

Oral History Interview with Mike Stiller

December 20, 2007

Location: Aboard the fishing vessel 'Janet E' in Santa Cruz Harbor (SCH)

Stevens: We're here at SCH, on the Janet E. I am talking with Mike Stiller, who is a commercial fisherman residing here in SCH. So, Mike, I wanted to have this interview with you b/c for one thing b/c I'm starting to get to know you pretty well and am comfortable with you and I also know that you've been fishing for many years. And what I'm trying to do is record and preserve what you know about fishing, what you've learned, what you love about it, hate about it. Just all those things, for future generations to understand how fishing has been on this coast for the last however many years. So, I'm going to start with your background. Can you tell me...how long you've been fishing, when you got into it and how?

Stiller: Well, I first got my commercial license in 1972. I was living in San Jose. My neighbor had a boat (I didn't have a boat), I never even thought about fishing. And he had a sport boat he used to take out; back in those days you could fish salmon commercially – use a commercial license - and sell sport fish. You can't do that anymore. So he and I would go out off San Francisco for salmon. I liked it b/c it got me away from what I was doing, kind of a high pressure job I had. It was relaxing, I mean the challenge, and I didn't get sick. And then, uh, I did that for a few years with him, and then in about 1977ish I bought my first boat.

And I moved over here to Aptos, and started fishing directed commercially. By then you couldn't do what we were doing anymore, you had to fish commercially or not. I started fishing part-time at first b/c I had another job and was trying to raise a family. But I had a job where I had free time (could make my own hours), vacations, weekends, I moved days around like a fireman, I wasn't a fireman but you can move your days

I did that for a number of years, I bought this boat (currently my 2nd boat), and I started fishing full-time about the mid 1980s. And then in the 1990s started to taper off the last 4-5 years, I'm kind of semi-retired. I fish now basically salmon, albacore when they come in close, and we have a freshwater albacore market that me and a few other guys fish for. That's about it, basically salmon and am involved in a lot of other issues with fishing that aren't on the water. In any event, that's kind of the way my little career has evolved.

Stevens: right. And so, I take it you're glad your friend got you into fishing?

Stiller: [laughs] sometimes I am, sometimes I'm not.

Stevens: and you just said 'albacore for freshwater market'? What is that?

Stiller: well when you think of albacore fishing, most people think of freezer boats that go way offshore, and get 10-20-30 ton or more depending on the size of the vessels... not the big seiners you see for yellowfin. And there are several boats in this harbor that go way out, up to Oregon and they're gone all the time. And they freeze and sell to canneries. We sell – it's a small market – it couldn't use a lot of boats..we sell 'sushi grade' albacore. It's not frozen, it's bled and maybe 3 days in the boat at most so it's in here and goes to fresh market. People eat it as sashimi or tuna steaks. And again, we get more per pound for it, so I can afford to go out there. I can carry a ton or a little more of fish on the boat, so you can't go very far and can't stay out very long, running around with fuel prices you have today. You got to catch them pretty quickly. If it's done right, you get nice loins out of them

Stevens: Do you think sushi restaurants locally are getting local albacore during season?

Stiller: Some of them, but I think most have distributors, so I don't think so. I make it myself, we do a little bit (eat out).

Stevens: and so, have you fished in other areas besides Monterey and San Francisco areas?

Stiller: pretty much I fish between Pt Sur and San Francisco. I go up to Bodega, if the fish take me up there I go there. I kind of follow the fish in summertime. I don't travel great distances, I don't go stay up in Ft Bragg for any length of time. But I'll go to Bodega, the city, Half Moon, Monterey, Morro Bay occasionally.

Stevens: and in each of those places, there's a port where you can re-provision, or do you have buyers that you work with up/down coast, or you utilize different areas?

Stiller: yeah, that's changed a lot over the years though, especially for salmon. Infrastructure's not what it was 15-20 years ago. There's a lot of buyers, the buyer here for example, they'll get in their car and drive anywhere to buy fish. So yeah, we do, I'll sell to him if he's up there, but I will sell to local buyers as well. There's fewer of them than used to be. Monterey bay right now probably 2-3 buyers at most for salmon. So to answer your question, yes we go in there, use fuel facilities. All these places have ports with fuel docks, and some have gear stores, some harbors like Bodega have showers and laundry and that kind of thing so you take advantage of that.

