

The Fishing Trip.

Chris was in the local Marine Supply Store thinking of buying a GPS for his aluminum, sixteen-foot, Alaskan-style fishing boat. As he perused the counters full of GPSs of all sizes, shapes, and prices, he soon became aware that they were too expensive for him. But as he was leaving the store, he saw some small compasses that were easy to install and required no batteries, setup, or configuration. They were only five dollars, so he bought one. When he arrived home, he installed the small compass on the dash of the center console in his boat. He was pleased to have at least something to show him his direction when or if the fog descended while he was fishing. Chris had been out fishing on other boats when the fog had descended, encircling the boat he was on, and if it weren't for their compass, they would have been lost. Thick fog, locally known as pea soup, came and frequently went where he lived. Chris was planning on going salmon fishing on Saturday, as he had heard the salmon were within three to five miles of shore. Since he would be fishing in the ocean, it was important not to venture too far out without a means of knowing which direction he was going in case fog rolled in. Chris had exclusively used his boat on lakes, so this was the first time he took it out on the ocean.

Saturday morning came, and Chris hooked the boat and trailer to his truck and set off to drive to Bodega Bay. He drove through thick fog for several miles in some areas, but as he arrived at the ocean, the sun shone, and he could see far out toward the horizon. He then drove several more miles to Spud Point, where the public boat launch was. While waiting for his turn to launch his boat, he looked back toward where he had come from, and there was the wall of fog inland he had driven through. He also noticed that while the line in front of him was only about ten boats, the line behind him already stretched to the main road. He thought to himself that it was going to be a hectic day at the boat launch.

After a short wait, as the others before him launched their boats, it was Chris's turn. His boat was now in the water; he parked his truck and trailer in the vast parking lot. The line of trucks and cars with fishing boats stretched as far as he could see along the main road. He was happy he'd gotten here earlier than all these other fishermen. Soon, he was headed out along the miles-long channel, to the seawall, and then out into the ocean. The sun was bright; the air was warm, and, best of all, the ocean was relatively calm. The right turn from the channel and out around the seawall and into the ocean had been the scene of several boats capsizing over the decades, so one had to stay very aware of the ever-changing conditions. Chris's sixteen-foot aluminum boat was very sturdy. Its high bow stopped most waves from crashing over the bow and into his boat, and the sturdy railings allowed him a safe hold as he maneuvered anywhere around his boat. Chris could see that his compass was working correctly and that he was headed west. A bell rang slowly from a buoy marking some rocks, and he noticed the fog was still far inland. After traveling several miles into the ocean, Chris readied his fishing pole by tying a quick-release weight holder onto his line. He then added several feet of line and attached a foot-long flasher to the end of that line. Next, he secured two feet of line to the flasher and tied a snap swivel to the other end of that line. Chris bent the four-inch shaft of the hook he would use, aptly named a crowbar, twice so it would do a slow, erratic roll as it traveled through the water, mimicking an injured fish. Then Chris threaded a sardine onto the bent hook, pierced the sardine's jaw with a copper pin, up through one hole in the hook's shaft, and out the sardine's head. He then wound thin copper wire around the pin in a figure-eight pattern to secure the bait to the hook. He then attached the baited hook to the snap swivel, and finally, he attached a two-pound sinker to the quick-release weight holder, and he let out line one foot at a time until he had

counted to thirty-five. He believed he was down about thirty feet because of the slow speed he was trolling.

After Chris finished getting his now-baited and weighted line to the correct fishing depth, he again looked back at the shore and noticed the fog was moving quickly back toward him. He was shocked because this was the first time he had seen fog moving from the land back to the ocean. But, always the optimist, Chris hoped the fog would dissipate before reaching him. The once calm ocean began to get choppier, the wind was also gaining strength, and the fog was getting steadily closer. Chris was five miles offshore now; he knew he couldn't do much of anything to avoid the inevitable conditions he found himself in, so he decided to continue fishing. Within what seemed like only minutes, the fog surrounded his little fishing boat; the wind had picked up significantly, so he and his boat were being tossed around like they were but a small piece of cork, and the center console and steering wheel were what he gripped to avoid being thrown around or even entirely out of the boat as multiple rogue waves now broadsided his boat.

