigger plants, but we have never negotiated for just our plant alone. Usually the big plants negotiated together.

You know, we thought we had problems when the plant was open, but everyday problems was really nothing when you looks at it now. You'd go in every day and problems would come up. The biggest thing was if someone got fired. The rest was just everyday problems, like somebody wasn't called into work or somebody got twenty dollars bonus that never showed up on their cheque. At the time it was important and I'm sure if we went back there again all of this would be coming around again, but those problems are nothing to what the people got now. Since the plant closed down we've been worked day and night. I was a TAGS liaison officer for a few months this year. Really it was only what I was doing for two years since I got laid off at the plant looking after people in the plant if they got any problems with TAGS. I just did it on my own time.

We were making good money up to the plant and people had their life set on what they were getting. You had the money coming in and then all of a sudden, gone, nothing. And as the saying goes, when poverty comes in the door, love goes out the window. Like in a lot of families, your husband would probably be on one shift and your wife on another. When one would be going in the door, the other one would be coming out. The only time you'd probably see each other would be on the weekends. Then all of a sudden the plant was closed down - two people together with nothing to do, getting on each other's nerves. You're home day in and day out and knowing that your job is gone and the future is so uncertain. We don't know if we're ever going to work again.
I was born in Quebec. When I was only one year old we moved all the way from over there to Hebron in Labrador on dog team. When I was growing up everybody used to go up north to go fishing in the summertime. I used to help my father clean the fish and salt them. We used to put the fish in barrels - sometimes about 20 barrels in one day - and the collector boat would pick them up. My father used to get a lot of fish. His boat used to be full of char, white and pink and red ones, but they wanted only red char. My mother always managed to dry the white ones and pink ones. Pitsik is what you calls them. She used to make lots of pitsik sell it to the government store, ten cents for one.
In the morning, I wake up at five. I cook breakfast and I wake them up. Soon as they finish breakfast they go off to see the nets and I will stay home and cook dinner or wash clothes, make pitsik, or clean the tent. Sometimes I make donuts using seal fat oil - seal fat for my Crisco Oil. I'm used to it and I love it. Seal fat is used for everything, but it has to be fresh seal fat to make oil. You rise the dough and start cutting up the seal fat to put in the pot. You boil the fat in the iron pot and you just put the donuts in.

We look for seals in the speedboat. I save everything off the seal. I clean the sealskin with my ulu - the knife I use to scrape off the oil. Then I wash the skin in detergent - Arctic Power I use real good for sealskin. I put it in a frame and hang it outside to dry. The sealskin is really good for mitts and boots. My mother used to sew the sealskins to make the kayak; clean them first, take the hair off, and sew it very neat. My father used to have this big, big kayak and me and my sister could fit inside. He would get everything with the kayak - flour and sugar, and sometimes he used to hunt for animals by kayak. One of the kayaks belong to my father is in the museum here in Nain.
This is how they tried to get us out. Soon as he said that, I was on the phone. I phoned the Labour Board. This happened the first of September and it was way after Christmas before we got it all settled. As it happened, when they let us go we had our stamps for the year. We were lucky. We were safe. If it had been in the middle of the year we wouldn't have had enough stamps for that. It could've been hard times if it had been in the middle of the summer.

When they were trying to form this union there was more women in the plant than men 'cause the trimmers were all women, the packers were all women, and the graders too. It was only the cutters and a few freezer men that were not. Anyway, the manager called a big meeting and he was talking about people signing the union cards, and one man spoke up and said, "I don't think them women really knows what they were signing."

I said, "You listen here. There's nobody in this plant that don't know how to read and write."

And that was the only time me and the manager ever agreed. But see, the men could do what they like. I remember in that plant the cutters were working on piecework and we were getting paid by the hour. It was just so unfair, it's unreal. They would come down on a Saturday afternoon, about 4:30, and ask the cutters to work another hour or two. And the cutters would say, "No, we're not working."

Then the foreman would go back up and tell the manager, and he would send the foreman down - "Well, if you work, we'll give you another half cent on the pound and we'll take the trap fish off the line and put handline on, the big stuff."

Well of course then the cutters would work, they would cut like the son of a bitch, pile us to the roof. No one would say, "This is Saturday night. Are you working? Do you mind working?" We probably after working 50 hours or more. We'd be there till midnight trying to clean up the mess, and not 5 cents, no overtime, not a thing. I could package what I like, the trimmers could trim what they like, they wouldn't put us on piecework. We figured it was because we were all women.