Stevens: ...What size is this boat?

Stiller: 33 feet by 11.5 feet

Stevens: what's your range?

Stiller: this boat has a tremendous range; it holds 165 gallons of diesel. I just re-powered it 2 years ago with a new electronic John Deere engine that's incredibly efficient, particularly at low RPM like we do with salmon, we spent 8-10 hours trolling. And I can go, I can fish, if I don't have to run to far, I can fish 7-8 days without having to re-fuel.

Stevens: speaking of trolling, can you explain to me the method of trolling from start to finish. I know it's hard when we're recording, you can't really see what we're talking about..

Stiller: trolling is the most inefficient way of catching fish that there is of the commercial ways. You've got trawling, which is dragging, you've got gillnetting, longlineing, dynamite, I don't know. But it's hook and line fishing, and it's the least efficient, but it's the most ecologically sound with bycatch is incredibly low compared to some other methods. It's also the kind of fishery that bycatch, even if it's salmon for example, most of your bycatch are undersized fish, say 80-90% of them returned alive. Sport fisheries not the case, it's the other way around. And if you catch species that are non-marketable, illegal etc., you can return those and they'll live, so from that standpoint it's a good, clean fishery.

A salmon boat is 4 trolling wires, 16 strands stainless steel wire that you run a leader off of every – most of us run – every 18 feet (3 fathoms). There's generally a large 30-50 pound lead on the

bottom. And you take them down as far as you need to, the bottom or wherever the fish are, and you drag them through the water. Depending on what speed your fishing for – salmon you want 2.5-3 knots. Albacore there's no weight involved it's all surface fishing and you're trolling 6-7 knots. That's basically it...it's just a slow way of dragging hooks through the water. By the kind of gear you're using you can target various types of fish.

Silver/Coho salmon are protected, illegal to catch them – sport or commercial-, no market for them even if you could catch, but a lot of times you'll get them mixed in with kings (Chinook). They way to avoid them is to avoid where they are, which is near the surface with spoons. So if you start catching the, you run your gear lower and stay out of them. There's no point in catching them because you can't keep them so you try to avoid. You can't do that with a net – you catch what's there.

Does that answer your question?

Stevens: yeah, well I'm getting the picture. And I'm sitting here looking back there at the gurdies, and can imagine the line going out and the weight holding the line, and these leaders. Is the leader same as a gangion?

Stiller: the gangion would be a leader off of a long line. Actually I missed that part. The poles on these boats...poles go out, there's a tagline attached to the poles, usually on a spring and acts as a shock absorber. The wire goes thru an insulator or something that will hold it as it slides thru the tagline. And that's the way you control it. You stop at a certain level using the brass stops on the line that mark every 3 fathoms. You can use that stop on the line, generally your 50-pound heavy leads are closest to the boat. The floats behind a boat, those are generally 35 pound leads so they don't tangle. [shows with hands how angles are so they won't tangle]. Although they do tangle, but it prevents a lot of tangle. And that is the way you set the gear up, so you troll 2 lines, 2 wires, say 50-60 feet behind the boat. And you have two that are right next to boat. Now there's a new system, where they have these bow poles, that's something that boats have, I don't. [looks for a boat that does]

The poles stick out off the main poles and shoot forward, and those are generally real heavy leads and they run them really shallow. You see Victor's old boat has them.

Stevens: and so, when do you.. how do you find the fish? How do you know what depth? At what point do you set the gear? If the fish are running, and there's current, what are all things you go though to find and then get the boat set to actually put gear in the water?

