

Following Fallon and Grace

The director of a documentary which pays tribute to Nova Scotia's small-scale fisheries reflects on her experiences of making the film

By **Corinne Dunphy** (corinnedunphy@gmail.com), is a specialist in social documentary, and is the maker of the film "Well Fished"

I need to buy Graval", I told Mom, days before I got on to the exciting yet worrying task of making my first documentary film. It was mid-May in Nova Scotia. I was at Mom and Dad's for a week, preparing for the shoots. I didn't have much idea as to what I was doing. The nerves were getting to me. I was sure the production would be a complete flop. But thankfully as it turned out, both luck and Graval, the anti-nausea medication, were on my side that spring!

I was making a documentary called 'Well Fished', based on the experiences of two young women growing up in rural Nova Scotia who belong to fishing families. The character-driven film was a homage to the inhabitants of the province, offering a positive outlook to the young people who live and work in a province facing many of the serious problems affecting the future of small coastal communities across the map.

The film introduces us to Fallon and Grace's worlds. Both hail from eastern Nova Scotia—Fallon from Whitehead, Guysborough Co. and Grace from Antigonish. Fallon spends her days fishing lobster and trapping mackerel onboard the Eastern Maverick with her father. The sun-soaked stripe running below her eyes shows that she spends most of her time outdoors in the sun. When she isn't helping on board, she is photographing the world before her: ocean scenes, critters, pretty much anything outdoors.

CORINNE DUNPHY



Fallon and Grace have no problem being the only women on board. The times are indeed changing!

Fallon is the second youngest of five daughters. Her father, Captain Pat Conway had help throughout the years with the older girls. Now it's Fallon's time and she loves the work so much that she finished school a semester early to spend her days fishing.

If you travel North about an hour to Antigonish, you will find another young woman with a similar story. At first glance she even looks like Fallon. Grace MacDougall arrives at the wharf every morning, her deep brown hair tied in a high ponytail, a small headband keeping wisps away from her face. You notice her smile before anything else. Grace finds humour in pretty much everything. She is what they call "salt of the earth". Her authenticity, insight and light-hearted spirit make those around her feel at ease. Onboard the Jan and Grace, Grace, her cousin Mark and her father Captain Dan MacDougall appear to work together in complete harmony. There is a rhythm to their work—it is top priority but they are also having a good time, filled with laughter. Grace speaks at length about her commitment to continuing the way of life she was born into. This day and age, it doesn't come easy. But Grace is finding a way to make her dreams work in what is becoming a more and more difficult industry.

Being a Nova Scotian, I have seen first-hand how gloomy the province's economic picture is. As young people migrate out in search of better opportunities, small communities, with their rapidly-ageing populace, face challenging times. Traditional industries are on the decline and it's becoming harder to keep money circulating in rural communities. Despite these shifts, however, it is very important that the involvement of youth in such communities remains strong.

One of the direct causes of the decline of the traditional, small-scale fisheries is the rise of industrial fisheries on a global scale. The industrial fisheries sector poses a great threat not only to those employed in the small-scale fisheries, such as the families of Fallon and Grace—and indirectly to their communities as well—but also to the environment. The Nova Scotian small-scale fisheries may have its own flaws but it is striving towards becoming more sustainable, trying to take from the earth in a more conscious way. Through 'Well Fished', I wanted to illuminate the issues that not only directly affect those on the east coast but all citizens—Canadian and beyond—who care about the environment and for the people who harvest our food.

A striking aspect of the small-scale fisheries is the strong family ties that are associated

with making a living on the water. Grace and Fallon both told me that if it wasn't for being raised in a fishing family they probably would never have considered fishing. Licences are no longer affordable for the young who wish to own and operate their own vessel, and so, fishing licences tend to stay within the family. Grace tells me, "Dad fishes a berth system, it's more of a gentleman's word...not really in legal terms at all. It's the old traditions where some fishermen have these berths and no one else fishes there. It's nice that it is a little less competitive." She is uncertain of how long this practice will continue and is concerned about what the future holds.

It's an overwhelming experience to be out on the water hours before my usual wakeup. The horizon is a riot of colours. It is very peaceful. Then a familiar feeling of guilt when I realize that while I have been trying to capture the beautiful landscape on film, everyone else is busy working their fingers to the bone.

Another thing one notices on the boat is the respect the deckhands have for the Captain; in the case of Fallon and Grace, their fathers. The appreciation Fallon has for Pat is clear to see; she is aware that he knows the waters in the area better than anyone else, aside from maybe his late brother Mark who had taught him all he knew.

Taking a break from the mackerel trap, Fallon comments on the physical demands the work places on her small, 18 year-old build but quickly adds that she has worked her small build just as hard as the men. Fallon and her father have an entertaining relationship both off the boat and on it. Each feels an obvious pride in the other. Pat is a quiet man with a playful sense of humour. He cranks up good tunes on the radio and often teases Fallon,

making the long hours fun. And what long hours they were—from daybreak until sunset some days!

"It's kind of cool working with Dad," says Grace "because it opens up new doors in our relationship, and I know me and my siblings definitely appreciate that. We hold on to that and that's what makes you respect him on a whole new level. He's so knowledgeable with fishing and he's been doing it for so long" she adds. Much like Fallon and Pat, this duo's dynamic is also pleasantly energetic. I've witnessed dancing, singing and even a bit of stand-up comedy, all before lunchtime. The work is physically demanding and involves long hours in every weather condition. I never heard a complaint other than a few abstruse belly grumbles.

Grace and Fallon have no problem being the only women onboard. "You definitely feel a little different on the wharf. The guys respect you. Dad may talk about when my sister or me fish, and mentions that we know what we're doing, how we've proven ourselves and that it doesn't have to be a male's job," to Dad may talk about when my sister or me fish, and mention that we know what we're doing, how we've proven ourselves, and that it doesn't have to be a male's job," says Grace. She points out that there are even a few female captains in the region. The times are indeed changing!

As the times change, the land and the sea remain integral to Nova Scotia's heritage, engrained in every family's history and enmeshed in the social fabric. If this social fabric is to be saved and preserved, it is vital that young women like Fallon and Grace, be empowered with complete economic and social support to pursue a sustainable livelihood in small-scale fisheries, which is clearly their livelihood of choice. ❏