

"I'm not trying to brag any, but I believe that I know as much about Pacific City as any man alive."

And he is not bragging – Walt Fisher has lived the history of the area. In a warm, ripe narrative this octogenarian weaves a tapestry of memories of this young and developing resort town on the coast.

"I never pass up a chance to talk about Pacific City, it's one of my favorite topics." And talk he does. His stories are filled with the colors of yesteryear.

It was a land of plenty, and of promise – a land teeming with natural resources that enticed many men to settle their families in the Nestucca Valley in the early 1900's. Walt's father, Sydney ("Sid"), a Virginian market hunter, was lured westward by Oregon's bounties – though it took crossing the plains five times before finally making this fertile area his home.

In 1912 when Walt was five years old he, his mother and younger brother went to join his father on the coast. "Things were a lot

different back then," grins Walt. Travel was slow going. They traveled from Portland to Tillamook via train. The next stretch of the trip was by stagecoach to Beaver where they put up for the night. Again, the following day they journeyed by stage to Cloverdale where his father was waiting with a boat to take them the remaining miles down the Nestucca River to Pacific City. There weren't really 'roads' between Cloverdale and Pacific City, "just some tracks," recalls Walt. "In bad or wet weather we couldn't get through – that's why we'd travel to Pacific City by boat."

"Dad hunted turkeys, quail, rabbits and other game for the market – his idea was to come west and trap. I took after him quite a bit that way, trapping and fishing – so I inherited it you could say."

Once out west though, Sid Fisher did more than just trap. He dabbled in about as many different enterprises as one person could. And Walt followed suit with his inherited

propensity for diversity and hard work.

"Pacific City used to all be a dairy farm owned by a man named Fred Beals. Dad managed the dairy for several years. I started milking cows when I was seven years old. They milked 125 cows with seven milkers including me – that's before the machines came – it was all by hand. Later, Beals had one of the first DeLaval milking machine that came into the south part of the county. I must have been 10 or 12 by the time they had the machines," he says, looking down at his hands.

"The milk was shipped to a cheese factory up on the Jenck Road, south of Cloverdale. Later the factory was rebuilt just above the junction of Highway 101 and Pacific City. Dad hauled the milk by team and wagon and sometimes he would get back quite late. With the way the roads were, sometimes he'd get stuck and some of the other farmers would have to pull him out, or he was out helping other farmers out of the

mud themselves," Walt remembers, his countenance alive with memories.

Walt's father ran a chowder house close to where Fat Freddy's is now. "It was just a little place," Walt smiles with remembered pleasure. "He'd give you all the chowder you could eat – he'd start you out with a nice big bowl – and a slice of bread, a slice of butter and a cup of coffee. All for the price of two bits."

Walt and his brother Lewis dug the clams for their father's chowder house. "I often said that he had lots of clams in his chowder because that was the cheapest thing," laughs Walt.

Other fond memories, "My mother used to bake bread and cookies and I'd peddle them in two baskets to the camp ground. She got a nickel a loaf – she made the best bread in the county, you know – but you'd be surprised at the old biddies that would complain. 'Your mother's got too much yeast in her bread today,' or 'she's got too much salt this time.' I used to peddle bread at least twice a day to the camp ground."

Walt leans forward in his easy chair remembering other ingenious ways he made extra money as a boy. "We used to have what we called 'peddlers'," he begins, his face lighting up. "They used to take two days

from Sheridan to here with a team and wagon. The peddlers would bring a load of fruit and melons and take back a load of fresh salmon to the valley. We had no ice or refrigeration – us kids would go out and pull ferns. We could sometimes make a buck pulling ferns." He described how the ferns were used to keep the fish fresh during transit. "A deep layer of ferns would be laid in the bottom of the wagon. Salmon, insides packed with ferns, would then be placed on top of the layer of ferns in the wagon, with more ferns covering the fish.

When Walt was twelve years old, Fred Beal paid him a dollar a day to man the ferry across the Nestucca River. Occasionally a quarter tip would be tossed his way if a gentleman had someone of interest on the other side of the river and was anxious to cross in a hurry!

In their teens, Walt and his brother began to fish commercially. It often took the two of them working together to land some of the heftier chinook salmon. "When we started out we got 2 1/2 cents a pound for silversides, 3 1/2 cents for chinook, and by the time the river closed to commercial fishing (1926), we were getting about 9 cents a pound for chinook and 7 cents for silvers – that's a

rough guess, but I'm pretty sure that's right."

