

Narrator: Many people acquire an interest in fishing sometime during their lives. Abraham Apilado, a commercial fisherman on the Island of Kauai, was born to fish.

Abraham Apilado: I was pretty much born on the water. My dad was a commercial fisherman, so he's the one that kind of planted the seed, and I took it from there. My dad was mostly a bottom fisherman, primarily onaga, opaka, sea bass. My dad, unfortunately, he passed away when I was 11 years old. So he was the only mentor. Everything else was taught by myself. You know, whatever learned is whatever I could retain from my first ten years of life, and then figure out the rest by myself, yeah. I went away for college for four years and I came back. I worked a few jobs. I worked at Captain Andy's sailing, and then I also worked down at PMRF. The 9:00 to 5:00 job wasn't for me, you know, to put it in a nice way. So I was real fortunate to get an opportunity to run a boat, and I've been doing it now full time for six years now. One of my uncles let me run his boat, and started -- from there, I started just running it, and then I eventually worked my way to set up like a loan, basically, through him, and I'm paying off the boat, to make it my own, yeah. I like the challenge. I like the fact that it's tough. I don't know, I guess it just reminds me of being with my dad, I guess, you know. It brings back old memories, and stuff.

Narrator: For Abraham, where he goes and the type of fishing he does depends on seasons and the weather.

AA: May, June, July, possibly even August, I'd be trolling and then the second half of the year would be strictly bottom fishing mostly. I'd go to Niihau and Kaula. Ten, twenty is the normal. I like to go up to Middle Banks. So being that my boat is only 30-feet long, I try to go with 15 mile, or less, you know. If you're going to wait for the light and variables, you're going to go broke.

Narrator: Abraham said there are many qualities needed to be a good bottomfish fisherman, but one, in particular, stands out.

AA: To me, the most important thing is you've got to be patient. Patience for as far as finding fish, getting the fish to bite, waiting for the currents to die, waiting for the current to change. I think if you have that, then you have maybe have a chance at being a successful bottom fisherman. All that types of stuff accumulates really quick, you know. It consumes a whole lot of time. Some days you're just driving the whole day. You don't even drop one line because you don't find nothing. You know, fish is constantly moving, following the currents, following the baits. You know, they're all over the place. And you'll never know because you don't have no birds to chase. You know, everything is whatever you see on your electronics.

Narrator: And this type of fishing can be time-intensive. While it adds up to days at sea, there's no time to waste.

AA: Generally, I try not to--I try to fish not more than five days. I try to keep it short. I try to bring the fish in as fresh as I can to the market. Middle Banks would be a day going, maybe two and a half days fishing, and then a day coming home.

Narrator: And because of the time involved, fewer people are willing to do this for a living. Back when I was a kid, compared to now, nobody is doing bottom fishing anymore

Interviewer: There were more before?

AA: Oh, yeah, a lot. All of the boats from Oahu, Kewalo Basin, all of -- the whole fleet used to be lined up behind Niihau before, you know. But now, lucky if you see two or three lights. I take that back, one light. You know, you don't see nobody out there anymore. If you're going to make it as a fisherman, you've got to be all in, or be doing something on the side. I mean, to make it legally, man, you cannot . . . you got to . . . you got to hustle, you've got to go out, man.

Narrator: While there are officially seven species being managed in Hawaii's bottomfish fishery, Abraham is primarily interested in just two of them.

AA: Majority, onaga. Because I notice if I target -- I'll go for paka, too, but they've got to be in a certain depth. They've got to be deeper than 90 fathoms. I try to be consistent all year-round. I try to see if I can target like New Years and Christmas would be like the ehu and onaga. I try to target that, yeah. But generally, I fish all year-round, and if anybody -- with graduation, and stuff like that, somebody if they need something, they'll know that well, I try to tell them, that hey, if you guys need something, just kind of . . . just give me a call the week of, because if you tell me months in advance, I'm not going to ever remember it, yeah.

Narrator: Abraham says he takes certain measures certain measures to conserve the resource so he can continue to fish successfully.

AA: I try to not fish the same spot over and over. You know, I try to look for more spots. I try to regulate, you know, how much fish I catch in each area. I also use bigger hooks, lift the line off the bottom. All the babies live on the bottom. If you want to catch the big boys, pull it off the bottom a little bit, yeah.

Narrator: Attempts over the years to manage the fisheries by closing areas have not been effective and Abraham feels that they've only hurt Hawaii's fishermen.

AA: I don't -- in my opinion, I think by having these BRFA's here, it only going to hurt the fishing because now you're corralling the fishermen to fish only in these certain areas, you know, and the areas that they close is predominantly the better fishing grounds, you know, better known grounds, and the resources and everything is plentiful over there. Now they're going to try -- I don't know, you know. Put them other places, I guess. I mean, I see where they're going with that, but fish not going to stay the same place. You know, they don't know open and closed zones. There are no more gates or nets out there for keep them in the area. You know, I went to the meetings at the State Capitol with Bill Aila, guys, and it seems like whoever get the bigger dollar going to get what they like, you know. It's sad to say, but that's what it looks like to me, you know. They don't care about who you, you know. Like that guy, that Presley guy . . . I don't mean to drop names, but he thought he was doing such a good thing until they . . . until they've been modified the thing and his Nihoa is not protected by that 400 miles now. He's in the same boat as us, you know. I never thought I'd see fishing being this hard to fish due to people trying to stop it versus the fishermen, itself.