I was at one plant and if they got the cost of a package down under 5 cents they would be in their glory, call you up in a big meeting, praising you to the highest. So, I knew what the cost in small plants was. This day we were at another plant and buddy called a big meeting. And he said, "The cost is up. What are you doing down there? The cost of this packaging is up."
I asked, "What's it up to?"

He said, "3.2 cents."

Well my head turned like a whiplash and I looked at our foreman and I started shaking my head. He knew that I knew what I was talking about. And I said, "Well, if it's up to that, just out of curiosity sake, would you like to tell me what it was down to?"

And he said, "2.9."

"Fine," I said, "and you're complaining."

But they didn't like people speaking up like that. They like to think that you have no idea what they're talking about. They think they're talking to a bunch of idiots because you're working in a fish plant. And that's not the case. I was always outspoken - I think probably Nat Sea made me in that point of view because you had your union behind you and you could afford to be outspoken. But then when you went to the small plants and there was no union, it didn't come off so good.

I can remember going down to the small plants in the summer and the first day we'd all be up in the lunchroom and they would come in and say, "Now, you're back to work, you're only here for a few short months, we don't want to hear tell of no sick youngsters, no 'I got to get groceries,' none of this stuff. That don't exist. We don't want to hear tell of none of that." That would be your first "How do you do" when you walked in. It didn't matter to me 'cause if my child was sick they could go to hell.
When we first started mussel farming we had to get a permit from Crown Lands to go in and occupy the waterway. Then we had to go to the Department of Fisheries to acquire a licence to aquaculture the site. Two years ago we moved to our third site, so right now we have the capacity to harvest a million pounds of product.

You can't just say you're going to process product. You have to abide by the fisheries regulations, as in every other fish plant. In 1991, we went out and bought a secondhand piece of equipment. We got funding to complete the processing line and set up in the S. T. Jones fish plant on Little Bay Islands. But it burned down a year and a half later. They rebuilt it, but there wasn't enough room there for us. So we said, "We're five years ahead of when we wanted to build our plant, but now is the time," so we began building in Little Bay.

The same month we began to build our plant, we lost my younger sister Deann and my niece Jessica in a car accident. For me to deal with this, I buried myself in work for a year and a half. I mean I just worked and worked and worked and worked, till I was told either stop or change or something. So last year I figured I'd go back to school, give myself a break. I also wanted to build up my knowledge and confidence because we are going farther afield into Japanese and European markets.

When we decided to go into processing, we came to an agreement that I'd run the processing part and my husband would run the farming part. Maybe that way we just might stay married a little bit longer! Everything pertaining to running the plant is mine - from the marketing to the accounting, to the hiring and firing, to the shipping. There's seven of us at the plant, seven employees, and this is a proud thing to say, we're all women. It's a woman-run plant. That is unique. The women are all former fish plant workers who worked at Little Bay Islands. They are all from Little Bay, St. Patricks, and Beachside, the three communities in the area.

What I like about my work is that it is not mundane. I can go in the office in the morning and I know that this is not going to be a typical day like yesterday, because there's so much happening. So many things can go wrong and they have to be corrected, but that's what I find exciting about it. I work best under pressure, when I don't know what's going to happen next.
You'd spread the fish in the mornings and you headed back inside for a bucket of berries. And you watched the sun then to see if it was going to rain and if you'd see a cloud coming you had to scramble for home because all the fish was out. There was always a chore to do. As a child we always had responsibilities. You had all the gardens to do as well, all the potato gardens and the cabbage gardens. 'Twas never a dull moment around; it was a job for everybody every day.

I wasn't very old when I got married in West Ste. Modeste in 1961. There was a lot of people getting married at 17. For the first eight or ten years I didn't do an awful lot around the fishery, only watch the boys come in.

I used to fish sometimes. After work in the evenings, Pat would go out probably and jig a quintal of fish and I might help him to put it away if I had someone up with the kids. I had five children and was quite busy around the house.

