

Nova Scotia

## The invisible ones

*No union or association can speak for those who can no longer fish*  
by **Ishbel Munro**

*Ishbel Munro is Co-ordinator of the Coastal Communities Network (CCN) in Nova Scotia. The CCN is a volunteer association of organizations whose mission is to provide a forum to encourage dialogue, share information, and create strategies and actions that promote the survival and development of Nova Scotia's coastal and rural communities.*

We are the invisible ones. In our snug homes by the sea, no one hears our silent cries hanging like fog over our villages, coves and towns.

Our families have fished for generations. It is not what we do. It is what we are. One by one, we have been squeezed out of the fishery. The small, independent fishing family hanging on, hanging on... while costs rise—fees to tie up at the wharf, fees to be monitored, rising insurance costs, gas and bait, even as the amount of fish we are allowed to catch gets smaller and smaller. One more regulation breaks our hope. There is nowhere else to borrow from, to hang on and hope for another year. We are the invisible, silent ones. No union or association speaks for us, as we can no longer fish.

When we lose our spouse to death, the community supports us, extends a helping hand. We can grieve and slowly heal. When we lose our way of life, we are alone. We are invisible. The pain is internal, turned in on the family. The man's pain is like bone cancer, gnawing at his confidence, his self-esteem, his image, the reality of who he is. The woman's pain is a knot of silent tears circling, squeezing tighter and tighter around her heart. It takes the strength and goodness out of her body, until her legs ache as she carries another load of laundry up the stairs, while bills and needs re-play and re-play in her mind. For the children, it is seeing the strain grow in your parents' eyes. You never know when they will snap. The child forgets money is tight and asks for new shoes for school and then feels so bad to see the pain in his mother's eyes grow. The pain often eats at the bond that holds the family together. The woman tries to bury the pain deep inside

her and wills her body and mind to carry on, searching for hope, for solutions, for a way to make things right again.

Morning comes grey and still. The man thinks of friends on the wharf. Their voices carried over the still waters - laughter, smiles and then the boats slip out of the harbour.

For some, still hanging on, it will be a good day. Their incomes are down by 60 per cent from 10 years ago. But the sun is shining. There's a slight breeze and - hey- they are fishing lobster. Out on the water, the rhythm of their lives, matching the world around them.

For those left behind on the shore, the rhythm of their lives is gone.