

For the Love of it

A Short History of Commercial
Fishing in Pacific City, Oregon

by Jay Taylor
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*"I wish I was a fisherman tumblin' on the seas/
far away from dry land and its bitter memories/
casting out my sweet line with the band of men I love/
no ceiling bearing down on me save the starry sky above"*
- The Waterboys
"Fisherman's Blues"

Fishermen are often romanticized as the above passage implies -- lonely wanderers separated from the trials of life encountered on "dry land." Songs like the Kenney brother's "Goin' Fishin'" and books like Ernest Hemingway's *The Old Man and the Sea* reaffirm a cultural impression of commercial fishermen existing outside of society or apart from a world of cares.

To a fisherman or even someone casually acquainted with the fishing industry stereotypes seem naive at best. From trolling to purse seining, from daytrips to week long expeditions, there is too much diversity underneath the umbrella term "fisherman" to make any standardized assessment of character or lifestyle, so it would be impossible to claim that any one fishery or any one fisherman is representative of all fisheries or fishermen. Instead, this paper will focus on one particular community, Pacific City, Oregon, and seven men who have chosen lives as commercial fishermen. The men: Syd Fisher, Walt Fisher, Brick Gilman, Jack Gilman, Victor Learned Sr. and Jr., and Ray Monroe, provide an historical reference to the evolving fishery of the Nestucca River and the Pacific Ocean near Pacific City, Oregon, from the early 1910s to the present. Their careers reveal the struggle of the occupation and the necessity for innovation and

adaptation to the changing political, technological and economic environment. From river netters to ocean trollers, theirs is a story of successful response to realities beyond their control.

*"A long time ago came a man on a track/
walking thirty miles with a sack on his back/
and he put down his load where he thought it was the best/
He made a home in the wilderness."*

*- Dire Straits
"Telegraph Road"*

The Nestucca River is located at the southern end of Tillamook County on the Oregon coast. The land is a varied topography of steep, forested hills and mountains running eastward from the beaches all the way to the western reaches of the Willamette valley. Dissecting the coastal range is a series of rivers and flood plains that comprise the Nestucca River system. Along the tidal zone of the Nestucca and Little Nestucca are two population centers that were important to the evolving commercial fishing industry of the area: Woods-Ocean Park (the name Ocean Park was later changed to Pacific City) on the Nestucca and Oretown near the Little Nestucca and Nestucca Bay.

Historically, the streams that comprise the Nestucca River system, the Nestucca, Little Nestucca, and Three Rivers, together with a multitude of secondary creeks, have been excellent salmon run producers. The Nestugga Indians, along with some Tillamooks, Clatsops, and Nehalems, had a well-established fish culture in the basin until Anglo-Americans entered the area in the early 1850s¹. The Indians employed traditional coastal techniques for harvesting the salmon: traps, woven gill nets, spears, and hook-and-

¹ Lloyd McKillip, A Short History of South Tillamook County, p. 1

line.¹ In addition, the Indians practiced a superstitious form of resource conservation by observing the "law of the pelican"², which forbade the capture of salmon in the bays and rivers during the summer until the arrival of pelicans during July. This tradition effectively allowed enough salmon to escape upstream before the arrival of the migrating bird each year. This insured a full crop of spawners for the next generation.

A treaty was signed with the Nestugga Indians in 1855, giving the Indians a reservation in the Little Nestucca River valley, but by 1876 this agreement was abrogated in favor of White settlement of the valley. During the spring of that year a group of men from Oregon City travelled from Grande Rhonde "over the old Gauldy Trail to file on homesteads."³ In June of 1876 the entire tribe departed by canoe down the Nestucca, over the ocean bar, and south to Salmon River. By 1877 a school was opened in the area, and the next year a post office was established for the new town of Oretown.⁴ Thus Oretown became the first official settlement in the Nestucca region.

With the removal of the Indians from the area, pressure on the Nestucca fishery was reduced. The Indian dietary emphasis on salmon proved to be much greater than that of the white settlers⁵, who were beginning to import cattle and plant grains to supplement their diet. So relocation of the fishing-dependent Nestuggas, combined with initially less

¹ John Sauter & Bruce Johnson, Tillamook Indians of the Oregon Coast, (Binfords & Mort, Portland, Oregon. 1974) pp. 54-62

² *ibid.*, pp. 117-118. This tradition was first recorded in the Diary of Warren N. Vaughn.

³ McKillip, p. 1

⁴ *ibid.* The pioneers originally wanted to name the town "Orecity" in honor of their former residence, Oregon City, but state officials would not grant the request for fear of confusion between the two, so Oretown was settled upon.

⁵ Sauter & Johnson, p. 99

populous white presence, proved a boon to the salmon of the river. Between 1876 and 1887 the salmon runs on the Nestucca river system must have experienced decreased harvests and increased spawning rates. However, that changed when Linwebber and Brown Packing Company decided to build a cannery on the Nestucca Bay adjacent to Oretown in 1886.¹

The building of the cannery on Nestucca Bay was not an isolated business venture but part of a coast wide trend in the salmon cannery business. William Hume, George W. Hume and Andrew S. Hapgood developed commercial salmon canning on the west coast on the Sacramento River in 1864. However, in 1866 the trio decided to move their operations north to the Columbia River because of depleted salmon runs on the Sacramento due to the effects of hydraulic mining, overfishing, and stream obstructions.² Success on the Columbia rapidly increased pressure on the salmon runs there as well. During 1873 there were 7 canneries operating on the Columbia; two years later there were 14 canneries, by 1880 there were 35, and 40 in 1883.³ R.D. Hume foresaw this trend and its subsequent impact as early as 1876. Hume "feared that the river was being fished out and accordingly he established the first cannery on a minor stream, the Rogue River, and made his first pack there in 1877."⁴ Hume's success on the Rogue created a rush as canneries on Oregon coastal streams increased to 13 by 1888. Meanwhile, canneries on the Columbia declined from 39 to 21

¹ McKillip, p. 1

² Courtland L. Smith, Fish or Cut Bait, Oregon State University Sea Grant College Program, Publication no. ORESU-T-77-006, p. 5

³ Courtland L. Smith, Salmon Fishers of the Columbia, (Oregon State University Press, Corvallis, OR: 1979) pp. 17-18, p. 53

⁴ John Ernest Damron, "The Emergence of Salmon Trolling on the American Northwest Coast: A Maritime Historical Geography" (Master's thesis, Geography School, University of Oregon, 1975) p. 124

after 1884 because of sharply falling salmon harvests in the ensuing years.¹ The Linewebber cannery on Nestucca Bay was just one of many coastal stream ventures by Columbia River canners spreading out from the overfished Columbia to virgin waters.