Stiller: well if you don't know where they are – if someone hasn't been out catching them yet -, you're just out looking around. The first thing you're looking for is water color.. denotes a cloudy or murky greenish water generally indicates an upwelling somewhere, bringing nutrients up that generally indicates baitfish in the area. You have a fish finder that shows you where bait are (not exact fish, at least mine doesn't), and you can see that's where the fish hang out. Salmon are voracious fish, they grow to be 40-50 pounds in 4-5 years you know, they're never too far away from the dinner table. They're always hungry. So [water color] is your first indicator. Sometimes also can look for water temp – salmon prefer 52-55 range. If you're in 57-58 degree water, that doesn't mean there aren't any fish there but it's not optimum. Same with 49 water, that's not optimum either so you try to find the perfect conditions. They may not be around, you may have to go somewhere else or fish where it's not ideal.

Another indication is just general local knowledge: you know where the fish generally are. You can go out here to the 'hole' and you know if you drag across here a few times or across the canyon, and you'd start there, and then go on based on how you're doing. If you're catching, you stay, if not, you move on.

Stevens: so you know from all the years you've been fishing...

Stiller: yes, every year, traditionally we know where's there been good fishing. A good example is Monterey Bay. We had great salmon fishing here in the 1990s, they had nothing up north – there were boats down here from Eureka, etc all the time. But it hasn't been that way for last 5 years, it's been just the opposite. Fish have been moving up the coast, it's a northern shift. Fishing hasn't been that good, fishing has been from Pt Reyes on up. You know what traditional areas are, but you have to modify that with what's going on in the moment too.

Stevens: okay...and so, you mentioned this local knowledge and experience over time. Do you keep track of that by writing down or just remember each year? How do you – like any business – to keep a record of things?

Stiller: well I keep a log, it's not extensive. I keep it for a couple reasons: number 1 for insurance purposes, secondly, I keep my hours and fuel consumption. I always put down what I did that day – where I was fishing, how many I caught, if I had sea lion predation, the weather, anything that stands out I'll record that. I just get one of those daily planning things at Staples and every year start a new one. So I can go back, not that there's that much value in it, but I can go back to last June and see where I was. Sometimes that's helpful, especially with albacore, but not something I rely on as number one source. But I do keep it.

Stevens: yeah it seems like there's so much out there in the ocean environment that every time you go out, if you're observing water temp, currents, all these things that it would be a lot of observations that you would probably get to a point where you would know it instinctively. But it's interesting to me, from a scientific investigation aspect, b/c you guys are out there so often, and you're seeing, having consistent observations of how ocean's changing over time, which leads me to my next question...you've been fishing since the early 1970s, have there been any key conditions or things you're seen out there that have changed of the last 30 odd years?

Stiller: you mean from a natural point of view?

Stevens: yes, like are the fish different, harder to find, more whales?

Stiller: yeah, there's a lot of changes, as far as fishing goes, we're catching a lot more salmon these days than we did in the past. Now the last couple years hasn't been that hot, but a 100 fish day for some boats not unusual back in early 2000s and 1990s. back in the 80s, a guy who's worked all day for 30 salmon used to be the top deal. You could live on that though, b/c the price was good, almost as good as we're getting today. But the cost of doing business was almost a 1/3 of today. With rockcod, they were a lot more plentiful than they have been, and that's the reasons for these closures – and you could do a whole different tape on my feelings of these closures – but nonetheless there aren't as many rockcod as there once was. As far as mammals go, the sea lions are a lot more prevalent, and they do cause us some major problems at certain times of the season. But also I can remember the first few years I fished out there, you rarely saw a whale,

any kind of whale. I never did. Now over the last 10 years, you see a lot of humpbacks, lot of gray whales. Humpbacks, particularly when krill is in here, it is unbelievable. You're actually hitting them, snag them in the gear. I've seen blue whales, the most fabulous creatures. I don't know what that indicates, in terms of their comeback. I know one thing, we very rarely saw them before.

