

## Transcription Het VISSERSKIND – THE FISHERMAN'S CHILD

INTRO: This is a podcast about the sea. Because I, Threes Anna, I love that sea. But I am also worried and sometimes even afraid. What actually happens in and with and on and under that water. Listen. Hello sea, can you hear me? Sea are you my friend or enemy? I want to ask you something? Are you my friend or my enemy? Swimming, storms, plastic soup, disappearance, diving, fishing, energy, overfishing, sea level rise, wind farms, transport, the wall of Europe, drowning.

VO: I was born in Vlaardingen, which was still a fishing town at the time. My school was on the harbour and I still remember, but that was at the very beginning of primary school, that those fishing boats were still really in the harbour. And on the quay were those wooden barrels that you actually only see in museums these days. And on the weekend it smelled more like the sea, because the ships were gone during the week, but they were home on the weekend. I think I was about 12 when I cleaned my first eel, I did that with a girlfriend. Because it was exciting. But my father wasn't a fisherman. Hers was. Yes, I sometimes dreamed of being a fisherman's child, such a life imbued with the sea. But I have no idea what that actually means.

This is episode two, the fisherman's child.

Adrie Vonk: I have never seen anything other than the sea. The sea behind the dike. The sea in the harbour. Everything is just the sea.

I was born on Texel, next to that sheep. Close to the Mennonite church. And I grew up on Oost near the dike.

Yes, my father was a fisherman. I come from a family that also fished a lot of herring. Even my mother is called Van der Vis. That is a generation of people who have taken the fish from the sea. And I continued that. And my son too. My sons. Uh.

I think that when I was five I already mastered swimming, or at least surviving, swimming. I probably came home every day with a wet suit or a dirty suit. But my mother didn't care about that either. I grew up there as a totally free child. Because my father wasn't there anyway. My father, he just sailed from Monday morning until uh... and Friday afternoon he came home again. My father sailed the entire North Sea. From Denmark to England, all the way to Cap Gris-Nez.

*Sounds of fishing + music*

A: My father was also one of the pioneers who, one of the first Texans started fishing for flatfish with a beam trawl. With a lot of teething problems and tubes that were too slack and nets that got lost and I know what. Yes, beam trawl is a scrub net, which is held wide by a tree, and fishes over the ground with chains. And those chains are called alarm clocks, which wake the fish up from the sand. In short...

Meow! Godkeleren. Shut up cat. Laughter puts cat outside and closes the door.

We also had a boat and fished eels with it. And then my mother and I would go together. Then I was about eleven years old. And my mother was like that, she had big hands, it was just... well, quite a manly woman. With one of those 'van der Vis' claws we say. But yes, she grabbed the eels with her thumb and her hand.

*Sound eel catching.*

A: Yes, that was never an issue for me, fisherman. It just came naturally to me. As a child, we even played that the cot was a cutter vessel. And then you also made that sound of poof, poof, poof. You know. And then you just played cutter. Yes, fishing. And then we would also be shouting at each other on a VHF radio, which we called Sputnik.

Shouldn't we be a bit more easterly? Answer. What do you think? Isn't it about time we made it? Answer. Search deeper? Answer. And now we are entering the harbour. Answer.

Oh was there anything left in it? Or how many box in it.

The box is the pouch, the collection bag at the end of the net. And then what's in there and it falls on deck, that's the box. Well, that's fish, undersized fish, starfish, crabs. Well all kinds of ground trash as we call it. So yes. In short I became a fisherman.

I know when I was about nine years old I was already going with someone else, when our own ship, I would go with the Texel 36. Because that was still herring fishing then. Then we went with deck cargo. Yes, I remember standing in the herring. Then he had a deck-load of herring. And ... yes, really, at least a meter thick. And my boots flooded, my groin boots flooded from standing in the herring. Huh so that cutter was very heavy in the water and the deck load still on it. I also remember the cutter was leaking at the time. And then we also got bad weather. So we just lost almost all of that deck cargo of herring, it just flowed out.