However, though the cannery may have been part of a regional trend, its presence had a deep and lasting impact on the local economy. Prior to 1887 Oretown was strictly a farming center, but economic opportunities opened up in supporting services for many settlers with the building of the new cannery. Several local families began providing their homes to carpenters and fishermen for room and board. In 1887 Mrs. Sarah Boxley offered her two story house to both male and female roomers (segregated by floors, of course), and the same spring Mrs. Anna Christensen began serving meals for "cannery workers, boat crews, fishermen and people living in the neighborhood."² Carpenters also found work constructing living quarters for the Chinese cannery workers and shacks for the fishermen and their families along the bay and rivers. Soon local farmers found that fishing made a substantial yearly contribution to their finances. "After the haying was done and the cows dried up for winter"³ Ole Redberg found time to net on the upper reaches of the bay, living typically in a small fishing shack and working the tides. This income, though not essential for sustenance, often was used "to pay off the farm."⁴ In this way fishing perceptively converted the previously frontier community economy into a combined agricultural/resource/service economy.

¹ Damron, p. 64

² Diary of Mrs. Hardy Rock, p. 13

³ Interview with Ralph and Marie Redberg, Sept. 10, 1989.

⁴ *ibid.*

The initial run of the cannery lasted only from 1887 to 1889¹. After 1889 the cannery remained dormant until 1899 due "to oversupply at high prices"² and then "unprecedented" low prices.³ However, the absence of cannery activity on the bay did not prevent continuation of commercial fishing. An 1892 Report of the Board of Fish Commissioners to the Oregon state legislature noted that "on the Siletz, Salmon, and Nestucca rivers no fishing was done except for home consumption. The catch of the streams combined may reach 50,000 pounds," but this is misleading. When the cannery would not buy salmon there were other buyers, called peddlers, "who

usually paid about ten cents apiece for the fish and then hauled them to the Willamette Valley where they traded them for fruit and groceries, and sometimes if they were fortunate they would receive cash. The peddlers would then bring the cash, or fruit and groceries, back to the coast to trade for more salmon."⁴

As late as 1900 this practice continued. The August 16, 1900 edition of the Woods Ocean Wave noted that "P.A. Shipley left for the valley this morning with a load of salmon."⁵ Fishermen and those who profited by their presence and activities sustained their livelihoods and the incipient economy independently of the presence of the cannery when the market failed. Early on the fishermen of the area learned to adapt and persist in the face of uncontrollable changes in the marketplace.

¹ John N. Cobb, "Pacific Salmon Fisheries", U.S. Department of Commerce Bureau of Fisheries Annual Report of the Commissioner of Fisheries to the Secretary of Commerce for the Fiscal Year ended June 30, 1930, Bureau of Fisheries Document No. 1092, p. 566

² 1890 Report of Board of Fish Commissioners, State of Oregon, p. 37

³ 1897 Report of Board of Fish Commissioners, State of Oregon, p. 31

⁴ Orcutt, p. 186

⁵ The Ocean Wave, Woods, Oregon: volume 5, no. 47; Thursday August 16, 1900.

The cannery went back into production in 1899 under the new ownership of the Astor Packing Company¹ and ran for three more years before it became inactive again in 1902.² However, fishing continued on the Nestucca in 1902 with five dealers and sixteen nets³ and in 1903 with one dealer and nineteen nets.⁴ The cannery made its final transfer before the 1905 season when the Elmore Packing Company purchased the facilities⁵ and resumed canning operations on a continuous basis until 1919 with the sole exception of the 1909 season.⁶

During the years after the construction of the cannery the communities around the Nestucca Bay grew with an influx of settlers, fishermen, and speculators. The town of Woods, about two miles up the Nestucca from the bay, was settled by Mr. and Mrs. John Belleque and Joseph and Mary Woods during the 1880s.⁷ On 145 acres of the opposite bank of the Nestucca from Woods, Thomas Malaney platted the proposed summer resort community of Ocean Park in 1884.⁸

The competing towns made a stark dichotomy. While Woods had grown up slowly as a classic pioneer community, Ocean Park was conceived as a fully pre-planned resort community for summer vacationers on the original plat map.⁹ By 1900 the town of Woods had an established body of merchants, including a general store, a drug store, a sawmill, cooper shop, a

¹ 1900 Report of the Fish Commissioner, State of Oregon, p. 65

² John N. Cobb, p. 566

³ 1902 Report of the Master Fish Warden, State of Oregon, p. 133

⁴ 1903 Report of the Master Fish Warden, State of Oregon, p. 66

⁵ 1905 Report of the Master Fish Warden, State of Oregon, p. 116

⁶ John N. Cobb, p. 566

⁷ McKillip, p. 3

⁸ *ibid.*

⁹ This information was derived from a map owned by Lloyd McKillip which I viewed while interviewing him on September 10, 1989.

cabinet shop, a boat builder, and two newspapers,¹ but Ocean Park was already a fleeting memory. Some of the lots from the original plat were purchased, but none had actually been developed because flooding during the winter of 1894 inundated the entire area of Ocean Park.² After that episode the entire town plan was moved downriver to the present location of Pacific City, and R.C. Magarell assumed the financial reigns of the community.³ The town and name of Pacific City were not actually platted until 1910,⁴ but from 1894 on community emphasis moved downstream to the new settlement.

"I was a bayman like my father was before..."

Among the immigrants that lent new emphasis to Pacific City after 1910 was a family from Buchanan, Virginia. Syd Fisher had been exploring west coast opportunities for several years before settling there in 1912. In all, he and his family made five trips across the country before he was satisfied with Pacific City because of the "fishin', and huntin'. . . . and trappin' and the like."⁵ Because of the inaccessability of the area, the family traveled from Portland to Tillamook by train, rode the stage as far as Cloverdale, Oregon and then rode a boat downstream to the town. Walt Fisher, his two brothers and his mother arrived at a town that was "all a

¹ McKillip, p. 3

² *ibid.*

³ *ibid.*, pp. 3-4

⁴ Inventory of the County Archives of Oregon, The Oregon Historical Records Survey Project, Official Project No. 65-1-94-25, April 1940, p. 17.

⁵ Interview with Walt and Si Fisher, Woods, Oregon, September 6, 1989

dairy farm,"¹ and his father found residence for the family in the Ferry Building.

Syd Fisher began his career as a driftnet fisherman in 1912. He fished the lower river and bay and sold to the Elmore Packing Company, which resumed regular operation of the cannery in 1905.² Like most fisherman he worked the ebb tides, making one or two drifts before the water became too low to float a net. The remainder of his time was spent picking and sorting the salmon from the net, selling the fish to the cannery, the salt house, or one of the boat tenders that cruised up and down the river as a relay service between the fishermen and the cannery (Art Edmunds, Lyle Craven, and Jim Burke all ran fish tenders)³. In 1912, the Elmore Cannery paid fishermen three and one-half cents per pound for large Chinook salmon weighing over twenty-five pounds each, three cents per pound for Chinook under the twenty-five pound split, two and one-half cents per pound for silverside salmon (coho), and one nickel for culls (salmon that had already started to turn brown in the river).⁴ Cleaning and repairing the net and his rowboat consumed more of his non-fishing time -- the essential repairs, reweaving, and regular maintenance that are the everyday tasks of any fisherman. Sleep came at odd hours, as the tides, weather, and fish migration dictated. The season ran from mid-July through March. He never punched a timeclock.

