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## Fishing as a Lifestyle In St. Croix





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## Joffre George

He started to love painting at an early age while looking at and studying his brother's portrait book. He then decided to teach himself, his technique had to be perfect. This painter, originally from Dominica, has dedicated over forty years recording the life and views of the Caribbean Islands. He has lived in St. Croix since 1990. St. Croix is his inspiration especially those activities that take place at the seashore. The passion that this artist has is reflected in each of his paintings and in the vibrant colors that he displays in them, the colors of his beloved Caribbean.



The artwork displayed on the cover does not represent the fishers of St. Croix, but those of his native Dominica. However, he asserts that Cruzan fishers sold their catch at the seashore in a similar manner in years past; his artwork also represents them.

Joffre George is owner of a store in Frederiksted where he creates t-shirts designs and exhibits some of his artwork.

## United States Virgin Islands (USVI) Fishery Dynamics Under Seven Flags: Transformations of Knowledge and Culture



By: Lia Ortiz

For over five centuries, the Virgin Islands have been under the leadership of 6 different countries, flying seven flags (including the USVI flag). The most recent being Denmark, which in 1917 sold what was then the Danish West Indies to the United States of America for \$25 million. Even though the islands had a set price at the time of sale, the beautiful landscapes and seascapes that form the environment of the USVI were invaluable, and the resources of these ecosystems have supported the people of the Virgin Islands for centuries. The US Virgin Islands have a long history of human-environment interactions. The profound ties of the local community to the marine environment are particularly notable. For centuries, US Virgin Islanders have supported themselves depending on the sea for its resources. This can be seen as far back as the saladoid and taino era, during the colonial era, and during US sovereignty leading up to the present.

Fishing has truly been a profound aspect of Virgin Islands culture and heritage. The saladoids and tainos were predominantly dependent on the Islands' natural resources, including their fisheries, to support their way of life; this included their sustenance and influenced their spiritual beliefs, which emerged from this dependence on the sea. With the demise of these indigenous people by way of disease and forceful colonization imposed by the Spanish colonialists in the late 15th century to early 16th century, the nuances of interactions and spiritual connection that the indigenous people had with the marine environment dissipated. New methods and technologies introduced by the Spanish and other countries that colonized and took lead of the Virgin Islands caused a transformation of the human-environment interactions in the Virgin Islands.

### CLAY SPINDLE WHORLS

Clay spindle whorls first appeared in the late Troumassoid period 500 - 600 A.D. (Rouse 1992). These whorls, used in conjunction with a long narrow wooden spindle, were used in the spinning of cotton. The Island Arawak used cotton for making hammocks, body ornamentation—usually in the form of bands worn around the upper arm and legs, fish nets, belts and sometimes one of several materials used for making zemis. Typically these whorls were made from broken pottery.





During the plantation era, slaves were brought to the Caribbean from various regions of Africa with the purpose of tending the crops and domestic affairs of plantation overseers. Not many slaves were skilled in fishing, but those that were originally from Africa's west coast brought their traditional fishing methods and gear. This led to a transformation in fisheries knowledge and interactions in the Virgin Islands. At that time, slaves who could fish were considered as an elite class, since they were able to provide their owners with great bounties of fish from the sea, a task for which few slaves were suited. Owners of these elite sets of slaves



*Photo courtesy of Estate Whim Museum*

were considered high in the social classes of that time because of the delicacies of the sea which could be provided during social events. Eventually, many freed slaves returned to the sea for sustenance in order to provide for their families, an activity from which they were banned in previous years. Though a subset of slaves did fish, the majority of them were banned from going near the sea and not complying was punishable by death, as owners feared they would attempt to escape. To convince the slaves not to make an attempt to escape, owners would tell them tales of the creatures and monsters that lurked beneath the waters, instilling a fear that has consequentially persisted to this day.

The emancipation of slaves in 1848 in St. Croix lead to another transformation in fishing culture and traditions in the USVI as more freed slaves turned to the sea for sustenance and indentured laborers were brought in to work on sugarcane plantations from other regions of the Caribbean and the rest of the world, bringing with them their own knowledge and techniques.





In 1917, under US sovereignty, major social reform was implemented by the Navy and continued under the civilian leadership of Paul M. Pearson who was appointed governor by the Federal government in 1931. The first elected governor was Melvin H. Evans in 1969. During these political and social shifts, large diasporas took place within the Caribbean, which caused great movements of people throughout the Caribbean and other countries. One notable emigration in St. Croix's history occurred in the 1940s, when thousands of Puerto Ricans, mostly from Vieques, moved to St. Croix to work the sugarcane fields. Many of them took to the sea as well, bringing with them their experience and knowledge from their Puerto Rican fishing heritage. To this day, the majority of fishers in St. Croix are of Puerto Rican descent. In the 1960's-70s' there was a sudden boom in the tourism industry as the USVI were marketed as "America's Paradise," and this movement caused another shift in fisheries knowledge among the St. Croix community. There was also a shift in fisheries dependence, from mostly sustenance to commercial fishing; from mainly multi-species dependence to a more focused single-species dependence in order to satisfy the palates of tourists. Currently, plate-sized fish are preferred, whether commercial fishers are catering to local clients requesting a parrotfish, or to restaurant owners requiring snappers and groupers.



But what does it really take to provide these clients with the fresh fish of their choice? What does being a fisher really entail? On a daily basis, fishers put their lives on the line to provide their communities with fish. Rain or shine, rough seas or not, they continue to fish as it is their livelihood, their lifestyle, and their heritage. Facing dangers and limitations while fishing are not rare incidents. There is so much uncertainty involved with fishing out at sea and, everyday, fishers face the reality that the trip they are taking today could be their very last. Furthermore, current economic uncertainty has, in general, created a shady future for the sustainability of the USVI community livelihoods and might potentially have specific impacts on fishers' livelihoods in St. Croix; especially since the closure of HOVENSA.



HOVENSA was a major oil refinery, part of the Hess Corporation, which operated in St. Croix for four decades and closed on February 2012. As one of the major private industries supporting the St. Croix economy, its closure has impacted local businesses, including restaurants, which in turn affects fishers' livelihoods as restaurant suppliers. There has been a reduction in the St. Croix population as former HOVENSA employees have migrated to seek



*Art acquired at the Estate Whim Museum*

employment elsewhere, and the thousands of out-of-town contractors that HOVENSA employed annually are no longer coming to the island and supporting the economy. Also, this economic volatility could potentially result in added pressure to fisheries resources as more Virgin Islanders seek sustenance from the sea.

Over time, even though the level of dependence has changed, one thing holds true: US Virgin Islanders are deeply connected with the sea and its fisheries resources, which support local consumption and livelihoods. With changing generations, fisheries heritage and culture is at risk of being lost when considering dynamics in fishing gear, technology, methods, fisher perspectives, and community interest. Thus, it is now critical to capture, document, and reiterate USVI fisheries heritage and culture, to ensure that generations to come will understand and appreciate the significance of fishery resources and habitats as well as the important role that fishers play in maintaining the balance of both the resource and fisheries heritage and culture.



## Arriving to St. Croix

*By: Jannette Ramos García*



When arriving to St. Croix by plane, the Caribbean Sea makes for a spectacular welcome. Its blue hues vary according to the different depths: a dark turquoise or navy blue in the deeper areas, and pale blue tones closer to the beach. The mountains present another spectacle, where the shades of green are as much the protagonists as the blues are in the sea.

Much like a gray cloud upon the landscape, one can appreciate the remains of what was once the HOVENSA refinery. For many years, this refinery provided employment and financial support for many Cruzan families. It also brought income opportunities to many Puerto Rican families who made their home in St. Croix. Despite the fact that the refinery looks like a cemetery, we had a warm welcome. We had left Puerto Rico behind, but had arrived at an island with inextricable links to our own.

