**Pam Ferris-Olson** (00:00): Today on the Women Mind the Water podcast. I'm speaking with Maine author, Ali Farrell. I will be talking to Ali about a book she wrote that explores the lives of women who catch lobsters for a living. The Women Mind the Water podcast engages artists in conversation about their work, and explores their connection with the ocean. Through these stories, Women Mind the Water helps to inspire and encourage action to protect the ocean and her creatures.

**Pam Ferris-Olson** (00:27): Our guest today is Ali Farrell. Ali wrote Pretty Rugged, a book that explores the life of women who fish for lobster. In Pretty Rugged, Ali writes that the life of a lobster woman is extremely hard and dangerous. The sight of lobster boats is commonplace for Ali, who lives along the central Maine coast.

**Pam Ferris-Olson** (00:47): Welcome, Ali. Thank you for being my guests on the Women Mind the Water podcast. It is a pleasure to speak to a fellow writer and also someone who, like me, is a transplant to Maine. Let me start by asking what motivated you to tell these stories.

**Ali Farrell** (01:03): Hi Pam, thank you so much for having me on first of all. And secondly, when I first moved back to Maine, about four years ago, I met a group of girls that I became fast friends with, and they were actually all female fishermen, and I loved hearing their stories that they had either doing shop work, or out on the water, or with other fishermen, some really interesting stories that I just felt should be shared with the world. On top of that, when I was younger, my father used to fish offshore off the coast of Newfoundland, and he would always come back with all these funny stories also. So, I think I always had it in the back of my mind that it would be a really interesting story to tell.

**Pam Ferris-Olson** (01:48): What is involved in researching and writing a book like Pretty Rugged?

**Ali Farrell** (01:53): So, I loved the whole process of writing this book. Not only was it just so interesting, but I was really able to submerge myself in some of these little fishing communities. I would go out there for a whole weekend and stay and meet all the people, and you'd be out to dinner at one of the local pubs and you would just meet all types of fishermen from 21 to, I don't know, 70, 80, and they all have these awesome stories, really interesting stories.

**Ali Farrell** (02:31): So, that was one of the parts that I really loved about this, but otherwise I would try and get out on the boat with them and I would ask them questions and I would try to get some great shots of them doing the work that they do. And honestly, really just trying to stay out of their way while I got what I needed.

**Pam Ferris-Olson** (02:50): So what sort of challenges did you encounter in telling these women's stories?

**Ali Farrell** (02:56): Well, COVID, as it did for everyone, put a real strain on this project. It was actually supposed to be released in spring of 2020, but when the first quarantine hit the seafood market just completely shut down altogether and there were no exports, there were no restaurants open, the wharfs weren't even buying anything. So, it obviously didn't make sense for the fishermen to have their boats and traps in the water at that point, if there was no outlet for their seafood. So we were actually, luckily, during that time able to make a significant impact with United Fishermen Foundation and we were able to connect them directly with consumers, which was awesome. The communities all came out and had lines of cars going to do market pickup, COVID style, I guess you would say. So, it was awesome to see that community come together.

**Ali Farrell** (03:49): But honestly, even when the COVID stuff slowed down and things did open back up, I still couldn't connect with a bunch of the people. Some of them were high risk. One of them for example, is Virginia Oliver, who is out of Rockport and she's 100 years old and she's still fishing, but they're people that I admired and who made an impact in the fishing community, so it was worth it for me to just wait and try to document them properly.

**Pam Ferris-Olson** (04:21): 100 years old and still pulling traps, that is amazing.

**Ali Farrell** (04:26): It is, yes. She's a very impressive woman, and she still goes out three days a week. She goes with her son and she does the work and she says she'll do it to the end because it's what she loves and it's in her blood, and she's a very cool woman.

**Pam Ferris-Olson** (04:45): So, I know you said you wanted to stay out of their way because you had your camera, but did you have a chance to put down your camera and try pulling up a trap?