¹ *ibid.*

² Report of the Master Fish Warden, State of Oregon, 1905

³ Walt and Si Fisher interview; Lloyd McKillip interview; Interview with Oren Burke, September 8, 1989

⁴ Ralph and Marie Redberg interview. This information was taken from a fantastic pile of fish tickets preserved by his father, Ole B. Redberg, and is by far the best source I've found for getting an understanding of the way fishing used to be on the bay: the superior numbers and size of the fish, the intensity of the fishing (some days he would make three or four sales to the cannery), and the amount a fisherman could earn in a day or season.

Syd eventually purchased some pasture land south of town for penning the horses and draught animals of summertime campers. It was another way to make ends meet, and he instilled this work ethic in his children as well. Walt and his brothers worked with their father hauling nets on the river, tending the penned animals, and clearing the lumber from the farmland throughout the lower valley. "A fisherman usually was a fisherman; that's about all he did, was fish. Dad didn't see it that way. When the fishin' wasn't good we had a job slashing brush, clearing the land. . . We got fifty dollars an acre and the wood for cutting and clearin' the land - all hand work."¹

Walt began fishing on his own when he was sixteen, employing several methods to earn a living and, like his father, adapting to the changes and opportunities around him. Following the lead of his father, he continued to set nets in the river, both drift and fixed nets. He and his brother also speared and raked crabs in the lower bay, "we'd go down on weekends and fill up our fishbox full of crabs, perhaps two-hundred, and bring 'em back and land there where the bridge is now, and people would gather around. We'd sell them for a nickel a piece."² Walt took advantage of the presence of tourists to employ still another way to make a buck as a fisherman.

The bar at the mouth of the Nestucca River was notoriously dangerous, and several fishermen lost their lives there by drifting too far out during the ebb tides.³ Caught in the solid line of breakers that crossed the bar, the heavily clothed men in short freeboard rowboats stood little chance of surviving such an encounter. Because of such dangers, men such as William

¹ Walt and Si Fisher interview

² *ibid.*

³ Cloverdale Courier, 8 October, 1915

Scott began rowing out from the surf-protected shore of Cape Kiwanda, one mile northwest of Pacific City, as early as 1900.¹ The easily accessible reefs north of the cape and around Haystack Rock were rich with cod and rockfish. These fish were then packed in ferns and transported to valley markets by peddlers, and during the summers the campers provided an additional market nearby.

Following the lead of William Scott and men named Miles and Hall², Walt Fisher began rowing passengers on his ocean trips for two dollars a head. Confident in his abilities and the productive reefs (one day he brought in three boat loads), he guaranteed his customers fish, including salmon, when, as he said, "I knew they was around."³ Though he could only make trips when the weather and surf allowed, Walt was still able to improve his financial situation by adapting to a local set of factors that presented a market opportunity but required an innovative approach to reaching the ocean.

On occasion Walt and several other fishermen would row the twelve ocean miles north to Cape Lookout to try the north reefs. Rowing such distances was extraordinary, but if one wanted to go there there was no other method but oars; oars took the fisherman everywhere, in the ocean or on the river. Walt married another fisherman's daughter when he was eighteen, and oars even carried him to her. Courting the girl involved rowing from Pacific City to the cannery (about three miles downstream), hiking over the hill to Oretown, and then making the returning trip at the end of the evening. "That made a pretty good night out of it, and sometimes

¹ The Ocean Wave Woods, Oregon, 16 August, 1900

² Tillamook Headlight, 8 July, 1915

³ Walt and Si Fisher interview

the tide wasn't right either." Si, Walt's second wife remarked, "that has to be true love."¹ At eighty-two years of age, the legacy of rowing a boat constantly as a young man is still evident on Walt Fisher's large frame.

Later on, Walt also fished ocean bottom fish as feed for his and other local mink ranches. He expanded his feed business by building an icehouse and storing surplus fish and dead calves he had hauled away as a favor or purchased from the local dairy farms. This sort of enterprising was essential in a local economy that involved very little intercourse with the world beyond the valley. There were no improved roads into the area until the mid 1920s, so supplies for the communities and cannery came by wagon or steamer (The Della, The Gerald "C", and the Sue H. Elmore) over poor roads or across the treacherous bar. Accordingly, these were also the only means of exporting the local products: canned and salted fish, cheese, and lumber.

During the 1910s and '20s Pacific City remained primarily a fishing community according to Walt. Thus the closing of the Elmore cannery after the 1919 season might have meant severe economic hardship for the locals. However, the community did not fold, it simply adjusted. Art Edmunds had for some time been buying and salting fish at his dock at the Ferry Building in Pacific City, and Bill Gage, operating for the Burke Fish Company of Portland, assumed operation of the salt house. Instead of packing the fish in cans, they were now salted and stored in barrels called *tierces*.² Peddlers remained active locally, buying fish and transporting them to the valley for the fresh fish market. Additionally, the summer campgrounds remained

¹ *ibid.*

² Walt and Si Fisher interview
Interview with Evelyn Rock, Oretown, Oregon, September 13, 1989

active, and a local Kelp Ore hot springs operated by the Brooten family (the family boys also netted salmon on the nearby bay) filled the town with more summertime tourists and potential customers for the fishermen.

Walt Fisher was well prepared for most changes in the fishing economy. He continued carrying passengers on his ocean trips, running his nets in the river, and supplying fish meal to his and other mink ranches. But on February 16, 1927, House Bill 282, introduced by two representatives from Yamhill county, was passed into law; commercial salmon fishing and all use of nets were declared illegal on the Nestucca River.¹ A power play by valley sportsmen wishing to have the river to themselves tore local fishermen from their livelihood. The Oregon Voter, an independent journal of legislative activity in Salem, reported of the bill,

"Persistent and effective effort on the part of organized sportsmen, operating through the state game commission and allied clubs, forced the passage of the bill. . . . It is argued that the interest of the entire people of the state, represented, we presume, by the interests of the sportsmen, is paramount in importance to the interests of the local fishermen. . . . So runs the argument, but we are not, in this case, much impressed by it. . . . The question may properly be raised as to just why the right of some people to make a legitimate living should be cramped by the desire of a relatively few men to flick a fly or cast a spoon."²

A grassroots effort was begun to challenge the law by referendum petition. A local committee was formed of affected fishermen, and petitions were circulated statewide to place the challenge on the June special election, and they succeeded in gathering enough signatures to qualify for the ballot. But the referendum was turned down by 6132 votes statewide. Overwhelming resistance coming from Clackamas, Marion, Multnomah, Polk, Washington,

¹ Oregon. General Laws (1927) chapter 189, section 100, pp. 219-220

² The Oregon Voter, 18 June, 1927

and Yamhill counties¹ -- all located within the Willamette Valley, and none with a vested interest in the local economy of the Nestucca valley. In Walt Fisher's own words, "after they closed the river there was none of us that made a living [at fishing], but some of us fished."²

Walt did continue fishing, both legally and as an outlaw. Other coastal streams were still open to net fishing, so he took his nets and fished both the Tillamook and Siletz rivers during the next several years to make ends meet. But he was at a disadvantage on these other rivers. It takes years to learn the best drifts and optimal times on any given river, because each river has its own unique characteristics, and the best sets are closely guarded secrets by those fisherman who have worked hard over the years to learn them. Walt and others struggled to make a living on these unfamiliar streams, where it was legal to fish but unprofitable. Eventually, the temptation to ply the Nestucca got the better of several of the displaced fishermen, and a rogue fishing cadre emerged in Pacific City, including Victor Learned, Charlie Edmunds, Wayne and Floyd Franklin, Vern Jackson, and Clarence Holley.