My friend and co-worker Raúl Omar (Pichón) and I arrived at midday, on a Sunday, at the end of August. The sun shone bright and intense in a cloud-free sky, and it felt strong and almost suffocating on our skin. Although it was very hot, the afternoon was so beautiful that not even the heat could dim our desire to learn more about all the lovely landmarks we saw from the airplane. On our way to the hotel we began taking pictures and videos, gathering images, and scenes to document the theme of our work in St. Croix.



*Raúl Omar Ortiz (Pichón Duarte)*



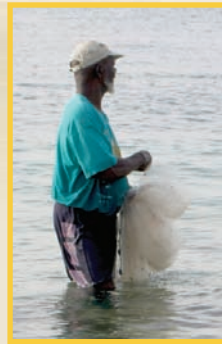


With this task in mind, and without being aware of it, on Sunday we arrived at Gallows Bay, in Christianstead. At the dock, a group of young people enjoyed the clear, cool waters of the bay. Along the side, a fisherman lowered his boat using the ramp just as across the street, a few men cooked fish on an improvised stove. In such a small area, we witnessed three different activities related to the sea.

Later, we moved towards Cramer Park, on the shore of which we found a man deep in concentration casting his net. He wore shorts, waterproof boots, and a cloth hat that protected his face from the sun. The skill he showed as he cast his net gave proof to the fact that this was a man used to fishing. Weeks later, to my surprise, he would be one of the fishermen we interviewed.

What brought us to the island? Many reasons brought us to St. Croix, but the main one was the purpose of and desire to get to know the life histories of the people that, one way or another, are connected to fishing with the intent of presenting them in this number of the *Fuete y Verguilla* magazine. Recording in each article the words, gestures, and experiences of these people, as well as for each reader to immerse themselves and be able to experience what we saw, heard, and on some occasions lived. It was a challenge that we accepted with pleasure and gave our all to, with the purpose of presenting and recognizing a product that truthfully records the fishing heritage of men, women, the young, and not so young of St. Croix.

St. Croix turned out to be a melting pot of several marvelous cultures, where the essence of the Caribbean flows from every corner. The richness of the music, the delicious flavors of the food, the architecture of the beautiful and colorful buildings, its people, and their love for the sea made our stay there, and the work we accomplished, one of the most rewarding we have ever experienced.







## Fishing Keeps Him "Intact"

### Adolphus Nelson

By: Jannette Ramos García

*"I learned to fish from a very young age. I used to go fish with my father in St. Kitts. I remember the first fish I caught. I had a little rod; my father had a big bamboo rod, which we had for a fishing pole, back in the day. I had a small, little one, about . . . maybe 3, 4 feet. And I caught a fish about 2 inches. And I ran from the sea straight to my house with the fish on the line. That was the first fish I catch. And everyone thought that was so funny. But it was my first fish, and I cherish that."*

Adolphus Nelson  
Fisherman

Recognizing Mr. Nelson is easy; just look for a gray bearded, thin man who uses water boots and an inseparable hat at Cramer Park beach. No matter if it rains, the sun shines, or the wind blows he will be fishing. He catches sprats and whatever fish gets trapped in his nets or on his lines. For him, fishing is a therapy that keeps him "intact" and his "brain functioning the way it should."

Mr. Adolphus Nelson was born in the Island of St. Kitts in 1943. At the age of 18, his parents moved to St. Croix. Since that day, 52 years have passed. Mr. Nelson is a hardworking man: he worked as a waiter, a bartender, and he also did some pipefitting. Now, at the age of 70, he does not work anymore. But as he told us, "the economy in St. Croix is really bad," so to help his economic situation and for sustenance, he fishes.



Being at Cramer Park every day, he has noticed how the fisheries have been changing. He has seen an increase in the amount of women fishing. He noticed that women have learned to throw nets just as well as any man and, at night, you may see a lot of them at Duggan's Reef, fishing with lines. He says that they all fish for sustenance. The increase in the number of people fishing goes hand in hand with the age factor. He believes that now there are more middle aged and older people fishing, maybe because they need relaxation.

As a fisherman and loving every minute of it, he has taught his children the art of fishing. They all know how to fish, even his 13 year-old grandson. Mr. Nelson describes him as "a shark in the water." The boy loves the sea so much that he wants to become a marine biologist. When they bring the day's catch home, Mr. Nelson's wife is in charge of cleaning it. Cooking it, however, is one of the activities that Mr. Nelson enjoys the most, apart from fishing. The fish he prefers is the sprat; he told us that "fish is my diet. I love sprat. I make all kinds of things with sprat. I make cake with sprat. I make soup with sprat. I make pasta with sprat. I make everything with sprat. So, sprat is my main diet."

He does not think that the amount of fish caught has decreased because of overfishing, but rather because of the impact of the anthropogenic footprint; such as the use of sea-scooters and the activities at seashore hotels. He believes that because of these activities the fish "take refuge, they go out" and that is why they are dwindling. Mr. Nelson is not against tourism, but he does



*Fried sprat*

believe that there has to be some kind of regulation for activities along the shoreline. In this way, he believes, the fish will remain closer to shore.

When he is fishing, he feels "great and away from everything. It's really relaxing, all the tranquility." Mr. Nelson is one of those men that, at his age, enjoy life and what they do.







## Patricia Skov

*By: Jannette Ramos García*

Patricia Skov was born in New Jersey; however, she has lived most of her life in St. Croix. Here, in this island, is where fishing and the sea became an integral part of her life. For many years, Patricia and her husband Robert Skov have been sports and commercial fishers. Robert's father was a fishmonger who owned a shop in St. Croix. Robert acquired the shop, and moved it to Estate Teague Bay. There he worked from Thursday through Saturday. The basic sales concept was selling the day's catch to specific, loyal clients who bought fish during these specific days.

As years went by, Patricia saw how fisheries were changing, and she grew worried about the impact certain fishing practices, particularly diving, were having on them. For instance, she was concerned with the way more divers lose their lives each year while fishing; often because they dive repeatedly, switching one tank for another, without decompressing properly. They are also endangering themselves by going out into deeper waters looking for lobsters and conches. These actions have the additional consequence of divers decimating these species' habitats. Patricia thinks that diving, as a fishing practice, should be banned. She argues that in other Caribbean islands, like Jamaica, this kind of fishing has been banned in order to protect both fishery resources and divers' lives.



Patricia and Robert both serve in the Caribbean Fishery Management Council as members of the Advisory Panel representing St. Croix. As members, they present their concerns pertaining to dive fishing and similarly share their knowledge in regards to fishery management and fishing as means of earning a livelihood. Yet, it is not only dive fishing that worries them. The Skovs are also concerned about the use of traps aimed at capturing deep-water snappers, a fishing method that has gained momentum in recent years. They think this practice should be banned. In this particular type of fishing, the traps are easily lost, and once they are lost, they remain there for a long time, causing many fish to become trapped and die; fish that could otherwise continue spawning or be caught through other means.

Patricia remembers the 'Golden Age' of fishing, and recalls how Robert's uncles, Teddy and Oliver, used to catch so many lobsters sometimes that they would grind them for bait in their traps. However, ever since the first trammel-net boat was brought to St. Croix, their worries increased. These boats produce a tremendous amount of bycatch, and they catch a huge amount of fish, which translates into local fishermen bringing less fish home as fishery resources become depleted.

Patricia is very concerned about the limitations currently in place, restricting local fishers. She is convinced that efforts must exist which will help preserve fishery resources, while respecting local livelihoods. She bases these thoughts on her knowledge of how small the continental shelf of St. Croix is, as well as how many fishery areas are closed off, further limiting local fishing.