Stevens: and what about the weather? Or water temperature, that kind of oceanographic stuff?
Stiller: yeah that changes all the time, but it's pretty constant. El Nino's come in, La Nina's and there are pretty basic changes in water temp and fish species. During an el Niño you'll catch a lot of fish out here we would consider trash fish that southern California would be common. We'll catch opah, sometimes mackerel – well they come through here quite a bit...Bonita, species like that are warm water fish that will follow currents thru here. In the fall, that's when we go out for albacore. That's when the warm current comes in, if it comes in close enough for guys like me we'll go. I would say that that hasn't changed much in a sense. The weather's pretty much the same – norwesterlies in the spring, southerlies in the summer, etc.

Stevens: when you talk to oceanographers, there's this decadal oscillation where they talk about how in the 70-80s it was more of a cold water regime, and it's started to shift into warm water?

Stiller: that's very possible, but I don't know...you're fishing in various currents...you'll get a northwesterly current come in May and blow like hell and the water temp will be down. You get a southerly for 3 or 4 days and it's up. I don't know if that's a trend or just currents. And global warming, if all these ice caps are melting and there's more fresh water in the mix, does that have something to do with it? I don't know. But I haven't really noticed anything permanent changes, it comes and goes. To me it's very cyclical.

Stevens: well now here's a question that could open up some things...how have you seen the fishing industry change over time? I know from previous discussions with you, there have been a lot of negative things, but what's happened both negative and positive? What are key things you've seen?

Stiller: well, regulations is the key thing...I'm trying to think back when I first started...we have so many regulations now, and also we're regulated by so many different people. We used to have to worry about [California Department of] Fish and Game, and of course the NOAA, but now you have the Sanctuary in here, and they're not managing fishing at this point, but they do try to manage the ecosystem and that affects this harbor, for example, dredging and all kinds of things that may not affect the day-to-day fishing operations but affects it overall. The regulations have...and again you're asking a guy who's going to give you self-serving answers...a lot of this stuff is done for no particular reason. I don't see any benefit to anything, it just makes somebody feel good. You can talk to a bunch of fishermen and they'll tell you one thing, and it's all anecdotal too, then you talk to somebody with NOAA or the Council or Sanctuary or Aquarium, and they've got supposed scientific data backing them up.

Well, our salmon seasons have been badly restricted over the last years, mainly b/c of something that has nothing to do with us down here and that is the Klamath River. We keep talking about fixing that river, every time we have a crisis, which is pretty much every 3-4 years, every time there's not enough water it's a crisis. When there isn't, the whole damn system collapses. That's something that has to be fixed. We talk about it. We're trying to get those damns out of there.

And it's talk, it's not even a snail's pace, they seem to be moving in that direction. I'm 66 years old, I can't wait for 20 years. But those issues – water- I mean look at in 35 years, how many more people live in these metropolitan areas. San Jose for example, Silicon Valley, or the city, etc. bodega bay development...every place where there's major fishing (recreational or commercial) there's a higher concentration of people. When you have that you'll have people that are want to go out there and, it just stresses the resources.

So that's why they have pens in here now, the salmon/trout project. That's not commercial, just enhancement so guys can go out and catch some fish...which is fine. I'm involved in that stuff with PCFFA and the Salmon Council, it's frustrating, particularly when you've been doing it a long time. You keep going to meetings just to go, so that's the number one thing, the amount of regulation that we have...we do need regulation, don't get me wrong. We don't want to be out there catching the last fish, but just to regulate somebody just for the hell of it, which is the case in my view, isn't right either. It cost a lot of guys their living – there's a lot fewer guys fishing. Some might say that's a good thing, but a lot of guys can't make a living anymore. In fact, it's become supplemental income – they got to have another job b/c they don't get enough time on the water to make a living. That's my answer to that one.

Stevens: and you've been not only a fisherman, but you've been involved – like you said- in these meetings, and right now you're the president of SCCFMA. How did you come into those roles?

Stiller: I didn't go to a meeting one time and they elected me. [laughs] ...in my other life I was in marketing, it was kind of a use of data, and I enjoyed that. So when I started to get in full time in fishing, the salmon council came into existence, and it's a marketing tool. Actually it's a commodity group in the CA Department of Agriculture, so we respond to CDFG and all that, but we're like the raisin board. And there's a \$0.02/lb tax that everybody has to pay, and we fund ourselves with that. It's not a lot of money but we do try to keep – we have director and board – which I'm on, and what we try to do is keep our product out in front of the people. We developed a niche market, we have regained our market I should say, after we lost a lot of biz in 1990s b/c of various things. We're also getting more involved with GSI (genetic stock identification) – DNA testing, and we administered the disaster relief program. So it's expanding, adding to the marketing aspect...you can only do so much marketing at \$2 cents/pound.