Under cover of darkness a few locals would set nets in the rivers and on the bay, but it was a risky enterprise. Some of the tales that survive are hilarious, others harrowing. On one occasion Walt and Charlie Edmunds tried to retrieve a net during the day by blocking the road one quarter mile in either direction, and Hank White set off dynamite to create a diversion while a third man went into the river and secured the net. Victor Learned

¹ 1927 Referendum Petition (Chapter 189 - House Bill No. 282, Thirty-fourth Legislative Assembly) Filed May 27, 1927

Voter Abstracts for the June 28, 1927 Oregon Special Election

² Walt and Si Fisher interview

Jr. remembered earning fifty cents or a "couple bottles of pop"¹ to keep a night watch on the bank of the river and fire a warning shot from a shotgun if he saw any game wardens on the Nestucca. Victor noted, "that's the way they got by, and probably would never even made a go of it, if it hadn't been for their fishin'."² Many times the fishermen were "run off" during the night by patrolling game wardens. One night on the river, Walt and Pat Baker were cornered by several wardens, and Walt decided to make a break for safety downstream. "I figured if I come up [north] they'll catch me sooner or later because they could follow the river all the way, so I headed for the bay. And as I went under the bridge.....I could see spurl away where the bullet hit the water," Walt remarked in dry fashion.³

Since there was no local buyer, the fishermen found several other markets for their illegal fish. Fish were either taken to the still-operating canneries on Tillamook Bay, or they were hauled to Portland and sold to the markets under-the-counter. It was a losing battle⁴; "We was mostly just

¹ Interview with Victor Learned Jr., September 8, 1989

² *ibid.*

³ Walt and Si Fisher Interview

⁴ Attempts were made in the state legislature over the next eight years to restore the fishery, but none proved successful. In 1931, Housebill 225 attempted to reinstate a two-month season during October and November, but it was defeated on a floor vote by Multnomah county representatives despite a positive recommendation from the Fisheries Committee. In 1933, Senate Bill 170 was tabled after a negative committee report from the Committee on Game, a committee heavily influenced by sportsmen associations. Also in 1933, a "depression measure" was introduced to allow commercial fishing by hook and line, but the provisions pertaining to the Nestucca were eliminated in Conference Committee. In 1935, House Bill 191, a last ditch effort by Representative Jack Caufield was defeated on a floor vote that was again dominated by the will of Willamette valley representatives. As the Oregon Voter noted, "Ruthless selfishness of sportsmen prevailed over desire of farmer fishermen to earn their livelihood..." Senate and House Journals, State of Oregon, for 1931, 1933, and 1935; The Oregon Voter, 9 March, 1935

stubborn," noted Walt, commenting on the futility of their actions, "just a lot of people left [the area]."¹

"Can't make a living as a bayman anymore...."

Ernest Gilman was raised in Willamina, Oregon in the early 1900s, but work and the daughter of his employer brought him west across the coast range to Woods as a young man.² Working for "Grandad" Miles, Brick Gilman (he got the name 'Brick' for his red hair) fell in love with his daughter, Elsie. Courting her involved a two-day walk from Willamina to Woods by trail, and while staying with the Miles, 'Brick' also became interested in fishing through Elsie's brothers, Clint and Dick.

The Miles boys "got interested in [fishing] when you could make money at it," so they ran nets in the river and, on occasion, rowed a boat off of McPhillip's Beach, just north of Cape Kiwanda. Brick Gilman soon gained the initiative to become one of the first to go off Cape Kiwanda in a small dory, though he was also active in the river fishery. From that time on he made his living as a fisherman; "all he ever done was fish out in the ocean in the summertime and guide. He was one of the first guys to start guiding on the Nestucca river." Of course, when money got tight, "he was kind of a jack-of-all-trades. He could carpenter a little. If he needed to. . . . buy some groceries he could go help somebody build a house."³

After the river was shut down to commercial fishing, emphasis gradually, but permanently shifted to Cape Kiwanda for those fishermen

¹ Walt and Si Fisher interview

² Interview with Jack Gilman, September 8, 1989

³ *ibid.*

who remained. Brick Gilman, Walt Fisher and his brother Louis, Pat Baker, Al Southmayd, Elmer Hunter, Enis Turner, Pete Belleque, and Norman and Elwood Reddikopp¹ all became involved in fishing dories off the beach. For the most part, they concentrated on bottom fishing for the mink ranch market. Fisher and the Reddikopps both had their own ranches to supply, but Brick simply supplied the fish. This meant he was dependent on market demand to a greater extent than the other fishermen, but because of the number of mink ranches in the area he usually found a buyer.²

The dory itself was an evolved boat form. Though no one knows exactly from where the inspiration for the designs came, general consensus believes the basic form was an emulation of the famous New England cod boats used for centuries on the Great Banks and other places on the Atlantic coast. The first Kiwanda dories were homemade from spruce planking obtained from a box factory south of Tillamook. The planks were butted and caulked together on the sides and bottom, and they had to be kept wet so the seams would swell and stay shut. This need led to an important but comical struggle among the few fishermen of the Cape:

"There used to be quite a crick that run out there on the beach right by the Cape, and used to pert near fight just to get to putting your boat in the crick. You'd set it in the crick, so it wouldn't dry out."³

In a fishery without benefit of a deep water harbor, a place where a boat could remain in the water, the local fishermen had to adapt and make do.

¹ Interview with Jack Gilman, October 15, 1989

² Mink ranching was pioneered in South County by Walt Fisher and others, but it soon grew to be, and still is, a minor industry of the area. The Kellows, Reddikopps, and Fishers all had ranches operating during the 1930s, and some are still in operation today.

³ Jack Gilman Interview, September 8, 1989

The dories were hauled across the sand peninsula that separated the Nestucca river from the ocean once in the spring and then stored up on the beach at Cape Kiwanda when not being fished until the fall weather dictated the end of ocean fishing for the year. With the introduction of outboard motors in the mid-1930s, wells were built inside the dories so they could be operated for trolling. However, the motor had to be removed when rowing in or out through the surf, because there wasn't enough horsepower to overcome the power of the waves. Using the small spring-fed creek and devising open wells were just more pragmatic solutions the fishermen found for the numerous problems of adaptation that confronted them.