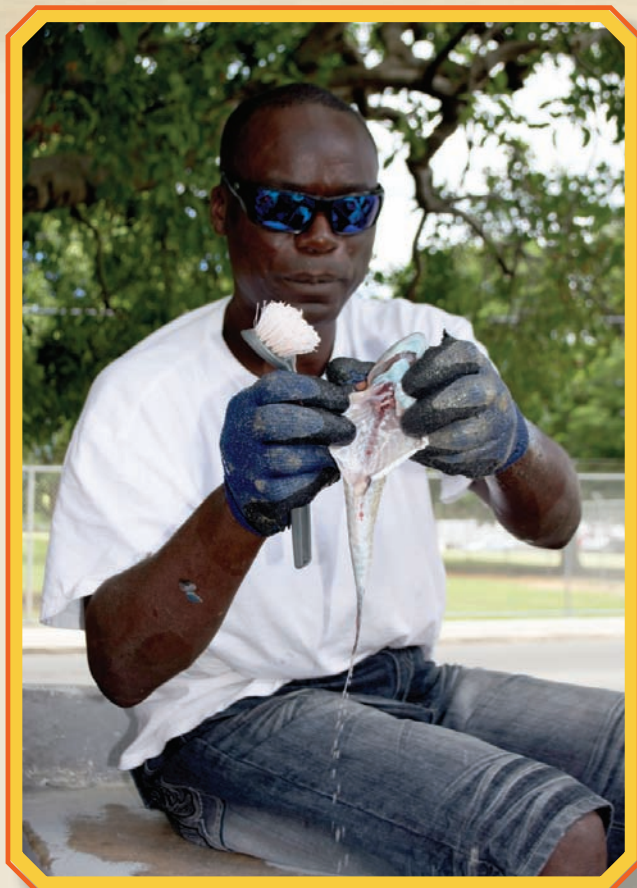
She is a strong believer of practicing and promoting sustainable fishing, and both she and her husband respect spawning seasons. Likewise, they stopped fishing snappers as soon as the new regulations were set in place. A few years ago, they visited St. Thomas, intending to see how fish were sold on the island, and what safe management measures were in place so as to preserve their catch for sale. To them, it was vitally important to educate and alert St. Croix fishers about the importance of safe practices when handling seafood. The common practice of hanging the day's catch on tree branches to display them for customers is an incorrect practice that works to the detriment of both the product and the consumer.

She still fishes with her husband, although they no longer fish for profit but rather for personal relaxation and enjoyment. Every time they catch a fish, they feel happy and excited, but their joy is dampened when they think about this resource's future and what the chances are for their grandson to someday enjoy another great 'Golden Age' of fishing.



## Bobby Thomas - The Life of a Commercial Fisherman

Por: Jannette Ramos García



fishing between 10:30 and 11:00 a.m., never later than that. Once they pack things up and hitch the boat to its trailer, they leave towards their spot on the road where they sell their catch. The trip from Gallows Bay takes almost an hour. Oftentimes, they already have clients waiting for them. As soon as they park, they begin the process of gutting, scaling, and cleaning their catch, while keeping it on ice (a safe handling practice) until clients arrive. There they remain until 3 in the afternoon, unless the sale is going good and they stay longer.

He wakes up around 4 in the morning, praying for the protection of his family, life, and captain; he prays to be led where the fish are, and, finally, for a safe return home. After this daily routine, he makes sure that all his equipment is in order and leaves for the gas station to fill up his boat's tanks. Before dawn, they are already unloading in Gallows Bay's dock. They have to be at their fishing location by the time the sun rises. Then, he examines the water's clarity, if he can see the ocean's floor here is where he dives. The image of what he encounters at that hour of the morning is almost poetic. He explains that it is during the first hours of the day, when the fish are still sleepy and the lobsters still walk openly through the ocean floor before hiding from predators among the rocks. Once the sun rises, this panorama changes and catching them becomes much more difficult. Bobby and his captain Anthony, return from



*Bobby Thomas and his captain, Anthony Montes*





Bobby's routine is repeated five times a week; he wakes up, prays, goes fishing, brings back his catch, cleans it, sells it, and on it goes. Selling his catch in his usual spot under a tree is a well thought out decision. There he has no competition from other fishermen, he is alone. This is one of the reasons not to sell in the fisherman's market. There may be more than 10 fishers in La Reine, and if snappers, groupers, and parrotfish are not available, there might be problems because those species are the most preferred.

His primary work tool is a double barbed harpoon and, for catching lobster, he uses a "lasso." The harpoon is a selective tool because you can only catch one fish at a time. The following are some of the species he prefers to catch: yellowtail snapper, parrotfish, and lionfish. At the beginning, he had trouble selling the latter because people were wary of its spines. However, he has been educating people and they now know to cut the spines off before cooking it. He sells it for \$10 a pound.

Thinking on how fishing was when he started, he recognizes that it used to be more plentiful, not because there are less fish than before, but because there are more fishers than 18 years ago, there were few and now there are more. Bobby has a 10 year old son. The boy has expressed a desire to be a fisherman like his father; however, Bobby has his doubts. Even though fishing leaves good earnings, he wants his son to have a formal education. Furthermore, once, Bobby got lost at sea and that terrible experience he does not want his son to have. Curiously, when he began fishing with the help of an uncle, Bobby did not like it. Nonetheless, as he learned, he slowly fell in love with his profession and the more he fished, the more he liked it. Bobby is a fisherman because it is what he knows and what he likes doing.





## Anthony Montes - Captain

*By: Jannette Ramos García*

The son of a fisherman, he was born 19 years ago in St. Croix. Anthony works as the captain of Bobby Thomas' boat. His position as captain entails, among other activities, keeping contact with Bobby once he enters the water. Visually, he follows the safety flag that the diver uses to pinpoint his location. There is always a risk that the flag will come loose and the fisherman might get lost. Therefore, Anthony feels really responsible for his job since he knows that most of Bobby's safety depends on how alert he is.







**José Alberto Sánchez**  
*By: Jannette Ramos García*

It was the 1960's and the economic situation of his family in Puerto Rico, the country where José Alberto was born, was in decline. Therefore, his father Efraín Alberto, a chef, decided to move to St. Croix seeking better opportunities for his family. His grandfather and maternal uncles already lived in St. Croix and they all worked as fishers, including his mother Benedita. "For me, fishing is in my veins through my mother, grandmother, and uncles. This is why I see a future; I can see my granddaughters, my sons, being fisherwomen and fishermen. They all love the sea."

When he was barely 4 or 5 years old, José Alberto suffered from asthma episodes so severe that his life was in danger. Two months had passed from his arrival in St. Croix when his asthma attacks worried his mother to the point that she decided to visit a bush doctor. The doctor was Harry Edwards, a veterinarian and pharmacist. When his mother asked for medicine to improve her son's health, the doctor answered that he had nothing that could help, but he did have the cure for asthma. He was referring to turtle oil. At the beginning, his mom had to restrain him to administer the cure, which had a horrible taste. After one week of treatment, he could play inside the house. In the following week, he could run in the backyard. After a month, his mom was scolding him at breakfast, lunch, and dinner because he would not sit still. Turtle oil was his cure. With the turtle oil and his good health came various escapes from school. Oftentimes, he left for school and did not arrive; he took detours to fish with his friends. As soon as his mother found out, she would discipline him.



## WISDOM

When he was 20 years old, he began commercial fishing. His guides were the old fishermen he used to observe in order to learn. José believes that each fisherman has his own tricks and secrets for fishing. He began learning from a young age; with every trick and secret that he learned, he got to know “a million ways” to protect himself and be a better fisherman. The old fishers saw potential in him, as well as his interest and love for the profession, and they shared their fishing tricks and secrets with him.