**Ali Farrell** (04:54): On most of them, I try to just not be a nuisance, honestly, because what they do, it's a perfectly planned and timed dance that they do, and someone taking the wrong step in a wrong place, it's usually a guest on the boat that will do that and, it can make it dangerous for everyone on board. Not to mention it will slow down their time, and they're up at the crack of dawn and working really hard all day and they want to be done and get off the water. So, I'm not trying to slow them down, but I was happy to be able to just stay behind the camera because it's hard work. I have done it before, and it's very cool, but I give them a lot of credit for what they do.

**Pam Ferris-Olson** (05:40):One other question about what they do. Did you get a chance... I know you were trying to stay out of their way, but to put one of the rubber bands around a claw? That seems to me a pretty scary proposition.

**Ali Farrell** (05:54): I was able to do that. It's funny, because the first time I was like, "Oh no, I don't even know what I'm doing," and then there's an eight year old girl next to me, just popping them on like it's nothing. So, that gave me a little bit of confidence that I was going to be okay with all of that type of work. But yeah, it's very fun to be out there and very interesting.

**Pam Ferris-Olson** (06:18): And it's definitely a different line of work than us who stay behind the computer writing, yeah.

**Ali Farrell** (06:23): Absolutely, yeah. I would not be interested in getting up in the middle of winter when it's freezing, first thing in the morning, and getting out of my warm house, going out on the ocean. I'm happy and grateful that they do that for us.

**Pam Ferris-Olson** (06:39): Right. So it would be great to hear more about one of the women you featured in your book, Pretty Rugged.

**Ali Farrell** (06:45): So, Holly Masterson, she's one of the people in the book, and she's a fifth generation fishermen. She lives up in Southwest Harbor and her family has always depended on the fishing industry. And likewise, the community has always depended on her family to provide that small community with fresh, healthy seafood, and they take that really seriously. And it's awesome to see.

**Ali Farrell** (07:10): Holly herself is just a really impressive woman, honestly. She has her 100 ton Captain's License. She's a mother, she's an entrepreneur, she's a local realtor, a pilot, she flies airplanes. And honestly, she's just really someone that the community holds in high esteem for her kindness and down to earth personality. So, I felt really lucky to be able to meet her and hear all of her stories, and stories from generations past. I believe it's her great, great grandfather was actually lost at sea, off of Gloucester, and she just has that fishing lifestyle in her blood and she loves it.

**Ali Farrell** (07:58): She's worked for Martha Stewart, who has a house up there on MDI. And she worked for her as a housekeeper for a lot of years, and she hosted all these celebrities that, it seems like a very cool situation that she had and she of course provided them with all their seafood dinners, which they would have these big seafood dinners that were just amazing.

**Ali Farrell** (08:24): And her herself, she actually has fished for lobster, shrimp, haddock, monkfish, cod, and I know a ton of people in that area and beyond that wait all year for her scallops because they say they're just the best and the freshest. And so, I know a lot of people wait for those. But yeah, she's one of the fishermen that I got to hang out with face to face and really get to know, and I will say she is a humble person like everyone says, and I feel lucky to have connected with her.

**Pam Ferris-Olson** (08:57): And for listeners, MDI is Mount Desert Island.

**Ali Farrell** (09:02): Yes.

**Pam Ferris-Olson** (09:02): Off the coast of Maine. So, you listed off multiple things that she did, or does.

**Ali Farrell** (09:09): Yes.

**Pam Ferris-Olson** (09:09): Is this something that she needs to do to support her income?

**Ali Farrell** (09:14): It's actually not, and it's funny because you see this across the board with a lot of these women who fish and they're just extremely driven, honestly. There's a lot of accomplishments that they do in the off season and they just do it because they see it and they want it and they get it done. So no, financially, they actually don't have to do a lot of these things that they do that are so impressive. They just want to, and they do it.