Brick and Elsie Gilman's third son, Jack, was born May 18, 1926 in Woods, Oregon. Except for service duty, Jack has never left the area, and like his father, he has always been, at least in part, a fisherman. He began fishing as an extra hand with his father and next-oldest brother, Cal, when he was six. During the depression, Brick guided sportsfishermen trips on the river and ocean, while Jack and his oldest brother, Warren, who was born in one of the fishermen's shacks next to the cannery, would do what they could to help make ends meet. Lingcod sold for one-half cent per pound, and there was no local buyer for ocean-caught salmon after the river was shut down. So Warren would take a days catch, load it in his car, and drive over to Sheridan and attempt to sell the salmon for fifty cents a piece. He would "usually end up having to give half of them away or trade for corn or strawberries or something. The people didn't have fifty cents. . . . [Warren and others] made their livin' however they could."¹

¹ *ibid.*

After being released from the service in 1946, Jack fished out of Newport, Oregon with Warren on a troller. The next spring Jack built a nineteen foot dory with a well for an outboard and troller-type poles to spread his gear. He learned the craft as a boy watching his dad build some of the first dories in the area, and he went on to build a few more for himself and others. Over the years, building up to five boats a winter in his spare time, he produced a number of dories that still are in use today.¹

The actual process of fishing was labor intensive and dangerous. The fishermen arrived early in the morning from town by horse, or later by crude sand buggies, and then carried or rolled² their boats down from the creek to the waterline. Once the boat was maneuvered through the surf the outboard motor was installed and engaged for trolling. Then three cotton weave lines, weighted with five, four, and three pound lead balls, were dropped over each side with bait attached. As fish were hooked, the boat was stopped and the lines were hauled in by hand. Using this method Jack and others could fill a dory with bottom fish during the course of a day or perhaps catch twenty to fifty coho when schools were around. The end of the day meant another risky trip back through the surf, this time rowing a boat weighted down with fish. The fish were loaded onto a wagon or into the back of the buggy for the trip back to Pacific City, where a buyer might or might not be, and the dories were carried back up to the creek.

There were no radios, flares, or life preservers then. An accident at sea or in the surf was a lonely crisis; there could be no way to call for help.

¹ *ibid.*

² Walt and Si Fisher interview. A curious method using a steel drum laid on its side like a log was employed by the fishermen to facilitate moving the water-soaked boats back and forth from the water. It significantly eased the task of carrying the heavy dories over the soft sand.

so the group stuck together when fishing or rowing. Hauling fish in hand-over-hand and negotiating the surf in a double-end¹ dory with eighteen to twenty-four inches of side was demanding and dangerous work, and exhaustion became an extra factor working against the fisherman's safety. Tired arms and poor judgement could easily endanger a man rowing back through a tricky surf at the end of a long day. The romanticized images of the carefree fisherman too easily overlook the persistent stresses of everyday dangers while working on the sea.

Methods changed little in that first period of ocean fishing; hand-tended cotton lines, multiple small weights, double-end dories with oar and outboard power remained the paradigm of Cape Kiwanda fishing. The fleet of boats remained around ten to twelve throughout the forties. It was a cozy though unsustaining enterprise.

"I always thought I could catch about as many fish as anyone, and I never tried to make a living at it," remarked Jack.² This underscores a basic fact of fishing since the river closure. The relatively short ocean season available to the small dory has never been able to support, by itself, the total financial needs of the fisherman and his family for an entire year. Jack always had another job to go along with his fishing, but perhaps it is more accurate to say he always had his fishing to augment his other jobs. In the late 1940s and early 1950s he drove logging trucks. In 1955 Jack was hired on at a plywood mill in Tillamook, and he and Victor Learned Jr. commuted to the plant until it closed in 1961. After the plant closing, Jack was hired on as a worker at Nestucca Union High School, and he stayed there until he

¹ The older dories retained the essential style of the New England design, having two bows and incredible buoyancy. Later design changes squared the stern to accept an outboard motor for increased speed.

² Jack Gilman interview, October 15, 1989

gained a retirement in 1985. Norma Gilman, Jack's wife, also worked as a waitress and a clerk in hardware and clothing stores in Pacific City and Cloverdale to help pay bills. Said Jack, "if I was gonna make [fishing] my number one source of income, I'd of never done it in a rowboat."¹

"...There ain't much future for a man who works the sea..."

Victor Learned Sr. was born in Denver, Colorado, February 22, 1891. In 1902 he was brought to Ocean Park by his mother and step-father, and by 1903 the family finally settled on land between Woods and Cloverdale above the Nestucca River. In 1908 Victor began pulling nets on the Nestucca for another fisherman, and later that fall he and his brother Alva began driftnet fishing on the lower river for themselves. Like Syd Fisher, Ole Redberg, and others, Victor sold his fish to the Elmore Packing Company. They were paid two and one-half cents a pound for fourteen tons of Chinook salmon and one and one-half cents a pound for six tons of silversides. They made \$880 for their first season.²

During the 1910s Victor owned and operated a soda fountain and pool hall in Cloverdale, but he continued to fish the river commercially. In 1917 he enlisted in the Army and was sent to Fort Columbia for training, but his unit was never transferred to Europe. While stationed in Vancouver, Washington, he married his sweetheart Grace Edmunds on March 12, 1918, and the two settled back to running the confectionery and a sporting goods store he had left for the service. Soon after the couple sold the store and

¹ *ibid.*

² Tillamook, Lest We Forget, (Tillamook, Oregon: Tillamook Pioneer Association, 1979) p. 136

bought farmland below Cloverdale. There they began clearing the land and raising dairy cows and their three children, Victor Jr., Shirley, and Edmund.¹

Victor Sr. continued to fish as well as farm, and during the fishing season he and his wife lived out of a fishing shack alongside the Elmore Cannery on the Nestucca Bay. It was here, on November 21, 1919, that their first son, Victor Jr., was born.

"When I was a week old, a big freeze come.... and froze the river over. They loaded. . . mom and me in the basket in the boat on the ice right at the cannery, and pulled it on the ice clear up to where the guardrail is now. Then the horse and buggy come down from the Edmund's Hotel, picked us up, took us up there, and then we stayed up there for 'bout a month until fishing season was over, and then Dad went back to the confectionery in Cloverdale." ²

"Baby" Learned was born into a fishing community, and his youth was spent on the farm or in his dad's boat. "I used to go out with [my dad and 'Curly' Taylor] in the river in the wintertime, and all I can remember is goin' down there and dad sayin', 'look at all the pretty fish here, look at 'em all.' I'd say 'oh yeah,' and then go back to playin' with my boat. . . .I wasn't much interested, I just wanted to play with my boats."³ In later years he pulled nets for his father, and after the river was closed he helped watch for game wardens, waiting to "torch off the shotgun" in warning.

Victor Jr. watched four of his uncles leave the area after 1927 to continue their fishing careers, while the few die-hards forged the dory tradition out at Cape Kiwanda. Victor took his first fishing trip on the ocean while camping near Cape Lookout as a boy. He had a chance encounter with Walt and Louis Fisher, Floyd Franklin and Vern Jackson while the four were

¹ *ibid.*, pp. 135-137

² Victor Learned interview, September 8, 1989

³ *ibid.*

fishing off Lookout on an overnight trip in their dories, and Floyd and Vern offered to take Vic and a friend of his out for the day. "Man, oh man," remembered Vic, "we'd never seen such great fishin' in all our lives."¹

In 1938 Victor Jr. graduated from high school. With a couple of cousins he rented a boat, bought a commercial license for five dollars, and spent the summer fishing on the ocean. "We never sold a fish, but I took a lot of friends out sportfishing that summer."² They returned the boat in the fall and paid the rent on it, but it wasn't until 1948 that Victor, his brother Edmund, and his brother-in-law Walt Caspell again attempted to commercial fish for salmon. Some of their successful early experiments included trolling tuna jigs and using a dip net to bring the fish into the boat.