When he was younger, he went fishing early in the morning. However, as the years passed, his schedule changed. Now he calmly goes fishing at 7 or 8 in the morning “because what is yours is yours.” In other words, the catch meant for you is for you, no matter what.

Each day brings new challenges and the sea presents itself differently. Some days the sea current may be stronger and he has to use his ingenuity to find the fish. José knows that when the current is very strong, the deep-water snappers, which is the species he favors, hide. Therefore, fishing them is harder. However, he has learned that organisms interact among themselves and there is a type of squid, which lives in the depths where the snappers are found. Once the squids are located, he knows that is where the snapper will be found.



*Photo provided by José Alberto Sánchez*





"Not everyone that one day buys a boat and goes fishing is a fisherman. To be a fisherman, you must learn to judge when it is a time to go out and when it is not. There are many times that people without fishing knowledge go out to fish and do not come back, because they lacked knowledge and did not know the sea. The sea tells you if you can or cannot go out fishing and if it tells you not to, do not defy it; obey and respect it." He sees it as his profession, where he wins his and his family's sustenance, where he gets his paycheck.

When he is not fishing, he invents new tools for fishing and his wife helps in this

endeavor, as well as with cleaning and selling the fish. Years ago, she went out fishing with him, but once their children were born, she had a spine injury and, since then, she has had to remain on land. They are a team based on respect and love for each other. They work together with precision and this strengthens their marriage. Oftentimes, she prepares coffee and cakes and places them in his boat; surprising him with these details that make him the envy of the other fishermen. José recognizes the importance of the work his wife does next to him and it fills him "with pride."

If José had not been a fisherman, he does not know what he would have been. When he distances himself from the sea, even for a week or two, he misses it intensely. His body needs to feel the salty water on his skin. It does not matter where or with whom he is, he needs the sea. José was born in Puerto Rico, but he feels it is unfair to the island he lived in until he was 4 years old, to call himself a Puerto Rican. However, he does not feel Cruzan either, even though it is in St. Croix where he had his children and lives his life. Not saying he is Puerto Rican makes him feel that he is letting his relatives and his *Borinquen* roots down, and not saying he is Cruzan would let his children down as well as the place that has given him a way of life and where he has grown roots. José resolves this issue in a brilliant way that captures his love for both islands and honors them; he is not Puerto Rican or Cruzan, José is a "**Portocruzan**" fisherman.





Roy Pemberton Sr. was born in St. Croix and is very knowledgeable of the culture, island gastronomy, and everything else that is related to fishing and the sea. When we met him, he participated in a demonstration held to show us how to make Cruzan-style fishing traps. Mr. Pemberton is like a fish in water when it comes to Cruzan cuisine. Kallaloo is a very popular dish in St. Croix; however, not many people like cooking it because it is energy and time consuming. Even so, fishermen gather at Gallows Bay, under the shade of the trees and with the spectacular ocean view before them, cooking kallaloo for everyone. Roy began to explain the ingredients needed for this dish.





To cook kallaloo, you will need the following ingredients:



water and salt



leaves from the  
kallaloo shrub



okra



pork snouts,  
trotters, and tails



eggplant and spinach



cornmeal



fish



conch (optional)





## Procedure:

1. First, begin cooking the pork snouts, trotters, and tails in water, since these will take the longest to cook.
2. Meanwhile, if fish will be used (it can be any kind of fish), they must be thoroughly cleaned: scaled, gutted, and rinsed with lemon juice.
3. Boil the fish in salted water.
4. In another pot, cook the cornmeal in salted water, stirring often so that no lumps form.
5. Cut the eggplant in small pieces.
6. When the meat is tender, add the fish stock and the remaining ingredients.
7. Serve with the cooked cornmeal.



In 1826, Anthelme Brillat-Savarin, a French lawyer and gastronome, wrote in his book *Physiologie du Gout, ou Meditations de Gastronomie Transcendante*, "Dis-moi ce que tu manges, je te dirai ce que tu es." If we take his words literally, we can safely say that if you eat kallaloo, you are Cruzan.





## Danny Boy and Chuíto: Two Lives Dedicated to Fishing

By: Jannette Ramos García



*"Each day I find something different. Like my son, he told me, 'I don't want to take more sun, I want to learn how to dive,' and he learned to dive and I love this everyday and everyday is different. The more you dive, the more different things you see. You see different types of fish, and it's something that I like. I want to be like him, he is around 60 years old and still dives. You know? And I want to make it to that age still doing what I love."*

*(Danny Boy – talking about fishing and his friend Chuíto)*

### Reception

Various boats, buoys, fish traps, fishing equipment, and diving tanks welcomed us at the home of Puerto Rican José "Chuíto" Nieves Soto. Around the area, various men and women worked with the fishing equipment and the women cleaned and packaged fish for sale. It was interesting to note the interaction between Chuíto and Danny Boy during the duration of the interview. At various points, one of them began answering a question and the other one completed the answer coherently, while the other agreed. Between them, there is a dynamic and easy partnership, other than the fact that they are as close as family since their wives are sisters-in-law.



Danny Boy and Chuíto



## Chuító

Chuító was 6 years old when he arrived to St. Croix. At an early age, his father taught him to throw nets and line fish, he learned deep-water fishing, and how to gut and clean his catch. Later on, he joined the militia; at his return, he went to work at a bank. Then, he realized that his true calling was the sea and what he wanted to do was fishing. Since then, he has dedicated his life to fishing and only his health has prevented it. At present, Chuító has an injured shoulder due to years of diving. However, this does not stop him, so he is repairing his equipment to go deep-water fishing.

The first time he went diving was under the guidance of Ángel Díaz, for whom he worked as captain. Tired of feeling the strong heat of the sun on his skin, he took advantage on a day that Ángel had an order for clams. On that day, he told Chuító, "today I don't fish; it's your turn to dive." Thus, his wish to feel the coolness of the water and experience other activities was granted and he submerged in search of clams. It must be noted that he had never used a tank before. Once he collected the clams, he emerged nervous and breathing rapidly, even his voice was affected and it sounded funny when he talked. He felt that the air had burned his voice and he could not even whistle a tune. As time passed, he got used to it, until he perfected the practice of diving.

For sometime, he dedicated himself to fishing with fish traps; but his frustration grew because he constantly found them opened and empty. He would close and submerge the traps again and on his return the incident would repeat itself. Tired of this situation and of not being able to bring money home, he changed his fishing equipment to trammel nets until their use was prohibited. However, even with the trammel nets there were problems, because when the Hess refinery ships (HOVENSA) navigated through the area where the nets were, they would cut the ropes and break the nets' mechanisms. He had no other option but to return to diving.



Chuító selling fish at La Reine Fish Market.



## Danny Boy

Danny Boy arrived from Vieques to the Island when he was only one-year-old. His father was born in St. Croix and his mother in Vieques. At the age of 15, he started fishing commercially, when a pound of fish was sold for 10¢ and then went up to 25¢. He had two fisherman teachers, his father-in-law Carlos Ventura (a fisherman from Vieques) and Miguel Meléndez who taught him how to dive. He suffered decompression disease and the last incident even had him hospitalized for 8 months in the Rio Piedras Medical Center in Puerto Rico. Because of this last incident, his ability to walk was affected and he underwent physical therapy to regain mobility. He has had many more incidents; on some occasions, as many as two incidents a month. The reasons? "What happens is, when we don't find the fish we want, we have to return. We have fish that swim down to 110 or 120 feet. I was a young fisherman, and when you are young you explore. And that is what you get for exploring." Due to so many accidents, he cannot dive the same depths he used to, now for his safety he only dives between 40 to 50 feet.



