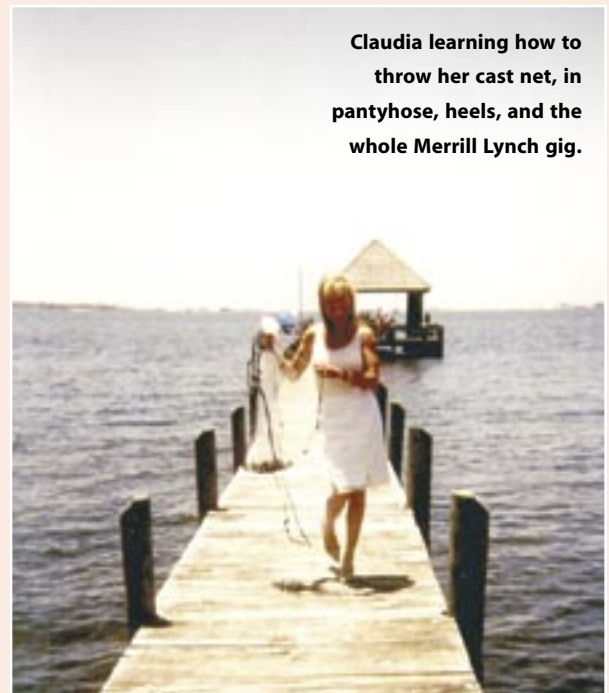


# Reel Women, Fun Loving, Like Fish!

*By Anne Goodwin*

Once upon a time, on the Gulf coast of Florida, a beautiful wife and mother of two sat on her dock watching the fish. She was unwinding after a stressful day as a financial advisor with Merrill Lynch. Mesmerized by the fish, she soon acquired a cast net. Every morning she went out to the dock to throw the net. Once a college shot putter and discus thrower, the motion was familiar. This was a special time of day for her.



Claudia learning how to throw her cast net, in pantyhose, heels, and the whole Merrill Lynch gig.



Claudia's house after Ivan. Later, Dennis floated her 200,000-lb. pool into her neighbor's house.

It wasn't long before Hurricane Ivan slammed into the Gulf and took away her dock. It destroyed her office, her decks and pool, and a good part of her home. She was very sad.

To relieve the grief from her loss, she bought chest waders and waded out to cast her net into the beautiful emerald waters in front of her damaged home. This is where she meditated and where her neighbors often saw her, the beautiful wife and mother of two, an athlete

accomplished in snow skiing, basketball, track and field, a part-time model, an ex-pharmaceutical and grits salesman, a financial wizard with several advanced degrees. They thought something was wrong. But they were wrong.

Everything was beginning to fall into place for the solitary wader. On Mother's Day she went to the bait shop and said, "I want everything I need to start fishing with a rod and reel." Tricked out, she went back to her seawall and immediately caught a 27-inch redfish. She was so excited, she was screaming as if she had won the lottery and she took it to be a sign. She would be a fishing chick. The hurricanes could take away her home but she could "still feed the family," a satisfying sentiment, albeit unnecessary.

Word spread along the coast and soon other women were "feeding their families" too.



Claudia fishing near Ft. Pickens with Captain Wes Rozier.

This lovely sea nymph, actually, drop-dead gorgeous vision from any shore, Claudia Espenscheid, was so excited about her new passion that she emailed all her friends and decided to start an all women's fishing club, and it would be called, **Fishin' Chix**, no experience necessary. The motto: "Reel Women, Fun Loving, Like Fish!"

The 80 members, ages 30-something through 70-something, desperately wanted and needed a diversion to help them deal with the destruction from the hurricanes, first Ivan then Dennis. And so the fashionable fishing club got underway with the first meeting at the Fishhouse Restaurant in Pensacola. It was gourmet. These ladies are no slouches. They wanted to sip wine and eat well while learning from the experts and guides who volunteered to coach them. (Who wouldn't?)