Victor Jr., Edmund, and Walt Caspell continued fishing together until 1952, but then Edmund left to work for Boeing in Seattle and Walt turned his attention strictly to farming. Victor found himself fishing alone for the first time, fishing a classic double-end, spruce planked dory powered by an eight and one-half horsepower outboard. The fleet still consisted of twelve to fourteen boats, with a regular contingent of six or seven. Plywood was starting to be used, and Andy Kershaw and Warren Gilman both had versions of the new wooden boats.

Change and innovation continued both on shore and in the water. Through the 1950s and 1960s, road extensions brought better access to the cape, but this proved a mixed blessing to the fishermen. Model 'A's and old four cylinder Chevys were now used to ferry the fishermen and fish back and forth from the beach every night. Victor recalled,

¹ *ibid.*

² *ibid.*

"You drove your beach car down there everyday. . . Most of 'em left [the boats] sittin' on the trailer. . . Nobody took 'em home because you had to. . . go off the turnaround, down to the beach, and up there. When you got ready to bring 'em home, you had to wait 'til it to rained real hard, so it'd harden up, because you had to take a *wild* run at it to get up on that turnaround with the rigs we used to have."¹

Fish buyers began to move out from town towards the beach for the better convenience of the fishermen and the tourists. However, the once secure confines of the cape were forever broken. Theft of valuable equipment became a problem, and quickly poles and motors were removed nightly by the fishermen to preserve ownership.² Paul Hanneman, who fished with Victor Jr. as a boy, remembered, "The road went in in '59, and Freddy Kinsey went down one morning and both wheels and tires were gone from off his trailer. We said 'well, that's the end of an era. I suppose were gonna have to take our boats home with us now every night.' So we did trundle our boats up the rock road and come clear on home."³

Fishing gear changed as well. The old cotton line gave way to stronger wire line and handcrank gurdies, outboard motors increased in power, and the dory underwent a radical design change. Norman Reddikopp and Fred Kinsey are credited with being the first to give up the old handline method for wire line on a hand-turned spool, using twenty pound lead cannon balls to carry his gear far deeper and retrieve it with greater efficiency.⁴ Outboard motor design introduced more powerful engines on the market, and soon fifteen and twenty horse motors were available for the dory

¹ Interview with Victor Learned Jr., October 14, 1989

² Victor Learned Jr. interview, October 14, 1989; Interview with Paul Hanneman, September 6, 1989

³ Paul Hanneman interview

⁴ Jack Gilman interview, September 8, 1989; Victor Learned interview, October 14, 1989

owners. This allowed for a radical design change of the dory's stern. Lloyd Boylan, a local fisherman, came to Howard Kellow with a request for a double-ender, but Howard suggested a new design idea. Howard remembers, "I [was thinking] about building a square-stern with a bigger outboard so you [didn't] have to use the oars to run through the surf."¹ Lloyd Boylan was no great fan of oars, so he approved the plan, and in the process revolutionized the fishery. "...The first square sterns that I remember, I told people it wouldn't work,"² recalled Hanneman, but within two years he had built himself one. This was not an isolated reaction. Walt Fisher, Jack Gilman, and others were immediately skeptical of the new design, but they all converted quickly.

Victor Jr. was among those who eventually changed to the new square stern. The design facilitated larger engines, which increased the speed and range of the dory, and eventually led to the addition of hydraulic powered gurdies, inboard engines, and sophisticated electronics. These were all advances with larger price tags, but fish prices advanced as well. In 1952, salmon prices were ranging between eighteen and twenty-two cents per pound, and bottom fish, which were still purchased by the local mink ranchers, paid two and one-half cents per pound to the fisherman. In the years after that, the price steadily raised. By 1969, fishermen could sell salmon for as much as sixty cents per pound.

Like Walt Fisher, Jack Gilman, and his father, Victor Jr. found fishing taking a supplementary income role in his life. In 1946, Victor and his wife Alice bought a ninety-seven acre farm just upriver from Pacific City. Victor worked odd jobs, felled timber, fished in the summer, and trapped in the

¹ Interview with Howard Kellow, September 9, 1989

² Interview with Paul Hanneman, September 6, 1989

winter to make ends meet. "Of course, it didn't take you a whole lot to live then -- ten dollars then instead of a hundred now, just about."¹ In 1955 he went to work in the Tillamook plywood mill along with Jack Gilman. Victor continued fishing on weekends and holidays, but every other month he had to work swing shift, so he wasn't able to fish for a whole month at a time. In 1956 he didn't even buy a commercial license, but after the plywood mill shut down, Victor went back to his farm and built it into a small dairy operation. He began earning more from his fishing, but he also continued milking cows with the help of his wife, Alice. In 1975, Victor along with his son, Terry, began taking orders for dories, and during the winter they built a few boats every year, like Jack Gilman, for the added income. During the winter of 1989 the father and son were still building a few dories for local fishermen.

By all accounts, the 1967 fishing season transformed salmon fishing in Pacific City. That year the annual Coho catch for Pacific City jumped from 6,013 to 44,146 -- an incredible 734% increase.² Additionally, the fish "were the biggest damn fish I'd ever seen," remarked Jack Hogevoll and several others.³ The combination of such big numbers and big size created a huge rush to the fishery in the next few years. The fleet jumped from about twenty in 1966 to "about 500" ten years later.⁴

The quiet fishery that had existed at Cape Kiwanda from the days of William Scott in 1900, through Walt Fisher, Brick Gilman, Victor Learned Sr., and their sons had slipped away for all time. Just as they had done in 1927, outsiders began to dominate the local fishing environment. Many new, non-

¹ Victor Learned Jr. interview, October 14, 1989

² Historical Troll Report for Coho . Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife

³ Interview with Jack Hogevoll, September 13, 1989

⁴ *ibid.*

local fishermen entered the fishery for the first time after reading glowing reports of the "get-rich-quick" commercial Salmon Fishing scene on the Oregon coast by people like Oregonian outdoors writer Don Holmes,¹ and Vic Ferrington's production-line dory building operation supplied this sudden increase in demand.² After 1967, the style and atmosphere of Salmon fishing at Cape Kiwanda were to change drastically; the fishing era in which Victor Learned Jr. had grown up, from birth in a fishing shack next to the Elmore Cannery on the Nestucca Bay through the double-end dory tradition, had ended.