Danny Boy at La Reine Farmers and Fish Market in Christiansted

## The Problems of Christiansted's Fishermen

Danny Boy and Chuito explained that the lack of fishermen's union is one of the issues that affects them the most, because each one acts on their own and for their own benefit. Furthermore, the fishermen do not want to get involved in this issues concerning them, since they believe no one worries for them. As an example, they cite the legislators that during election season appear to promise many things, afterwards they are never seen again, and there promises are broken. On this note, they recognize the work done by Carlos Farchette, while in his position in the government, worried, listened and took action on their behalf.



For years, Chuíto was part of a fishing advisory council. However, he thinks the fishers never took them into consideration, as to the way they ignored the preparation of a management plan. It was only after the plan was implement that they decided to voice their opinions.

Another problem that affects them is the unhealthiness of the fish market (La Reine Farmers and Fish Market). Each fisherman builds, as best as they can, a small kiosk where every Saturday they sell their catch. The situation is aggravated by a lack of drainage and, when the fish bleed out, the blood reaches the water that accumulates in the surrounding areas causing an unbearable stench. Additionally, this contaminated water reaches the sidewalks and streets where visitors walk. For them, it is important that the people in the government construct adequate facilities to handle and market their products, similar to the ones the farmers have.



La Reine Farmers and Fish Market

### The Risks

Many times, they go fishing and the sea is calm, therefore, minimizing the probability of an accident. However, the need for sustenance pushes them to go out fishing even when the sea is "rough." This is when, having a good captain makes a difference. If the captain is trained, he can even spot the diver in murky waters. But if the diver goes out with an inexperienced person, it is probable that he might have to swim to shore and it is not easy to swim back and see your boat go adrift.



### The Boats

Chuito began fishing in small boats and, as his finances improved, so did the size of his boats. Like for instance with Danny Boy, the only difference being, that his father-in-law gave him the boat he uses at present, a bigger one, which he can use to get to Puerto Rico if it were necessary. Those boats are safer because they are equipped to deal with the waves surrounding the Island. In the beginning, Danny Boy's boat only had one motor and, on various occasions, he had to call Chuito to come to his rescue. They agree that nowadays fishermen have better equipped boats, in terms of safety, with the use of computers, GPS, and cellphones. "...years ago it was a catastrophe, a real catastrophe" because they lacked artifacts that could provide immediate communication or sophisticated navigational tools.

### The Role of Family

I asked them about the role of the family in the trade he works in. Both their answers were on the dot, the first to answer was Danny Boy: "For me, my family comes first. I love my children and I have a good wife. Things being as they are, sometimes it is hard, but I am lost without fishing and without them." He talked about his son, who studied in Florida and returned to the Island because he did not want to stay there and said he wanted to fish. Since then, they fish together. Their relationship is described by his words, "I am so used to him that if he doesn't go, I don't go either." His three daughters do not fish, but they are close to him because his family is his refuge.

Chuito and his wife, Dorotea Nieves, have been married for 20 years. She used to be his captain and, during that period, underwent all possible shortages at sea. Afterwards, she learned how to fish and clean the catch in order to sell it to restaurants. He guarantees that she is a professional in the work she does and no one is as fast or effective as she is when scaling and cleaning fish. She is so fast that she can scale between 200 to 300 pounds of parrotfish in 8 hours (parrotfish is considered one of the hardest fish to scale). They have a son and a daughter. Their son followed his father's footsteps and also fishes. Danny Boy's wife, Elena, is Dorotea's sister-in-law and fellow worker. His son delivers to and charges the restaurants that purchase their product.





### Wisdom

The wisdom acquired by their experience enables them to recognize how sustainable fishing practices have produced results in St. Croix. For example, they think the closed seasons have produced results in the reproduction of groupers and snappers. Both of them have observed more individuals of each species. They also recognize that fishing with fish traps eliminates bycatch. The rule they both follow is that once they raise the fish traps, if they have caught banned species or species they are not going to sell, they throw them back. However, they never take more than they can sell. They know that taking more than necessary means spending more on ice and there are losses if they do not sell everything.

Selling fish requires patience when dealing with public, which at times is very demanding. Sometimes, they encounter people that are hard to please. This is when a good attitude and disposition is necessary to make a sale. They know that a satisfied customer is more likely to return.

The species they look for the most is parrotfish because this is the favorite fish mostly served by the restaurants on the Island. According to them, this species is difficult to deplete because they reproduce every full moon. The quantity of parrotfish they see and trap are enough for them and for other fishermen to satisfy the demands of these restaurants and the general public.

### Advice for the Young

Both agree it is not an easy job; but at least no one can fire you. However, being a fisherman implies having to plan when outings have been cancelled or when you want a week off. Furthermore, they should always ask the advice of the more experienced fishers, since it is important not lose perspective that commercial fishing is not a sport. You risk losing everything, your house, boat, and life.

### They Would Be Fishermen

They deeply love the sea and its feeling of freedom. For Chuíto, putting on a tank and submerging is leaving behind all the stress and headaches produced by problems. His mind only concentrates on fishing and what he can see, which is how he forgets the world above. Meanwhile, for Danny Boy, the greatest pleasure when fishing derives from enjoying his son's company. If they had the opportunity of being born again and choosing their profession, they would be fishermen again.





## Dorotea and Elena: Wives and Partners

Dorotea and Elena are natives of the Dominican Republic. Dorotea is Chuito's wife and Elena, her sister-in-law, is Danny Boy's wife.



Dorotea

In her country, she was a supervisor for an underwear factory for two important stores. Subsequently, she moved to the United States and continued to work in factories. After hurricane Hugo passed through the Virgin Islands, and as consequences of the devastation it left behind, large teams of people were required for cleanup. The pay was good; therefore, she left her job and moved to St. Croix.

At times, she was the captain of Chuito's boat, a skill he taught her. She also learned how to throw and retrieve nets. At present, she cleans and packs the catch that he brings home for sale.

Cleaning fish is not the job that she enjoys the most. However, she understands that her collaboration is essential and, because earnings stay in the family.

Elena

In the Dominican Republic she was a licensed nurse, but when she moved to St. Croix she was not able to work in her profession. Therefore, in order to sustain herself, she dedicated her time to collaborating in the cleaning of the catch. Also, on Saturdays, she accompanies Danny Boy to the La Reine Farmers and Fish Market to sell the catch.





## Bernnet Barnes – The Net Weaver

*By: Jannette Ramos García*



He barely looked at what he was doing; it was as if his fingers had a mind of their own. They did not lose their rhythm and skilled movement when creating a pattern. The needle would go in and out between the threads. The hands moved rapidly with the skill of someone who knows the pattern to follow. Patterns emerged from the threads and between them the necessary knots were made that would later be impossible to unravel. And, as if by magic, a fishing net slowly emerged, which would at some point end in the strong hands of a Cruzan fisherman.





He is a 76-year-old native of St. Croix, a net weaver, and he sometimes fishes. His father was a carpenter who died when he was a boy. Meanwhile, his mother cleaned houses for living. Unlike other fishermen, Mr. Bernnet Barnes did not have anyone in his family to guide and influence him towards fishing. However, he lived close to the sea and learned how to fish on his own, when he was barely 5 or 6 years old. Since then, he has dedicated a great portion of his life to the sea, except for the time he worked as a cook in hotels in the United States. When he returned to St. Croix, he worked in construction and in carpentry; nevertheless, the call of the sea was present. This call led him to own a 26-foot boat. At present, even though he sold his boat, he deep-water fishes, yellowtails and snappers with a friend. Mr. Barnes does not sell his catch, however, he does share it with some friends and the rest is for his family.

### Weaving Dreams

When he is not fishing, he weaves, a skill he learned working with threads to capture sardines. Later on, he made them bigger. With practice, he learned that when weaving a net, the first thing to do is calculate the area you wish to cover. Then, start weaving the "head," which is the base. For a net of 24 feet, the upper part must be a netting of 120 feet; if it needs to be bigger, then it increases to a length of 125 feet. Precision is key, if not, the net will not come out right.