*Sounds fishing + music.*

And right from primary school, by the age of 12, I went to the Fisheries School in Den Helder. I just wanted to sail smoothly. And especially in the holidays. Yes, otherwise you had to peel the bulbs. So as far as that was concerned, you preferred to go sailing. And yes, you also earned something then. And it was fun. That was my picture of the future, that was filled in then. Yes.

*VHF radio + music*

And then I had obtained a diploma in the name of the queen, motor driver seafishing. I was 15 years old at the time. Well, that was actually a bit on the early side to start sailing. Then I also did a first part mate behind it. And that wasn't even a year, so before I was sixteen I was already sailing on the cutter. As chief potato peeler, of course, so you kept it a bit clean and you had to cook decent food. Otherwise you got your ass kicked of course. We worked around the clock, with hazy naps. But we basically just always did three meals a day just like at home. Eating bread twice and hot food once. Well though at lunchtime. In the early days when I was feeding, we always got two gravy pans, which my mother would make. That was rammed full of meatballs and one with plain simmering meat. But then we did every other day. And you kept that under the fat, so that didn't spoil either.

After a year or a year and a half, then you also started running guards. You do your fish processing, you just do everything else. Yes and within two years you were just really all-round sailor. Yes.

But anyway, if my brother couldn't do it then, I had to skipper there. Well, that was really very young. I think I was about 18 or so. Yeah, so then I sailed for about three years. And it went maybe a bit differently than an older person did it. But anyway, I wasn't constantly skipper then. I skippered occasionally. And later at my, 21, I became a regular skipper.

In the sea, we were really responsible, you know. So it was a wild life ashore and a bloody serious life on board.

What's exhausting is hazing every time, working an hour, sleeping an hour and 24 hours around. And then having the occasional watch. That rhythm then by the end of the week you're pretty totelos.  
*Music.*

You can think of all sorts of things, but it's just a dangerous profession. You have narrow escapes and anxious moments. That's part of it, yes.

All those old fishermen, including my grandfather, they had that carved in with blue India ink. And that was really for when you washed up on the beach. I just went to Tattoo Peter, that's how I got all my tattoos and that earring. Then you kind of belong. Yes I used to be a macho little guy. A rascal. I was untamable before I was 22. Not in the sea, but if I had the shore then uh.... Yes.

I think all the pettiness you had on that few square metres of cutter...and that man's world, that just had to go by the wayside over the weekend.

Sound off. A: Shall I join in for a bit? Yeah yeah, yeah yeah. Yes, yes, yes, yes. Oh, oh. Super!

And then on Monday we started again with fresh courage. At least, fresh uh...

... and... then...

Song: sea. Woman giggles

Yes. Yes, yes, yes, yes, yes, yes, but well, that was weekend love, of course. Sunday night away until Friday. We just gave each other a kiss and then, then I walked to the harbour, with a weekend bag. It's bonjour and we'll see each other again, when the time comes.

She didn't tame me, you shouldn't see it that way. I don't think I handled it differently, just more consciously. And that awareness, of course, grows after you get more accountability.

*Children's voices. A laughs. Song: sea*

The sea, the sea, everything is just the sea with us. As an islander, you are so connected to the sea. With fishing, you are connected to the sea. Everything is the sea.

I talk about fish and the sea. And the sea is not just the waves, the sea is also the currents, the tides, the moment, the moon, the surge of nutrients, all that is the sea. But those are all elements of the sea. And I just have to combine those with an expected fish behaviour. And you have to enter that, of course, and then with your hunting instinct you go and execute that. Because, of course, your head is just a kind of computer. But it doesn't always work, of course. Because that fish has a head and a tail, or at least the fish has a tail. And that one sometimes just goes away. And then you say, why doesn't that fish lay here? Well, that fish has an urge to eat or to spawn.

The hunting feeling that is the feeling you need to get to the bottom of that interpretation of that fish. It's just. Everything in me says, that must be better there, you know, that might be instinct. Yes.

*Sounds fishermen + music*

My kids just went sailing with me every school holiday. So yeah, that just slowly grows into it. Wearing way too big gloves. *Sounds fishermen cleaning on board.* Were they cutting that fish there in blood and it stinks. They were just involved in the work. They felt appreciated, and in a boy's point of view like that, that's nice too. If you're not very seasick, it's just fun.

