

Coastal Life

Story by MARILYN GILBAUGH

Tele Aadsen, fisherpoet

Sharing stories on stage and off

If you pronounce Tele as “Tell-ah,” you’ve probably met Tele Aadsen before. Or maybe you’ve heard her perform at the FisherPoets Gathering. In 2012, the 37-year-old Aadsen first traveled south from Bellingham, Washington, to Astoria to share her stories.

Born into a fishing family in Sitka, Alaska, Aadsen’s early memories are of wide open waters, fishing and writing. The three have remained her constant companions.

From May to September, Aadsen, Joel Brady-Power — the captain of her heart and her fishing partner for 11 years — and Bear, a large, black boat cat with attitude, can be found aboard the 43-foot troller Nerka. Out on the water until the boat’s flash freezer is full of salmon — maybe a couple of weeks at a time, maybe a little longer, hopefully a little shorter — they fish more often than not in southeast Alaskan waters. When

you make your living as a commercial fisherman (Aadsen has no problem with the generic gender i.d.) it’s hands-on, heavy work. “We’re strong but broken by the end of September,” said Aadsen.

A six-year break in 2001 took Tele from commercial fishing and writing to a life on land. She earned a master’s in social work from the University of Washington and then worked on the streets of Seattle with homeless people who needed help.

“Working crisis to crisis was a recipe for burnout. It’s the only time I can remember not writing. As my speaking voice emerged, my writing voice retreated. I returned to Alaska and to fishing, so happy to be back then and now,” said Aadsen.

Linked to her initial FisherPoets Gathering 2012 appearance, there is — no surprise — a story she loves to tell. “That first night at the Baked Alaska restaurant, I was very frightened when getting up to tell my story,” Aadsen said. “Then I noticed two people in the audience seated two rows back. A warm-faced woman and the young man next to her were responding to what I was saying. Just seeing them there, being so receptive was a gift. I would go back to them and gather strength. I was appearing the next night at Fort George Brewery and again, there they were. Whether they knew it or not, they were now



my go-to people.

“I thought about them all year, between that first appearance and the next FisherPoets Gathering. They had supported me in a way they may not even have been aware of,” Aadsen said. “So, the next year I was at my first venue, and they walked in. This is all to say, I was soon to learn that this mother and her son annually make the FisherPoets Gathering their own together-time. Here they were sharing with each other and as well (whether they were aware of it or not) sharing with others. Their kind and generous support all came about for me because of the FisherPoets Gathering. Just being there makes you want to be involved in the magic.”

The two people two rows back at the Baked Alaska that night

Born into a fishing family in Sitka, Alaska, Aadsen’s early memories are of wide open waters, fishing and writing. The three have remained her constant companions.

were Astoria’s LuAnne Farrah and her Seattle son, Chris.

“In 2012 we were there to hear Jon Broderick and Jay Speakman’s music. They do such an awesome job,” Farrah recalled. “As it happened, Tele was the first story teller that night. She was kind of nervous, but she was presenting in such a warm and interesting way, drawing you into her story. We followed her throughout that weekend.

“Since then she has really made

a name for herself,” Farrah continued. “She drew us in the very first time we saw her and continues to. It’s just ‘hurrah for her’! And through it all, we’ve become good friends.”

Tele Aadsen compares her writing to a muscle that needs daily exercising; she has a blog (Hooked), a website (teleaadsen.com), stories to perfect, and a book in the works. In season or off, this woman fisherman has a world of words to share.