At present, he makes them by request and the cost varies according to size. The size of the holes in the net depends on the needle used and the fish you intend to catch. He used to buy his needles, but the quality was not the best and they would split at the tip. Thus, he decided to make them himself using PVC piping. These are more useful since they last longer.

The time he spends weaving is also time spent thinking, singing, and whispering. For him this is a time of peace that is reflected on his face.





Henry Christian  
Cruzan Fisherman and  
Fish Trap Artisan



Materials used to build fish traps



Coming back from fishing



## José and Luis – Two Lives Dedicated to Fishing

By: Kim Bazil



José López was ushered into the world of fishing by his deceased older brother José C. Carrión, who spent most of his life at sea and to whom fishing was a lifelong passion. Carrión taught him the art of fishing at a very young age. Mr. López thanks his brother for teaching him everything he knows about fishing. López plans to carry on the legacy for as long as he can by also introducing his children and grandchildren to the fishing industry. Commercial fishing has become his livelihood and he intends on doing it for as long as he can. In the early days, fishing was a sport, a weekend outing with friends and family, only for fun. Now, fishing is more commercial. Presently, in these times of economic hardship, fishing has become the way of life for most Cruzan families,



Luis Ortiz is the third of five children, and he remembers spending time with his father at sea every chance he got.

In the early years, Mr. Ortiz and his family spent countless hours on the beach with family and friends playing dominoes, cooking, and sharing stories. Truthfully, they still do so. Long holidays, weekends or whatever the occasion was, anything was reason enough to hit the beach. These holiday trips were the introduction needed to start fishing. He gives all accolades to his father for teaching him the ropes. His father would take him and his brothers out to sea at daybreak. For most young people, waking up in the early hours of the morning to go fishing was not a great idea at the time since they preferred to hang out with friends; however, for Mr. Ortiz, these were good experiences. He will never regret the choices made or the path taken. It is a passion inherited from his father and it will be cherished forever.



*Photos provided by Kim Bazil*



José and Luis, the “Dream Team” joined forces over ten years ago, fishing over the years in Molasses Pier, Frederiksted Fish Market, and at the Altona Lagoon. Western locations seem to be the best spots, their own special area. Some of the species caught are queen conch, lobster, grunts, red hind, parrotfish, old wife, among others. Other than fishing, the men enjoy making fish traps, crab traps, and catching the local land crabs during the rainy season. It is a fun-filled family affair.

The Frederiksted Fish Market was the best place to buy fish. As the years passed, kiosks were constructed at the edge of the road. In 2002, the La Reine Farmers and Fish Market was built and almost as fast as it came up, it went down in 2007. The localization of Villa La Reine was indeed a great idea, although not that welcoming to some. Regardless, it was beneficial for the people. It was a centralized location where the community could purchase fresh fish, all in one place, from their favorite fishermen.



Both men agree that in the early years fishing was not so technical or commercialized, with so many restrictions. They are aware that there are people who make things difficult for others who are honestly trying to make a living. However, it would be of great help if Fish & Wildlife and NOAA representatives, not only spoke to the local fishermen, but seriously take into consideration what they have to say before decisions are made with regards to their livelihood.



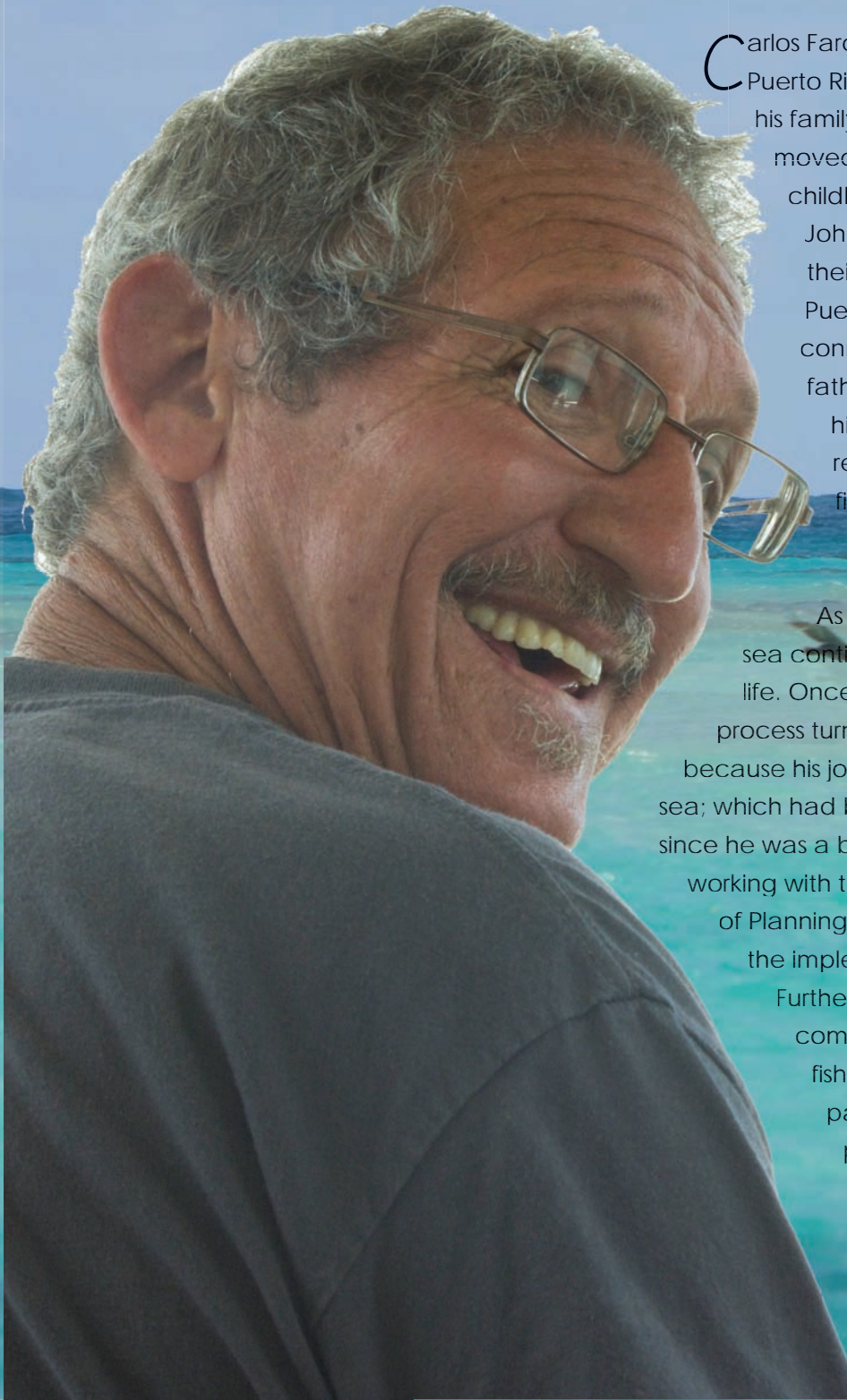
*Photos by Jannette Ramos García*





## Carlos Farchette – An Enthusiast of the Sea

By: Jannette Ramos García



Carlos Farchette was born in Fajardo, Puerto Rico. When he was a baby, his family, including his brother John, moved to St. Croix where he lived his childhood. Their father, also named John was a native of St. Croix and their mother Ana, was from Vieques, Puerto Rico. During this time, his connection to the sea began. His father was the driving force behind his connection with the marine resources, since he took Carlos fishing every time he could.