I enjoy that – it's fun for me – b/c you're not going to develop strong markets unless people demand your fish. I don't care how good you say they are or how much fun they are to catch, unless, no one's going to buy the next fish until they eat the one you sold. To me, that's a challenge that's interesting. So I got involved in that and the local association. At one point the guy that was president quit under – he just finally had enough back in the 90s – and I was the VP, I took over and have been doing it ever since. Not too time consuming, I enjoy it (to a point). There's nobody clamoring to take my job [laughs]. But again, it's something that I feel comfortable doing, and I'll do it as long as I feel that way about it. I've been at it for about 10 years. I'm also on board of directors of PCFFA, and we are – this organization in Santa Cruz (SCCFMA) along with ones up down coast, are part of that federation so everybody has a board seat and generally it's the president but it can be somebody else. In fact I'm trying to get somebody else in on that right now.

It just kind of evolves. But we're very thin in this industry in leadership. Very thin. You might have someone good at their job, but what happens when they quit, die? Who's going to take his place? Our infrastructure is weak – people wise and facility wise.

Stevens: why do you think that is? Apart from the obvious...

Stiller: listen, people love to do this. It's a lifestyle. People could make a lot more money doing other things but they do it b/c they love it. If you don't like this... you could make a lot of money doing this, I don't want to sound like we don't – but pretty much it's all you do. You have no social life. It's a lifestyle, and unless you're willing to do that, to stay out there and fish 12-14 hours a day, live in these ports, get blown into Bodega Bay and live on your boat for a week, then you're not going to be able to make a living. People do it because they like it, that's the only reason I do it these days. No matter what's going on in here [harbor, federation, whatever], once you turn this thing out and get out the jaws here, you're on your own, you do what you want, go left, right, go home, stay out there. You can do what you want. It's a great feeling of independence, even though you got a lot of restrictions.

I remember I'd get up there some mornings at Ano Nuevo, anchored up there for a couple days, turn on the radio and listen to the traffic report, all these people backed up for miles on the Bay bridge, and you're sitting there and there's a dolphin here and, it's great.

So I mean there's certain aspects to that lifestyle – some people don't like that – but you just can't really tell somebody unless they get out there and experience it. And when they do experience it...nobody around here that I know – no matter how much or little they fish – they don't do it because they have to, they do it because they want to.

In other jobs, people say 'I wish I don't have to do this, when can I retire, quit'. Around here some people are pissed off b/c they can't fish, not b/c they have to fish.

Stevens: there's a couple young guys, but generally it's an older fleet. So obviously there's more challenges to getting in now than maybe there were before?

Stiller: it's easy to get in to this business, there's some younger guys, I don't know them very well. Up in eureka and places like that. Aaron Newman's a fairly young guy, he's the president up there. We've got a couple young guys in harbor that bought boats. One is really serious, the other pretty serious. One guy 21-22, the other 28-29, and they both fish out of their boats, and they can both crew on other boats, they've had to last couple years. Salmon fishermen just couldn't fish.

That's okay when you're 21 or 25 and single and not a lot of financial responsibilities. But at some point they get married or have a kid, or buy a house, retirement, some kind of investment, some kind of normalcy. And when you start thinking about those things, that makes this business not as attractive. If you knew from year to year – in your job you know what you can live on – this industry you don't know that b/c from one year to the next, you don't know if the fish are going to be there where you want them to be, what the price is going to be, or if the government will even let you fish for them. All things being equal, when it comes all together, it's great. But it doesn't come together that often.