Suddenly, he heard a boat coming closer and closer, and when the large aluminum commercial fishing boat passed close by, Chris realized that his little boat was so small that the much larger boat's radar probably hadn't even picked it up. The waves were becoming disorganized and too large for his little boat, so they lacked a steady direction. Waves were coming at his boat from multiple directions, and the conditions were tense. Chris laughed nervously as he thought this was probably what boating in a washing machine would be like, with waves coming at him from all directions. The conditions deteriorated further, and the wind-driven waves hit his boat faster and harder. Usually, waves are measured by their height and the seconds between them.

Mariners know that the shorter the wave height and the longer the seconds between waves, the

better the conditions, but now there were barely any seconds between the waves. Add to that that the wind was blowing these waves, which meant that some of the waves had a ramp for his boat to climb up on, but then there was no back to the wave, so the bow of his boat would tip down and plunge straight down into the ocean, only to be caught and violently popped back up. Waves coming in the opposite direction sometimes had no front for his boat to climb onto, so hitting the wave was like violently running into a sturdy wall.

Chris held on as tightly as he could, fearing being thrown overboard by a rogue wave.

During a moment of relative calm, Chris shut his eyes and thought, which *way is east?* He then pointed to where he thought east was, and then, glancing down at his compass, he saw that he had pointed one hundred and eighty degrees in the wrong direction. So, instead of returning to where he had launched his boat, he would have been heading toward Hawaii. He smiled and thought what a tremendous five-dollar investment his compass had been.

Just then, a large, rogue wave smashed into the bow of his boat with such force that the entire boat shuddered from the collision. Chris was thrown off his feet and into the air, but luckily, he held on tight to the steering wheel and landed between the center console and the starboard side of his boat. The force of the collision plus his body weight was too great for the rivets that held his center console to the deck, and the console broke free and crashed onto the deck, with Chris still holding on tight to the steering wheel. Water poured over the bow, soaking him, and the boat's forward progress violently stopped.

Chris knew his predicament was now serious, and not much else could go wrong before he would be in dire trouble. Then Chris heard the faint sound of the bell ringing from the buoy he had passed while leaving the channel earlier that morning. It was as if the wind had carried the sound to him. Chris carefully and gently managed to steer his boat towards the bell without

breaking or damaging the now stretched, taut steering and throttle cables. Because his center console was broken and the ocean was tossing his little boat around violently and incessantly, he was forced to stay sitting or kneeling on the floor of his boat, both for his safety and to steer his boat towards the sound of the bell. Chris was beginning to feel seasick, and soon, the motion of the ocean became too much for him. Chris leaned over the side and vomited the contents of his stomach. Over and over again, he retched. Finally, nothing was left to vomit, but he kept heaving, yet nothing was coming out. Chris was sweating so much it appeared as if he had just exited a shower, but he could do nothing to change anything. The erratic motion of the ocean was relentless. As he wedged his body, as best he could, between the broken center console and the boat's starboard side, the unpredictable waves kept battering his boat without any rhythm, and his body was flung wildly at times against the hull or the console.

Chris's pole bent down hard, and the drag on his reel, which was set to release line before a large fish could break the twenty-five-pound test line, began releasing, making what was usually a very exciting, rapid clicking and whirring noise, indicating he had a fish on his line. Still very seasick, he grabbed the pole and could immediately feel that a large salmon had eaten his bait. The tip of his sturdy rod bent and repeatedly tugged as the heavy fish tried to swim away. Chris reeled his line in, but the huge fish would often swim away, repeatedly peeling yards of line from his reel. This played out for over half an hour, but Chris steadily reeled the fish closer to his boat. Chris was on his knees fishing, and when waves crashed into his boat several times, he would lose his balance. Still, each time he managed not to drop his pole into the ocean or to get hurt, and eventually, between waves and more than forty-five minutes later, the monster King salmon was close enough to try to net it.

Suddenly, a much larger wave lifted his boat and slammed it down twenty feet away. His body swung violently to the right when the wave hit, and when the boat landed, his body jerked violently to the left, yet he remained in his boat through it all. His reel screamed as the line peeled off, and Chris was more than a little surprised that the fish was still on and even more surprised that he still had a hold of his fishing rod. Glancing at his compass, he saw he was no longer headed in the direction he had been going, so he turned the steering wheel slowly to avoid getting his line caught in the propeller, and slowly, the boat turned back towards the east.