As an adult, St. Croix and the sea continued to be the center of his life. Once he started working, this process turned out to be simple, because his job was related to the sea; which had been his primary interest since he was a boy. In 1980, he started working with the St. Croix's Department of Planning and Natural Resources in the implementation of marine laws. Furthermore, he worked with commercial and recreational fishermen, conducted coastal patrols, and helped the police. At the beginning, two of the major problems he identified was the illegal retrieval of turtle eggs and stealing sand.





However, he recognizes that these problems were a thing of the past and the fishers collaborate and understand the laws implemented to protect the future of fisheries and, therefore, the future of their income. Carlos established a friendly, respectful, and close relationship with the commercial and recreational fishers. This relationship is still intact despite his retirement. At present, Carlos is the president of the Caribbean Fishery Management Council, a position he has occupied for two terms. Carlos dedicated work throughout these years has been of great importance for the protection of the sustainability of St. Croix's marine resources, which are the inheritance of future generations.

John Farchette, Carlos' older brother, is a marine park ranger for the DPNR/CZM St. Croix at East End Marine Park.



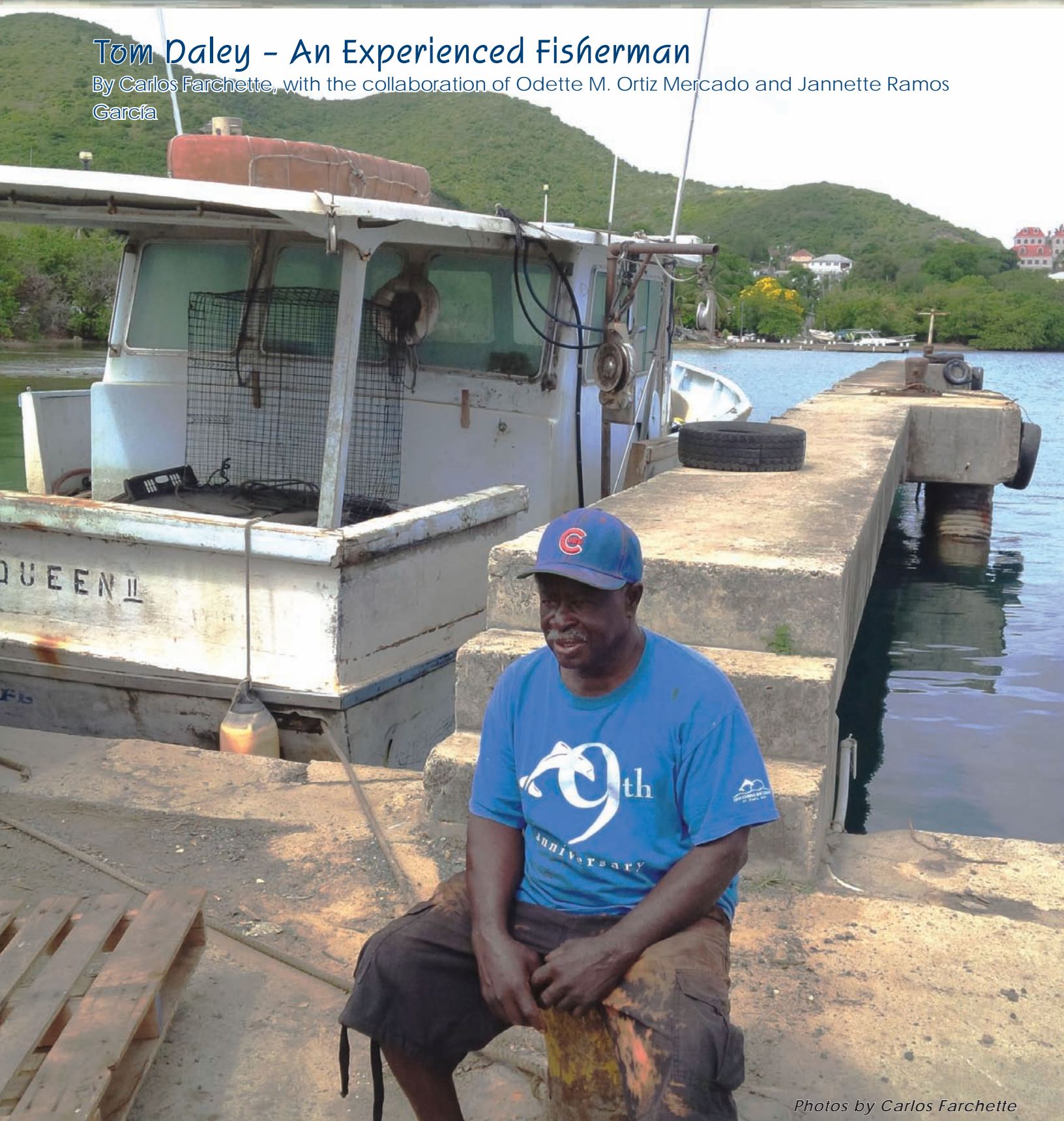
Carlos is married to Nora Santana, another Puerto Rican that has lived her life in St. Croix. They have four children together. As a retiree, he has dedicated himself to gardening, fishing, and spending time with fishermen that have been his friends for more than 30 years.





## Tom Daley - An Experienced Fisherman

By Carlos Farchette, with the collaboration of Odette M. Ortiz Mercado and Jannette Ramos García



*Photos by Carlos Farchette*



Tom Daley, a native of Montserrat, moved to St. Croix in 1963 searching for a better way of life. Once he established himself in the Island, he married Laurel Daley and had 7 children.

On his arrival at St. Croix, Tom worked in various areas in order to make ends meet. For 11 years, he worked in the construction industry and became a supervisor for Gannett Construction. At the same time, he also worked part-time as a taxi driver and fisherman, for extra income.

In 1975, Tom realized that he could support his wife and 7 children and do what he loves at the same time, by becoming a full-time commercial fisherman. Thus, he decided to dedicate himself only to commercial fishing. During this time he was offered the opportunity to go back into construction; however, he declined the offer since he had invested a great deal of money and wanted to make commercial fishing his career.

For 10 years he fished with fish traps in Lang Bank, northeast of St. Croix, and in Saba. However, he decided to only fish in Lang Bank because of how far he had to travel to get to Saba. Another problem that helped him decide to stay in Lang Bank was the situation encountered when he discovered that his traps were been stolen. The change has not affected him, since Lang Bank has proven to be a productive fishing ground due to its unique geographical location.

When asked where he thinks the fishing industry is now compared to back in the day, Tom stated that:

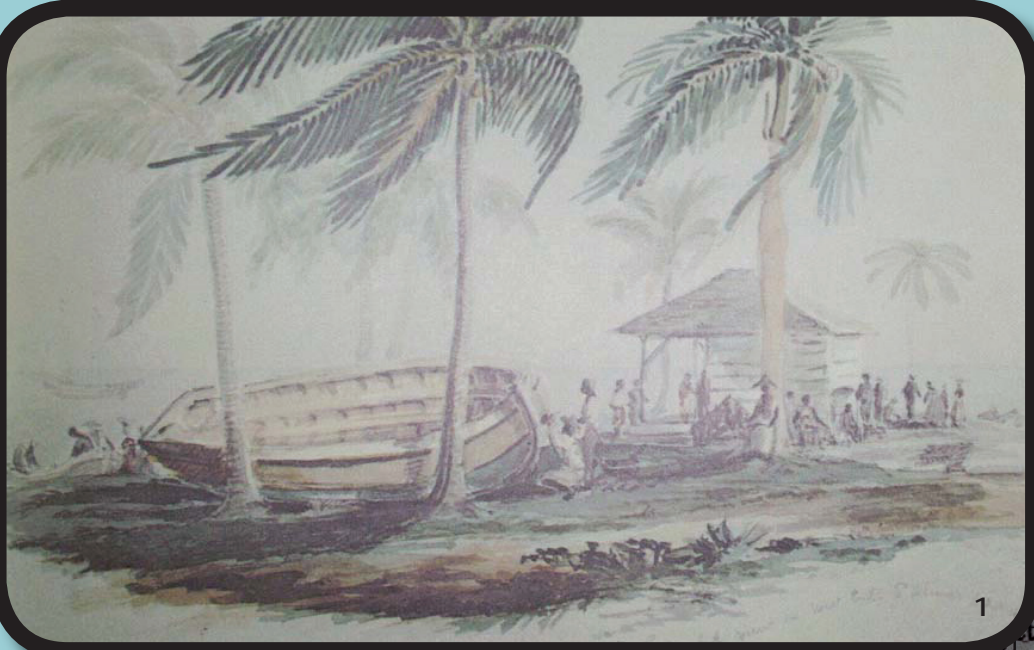
"Blanket laws create hardship for fishermen. I believe that St. Croix needs to be treated differently. We have too many closed areas, which is crowding the fishermen into the small areas still open; which is creating competition by multi-use fishers. I also believe that if fishing collapses on St. Croix it will be attributed to the invasion of lionfish because there is nothing being done about this invasive species in closed areas."

