

2nd Generation Captain and Crew Commercial Fishing



On the island of Kodiak off the coast of mainland Alaska is a Unification Church community with many families; including several young 2nd generation couples with children. One of the young Unificationists living there has worked as a commercial fisherman for many years and resides on Kodiak with his wife and three young children. Growing up in a family of commercial fishermen, he too pursued work in the commercial fishing industry and recently bought his own 44ft commercial fishing boat. Out of respect for his request his and the boat's name will not be mentioned.

This last 2017 summer, this young man as the captain, along with 3 other young Unificationists: Jordi , James and Kohki, were all part of a 4 man crew for the 44ft purse seining fishing vessel working as the skiff man and deckhands. All the young men were born into the Unification Church movement and this is perhaps the first time in history to have an all 2nd generation crew working on a commercial fishing boat together.



2nd generation captain with his wife and children

Some of the crew members shared about their experience on the boat and what it was like working on a commercial fishing vessel.

Kohki from Colorado wrote about his experience recounting one of the days out fishing.

Written in Feb. 2018



‘It had been a beautiful, sunny day with a slight breeze of fresh sea air blown off the gorgeous landscape of Kodiak, Alaska. Taking in a deep breath to appreciate what most people may never experience, I continue to plunge off the boat, which is exactly how it sounds. Imagine an oversized toilet bowl plunger made of aluminum, being thrust into the sea. To any onlookers who may not know what salmon fishing is, this may look ridiculous, and well sometimes it sure felt like it, but when you see a school of fish swim into the net because of your efforts, you realize it may just be worth it. The things we do for fish.

‘My fellow crewmate, James, is jamming out to some music beside me. He

hands me an earbud and we jam together as I continue plunging to the beat of the music, pumping ourselves up for this next load of fish. The captain yells “purse up”; it’s time to reel in. We head to the stern (back of the boat for you land lubbers) which is a precarious walk. I’d slipped off on this before and let me tell you, it’s no fun to work when soaked to the...

“Snap!” I turn to the back of the boat to find the tow line of the net floating away. I turn to James and yell, “Net overboard!” He looks back with eyes full of the joy of a good song and a good day. He responds with,

“Yeah this song is awesome right!”.

“No! Net Overboard,”

“Man, this is my jam!”

“No!” and I point towards the net floating behind the boat. It was a jaw dropping moment as he looked back to me in disbelief. We took a moment bent over in laughter and tears at such a drastic misunderstanding as the captain makes a U-turn to grab the end of the net and temporarily shackle it to the boat.

‘Now tied back to the boat, it’s back to business, just like any other set we’d done. Had we done 30 or 500 sets? I’d lost count, but by now we had a routine down, and we’d gotten better and faster at it.

‘With salmon fishing, the net is pulled out perpendicular to land to catch the fish swimming the shoreline. One end is connected to our boat, and the other connected to the skiff which is a smaller boat. After a few minutes, the captain circles up the net and we take the skiff’s end. Once secured, a special line on the net called the purse line is pulled to close off loose ends, trapping all the fish. A fisherman would say the net was so many fathoms long, but translated it was about a quarter mile. A big hydraulic wheel called the block pulls in all this extra length.

‘Now it’s our job; laying down the net as it gets reeled in, making sure no line tangles since it would be released once again. Like a wet noodle dripping wet over our heads, we guided the net back and forth, laying it out nicely, well as nicely as we could. It was moments like this, where everything seems to be going smoothly, where disaster could strike the unsuspecting victim.

‘It only takes a moment, but it’s those moments which are important. One moment and you have fish onboard, one moment and they could spill back into the ocean. One moment you’re safe and another you could fall overboard. I started out with both footwear, but in a moment, one remained. One boot makes all the difference.

‘As we laid out the net a line wrapped around my foot. I thought to myself, “Well this isn’t good.” In attempts to keep work flowing, I try to work my boot out of this situation. I knew that this was one of those moments which could go terribly wrong. I try yelling this to James, but over the roaring of the engine and pace of work, its meaning was lost to the chaos.

‘Tugging, pulling, while more lines are stacked upon it, this could potentially be a life-threatening situation, or at least another opportunity to fall overboard. But at last, the boot is pulled free, but at a cost, its foot is no longer in it.

‘Worried that my boot here would be trapped under this pile of net, I kick it over toward our Captain. It sails in the air in a swift and graceful arc, then lands up right, right in front of him like it was meant to happen. Those words I was trying to say then made sense to James, the look on our faces were priceless.

‘We finish that set, which was the last set of the day. The sun was setting in that beautiful purple and orange glow. It was the best of feelings to rest from a hard day of work. The captain tells us “Good work today guys.... Except that last set.” Each day out here in Alaska had a story of its own such as this one. I thought to myself,” Just another day in the life of a fisherman.” Each day an adventure.’



Jordi from Maine



James from Virginia

Naria Gaarder, who works with Ocean Church, had the opportunity to interview Jordi and James about their experience and work. Jordi is a seasoned commercial fisherman and this was James' first year of commercial fishing:

Q. What kind of work do you do and for how long at sea?

Jordi: Purse seining, where you have a big boat and a little boat and a curtain of a net between them. You find a school of fish, circle the fish and then you have a big bag of fish.

James: It depends on your captain and the kind of fish you are going for. On the boat it's not a democracy, whatever the captain says, goes. Even when you are onshore and in town you have to have the mindset that you are still on the job because the captain might need you back at the boat. In our experience we were fishing around a week or two at a time. I was a "cork man". I stacked the corks.