*"I've got bills to pay and children who need clothes/
I know there's fish out there but where God only knows/
They say these waters aren't what they used to be/
But I've got people back on land who count on me.
- Billy Joel
"The Downeaster 'Alexa'"*

Ray Monroe was born on August 30, 1957 in Santa Monica, California. As a boy Ray had excelled at competitive judo, and in the summer of 1968 he made a trip to Seattle for a tournament. On the return to California his family stopped off at Pacific City, and it was then that he went dory fishing for the first time, but, as he said, "it was playtime then."³ The next year his mother and stepfather, Judy and Darrel Landingham, left their jobs with Teledyne and moved Ray and his younger brothers and sister to Woods, where they lived for the summer. By autumn the family had settled into a house north of town in the Sandlake area.

¹ Jack Gilman interview, October 15, 1989

² Victor Learned Jr. interview, October 14, 1989

³ Interview with Ray Monroe, September 15, 1989

Ray's stepfather spent the summer dory fishing to support the family, and Ray went to work for his grandfather, Bill "Redeye" Wilson, as a puller. He was eleven years old, and he started out making one percent of the catch. Redeye raised Ray's wages to three percent by the end of the summer, and the next year he got six percent. "That's how we made money when we first came here, then they. . . . worked construction for Morey Flemming in the winter," Ray said.¹

Ray pulled for Redeye until 1973 when he leased a boat from Walt Martzof. The dory was "a little eighteen foot skow -- liked to leak and the engine didn't run very good." The next year he leased a better boat from Wally Doss and made enough money to buy his own boat in '75. Ray was fifteen years old, captain of his own dory, and driving his rig to and from the beach every day. "I wasn't old enough to drive across the street," he noted. "I had an old station wagon with big, fat tires -- never got stuck [on the beach]."²

The money Ray earned as a puller hadn't amounted to very much, enough to buy clothes, but working on his own he began to save some and contribute more to the family coffers. "Some days we all ate with [the money]It went more to the family, almost all of it." In 1975 Judy and Darrel separated, and Ray's fishing earnings became more significant to family finances. After Ray left for college, he kept more of his earnings, but during the summertime "the family got some of it whenever anybody needed any money."³

1 *ibid.*

2 *ibid.*

3 *ibid.*

Those early years for Ray were a time of growth and change for the dory fleet. Throughout the sixties boats were still changing over from cotton line to wire, and fishermen switched back and forth from running charters for sportsmen to commercial gear depending on the availability of salmon. Another major innovation was the introduction of hydraulic power for running the wire spools. "Somewhere around 1971 or '72, Barry Fisher came here from Oregon State University. . . .This kooky guy wanted me to get a whole bunch of dorymen together. He had a new idea on how to get power out of the flywheel of a motor to run hydraulic gear," remembered Hanneman. "I took the motor, and, by God, the thing worked."¹ The increased power allowed for use of heavier lead weights on the wire line. Fishing gear could be dropped deeper and retrieved faster with greater ease, making the job of catching fish more efficient and less tiring.

Fishing theory changed as well. Back in the late '40s and early '50s, Victor Jr. took the suggestion of Dutch Shermer, the local sporting goods store owner, and began trolling tuna jigs at a fast pace across the water to catch Coho; it worked.² During the '60s new types of lures gained favor. Colored plastic squid, called hoochies, tied to a flasher began to catch more fish. Inevitably, fishermen found particular favorites. Each had his own secret "killer"-hoochie which he swore by, but all seemed to work fairly well. Fishermen improved on this method in 1971 when they began chopping up frozen herring and placing the chunks on the hook for its scent. Ray remembered, "that's the first year everybody started using chunkies. . .

¹ Paul Hanneman interview

² Victor Learned interview, October 14, 1989

Everybody used to argue back and forth whether it was worth the money or not, but the guys who did it caught more fish."¹

For Ray, each year gained a character of its own. "'71, when I was a kid, was a real good season. We didn't get any price, but there were a lot of fish." In fact, they were only paid thirty-six cents per pound, but 111,561 Coho were landed at Pacific City that year -- 62,466 more Coho than the previous year. In 1974, the price was "O.K.," but the fleet landed 99,753 Coho that summer. Two summers later came the great boom. 169,810 Coho were landed that summer, recording the best salmon season ever, but, as Ray points out, figures can deceive. The 1976 fishing fleet was the largest ever seen at Pacific City. "In '74 there was, god, I don't think there was 150 boats. In 1976 there was over 300 or 350, 400 rigs on the beach every day, triple stacked all the way from one end of the cape clear to the parking lot. Some guys even had to park in the parking lot."² It was phenomenal and chaotic -- three rows of rigs with their trailers parked side-by-side on the beach for a quarter mile, and still not enough room for them all. But with all boom cycles comes the inevitable bust as well. The next two summers saw landings plummet to 45,646 and 50,840 respectively.³ Fishermen who bought new boats, motors, and equipment after 1976 in anticipation of good times were caught in financial straits by the subsequent poor seasons.

After graduating from Nestucca Union High School in 1975, Ray was admitted to the Oregon College of Education at Monmouth. There he majored in the field of criminal corrections and played football on a scholarship for four years. Ray was headed for a career as a truant officer,

¹ Ray Monroe interview, September 15, 1989

² Ray Monroe interview, September 15, 1989

³ All catch figures come from the Historical Troll Report for Coho, Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife

but occupational realities and conversations with his fishing buddies led to a radical change in his life during the spring of his senior year. "They said I was gonna make \$9000 a year when I got out of school and be prison guard for a while. Meanwhile all my friends were making \$4000 to \$5000 every two to three days shrimping, so I went shrimping,"¹ Ray explained. He was nine credits shy of a degree in criminology at the time.

"'79 was a good year for price, making a thousand dollars a day then too. I was shrimpin' to begin with that year. I came back here, and I had thirty eight fish for 780 some dollars."² It was a good summer for making money, but the fall season turned into disaster. Ray got a job on a big boat working Black Cod pots. The job involved running nylon line through a hydraulic power block to retrieve the weighted cod traps from the ocean floor. The work was rapid and had a potential for a serious accident. One day Ray was handling the rope and got his right hand caught in a loop. The hand was forced back until the fingers touched the top of his forearm. Most of the carpals were crushed. "I didn't fish on the big boat for three years then. I just fished in the summer." He didn't really make enough to support himself. "I still had money coming from compensation on the boat, because I was still getting rehabilitated," but fishing never paid all the bills by itself.³

After 1978 salmon fishermen in general had even more problems to contend with. The Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (O.D.F.W.) instituted a moratorium on commercial fishing licenses for salmon fishermen. No new boats could enter the fishery, and seasons were drastically

1 Ray Monroe interview, September 15, 1989

2 *ibid.*

3 *ibid.*

cut. In 1978 the coho season went from June 15 to October 31. By 1982 the season was twelve days in July. The price was \$1.35 at the start and \$1.50 by the abbreviated end. "I still believe fish production was the number one problem," Ray observed. Meetings with representatives from British Columbia salmon agencies opened the eyes of many Oregon commercial salmon fishermen. "They said that in 1977 [British Columbia] was ten years behind the United States in salmon production. By 1979 they were ten years ahead of us." The improvement was brought about by intensive stream rehabilitation, personal effort to enhance spawn survival, and fidelity to stream stock genetics.¹ This program was not very different from a grassroots effort established in Tillamook county in the mid-1970s. The Tillamook County Landowner Program developed "a volunteer egg incubation method employing wooden troughs placed near creeks, with water flowing upward through screen."²

Local fishermen began to believe that state agencies were not serving their best interests. Richard Goché, State Representative Paul Hanneman, and David Schlip, with the assistance of Bill Bakke, Gerald Branch, and Scott Frederick compiled information and issued two reports, the first in 1979 and the second in 1980, that amounted to a state-of-the-fishery address. In the second comprehensive report, entitled ORCO '80, the team effectively addressed issues concerning commercial salmon fishermen and the public hatchery system, private salmon aquaculture, and O.D.F.W. policies. In the final chapter of the report twenty recommendations were made to the Oregon legislature and O.D.F.W., but for the most part the report received a

¹ *ibid.*

² Richard Goche', Paul Hanneman, and David Schlip, ORCO '80 Report (1980) p. 39

cold shoulder. The state legislature and O.D.F.W. ignored the complaints of the industry. In 1984 there were no days allotted to Oregon commercial salmon fishermen for coho harvest. None.