I think I've told a couple these young guys I said, 'give it a try, get it out of your system, maybe you'll like it and get a bigger boat to go offshore, or you put a for sale sign on it and go to college'. I know a couple guys in moss landing too that, they would be miserable if they couldn't fish. It's in their blood. Kind of like old Victor [Ghio] in that old boat. He fished until he was 89

or so. Didn't catch much those last years, but he was out there all the time. Had he not been able to go fishing, he wouldn't have made it a month. It's the kind of business, you've got to be alert, a mechanic, weatherman, navigator. I don't know if you're had an opportunity to talk to the older guys that are left – I mean I'm 66 and I'm a young guy. The older guys are alert as hell, b/c that's what they've done.

I don't know how many times Victor [Ghio] set that thing on fire out there [laughs], but it's a very self-reliant type of business. When you do it, you feel good about it. In a way though it is a dying business, unless you have younger people coming into it, at some point, it just isn't worth it. There will always be commercial fishing. They can talk about fish farming all they want – it's already here- but there's some species you just can't do it with profitably. I'm not real optimistic about this, but I'm not pessimistic about it either. It is what it is. There will always be people wanting to do it.

Stevens: it's interesting to think if this is a dying business, you might think there isn't as much demand for the product, but yet there is. People are still eating a lot of seafood, and people here are locally oriented. It's so strange to me that there isn't more of a fish market down here and more people 'I'm going to the harbor for my fish', there seems to be a disconnect.

Stiller: yeah well, when they first built that building (1980s), the first fish buyer was Alioti, I don't know if it was the same ones as Monterey but it was a family. In the back part there was a fish market – the part that face towards the steps to the restaurant. It was nice, but they couldn't make a go of the whole thing and they shut it down. You'd think it would be great, but it wouldn't be...here we are on a Thursday morning, do you see anybody down here looking for fish? No. you've got to have walking traffic. how much of the fish is local? Here or on the wharf? And, if you're in Safeway or Costco, they have fabulous seafood departments, who's going to say 'no I'm not going to buy my fish here, I'm going to go down to the harbor and hope to hell they've got what I want'...people won't do that. Even on Sundays, you come down here with your family, you want to walk around, you don't want to carry a bag of fish around...you know, it sounds good, but when you start picking it apart, just not good idea. There was an idea kicked around of guys sell their fish off the boat on the weekends, meet all health requirement, etc. Half Moon Bay it works well, but they have tremendous walk-in traffic. And it's an Asian trade – there's quite an Asian population – they're the majority of buyers. They like to do that – that's part of their culture. You've got to have a lot of people to do that – and up there they do. Here it isn't...a lot of people don't even know how to get here from San Jose.

Stevens: so do you think there's been a shift in public awareness, say from the early 1980s to now?

Stiller: I would say in the exposure I've had of people around, the average citizen, has been very positive. I've never had, I don't notice a lot of negative stuff about fishing in general. People come down here on the docks, all the activities on R,S, and T docks, there's guys working on our boats, boats are moving, unloading fish, working on gear. People come down these docks with their families and just look. They'll sit up there in that restaurant and watch people unload the boats. We're part of the ambiance. If the fishing gets bad, maybe they can just hire us to drive our boats up and down the channel [laughs]. The city of SC is sometimes, kind of anti-business I think but as far as this harbor goes...the management in terms of Commissioners, they've always been very supportive. We have an excellent relationship with all these people. So no, I don't see negativity here, I really don't. there's a certain fascination about commercial fishing. It is

dangerous to a certain degree, not as dangerous as AK, but we've lost a few guys this year already. Lost a boat here and up there, plus two fishermen. We're kind of the last independent, wild business. Some people like that, like to see how it's done. They see all this gear on the boats, they ask 'what the hell is all that stuff for?'. I had an opportunity to get out on that boat, Science under Sail program, it was a great time. It was in June when salmon was closed, and a question came up about management, and I told them that's why I'm out here with you guys b/c I can't fish.

Whether you agree with it or not, when you reach a certain point, you can fish. I really enjoyed it, was an excellent couple hours, I got a lot of great questions from these kids, about the Klamath, the bay, that type of thing. Other than a couple of individuals, I really can't say that we have much negativity here.