In 1974 I went to work for Port Union Fisheries in West Ste. Modeste. I bought fish, and myself and another woman split the works. We had a fair bit of fish there that summer. The next summer, 1975, I did a bit of work for them too. I got away from the fishery then for a few years. In 1979 I went back at it again as a supervisor after Northern Fisheries set up in L'Anse au Loup. This was fresh fish now he was getting into, first time ever in the Labrador Straits. I had around 65 people on my shift. When we started getting ready for this, a group come in from St. John's to put on those 2-week courses to train the trimmers and the cutters and all this stuff. And I was very good at filleting, and buddy said this day to the owner, "That's one of your top filleters."

In the summer of 1981 I worked for Nickersons buying fish on the wharf in West Ste. Modeste. There wasn't a day I went under 30,000 pounds of trawl fish, the biggest kind. The next year I went to work with Earles and I worked with them for six years.

From there on in the fishermen's committee and the community council started going after money and we got an ice maker installed and we got our canopy on the wharf done. Every year you kept adding a bit to it and trying to get what you could out of it. In 1987 I went after a large amount of money to diversify that plant. We could see what was happening with the salt fish market. It seemed to be diminishing - it was dying away because you weren't getting the price and the grade on the fish.
In 1959, when all the people had to move from Hebron we moved to Nain and I married there. We used to go back to Hebron in the summertime to go fishing. The people on the collector boat said that Hebron is far, so in 1961 we started to go to Okak.

Okak is about 70 miles north of Nain - nine hours to up on the boat. As soon as the ice breaks up and the collector boat comes, around July 1, we go up north a stay there two months. We live in a tent all summer. I used to make my own tent, but there is none of that kind of material here now so we have to bring an already made one. This summer six of us went up to Okak. There was me and my husband, one son, and two grand children, and one person that was fishing with my son.

There used to be about 10 tents around Okak and a lot people fishing there. Now some of them got no nets a no boat, most of them sold their licence. That's why they don't go up anymore. This summer there was on tent, just us, but we're never bored. Up there you don't think about nothing, always something to do. Sometimes it's lonely because there's only a few of us, but I don't want to come back. I would stay until almost freezing, I suppose because I like being outside of Nain. It's so fresh and clean.
We found at one point that we were losing a lot of fish; I couldn't buy anything under 18 inches through the Salt Fish Corporation. That's when I changed the plant over from salt to fresh fish. It gave us a lot more leeway in terms of being able to ease up on the grade and be able to tap into the fish what was coming through.

When we got into the fresh fish we had automatic headers, automatic splitting machines and all this. I was splitting it up and freezing it in 5-pound fillets. Most of that was brought in from Black Tickle and Domino. The sad part was you watched the Gulf stocks die; as the stocks were declining, the sizes were declining. We saw that. Back in 1982, 60 percent of our fish was large fish, over 22 inches. In 1989, 95 percent of our fish was under 18 inches. In 1984, I put up 1.2 million pounds in West Ste. Modeste and in 1985, I went down to 800,000. It went down to less than 50,000 pounds in 1990. The Gulf stock was gone, see.

We had a lot of good times in those 10 or 12 years there in that plant, but I tell you there was some nights it was pretty rough. I remember one night - it browed hard all day and there was a lot of Newfoundland boats over small-boat fishing. And the boys went out after supper and the wind calmed down and they started jigging.

The first boat that came to the wharf was 10:00 that night. We started grading off fish, and one then tried to get ahead of the other. Cause they knew there was good jigging for the next morning. And every boat with 800, 900, and 1,000 pounds of fish. My husband and our son were there - 3:00 in the morning I got them graded off. The next morning some of the fishermen grabbed one young fellow belonged to me by the throat. I went out, grabbed one of the fishermen and said, "Look here. Any fighting to be done, I'm going to do it. You behave or you take your fish and go where you like with it. I don't even have to buy it from you." But I never had a problem with it. I thought I could always handle it well. I never had that many people come and jump down my throat. You always had it the odd time, but no matter who was there, you'd get that.

In West Ste. Modeste the fish plant is owned by the community and leased to a processing company. In 1986 the Fishermen's Committee decided to let Earles go and they hired H.B. Dawe. I worked for them that year. I was the first woman that ever the old skipper H.B. hired to be in charge in any of his plants, 'cause he didn't believe that women were capable of doing a job. Every day I had to fax them my production costs. Well, they couldn't believe that they could make money, that they could break even in Labrador, because of the high cost factor and everything.
That winter in February I got a call one day and they wanted to know would I take over the management of all their plants. They had one up in English Point, one in Long Point, one in Red Bay, and one in West Ste. Modeste. So anyway, that's what I done. I was all over the place. I might be in Red Bay 9:00 in the morning or I might be in English Point, anywhere.