These are the observations of a wise fisherman that has dedicated a large portion of his life to doing what he loves.





# How fishing was in the past







#### LEGEND:

1. Fish market in Frederiksted (Henry Morton, 1843-44)
2. Landing stage in Frederiksted (Jack Delano)
3. Women waiting for the catch in Christiansted (Jack Delano)
4. Puerto Rican fisherman and farmer (Jack Delano)
5. Waiting for the catch in Frederiksted (Jack Delano)
6. Main Street in Christiansted (Jack Delano)

Map taken from  
[http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/americas/christiansted\\_82.jpg](http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/americas/christiansted_82.jpg)



## The Faces of Fishing



Bollolo



Idelfonso García



Carmelo Torres



Luis Viera



Gerson Martinez







## They will be the Future of Fishing in St. Croix...





## Acknowledgements

I want to thank the Caribbean Fishery Management Council and its director, Mr. Miguel Rolón, for choosing the *Fuete y Verguilla* magazine as the forum that would present the different aspects of fishing in St. Croix. Likewise, I thank Carlos and Nora Farchette for the care, fellowship, and solidarity they shared with us. They were excellent hosts. Many thanks to them for taking us to see every corner of the Island where men and women congregate to practice their trade as fishermen, fisherwomen, captains, cleaners, and some of the officials in charge of the agencies that oversee the conservation of fishery resources and the upholding of the law. We also thank them for taking us to meet the families that in one way or another support fishermen and for introducing us to the wonderful cuisine of the Island. To Mr. Adolphus Nelson and Mr. Roy Pemberton, a thousand thanks for cooking Cruzan delicacies for my friend and co-worker, Pichón Duarte and myself. Never have sprats and bread tasted so good than when Mr. Nelson cooked them, and the kallaloo prepared by Mr. Pemberton was so delicious, we even had seconds. To Lia Ortiz, thank you for your confidence, friendship, and the effort you put on the work you do. Knowing her and recognizing the wisdom she displays at her young age, is an inspiration.

Jannette Ramos García  
Coordinator for *Fuete y Verguilla* Magazine



Jannette Ramos García, Pichón Duarte,  
Carlos Farchette, and Nora Santana



Lia Ortiz and Jannette Ramos García





Sea Grant's mission is to conserve and use, in a sustainable manner, the marine ecosystems and resources of Puerto Rico. To complete this mission the program works on research, education, and marine outreach projects.



CIEL is an interdisciplinary center for the study of social coastal processes. It pays attention to the relationship between people and nature, and also collaborates with management plans for natural and marine reserves. The center is subsidized by the UPR's College of Arts and Sciences and Sea Grant College Program.



The Caribbean Fishery Management Council is an office affiliated to the Department of Commerce of the Federal Government and it is charged with the preparation of administrative plans and coastal management for the waters that surround Puerto Rico and the US Virgin Islands within the Exclusive Economic Zone. These plans include information about the biology of marine organisms that are important for fishing, data on essential habitats for fish and shellfish, as well as the socio-economic aspects of fisheries.

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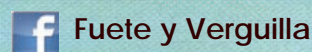
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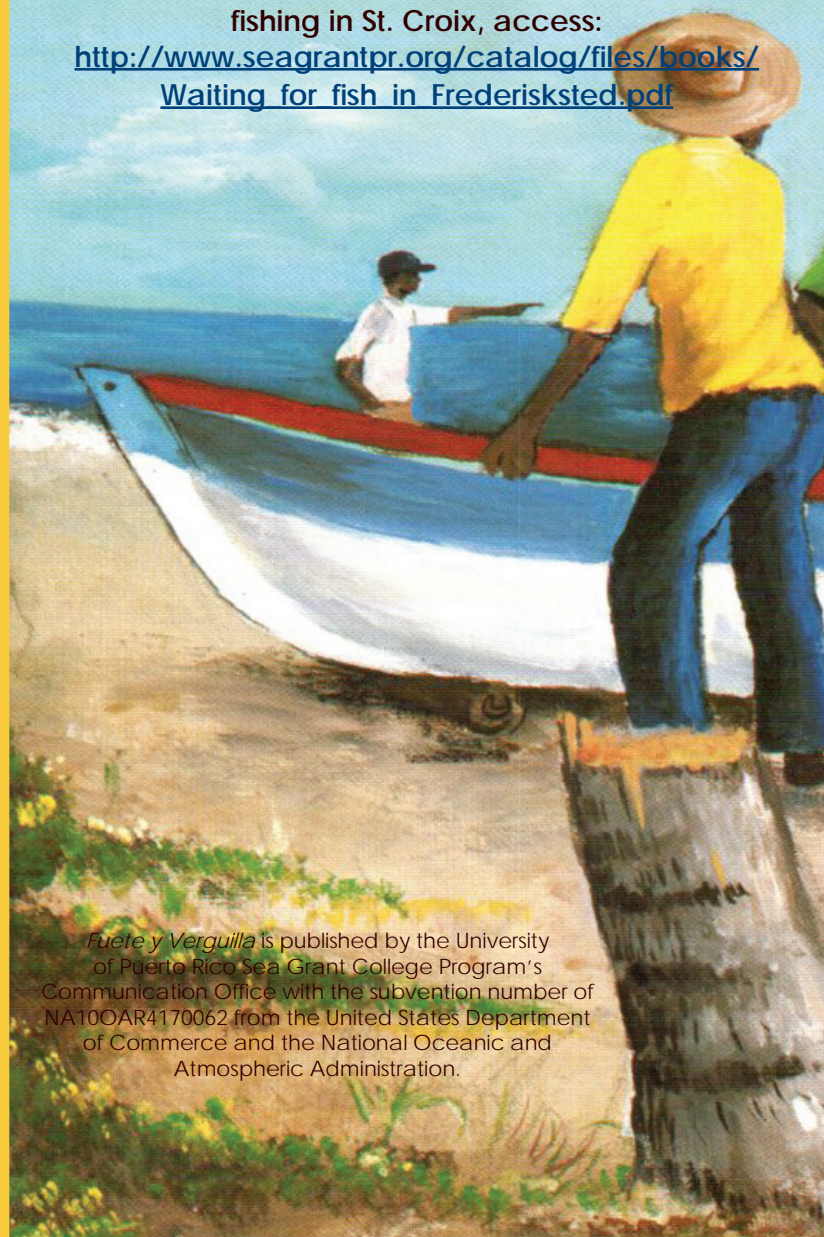
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Sea Grant Website:  
<http://www.seagrantpr.org>

For additional information about fishing in St. Croix, access:  
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