I know a kid here who currently does the farmers markets, Hans, they can't get it fast enough. Stevens: yeah he's doing really well it seems.

Stiller: and our little niche market, we're getting a decent price for our fish. There is no base price, but what it's been the last couple years, we can make a living, if they'd just let us go fishing. So, it's not all negative, it really isn't. if you're looking at it from a local perspective, it's pretty positive actually. For salmon, and crab.

Stevens: and salmon has historically been the fishery here?

Stiller: yes, salmon and rockcod. But rockfish will never come back as a fishery, even though there's a lot of fish out there now (you can seem them on the fish finder). If you could hook and line for them, I don't want to knock anybody's gear, but you drag around for 6 hours... But that's the most economical way to feed the world, so you can't knock it. But nonetheless if you could come up with a system and regulate with a good quota, hook and line which is easy to control. I think it could sustain a hook and line fishery. It'd be more expensive, but I think a lot of people are willing to pay that.

Stevens: I think you're right, especially around here. Well I don't want to keep you too much longer. But my last question is: what's your best fishing story?

Stiller: [laughs] ah, you should have mailed me that question...

Stevens: well you can think about it and get back to me...just wondering what's the craziest, scariest, etc.?

Stiller: well, some of these guys have crazy stories about what they've pulled up out of the ocean, I've never seen odd stuff....one time I caught a sea cucumber, don't know how the hell that got on there. No Volkswagen car or something....on man. Can I get back to you on that one? Most the stuff that's happened to me, I've had some hairy experiences, everybody has – if you go out there enough- I broke some ribs once. Again that's not necessarily unusual either. One night we out fishing albacore about 50 miles out, and we decided to shut down for the night and drift, and it was a rare night, clear as a bell, stars all over the place, reminded me of Arizona. And it was flat calm, I mean flat calm. It was so quiet, I've never heard it so quiet, not even a ripple. And it was dark, maybe 9-10 pm, all of a sudden I hear this whale, 'sound', and you can smell them. They get fish breath, that guy – I got a flashlight out and was looking around for him – he was out there about 100 yards or so. And that guy stayed next to that boat all night

long. He never moved, he was there in the morning when I got up. It was funny as hell. I got up a couple times in the night, there he was. I'll never forget that night, that's the only time I've been out there in all the year fishing...it was just unbelievably calm, and there was not a sound, no fog, no wind, no nothing.

Stevens: and you were by yourself?

Stiller: no, there was about 4 of us boats. What you try to do when you drift like that at night, you try to stay at least 1 mile apart b/c boats drift at different speeds. I don't fish with anybody on the boat, fish by myself.

Stevens: well that sounds like one of the most memorable experiences you've had out there.

Stiller: like I say, it's something you can't really describe to people. You can tell them about it, but until you've actually done it...another whale story. There were a bunch of us fishing out at 'three trees', well where it used to be. As you go up the coast, it's probably right off of 4-mile beach, there were 3 trees on the land side of Hwy 1 and it was kind of a landmark. Like the 'hole' or the 'slide' down there. Anyway, they cut them down – they were pine trees. Anyway we were fishing up there, and there were krill all over and whales everywhere. We were coming up behind them, and this blue whale and a couple humpbacks, you could see them doing that circle routine and come up under them, you see bait going everywhere. First thing I get the wire cutters out...they're not going to get attached to you but they could and if they do you don't want to be on the other end. This blue whale's up there, and he turns around – he's up in front of me – and Larry was out on my port side. And that thing turns around and comes back between us. And he or she was about – the water was real clear – down 10 feet, and you could see it. And it was aqua blue color and the thing just kept going and going. The biggest thing I've ever seen in my life.

Stevens: wow. That's got to be amazing to see. You're one of so few people who ever gets to see such a thing.

Stiller: well it's like anything. We see dolphins, porpoises, and they'll perform. I don't know if you've ever seen them out there – they're fun to watch. Those are the kind of things that I like to remember. I've had good fishing days and bad fishing days. But those are the kind of things that pop into my mind.