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“Other than the outrageous damage to the environment and monumental loss of life in a pristine, gorgeous place, I was thinking about what was being taken away from me because of the oil heading into Cook Inlet. I wasn’t going to get to experience my life’s adventure at sea – for who knew how long?” Dixon said. Shortly after the disaster, Dixon’s reflections led him to pen “Middle Rip” and “Fallout,” his first forays into the maritime poetic genre.

An Indiana boy spurred to the north by curiosity, Dixon remained in Alaska for over 20 years. He fished for salmon in the summer and taught photography in the off-season. A desire to be closer to family spurred a move to Washington in 1989. “That first year of being down here was very difficult,” Dixon said. “I felt I’d lost my identity and spiraled into a pretty severe depression.”

That’s when a close friend and fellow fisherman took Dixon to the second FisherPoets Gathering. “When I sat down in the Wet Dog saloon and saw guys walking around in stormy seas jackets, deck slippers and rubber boots, then heard the stories, poems and songs they were performing, I immediately felt I had found the community I left in Alaska,” Dixon said. Moved by the evening’s performances, Dixon left the bar, took his journal to a back room, and penned his feelings. “I read it at open mic the following night, got asked to return for the next gathering as a reader, and I was hooked,” Dixon said.

Returning virtually this year, the FisherPoet Gathering is once again poised to present audience members with a view into the tightly intertwined relationship between the maritime life and that of the artist.

“I think the biggest commonality for me is that when I write, I become immersed in the story. I believe those details help bring the experience closer for the audience,” Dixon said. “When I get into a reading, the experience can be similar — almost visceral. I’ve seen other outstanding readers get so swept away that they end up in tears from reading pieces they’ve read dozens of times. I’ve done that



Patrick Dixon

Patrick Dixon performs at a previous FisherPoets Gathering in Astoria.

AS A LONG-STANDING RESIDENT OF THE FISHERPOET GATHERING, DIXON HAS RATHER STRAIGHTFORWARD ADVICE FOR THOSE NEW TO THE SCENE. ‘SIT DOWN, GRAB A BEER AND LISTEN. THERE’S A WIDE VARIETY OF TALENT STANDING UP THERE, BUT REGARDLESS OF WHETHER THEY’RE POLISHED OR NOT, EACH ONE IS A GEM. YOU NEVER KNOW WHO WILL SPEAK TO YOU.’

very thing myself. The audience always appreciates a performance that’s real, honest and vulnerable.”

Over the years, Dixon has continued to hone his photographic pursuits. His decision to do so was, in part, inspired by a workshop in 1979. Led by the late Ansel Adams and his carefully curated cadre of expert teachers, the seminar was a self-proclaimed lifesaver for Dixon. “At the end of that week I finally knew what I wanted to do with my life,” Dixon writes in his memoir, “Waiting to Deliver: From greenhorn to skipper, an Alaska commercial fishing memoir.” Dixon is keenly aware that photography and poetry share a similar ability to capture both a moment and the unique perspectives of those present at the time. “Both choose what they are focused upon, what it means, how to render it,” Dixon said. “I’ve attended dozens of photo workshops and poetry workshops, and in all of them I’ve experienced the same thing again and again: no

two people ever experience identical realities.”

As a long-standing resident of the FisherPoet Gathering, Dixon has rather straightforward advice for those new to the scene. “Sit down, grab a beer and listen. There’s a wide variety of talent standing up there, but regardless of whether they’re polished or not, each one is a gem. You never know who will speak to you. And brace yourself. Some of the readers will blow your socks off! And although the virtual gathering is good, once the air clears and we can all get together again, the in-person gathering is one of the best ways to spend a February weekend I know”, Dixon said.

For those wanting to know more about Dixon, his memoir is set for release prior to the gathering.

Dixon is scheduled to read at 8 p.m. on Friday. The reading, like all 2022 performances, can be viewed online at www.fisherpoets.org.

‘FISHERPOEM’

Written in Astoria, December 2000

BY PATRICK DIXON

I slide into this crowded bar
like I’d ease a boat into a slip:
the river is crowded tonight.
Fisherpoets
ride these aisles like currents.
Tying up to booths
or dropping anchors on barstools,
they open journals like hatch covers:
unsure of how the catch compares.
How many brailers does the rest of the fleet have tonight?
How many pounds?
(Crap. Maybe I’ll wait to deliver until morning,
when no one else is watching.)
But morning comes and no one cares.
We drink beer, watch the show, and listen.
And damn, the stories fill the air like jumpers;
words weave to catch them like nets hung deep,
ears cock for the sound of a splash
eyes narrow, looking for hits.
Then here comes the next set, and a poet picks up the microphone,
like static over the radio, the bar chatter fades,
and in slow-motion the words lift us, riding on the back of a swell:
“The VHF just said a boat went down with all hands.”
“The sunrise lit the mountaintops the color of salmon.”
“...that halibut hook sunk deep into the side of his hand.”
“The lights of the fleet looked as if the very stars had fallen to the ocean surface.”
“Pea soup.”
“She went over when we weren’t lookin’...”
A slip of a boot on a wet deck
becomes a slip of the tongue,
and this place fills with salt water.
The speaker pauses, turns off the key
and walks away without a look.
In a moment all hell will break loose,
and we’ll relive it again in the telling,
but as the story lands on the dock
solid and hard,
we can sense the slightest change of the engine,
feel the gentlest breeze,
hear our own heart beat
in the distance,
in the waves.

Astoria, December, 2000