One of the plants was costing them a lot of money. With the Salt Fish Corporation you were allowed so much per pound in terms of your labour cost and your overhead. There was a formula in terms of your salt, you were allowed so much for every 100 pounds of fish. You knew if you had 20,000 pounds of fish gone down, exactly how many bags of salt that was. One of the first things I'd do was go check the pile of fish and see if the salt was on in the right areas because I didn't want my fish under-salted either. When I started up at this plant in 1986 they couldn't account for hundreds and hundreds of bags of salt at the end of the season. And I started showing the women there how I wanted it salted. The second year I was seven bags over at that plant.

Skipper H.B. couldn't believe it. He didn't know how I did it. And I remember one time during the summer of '86 one of the truck drivers told me, "You know what the Skipper told the crew down in Cupids yesterday? He's going to fire the whole goddamn lot and have that woman come up from West Ste. Modeste and do it for him." He had a lot of confidence in the job I was doing for him.

I was told by the Salt Fish Corporation or Earles when I started with them, we had 7 cents per pound for labour to work with. And at the end of the day I put up fish for Earles for 3 1/2 cents a pound. I never ever went more than 6. All hand splitters and 75 percent of them women. I always worked below my cost. I was conscious of other people's money. I don't think I overworked anybody, I don't think I undercut anybody. I thought I was always fair as I could possibly be to the workers. I didn't only just walk around with the workers and look over their backs. If I needed to jump in and grab the box of fish that was on the weights, I jumped in and did it. If there was no one around to weigh the fish, I done it myself. I was always a part of the operation.

I was also doing a lot of work now in terms of supplies and one thing and another, shipping a lot of stuff up to Cape Charles and Domino and doing some work down on the Quebec side, like in Old Forte and those places. We were buying caplin at times, got into a bit of herring, and had a go at the whelks. I bought the first caplin in the Labrador Straits. That was the first dollar that fishermen made from the sale of caplin here, and they made some damn good money in those two weeks.
There was times there was a lot of pressure, but it was always a new challenge. That's what I found when I went down to open the plant in the spring of the year. I never ever felt that there was any real stress on because I didn't think there was anything ever come along that I couldn't handle. I always felt comfortable with the fishery.

I also got involved in my own company. I had so high as 200 fishermen on the payroll. I was buying salmon, which was a very delicate product. You were always worried that you weren't going to get them to the market in time, because you were putting a fresh product on the market. And for three or four years I concentrated on that. Then I see that was also failing - I wasn't getting the amount of product that was feasible to have a truck come in every week. So that's when I decided that I'd move on further up the coast and put a collector on.

I was bringing in anywhere from 5,000 to 8,000 pounds of salmon a week from the southeast coast of Labrador. Set up a small operation up there in Snug Harbour and had a young fellow buying and icing for me all week long, and had my boat up there around Friday to collect and load on board and bring it back. It was also giving people another access to sell their salmon, because at this point in time it was the first year that ever the fishermen from Red Bay and up around the Cape Charles area could ever sell late-run salmon. I bought something like 25,000 pounds from August 15 to September 20. Now they weren't so bright a salmon as they were early in the year, they were a little bit more paler, but I still kept paying those fishermen $1.50 per pound. It was fantastic for them, they made a great lot of money.
That was one that I really enjoyed. It was like you were really doing something when you got into the fresh fish - the actual buying the salmon, putting them on the market, and seeing returns from it within a few days or a week or so. I think it was too bad at the time I started up things were starting to decline. If it had to continue I think it would've probably grown into a fairly decent operation. But the change and the shift in everything sort of threw monkey wrenches in all that.

I remember back in the '70s when there was very few women working in coastal communities, and when that fresh fish plant started up in L'Anse au Loup, it was the prime source of employment for women in the Straits. It was something like over 100 employees that Pat had on there, and I've heard women older than me say for the first time in their lives, "I'm making my own money now." And I don't think it was by choice a lot of women got into the plants. I would say it was the only thing available. And times was getting a bit tougher, I guess, when people needed a second income. It was a whole turn of another different generation.