

Oral History

- 1. What was your first job in fishing/fish processing/service?**
 - a. What made you get into it? (family business, choice, necessity...)**
 - b. How many years have you been in the industry and how have your jobs changed over the years?**

My dad has been a fisherman and had our family business for my whole life, so I started working for my dad as a young kid. I started out hanging out with him at our gear shed and around the boat, just playing around and helping whenever I wanted. I think I started going fishing when I was 8 or 9. At first I slept a lot, and worked however much I wanted. But the older I got the more I wanted to work and be treated like one of the crew. Eventually, I was working for a full share and being treated like everybody else.

I probably started working for my dad because that's what he was doing, and that's what my older brother was doing, and a lot of the time it was pretty fun. Then, of course, as I got older, I realized that there was no other way to make such good money. During high school, I worked during the summer and winter break, and I made more money than I knew what to do with. So I just saved it for college and the future.

When I was working for the family business through high school and college, I definitely didn't think that fishing would be my career. As a very young child, I wanted to be a veterinarian, and then later I wanted to be a counselor or teacher. I thought I would probably live in a big city, far away from where I grew up. After college, I lived in Portland, OR for a few years, and I tried going back to school a couple times, but I was kind of through with school. I was working as a landscaper, and then also fishing back in Newport seasonally. During this time, in my late 20's, I realized that I loved fishing, and going back to my roots was going to be comfortable and also fulfilling.

I have worked for my Dad for basically my whole life. Performed the same function as any other deckhand for the majority of that time. I prepared the traps, ropes, buoys and equipment during the off seasons, and during the fishing season I worked on deck. It was like this until about 5 years ago, when my dad bought his latest boat, the Timmy Boy. This time, it was more like a partnership because I was actually committed to staying in Newport and learning to drive the boat and help with the business. So for these last few years, I have learned everything he had to teach, and now I drive the boat about half the time. My dad is still very involved, so he drives the boat basically whenever he wants, and when he goes out, me or somebody else on the crew takes a trip off.

- 2. Which fisheries have you worked in?**
 - a. Best ones for you?**
 - b. Worse ones for you?**

I have pot fished for Dungeness Crab, long-lined pots for Black-Cod, Long-lined hooks for halibut, and shrimped. The great majority of my experience however, and all of my skipper experience, is in Crab and Black-Cod. Those are the only two fisheries our business has done for the last 3 years.

I like them both for different reasons. Crabbing is fun because it is more competitive and there a lots of boats around. You are usually working close to shore, so the coastal beauty is astounding. Black-cod is nice because it is usually quite peaceful--40 miles offshore and not another boat in site. The weather is

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also very, very different in the winter (crab) and summer (black-cod). The winter is sometimes still and perfect, but it also comes with storms, some unpredictability and often difficult judgement calls. The most dangerous part of this job is crossing the bar when the swell is high, and the large swells are only a factor during winter months. I don't like dealing that with that at all.

3. What changes have you seen in the ocean, coast and/or fishing over time?

I guess I have been doing this for about 25 years now, and the most changes I have seen have been in the rules. The ocean doesn't seem any different to me, though it would change if there were wave energy or offshore wind. The stocks of the species that I have fished for have fluctuated over time, but for the most part been very healthy, as far as I can tell. It is a little hard not to worry about the ocean now though, because of global warming and ocean acidification. There may be a lot of adapting taking place as the ocean changes.

Rules-wise, the fisheries are being managed more and more closely every year. From when my dad started and everything was wide-open, catch as much as you can, to now, where we are told how many pots to fish, when and where to fish, how much to catch and everything else. I understand it though. We all want a sustainable fishery. We all want a future for this industry, and this is the best way to keep that. Some of the management, such as "rationalizing" the fisheries (creating allotments of fish to be bought or traded and then caught at one's convenience) have also made the fisheries more safe.

4. What role has your wife/husband played in your fishing-related business and how has this changed over time?

My partner has always been very supportive of my life's work, but has remained relatively uninvolved. She has pursued a master's degree and her own career. I have always been an employee of my parents' business, so I don't actually have to do very much of the administrative tasks, but if it were my business, I don't believe she would want to be too involved.