In 1985, 1004 coho were landed in Pacific City. In 1986, the fishermen only fished during July for coho, but they were able to land 63,302. The next year Ray started seeing a profit again for the first time since 1982, and in 1988 the boom returned. The price opened at \$2.50 per pound for coho and \$3.50 per pound for chinook, and 68,258 coho and 6,345 chinook (the second highest total ever at Pacific City) were landed that summer.¹ The low had passed for the dorymen, but there were still bills to pay.

Starting in the late 1970s the dorymen began trailering their boats to other ports on the California and Oregon coast. They chased bites, going where the reports held promise of better fishing, but results were always mixed. They also began fishing earlier in the year. Some locals travelled as far south as Morro Bay, California for the spring Salmon season, while others remained on the southern Oregon coast for the Chinook season.²

Ray returned to fishing big boats in 1983, scalloping that winter. The next fall he worked on a crab boat out of Crescent City, California. The following spring he worked on a dragger, and he signed on to a crab boat again that fall. Every summer Ray returned to his dory for the Salmon season, with the exception of the 1984 non-season, which he spent on the dragger hunting Sand Sole, and every winter was spent working crab pots up and down the central Oregon coast. Ray was injured again the winter of '85 when a stainless steel wire went through his leg and into the bone

¹ Historical Troll Report for Coho and Chinook, O.D.F.W.

² Interview with Marlene Carter, September 11, 1989

marrow. He spent a week in the hospital with cellulitis and didn't work again for four months.¹

In 1986 Ray and Shelley Brock began living together, along with her two children. The added responsibility of a relationship with children has compelled Ray to take on wintertime work that keeps him closer to home, so he pumps Sandshrimp for local sporting goods shops during the off-season. The work is a concession to the relationship, but he still fishes his dory, now twenty-one years old, harder than anyone else in port come Salmon season.

*"Now it all comes down to numbers,
Now I'm glad that I have quit,
Folks these days just don't do nothin',
Simply for the love of it."*

*-Don Henley
"A Month of Sundays"*

The fishermen of Pacific City have learned by necessity to adapt to the changes that affect their lives and careers. Fishing was a way of life, not always their sole or even primary source of income, but certainly their central focus. When the cannery shut down or the river was taken over, they rethought their approach to the problem of earning a living from fishing. They did not abandon fishing, and they did not abandon their home. They innovated; they fought; they engaged. They built new boats. They waged political battles. They got involved and fought for their livelihood.

¹ Interview with Ray Monroe, October 14, 1989

Fishing became personal for them. Walt still takes pride in his days as a doryman, rowing all the way to Cape Lookout and back, and filling his boat with a full load of bottom fish. Jack was always the first one on the ocean, every day, and it seemed he always had a boatload of salmon. Victor has an impeccable pedigree as a Pacific City fisherman -- and the talent to match it. He is steady and one of the best ever. Though Ray is half the age of these other fishermen, his experience gives him the semblance of one much older. His fishing knowledge and boat expertise are humbling. He is also strong as a bull and twice as stubborn when it comes to sticking it out on a good bite or a rough ocean. These men are proud of their work; it *means* something to them.

The lives of fishermen cannot be generalized, but I will try to make a few overarching statements. Working on a boat is not glamorous. It is back-breaking work from well before dawn until usually well after sunset. Handling greasy, smelly fish, cutting frozen bait with numbed hands, shivering from wet socks and wet pants because there was a new hole in the hip waders this morning, looking at hands that have turned brown from ocean fungus and too many crankcase oil changes, the discomforts wear on the mind; the body reels from an assortment of sore backs from leaning over the edge of the boat half the time, bruised knees from the same thing, hands scarred from countless hook, knife, and line cuts, the incumbent infections, sleep deprivation, and physical exhaustion.

Mostly what comes to mind though are the hands. The hands of Ray, Victor, Jack, and Walt possess the common characteristics of fishermen everywhere: thick, callous, and worn from use and abuse. Often an entire hand is permanently mangled or there is a finger missing, as in the cases of Ray and Victor respectively. Jack and Walt have those same thick paws

from years of handling hooks and line or rowing a boat. The body shows its wear too. Jack has had several disks removed from his vertebrae, and Victor now has a badly injured shoulder from an accident with his boat last August. Jack sold all his commercial gear last year, calling quits to the second longest fishing career in Pacific City, bested only by Walt Fisher. It remains to be seen whether Victor will be able to continue fishing next spring, and Ray is already a badly abused body. His right hand will never be totally rehabilitated, and each year he seems to accrue another injury to his body. Walt is 82; Jack is 63; Victor is 70; and Ray is 32.

Why do it? Jack Gilman came up with the best answer, and the simplest: "I done it because I liked to do it. It was good supplemental income."¹ That is the heart of everything for a fisherman. To make money at something you love is like finding "the key to the universe."² Fishing in a dory is a rush which cannot be duplicated: dropping the boat in the water before sunrise, running it through the waves, setting your gear, watching the sun rise from out on the ocean, working the gear, hooking the fish and landing it in the net, running back in at night, cresting the last wave at full throttle, and sliding across the sand up onto dry beach. I do those moments poor justice just listing them here. They are special, emotion filled experiences that evade articulation. It takes some inner drive to subject oneself to all the harsh realities of being a fisherman, but the rewards, for those who know, are always there.

¹ Jack Gilman interview, September 8, 1989

² Bruce Springsteen, "Growin' Up"

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fish-buying history of the area during the 1950s, '60s, and '70s, as well as fishing history during the '50s and '60s.

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Learned, Victor Jr. Woods, Oregon. Interviews, 8 September and 14 October, 1989. My interviews with Mr. Learned gave me a tremendous amount of information on the fishing history of the area from the early 1910s to the present. He related much of what I used on the old net fishing days, and he helped me put into perspective the dory building industry of the area after 1975.

Monroe, Ray. Pacific City, Oregon. Interviews, 15 September and 14 October, 1989. My interviews with Mr. Monroe gave me the best description of the ocean fishery from the late 1960s to the present, and his insights into the political fish fights from the late 1970s to the mid-80s were clear and valuable.

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