*Foghorn*

But not always everything is fun of course. Yes.

Because we really did struggle a lot with these restrictions that the government imposed on us.

And global-warming I can see too. I've seen the cod go away. And many times more mullet. And, many times more squid. We didn't used to catch those. We really didn't. We used to catch red snapper as summer fish and we catch them now year round. But we preferred the sole.

Pulse is a sec sole fishing gear. And it is a fishery that actually generates the fish from the ground with electric pulses. Because that sole is such a muscular fish that is actually the most sensitive to that stimulus. And the plaice, they have fewer muscles, so they don't spasm as much. So those... Those keep laying on the ground, we can't get those off the ground with that pulse. Yes that catch was better. You could get to other places because you fished lighter. And of course you just used half the fuel. So in that sense it did give quick profit.

And uh overfishing, well. There were periods when they really had to curb the HP (horse power) race. Because at that time, stocks were being pillaged. Yes, the HP, they just put heavier engines in those ships Many companies were brought into line. Yes, huh, with the whip.

#### *Sounds of modern fishing vessels.*

Everything is laid down in such terrible detail. That legislation. That it's almost impossible to work 100% straight. That's difficult and that really creates a lot of pressure. And in the last six months we've been kicked out by the Englishman with the Brexit. After the deal was issued... Then they came one more time of.... Yes, but we don't want those 22 pulsers we don't want any more here either. So those were just kicked out. Because those coastal fishermen there said that those pulsers ruined everything for them. And those fishermen said, well, get lost, because that's our water. I say, it's international water. So fucked up, we have the oldest rights. So I was... I'm pissed off about it, still am and frustrated too.

#### *Music*

I sailed for 37 years. And 35 years that just went well in that irregularity. And the last couple of years, it just didn't want to. I couldn't sleep anymore. I couldn't take those hazy naps anymore. And then I went to sea on Sunday night. And I didn't sleep until Tuesday. Yes, and then the battery was empty. And I couldn't fill it up again. Actually, I kept piling fatigue on fatigue. And then why I went well for 35 years and not for the last few years.... It's not easily explained. But the insomnia, that's actually what made me disembark.

#### *Zee Bird Sounds*

What do you miss? You just miss the competition and the hunting feeling, you miss that. Not the sailing, but the fishing. That bothered me, that I had to miss that. Yes. That less fun that's now one of the reasons there my sons naturally dropped out. Because we didn't earn a penny more after we had to stop pulse fishing. I'm still frustrated. I still struggle a lot with ending the business. But that's more the responsibility of me that I can't meet towards my father and my grandfather.

Yes. My father was deadly, deadly, deadly serious man. My mother was more light-hearted, a lot more light-hearted in life as my father. My father was very serious. Yes.

That quitting still feels like a failure. But I do see that my sons are just a lot happier. There is no future for this form of fishing. And uh the Urkers (fishermen from the religious village of Urk) who are still doing well, because they have canal permits. Or, they have more God-fear that it might all still work out. And we actually missed that a bit.

Song: The sea is your friend...

I do have an affinity with the sea, of course.

Song: ...or enemy?

Well... Not directly an enemy, that would be too... too.... And not directly a friend either. I think, you just have to be more realistic about it. The sea is the source of life, of everything. And that has its... well, you're an oaf if you underestimate it. Let me tell you that. So yes, in that sense, the sea is a friend. But you have to stay on your guard against that friend.

*Music sea*

VO: Adrie Vonk was an owner and fisherman on the Texel 1 and 2. He also collected everything to do with whales all his life. And he has one of the very largest private whale bone collections in the world. Of course, there is an awful lot to say about whales and they are definitely on my list of all my ideas. But next time I'm going to make something about seabirds, who suddenly get sick, and nobody understands why.

This podcast is the second in a series that will be about the great sea in all its shapes and colours. My plan is to make 6 episodes a year, because I do everything on my own, so more won't do. If you want to hear them, subscribe, they will automatically appear in your podcast app. You can also follow me on Instagram. All credits and more information can be found in the show notes. And did you like the story please pass it on, thanks for listening.