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FROM COAST TO COAST TO COAST



**fête de
la culture** CÉLÉBRER LES ARTS + LA CULTURE
D'UN OCÉAN À L'AUTRE

Smokeroom on the Kyle



By Ted Russell

Born in Coley's Point

June 27, 1904

The Smokeroom on the “Kyle”

Tall are the tales that fishermen tell when summer’s work is done,
Of fish they’ve caught, of birds they’ve shot, of crazy risks they’ve run.
But never did a fisherman tell a tale, so tall by a half a mile,
As Grampa Walcott told one night in the Smokeroom on the Kyle.

With ‘baccy smoke from twenty pipes, the atmosphere was blue.
There was many a “Have another boy” and “Don’t mind if I do.”
When somebody suggested that each in turn should spin,
A yarn about some circumstance he’d personally been in.

Then tales were told of gun barrels bent to shoot around the cliff,
Of men thawed out and brought to life that had been frozen stiff,
Of bark pots carried off by flies, of pathways chopped through fog,
Of woodsman Bill who, barefoot, kicked the knots out of a twelve inch log.

The loud applause grew louder still when Uncle Mickey Shea,
Told of the big potato he grew in Gander Bay.
Too big to fit through the cellar door, it lay at rest nearby,
Until, one rainy night that fall, the pig drowned in its eye.

But meanwhile in a corner, his grey head slightly bowed,
Sat Grampa Walcott, eighty-eight, the oldest of the crowd.
Upon his weather beaten face there beamed a quiet grin,
When someone shouted, “Grampa, ‘tis your turn to chip in.”

“Oh, no boys, leave me out,” said Grampa. “Oh thanks, don’t mind if I do.
Ah, well alright boys, if you insist, I’ll tell you one that’s true.
It’s a story about jigging squids I’m going to relate,
And it happened in Pigeon Inlet in Eighteen eighty-eight.

Me, I was just a bedlamer then, fishin’ with my Dad,
And prospects for the that season, they were looking pretty bad.
Now, the caplin scull was over and that hadn’t been too bright,
And here was August come and gone and nar a squid in sight.

Day after day we searched for squid, ‘til dark from the crack of dawn.
We dug up clams and cock n’ hens ‘til even these were gone.
And still no squids so, in despair, we give it up for good,
Took our gear ashore and went cutting firewood.

Now, one morning, while out in the woods with all the other men,
And wondering if we’d ever see another squid again.
Father broke his axe that day so we were the first ones out,
And as we neared the landwash, we heard the women shout.

“Come hurry boys, the squids are in.” Well, we jumped aboard our boat,
And started out the harbour, the only crew afloat.
But soon our keel began to scrunch like scrapin’ over skids.
“Father,” says I, “we’ve run aground.” “Me son,” says he, “that’s squids.”

Said he, “The jigger, heave it out,” and quick as a flash I did,
And soon as it struck the water, ‘twas grappled by a squid.
I hauled it in and what do you think? As soon as he crossed the rail,
I’ll be darned if there wasn’t a second squid clung on to the first one’s tail.

And another clung to that one and so on in a string.
I tried to shake ‘em loose but Father said “You foolish thing.
You’ve got something was never seen before in Newfoundland.
Drop the jigger, grab the string and haul hand over hand.”

I hauled that string of squids aboard ‘til the boat could hold no more,
And then we hitched it in the risings and rowed for the shore.
Now the men were coming from the woods, they’d heard the women bawl,
But Father said, “Don’t hurry boys, we’ve squid enough for all.”

So Uncle Jimmy, he took the string until he had enough,
And, neighbour-like, he handed it on to Skipper Levi Cuff.
Well, from stage to stage that string was passed throughout the whole night long,
‘Til daylight found it on Eastern Point with Uncle Billy Strong.

Now Uncle Bill, quite thoughtfully, before he went to bed,
Took two half-hitches of that string ‘round the grump on his stagehead.
Next morning Hartley’s Harbour heard the news and up they come,
In a trap skiff with three pair of oars to tow the string down home.

And when Hartley’s Harbour had enough, the following afternoon,
That string went on from place to place until it reached Quirpon.
Now, what happened to it after that, well I don’t exactly know.
But some folks say that it crossed the Straits and ended in Forteau.

Yes, tall are the tales that fishermen tell when summer’s work is done,
Of fish they’ve caught and birds they’ve shot and crazy risks they’ve run.
But never did a fisherman tell a tale, so tall be a half a mile,
As Grampa Walcott told that night in the Smokeroom on the Kyle.