5. What role has your kid(s) played in your fishing-related business and how has this changed over time? (2000, 2010, and present)

No kids yet, but were expecting in October!

6. What does fishing mean to you?

It has changed over the years. Mostly fishing has been what connected me to this earth. It is a job that has always been here for me, has always grounded me. The adventure of leaving port on a fishing trip is like no other feeling. It is such a distinct mission--go out there and get as much as you can and come back safe. And coming home is so glorious--every single time. There is something about working on the ocean that makes me feel larger than just the hustle and bustle of life. More in touch with my primal self. When I'm working hard at sea, nothing on land matters, and that it pretty liberating.

a. What was the high and low of your career?

When I was a freshman in college, our family suffered a tragedy. One of my fathers' two boats was setting crab pots on the first day of the season and a storm came up. The boat capsized a few miles

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west of Yaquina Head (near Newport), and all 4 men on board drown. My brother was on the boat. My brother meant the world to me and I have never really recovered emotionally from his loss.

I can't really explain why, but I kept on fishing. Since then however, one of the same things that makes fishing a great adventure--the wildness and unpredictability of the ocean, can also be huge source of discomfort to me. Deep down, I am scared of the ocean and what it can do. This fear can be distracting.

My mom, Michele Longo Eder, wrote a memoir about being a fisherman's wife and it also tells the story of that tragedy. It's called "Salt in our Blood."

b. What brings you the most joy and the most grief in this industry?

Aside from the things I personally love about fishing. It has been very rewarding to spend so much time with my father. As a child, he was working so much, we didn't get to spend very much time with him. He was fishing all the time, and often the boat was working out of California or Astoria, so we wouldn't see him for months. Because I became a fisherman also, and now spend a ton of time working with him, he has had a chance to make up for that absence, and then some. We spend more time together than most father-sons. I truly respect my dad as a fisherman and a person. He is very inspirational in many ways. Having a hands on family business together means that he has been able to pass on not just all his fishing knowledge, but also his life wisdom. That has been very healthy for him also. I think all parents want a chance to pass things on.

c. What are your greatest hopes for fishing?

For fishing in general, I just hope there is always an industry that involves people going to sea and bringing home wild sea-food. As time goes on there will probably be fewer and fewer things that connect humans to their hunter-gatherer roots. Commercial fishing gives those who participate a great sense of connectedness. And even those who purchase wild seafood probably feel this. As aquaculture becomes more developed, the sea chemistry changes, and the ocean is used for a greater variety of purposes, it is hard to say what the future of commercial fishing will be. But right now it is so diverse and full of amazing sources of healthy protein, I can't see that changing overnight.

My personal hopes for fishing are a little foggier. I am going to be a father in a couple months, and I think I want to be home a little more than my dad was. I am planning on reducing my sea time so I won't miss all the birthdays, first steps, and camping trips. I want to keep fishing in some capacity, but my family and I are trying to work out what this will look like. It is hard to find a compromise in a business that often feels all or nothing.

I have been considering buying a smaller fishing boat (the Timmy Boy is 60 ft) and fishing fewer days and shorter trips. I feel that this might be more conducive to the type of family life I want. As I look into starting my own fishing business, however, it is very intimidating. The stressors are great and the profit margin is small. I am also used to working on a large boat, and a small boat might not feel as safe to me.

For Fishermen/Wives (from Q5 above)

5. What role has your kid(s) played in your fishing-related business and how has this changed over time? (2000, 2010, and present)

[Repeated from above] No kids yet, but were expecting in October!

5a. Have you found yourself encouraging or discouraging your kid(s) to stay in the fishing-related business? Why? What are the benefits or costs of them staying in the industry?

For my son, I guess I am open to him becoming a fisherman if he wants to. But watching my parents lose their son (my brother) to the ocean, I don't know if I could cope with that. So, as far as the dangers of the job go, I'm not sure how well I would deal with it.

5b. Thinking about young adults in general,

1. What attracts these folks to the industry and how has this changed over the years?

I think people have been attracted to all different kinds of fishing for the same reasons across time. To make money, and do something adventurous. Fishing is always adventurous (if you make it past the gear work and out to sea), but you don't always make a lot of money. Sometimes you make nothing. I have been blessed to be involved in a very successful fishing business that is consistently profitable, but there are many different kinds of fishing businesses out there, and many of them struggle to get by.