Q. How do you sleep and eat?

Jordi: I'm on the skiff, the small boat. Every 30-40 minutes of free time the 3 guys on the main boat make me a plate of food so when we finish a set and I go back to the boat and give them the net and they give me the plate. It depends on your crew because sometimes it's just cold sandwiches all the time and I'm on the skiff in the freezing cold all day.

James: There are two bunks in the bow called the "fore peak". We were probably all grimy and salty, but didn't really care since we were so tired from a 15 hour shift. It's rough getting used to it at first. The captain would cut the engine, but the generator is still running and is very loud.

So eating: breakfast is a free for all and you eat whatever you feel like. We try to prepare some coffee, lunch is also a free for all, usually it's cereal or oatmeal, and throughout the day you just snack. For dinner we rotate on cooking dinner for everyone. Pretty much dinner was the

one meal we prepare for each other, but hey, it's up to you if you want to make breakfast for others. It's different on each boat, generally you try to prepare food for the captain and skiff man.

Q. What's the most difficult thing while on the boat?

Jordi: Trying not to be bored.

James: The most difficult thing for me was expectations and morale. Maybe that's something I need to work on for myself. With morale, I guess it's internal and trying to keep yourself positive and motivated because if you get low it starts to snowball and affects your mood and your work. Also other people's moods can affect your morale, especially in such tight quarters for extended periods of time.

Knowing where to be was difficult while working. Definitely ask many questions.

Q. Do you experience God or anything spiritual while at sea/working?

Jordi: Not really, but there's really cool mountains to look at.

James: Yeah. When I was there fishing, I felt like, to be honest, it's a hit or miss. Some days you don't feel anything and push through your mental struggles. But with the beauty and nature of where you're at you are reminded of God, like the time I hugged a shark. We had a salmon shark on deck that was 6-7' long and I asked Kohki, "Hey, do you want to hug the shark?"

There was also this time I asked the captain if he ever christened the boat. He said nope, and then I asked did you holy salt it? And he said no, so I told him I would holy salt the boat the next time we were back at the harbor. I messaged my mom about making holy salt and she sent me some. When we got back to town I got her package and then two days later we started heading out again. I said a small prayer and started throwing the salt everywhere on the boat, in the wheel house, in the galley, on my crewmates and the captain...just kidding. And that last two weeks we literally doubled the amount of fish we caught for almost the entire season. I don't know, I'm just saying...that was God to me.

Q. Why are you working as a commercial fisherman and would you do it again?

Jordi: You can work 4 months a year and make enough money for the rest of the year to do what you want. I've done this for 15 years and will keep continuing. I started on a tuna boat. You can work really hard for a couple months and take the rest of the year off, which is nice.

James: I worked there for the experience and the adventure. I did Ocean Challenge and didn't feel it was challenging enough. I grew up watching deadliest catch and always wanted to try doing it as a kid. And yeah, I think I would do it again. Definitely if you're a college student it's a sweet summer job.

Q. What do you do during break?

Jordi: It depends on how much time we have off. On land we go hiking, hunting, beach combing, have bonfires. On the boat we do whatever we want for break. One crew member would carve or whittle, another would write in a journal. I would look for animals on the mountain with binoculars then take the skiff to shore since it's close by and go hunt. In some areas the fishing

might close for a period and if it's supposed to open soon, like 12 hours, then we just wait in the area until it opens. If it's just a couple hours wait we might play cards.

James: *Laughs* What break? No, just kidding. Ultimately the captain was trying to get us to understand that anytime you are not doing your main responsibility there are a million and half things to do on the boat. The ideal fisherman is always busy. I would read work out, write and try to play guitar. You do have certain breaks when you are traveling from one fishing spot to another. These boats are pretty slow so if we have to go up the coast we would have a pretty good downtime. The captain doesn't get to have that luxury since they have to steer the boat. They might not have to do as much physical labor as the deckhands, but they probably get the least amount of sleep. When you're underway they don't take naps.

Q. Do you ever get seasick?

Jordi: I do get seasick, but not on the boat I was on.

James: So yeah, on the Stella [another commercial fishing boat], the first trip I thought I was going to die. After an hour I started to get the feeling and was like, "Uh oh, I know what this is". I made the mistake of not eating on the first day, and felt sooo sick. I took Dramamine, but didn't pre-dose enough. I was fine by the third trip, even though on the trip back the swells were really high. Then we had a week break and were on land. When I went back to work I lost my sea legs. I was fine by the time I started working on this boat.

Q. What is it like working with an all 2nd gen crew?

Jordi: Nice, everyone's well behaved. It's like a relief; you don't have to worry about people being an idiot. You can tell when people are listening and doing their best instead of not really trying. Those guys really wanted to learn and learn how to do things properly and stuff.

James: Really cool and providential. Spiritual juices were flowing. It's the first time in history and I'm really proud to be a part of that.

Q. What are things to expect if you want to work on a boat?

Jordi: Long hours, hard work. You gotta focus 100% of the time and pay as much attention as you can.

James: It's not a democracy; you have to have the mentality that you're always on duty even when in town. Our captain has one of the highest standards as a captain, but there are some that are really laid back so there's a wide spectrum.

Other than to expect to work long hours, always ask questions. If you're unsure, say something. The two simple ways to get hired are 1. You know somebody, 2. Just walking the dock. If you talk to a captain they might need someone to work, but before you commit ask about this captain around town and from other captains and find out what kind of reputation they have.

Come ready and willing to learn.

Practice your knots like your life depends on it.









Compiled by Naria Gaarder