**Pam Ferris-Olson** (09:43): They're driven. Okay.

**Ali Farrell** (09:45): They are.

**Pam Ferris-Olson** (09:46): Did any of the women talk about changes in their industry? For example, how the warming waters of the Gulf of Maine has affected fishing?

**Ali Farrell** (09:55): Yeah, actually there's definitely a very clear change in the water temperatures and they're starting to see the lobster migrate a little bit, either heading north into Canadian waters, which is a no-go for them, they can't fish up there. And the lobsters are also going off shore where they can get a little bit deeper into cooler waters, and you do have to have a certain license to fish off shore also. So, we are definitely seeing changes in the waters, which are affecting their businesses, for sure.

**Ali Farrell** (10:29): They also have been bringing up some interesting seas that you don't usually see up here in Maine, like seahorses, for example, and they're bringing them up in their traps. I think actually the lobster industry is a really great example of how the warming waters are already affecting real people and it's not an issue just for future generations to deal with, rather something that's actually affecting us right now today.

**Pam Ferris-Olson** (10:57): So I'm no expert, but I think that seahorses, the farthest north they usually come is North Carolina, so this is a long haul for them.

**Ali Farrell** (11:05): It is absolutely, yeah. So, it's a little bit scary because the lobster industry really drives a large portion of Maine, and if the waters get so warm that the lobsters aren't here, that's a problem for sure.

**Pam Ferris-Olson** (11:20): Right. So what did you learn about yourself in writing these stories about lobster women?

**Ali Farrell** (11:27): So I think one thing that I took away from all of these stories and putting the book together is just that, like I said before, these fierce women all really have that one thing in common and that's that they just don't conform to the norm or what's typically expected of someone. On one hand they are these just really tough, tough fishermen out on the water, some of the toughest out there. And then on the other hand, they have these off season accomplishments such as attorneys, scientists, state representatives, pilots. And I could definitely go on with that list of really cool things.

**Ali Farrell** (12:11): But the point is that if they want something, they're just going to go for it, no matter how far outside the box it is. And I think that's really a lesson that all of us can learn and relearn throughout our life, because your life doesn't have to be any certain way just because that's what's normal, and you should just get out there and take some risks and just do whatever sets your soul on fire.

**Pam Ferris-Olson** (12:38): All right. So how do you think these stories might encourage readers to engage with the ocean in more positive ways?

**Ali Farrell** (12:47): Well, I hope that it will make a career on the ocean feel more accessible to readers, especially the young women out there trying to decide what they might want to do. And between aquaculture farming, fishing, studying the science and behaviors of the ocean, all of its inhabitants, there's just so many jobs out there that you might not expect that can really provide really fulfilling jobs and lifelong careers. And most of those careers come with an office view of the ocean, and I think everyone wants that.

**Pam Ferris-Olson** (13:23): So is there anything I haven't asked you that you'd like to tell the audience?

**Ali Farrell** (13:28): Oh boy. Well, it's certainly a very dangerous job, so I think that we all need to go thank our fishermen for getting all that onto shore for us.

**Pam Ferris-Olson** (13:40): Right. And this is the season for a lobster that's for sure.

**Ali Farrell** (13:44): Absolutely. And halibut.

**Pam Ferris-Olson** (13:47): Yeah. So Ali, it's been most interesting talking with you today. I have gained a new understanding of the term women's work, and particularly the work of women who daily put on boots and go to sea.

**Pam Ferris-Olson** (14:00): I'd like to remind our listeners that I've been speaking with **Ali Farrell** for the Women Mind the Water podcast series. The series can be viewed on WomenMindtheWater.com. An audio only version of this podcast is available on the Women Mind the Water website, iTunes, and Spotify.

**Pam Ferris-Olson** (14:17): Women Mind the Water is grateful to Jane Rice for the song Women of Water. All rights for the Women Mind the Water name and logo belong to Pam Ferris-Olson. This is Pam Ferris-Olson, and thank you for listening.