"Earlier than that, when the cannery was buying, I think they paid two bits a piece for silversides – that would be about 2 1/2 cents a pound. They paid 40 cents for chinook – not 40 cents a pound – 40 cents a fish!" he notes with amazement still. "Now they get \$3.50 a pound for chinook and \$2.50 for silvers – a hundred times over what we used to get!"

Walt concedes he is one of the last fishermen left who fished the river commercially. "There was quite a lot of commercial fishing going on then."

"Most of the fishing done in the river was with set nets, and there were set nets clear up to Cloverdale. We were allowed to fish a third of the river – we had licensing. We even had to have a seal and sea lion license to go with each set net. We paid \$2.50 a license and then in turn the game commission paid a bounty on seals and sea lions. I'll tell you, there's lots more seals now that they're protected," he grimaces.

"I started fishing out of the mouth – in the ocean when I was about seventeen – I took my first boat out when I was sixteen. Rowing with oars, I hauled passengers for thirteen years out there. I charged \$2 a trip and guaranteed them fish. I

never failed to collect from my passengers – some of them maybe didn't catch anything – but I would catch some, so they always got their fish," he smiles broadly. "Some days we'd fish all day. I'd take four passengers at a time – nineteen was the most I ever hauled out in a day."

Several times Walt has rowed his 20' dory out to Cape Lookout – talk about hard work! "I was one guy who fished all the time, pretty near." Whew!

Along with commercial fishing, Walt launched a new enterprise around 1923 or 1924. "While I was still fishing out in the ocean and the last few years of commercial fishing too, I started raising mink. I was pretty busy," he interjects, recalling the weariness of those early days. "I'd get up in the morning and tend to the milking, then I'd walk over to the cape before daylight. Whatever extra fish we'd have that day, I'd bring it home to can. I had a big cooker that I'd can half gallons in. I'd get that full and get it going and I would sit in my old rocking chair that I had. I would set the alarm for every hour to wake me so I could keep the fire going. Those were long days."

Clamming was another aside Walt immersed himself in for a few years while he was building his mink business. In the early 1930's – during the depression, he "furnished clams from Tillamook to Coos Bay." "We dug here on the bay – we got a dollar for a five gallon can-full. On a good tide I could average 25 gallons to the tide – it had to be a good tide though. It took 108 clams to fill one of those five gallon coal oil

cans. I did that for about four years."

By the early 1940's Walt had one of the largest mink operations on the Pacific Coast. "I got started in Pacific City and then went to Eureka for a few years. I used to have a mink farm right across from the Sid Fisher Community Hall, that's where I got my good start. At one time they figured that the mink industry was the third largest in Tillamook County. During the 1960's the price dropped and you couldn't afford to raise them."

Walt had an edge on the market with what he called his "ranch-wild" mink. He found out which was the best breed in the world and went trapping for them. He brought back fourteen mink for breeding stock from the Kuskokwim in Alaska, south of the Yukon, in 1951. By crossing them with his mink he got a much superior pelt and a good price for them. Because of that, in 1962, he was having some of his better years when a lot of mink ranches were going under.

"I pelted out in 1970 and retired. I had been in the mink business longer than anyone in the world – I had been in the business for 45 years. I started out as a young man in the business – a few got started ahead of me in different places, but they were older men when they started and I out-lived them."

At one time Pacific City was THE resort on the coast. "They had a lot of celebrities that came down here. They had wrestling matches with a world champion – there was the Jap, and the Mad Russian. They all come in here one time for a fight – they beat one

another up, cussed one another, stomped one another and all that stuff. They had a manager here by the name of Louie Wagner – the next day I said to him, you know those guys were really mad at one another – and he said, they all came down in one car and they all stayed in one cabin here!"

"They had big ball games here – they had quite a big grandstand where the sporting goods store is now – they had rodeos – anything to get a crowd. This was about the closest resort and beach to the valley."

"Dad really promoted this town. At one time or other Dad and I have owned all of Pacific City that wasn't already deeded out. We bought a blanket mortgage on Pacific City – Beal's mortgage couldn't be met so Dad and I bought it out."

Walt and his Dad have also donated property to the city (P.C.). The airport, the boat landings and Sid Fisher Community Hall are among them.

"I worked hard in my life, but I played hard too," he reflects, looking back with fond memories. He shot trap for more than thirty five years winning every trophy possible to win. He has made two safaris to Africa, acquiring the "dangerous five," the lion, the leopard, the rhino, the cape buffalo, and the elephant. Most of his trophies are on display at the Walt Fisher trophy room in the Pioneer Museum in Tillamook.

When asked what he would have done differently in his life, he responds emphatically, "The only thing I'd do different, is that I'd do more!"

*by Cher Bullock*