Claudia, who calls herself "the Martha Stewart of fishing, no prison," set the tone for the Fishin' Chix: fun-loving, glamorous, stylish, pink. The women would have instruction, they would fish and they would look good doing it. She started an online store so the club members could find special gear designed for *chix*. She started a newsletter, the Monthly Chum, with stories and a calendar of events. She quit her real job.

Claudia will tell you she is a risk taker, a team player with an athletic spirit, and she needed all of those qualities to pull off her very first fishing tournament, the **Pink Rubber Boots Ladies Fishing Rodeo**, which benefited the Covenant Hospice Children's Programs.

She said it was like planning a wedding in only three months. And it was a huge success, donating over \$5000 to Hospice.

The **Pink Rubber Boots Ladies Fishing Rodeo** was held June 3<sup>rd</sup>, from 6 to 10 a.m. with 75 ladies in designer

Claudia, left, and Sondra Jack (the most accomplished angler in the club) catching an award-winning red snapper on Tim Falzone's boat, *Dataman*, with the NBC crew from NYC.



boots competing for the bounty of donated prizes, aboard 26 boats whose captains volunteered their services and all the provisions for the anglers. Women were “screaming their brains out” for a pinfish. While ten-year-old Katerina Espenscheid manned the merchandise booth, her nine-year-old sister, Isabella, caught the 3rd place ladyfish. Of course being related to the director, she was ineligible for the tournament prize, but was awarded a fish necklace for her catch.

The **Fishin’ Chix** popularity is booming so Claudia can’t find time to fish, cast or wade. She is busy planning for the future. And with her enviable energy and imagination the future looks like serious fun. She is expanding the online store. The next “meet and greet” new members’ orientation will be on a yacht. The next club meeting is a Dock Hop, a family event, along her waterfront with a fishing expert on each newly repaired dock, teaching skills (along with the required music and refreshments). Another tournament is on schedule for the fall which she calls a “picture” tournament. It will be a “catch, photograph and release” rodeo in the evening, in the dark. Time to order a pink water-proof camera to go with the pink rubber boots.

Also, tugging on the cast net, are the requests for “Chapters” of the Fishin’ Chix from around Florida and as far away as Michigan and Colorado. The Chapters will follow the direction of the original Fishin’ Chix club, with by-laws, scheduled meetings, experienced guides and charitable tournaments. The original purpose of the club was to help reduce daily stress, to learn to cope with the aftermath of the hurricanes, to comfort and support each other, to spread a passion for fishing and encourage enthusiasm for new skills and techniques. Will the lovely sea nymph ever find time to



**Claudia and Stephanie Judy, another club member, aboard *The Entertainer* from Pensacola Beach.**

fish again? Will she wade again after her latest misadventure, which she tells with eyes wide as saucers?

One evening when the Espenscheids and their neighbors were fishing from the seawall, Katerina caught a nice redfish. The plan was to release the fish but the line parted above the bobber before she could. Everyone was upset and feeling sorry for the fish as the bobber would disappear then pop up again. Someone suggested Claudia get her chest waders and go after it, “But don’t forget, you can drown in waders,” they warned. She responded with a look of disbelief, “I may be a blonde but...” and headed out into the chest deep waters to free the redfish. After stalking the bobber for a few minutes with a net, she got close enough and lunged for it, miss-stepped and went completely underwater. Her waders filled up and pulled her farther under. She was going to drown after all. A

combination of athletic ability and determination got her to the top but the redfish got away and she still feels bad about that. And, she believes you can drown in waders.

My granddaughter plays dress-up and sashays around saying, “I’ve had a bizarre life.”

Well, my dear, you have to meet the dynamic Claudia Espenscheid. She *invented* bizarre.

There are numerous articles about the Chix online from the Pensacola News Journal. Just “google” Claudia Espenscheid and enjoy a reel fishing trip. You’ll be exhausted, guaranteed. ———)

*If you’d like to cast with these vivacious and fashionable women you can go online and find out more about Fishin’ Chix, becoming a member or starting a charter club at [www.fishinchix.com](http://www.fishinchix.com). Or call toll free: 866-895-CHIX.*