

Fisher Seitz gears up to cast his amusing lines

Poet wooed his wife, then penned an ode to lingcod

By PATRICK WEBB
FOR COAST WEEKEND

Poetry has loomed large in the life of Rob Seitz.

He grew up one of five kids packed with his parents in a single-wide trailer in Fairbanks, Alaska. “When it’s 65-below, you need something. Dad used to make us memorize poetry in the winter months,” he smiled.

Robert Service’s classic “The Cremation of Sam McGee” chronicled a prospector who froze to death.

“It planted the seed,” Seitz said.

After his schooling, he gillnetted for salmon with his grandfather and brother around Alaska’s then-lucrative Cook Inlet, before the devastation of the Exxon Valdez oil spill prompted a move to the North Coast. Between 1992 and 2011, he fished here for Dungeness crab, pink shrimp and albacore.

He met the love of his life, Tiffani, who had been a welding student and assistant instructor at Clatsop Community College.

“I wrote a lot of poems trying to win her over,” he said, looking across to catch her eye and share a smile. “Once she relented, I went on to write about fish!”

Seitz, 51, will be one of the presenters at the annual FisherPoets Gathering in Astoria this weekend. He said he is delighted to connect with audiences whose lives afloat parallel his.

“At the beginning, I was afraid to get up. It was very stressful,” he said, remembering his performing debut. “Going to FisherPoets was important, though. It helped remind me why I got into fishing. It was like a support group.”

Organizer Jon Broderick recalls that initial nervousness. “Rob was apprehensive at first, but now he’s a star,” he said. “He’s so authentic — the real deal. They are both very steady, progressive people, wanting to use the resources wisely and preserve jobs — in some ways, visionary.”

Tiffani Seitz recalls encouraging her husband, too.

“I kept saying he could do that,” she said, then teasing about certain ironies. “If people are writing poetry about it, it’s a dying industry.”

Gallons per flush

His success performing in Astoria led to another appearance four years ago at the Working Waterfront Festival in New Bedford, Massachusetts, an opportunity to entertain while learning about East Coast fishers’ concerns.



PATRICK WEBB PHOTOS

Fisherpoet Rob Seitz and his wife, Tiffani, have returned to the North Coast after about five years fishing in California. The couple has four children. They are grateful for widespread assistance while turning a former Flavel storefront in Astoria into a fish market. “It really made us feel like we are a part of this community,” Rob Seitz said.

**“KEEP YOUR WITS ABOUT YOU,
ALWAYS BE READY TO DUCK.
IT’S A FOOLISH FISHERMAN
WHO DEPENDS SOLELY ON HIS LUCK.”**

—FROM “A STRATEGY FOR FILLING THE BOAT” BY RON SEITZ

In 2013, Seitz self-published “2.5 g.p.f.,” a book of poetry and prose. The title refers to the size of bucket used for onboard bathroom use (g.p.f. = gallons per flush). It includes an ode to lingcod, poems about net mending and beloved yet feared fishers’ wives. Interspersed are poignant observations on responsible parenting, the cancer death of his young sister and intimate revelations of troubles he has overcome.

They’ve given many to family and friends as presents, and a few remaining copies will be available when they open a new fish market in downtown Astoria.

South Bay Wild, will be housed in a Ninth Street storefront in the Mary and Nellie Flavel Building in Astoria, which has been vacant for decades. The building was recently purchased by Marcus and Michelle Liotta. The Seitz crew will also prepare fish and chips and fish tacos.

It’s part of what economists label a vertically integrated business model where the producer/supplier sells directly, without a

middleman.

“It helps people feel that they have connection to the people who are providing their fish,” Tiffani Seitz said.

They have taken Small Business Development classes to enhance their practical knowledge on marketing and branding.

Rob Seitz added, “We are going back to the way it used to be.”

Help from many directions

The unglamorous task of preparing the store is alleviated by support the family have enjoyed on their return from Morro Bay on the central California coast.

A five-year stint away fishing for petrale and Dover sole, rockfish, lingcod and thornyheads gave them experience marketing their own catch, plus success with a commercial smoker.

They worked with a nonprofit organization studying how fishers best adapt to regulatory changes and make the industry more sustainable. But groundfishing was still diminishing,



In 2013, Rob Seitz published a book of his poetry and prose titled “2.5 g.p.f.” The title refers to a certain bucket size.

and the high cost of federal observers and other difficulties led them back to the North Coast with their 59-foot F/V South Bay.

“Going away really made us appreciate this community,” Seitz said.

“I think you have to really go away to understand its value, the infrastructure and the fishing support group, the hydraulic people, the net guys. Everyone. We got help from so many directions.”

Punchline

Seitz anticipates being asked what percentage of his poetry is work or inspiration.

“Some stuff I want to write about, but it takes a while to figure out how I want to say it. I try to make it humorous,” he said.

“I have got one that I have questions about and one that is a long way from being finished.

“Then, as FisherPoets approaches, I concentrate on it.”

His reward is sharing the experience.

“I have the opportunity to do something that a lot of people never have the opportunity to do,” he said. “I try to make people understand some of the aspects of fishing.

“And fishers say that’s exactly how they feel — that’s one of the things I like.”

He offers a punchline that’s clearly rehearsed, but totally appropriate.

“It’s a dangerous combination being a fisherman and a poet ... because it doubles your chances of dying penniless and insane!” 