2. Are there obstacles or barriers for young people to get into the industry?

A young person has a good chance of getting into the industry if they are healthy and motivated. You often cannot just jump on a good boat and go fishing unless you are very well connected. Usually, if you are new to the industry you have to inch your way into a good job. First, get experience on a small boat, at a fish-plant, or as an unloader to develop a resume and get your foot in the door. Getting a job on a boat isn't like other jobs where you find a posting online (though you can sometimes). Usually, you have to walk around on the docks day after day and inquire if anybody needs help. Often, a boat will hire somebody on a trial bases, where they are payed a daily wage, or work for cheap, to see if it might work out.

Once you become a deckhand, you will have to save a lot of money to be able to buy your own boat or business. You will have to start with fisheries that require very little initial investment, like Salmon, or tuna. Then save up more money for a crab permit or other kinds of quota if you want to change fisheries. With enough experience or ambition, you can also become a skipper on somebody else's boat. This requires developing a strong reputation and relationships.

a. If yes, what are the 3 biggest barriers?

The biggest barrier to being a fisherman is sea-sickness. Many people get sick consistently on the ocean and they will not want to continue. The other main barrier is not wanting to work that hard. Fishing can

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be so incredibly grueling it is unbelievable. A barrier for owning your own boat would be the buy in cost and the know-how required. You have to get a lot of help along the way.

b. Has this changed over the years?

It hasn't changed too much over the years, except for the fisheries that used to be open to anybody but now require hundreds of thousands of dollars for the permits.

5c. There are data that indicate that the average age of commercial fishermen is in the 50s. In your opinion, has this always been the case, or is the fleet "graying?"

I think people are working until they are older than ever before because our life-spans are getting longer, and retirement is so expensive. But, I am not concerned about a "graying of the fleet." I see young people joining every aspect of the commercial fishing industry and joining every fishery consistently. As long as there is money to be made, there will be some young people ambitious enough to go after it. As a young person in the business right now, I have many friends who are fisherman and who love it. I know twenty and thirty-somethings who have their own boat, who skipper large boats, who work on deck, who go to Alaska etc. etc. Many are locals who grew up around it, and many of those are also kids who came from fishing families. However, there are also young people who get their start by salmon fishing in the summer in Alaska who might travel all the way from Chicago or wherever else to give it a try. Then they find something truly unique and they connect to it and never leave.

5d. What would it be like for you if your family fishing business (OR THE ONE YOU WORK FOR) were sold?

If my family business were sold, then our employees would either stay on the boat but have different bosses, or have to look for other work. I think they would be fine. There seems to be a healthy amount of jobs available around Newport. Our boat is just one of many, so I don't think it would have a dramatic effect on the community.

5d3. What is the "tipping point"? In other words, what would happen in (PLACE) if most (or all) of the fishing family businesses were sold?

If Newport lost its fishing businesses, I think it would have a pretty detrimental effect. The fishing industry and the tourist industries are tied as the largest employers. The tourist industry is also fueled by the fishing industry because many of the tourists come here to see the boats and fish plants and to buy and eat fresh seafood. Our working waterfront is our biggest draw.

For Fishing Kids/Young Adults

**5c. What are your key skills and abilities that help you do your tasks in the fishing related business?
5c1. Are these skills transferable to other industries? If so, which ones?**

Being a fisherman is great because it involves such a huge variety of jobs and projects. Maintaining a fishing boat involves carpentry, welding, engineering, electrical work, computers, plumbing and much

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more. There is no end to the types of problems that have to be solved. Working on the ocean requires patience, resolve and teamwork. All of these skills are transferrable to other industries.

5d. Please talk with me a little bit about the kinds of places you want to live and work?

I'm really not sure what I want for the future. I don't know if I will be fishing forever or what else I would do. I have considered being a teacher, but I don't know if I would have the patience. I would like to volunteer more with the community.

I am interested in the possibility of living somewhere else, but it would be hard to move. I don't really want to start over making friends, but mostly, I don't want to leave my parents. It is so nice living near them, and with our son coming, they will be the happiest people in the world living so close to their grandchild :)