Slowly, Chris reeled the large fish closer to the boat until it was near enough to try and net. As Chris stuck the net under the salmon, the salmon stiffened its body, making it too long to fit into his net. The fish fell off the net, and with a single swish of its massive tail, the salmon was ten feet away, and again, it was ripping line from his reel. Chris needed to kneel again and wait for the large salmon to tire even more before he could reel it back within netting distance. Sweat dripped down Chris's neck, and he shivered as the cold ocean air blew into and down his open, wet collar. Finally, the salmon, now tired, was near enough to his boat, and Chris stood, stabbing his net into the ocean under the fish. He shook the net forward and backward as he raised it until the large salmon finally dropped into the net. Chris dropped to his knees to avoid falling overboard and using both hands, he grabbed the net, using his armpits to pin himself to the railing briefly, and in one move, he manhandled the net with the large salmon safely over the railing and into his boat. The salmon landed on the boat's deck with a loud, solid thump.

Chris whacked the fish on the head with his welcome aboard club, killing it. He then got the hook disengaged from around its jawbone, and he smiled a seasick smile as he saw this salmon would not have gotten off that hook. He grabbed a length of rope he kept for these occasions and slid it through the fish's gills and out its mouth. He passed the length of rope through a loop he

had previously tied so the fish was fastened securely. He attached the other end of the rope to one of the cleats on his boat. This way, if he dropped the fish while gutting it overboard, he wouldn't lose it. Chris guessed the salmon weighed about forty pounds, but he was so sick he wasn't in the mood to celebrate his catch. He could still enjoy the massive fish and its beautiful coloring and patted its head and side to show his respect. As he braced himself against the inside of his boat, seagulls appeared and ate the scraps of guts and blood Chris tossed away as he cleaned the salmon. Chris dunked the salmon into the ocean several times to rinse the blood off, and he then pulled the fish back onboard. After removing the rope from the fish's mouth, Chris opened the large onboard cooler and placed the salmon on the bag of ice inside the cooler. Finally, he could relax a little bit. *Cleaning that salmon overboard while being flung around violently was crazy*, he thought. His uppermost thoughts were landing and cleaning the salmon while remaining in his boat. Chris had always held the rock-solid belief that he would not die while doing whatever he was doing.

Chris was still very ill and sick, so after attaching the hook to his reel and taking up the slack, he left his fishing pole down on the deck and carefully steered his boat towards the ringing bell. His dry heaves continued as he held on tight and slowly but surely made his way toward the ringing bell. Chris was wet from the waves crashing over the boat and wet from sweating, and he shivered uncontrollably inside his wet clothes. Chris knew he had traveled about five miles offshore, and he also knew he had been trolling at about two miles an hour, so he was probably two or more hours away from land.

After what seemed like several hours, but was probably only half that, his little boat suddenly came out of the fog and into bright sunshine. It was as if there had been a curtain of fog, and he had passed through it. One minute, he was surrounded by a thick, blinding fog, and within only

several seconds, he emerged into the lovely, warm sunshine. Chris could now see where he was; he could finally see the ocean in front of him, and he could finally accelerate slightly. He headed towards the seawall which protected the channel, which he guessed was still about a mile away. As he carefully steered around the ringing bell, his little boat was now broadside to the ocean, so he carefully headed towards the point of the rock seawall while keeping a steady eye on the incoming waves. He finally entered the channel leading to where he had launched earlier that morning. The water around him grew increasingly calm, allowing him to accelerate even more. He passed the Coast Guard cutters safely moored at Doran Beach and smiled wryly at that sight. Ten minutes later, he could see the launch ramp, and a wave of accomplishment swept over him. He slowed the boat to a crawl as he was nearing the boat dock, and two men standing on the ramp hurried down to the dock to help him. As Chris tossed his bow line towards them, one of the men laughed and told Chris his skin was green. He asked Chris if he wanted him to get his truck and trailer, and Chris handed him his keys, simply telling him his truck was the white F250.

The man laughed aloud and said to Chris, "Your truck is the only truck still in the parking lot with an empty boat trailer, dude. All the others came back in and left hours ago. Everyone who came in said it's way too rough to go out today."

Chris thought to himself, *Don't I know that!*

A short time later, the two men had Chris's boat on the trailer, securely fastened, the outboard engine raised and locked in place, and parked in the now nearly empty parking lot. Chris thanked the two men many times. Chris climbed into his boat, checked on the King salmon in his cooler, and put his fishing rod in the rod holder. He ripped open the bag of ice, secured the

cooler lid, and slowly climbed out of his boat. Before getting into his truck, Chris removed his wet clothes except his t-shirt, jeans, shoes, and socks. Then he got back into his truck.

As he slowly drove inland to his home, he felt the air warming through the open window, and as each mile passed, his shivering slowed, his clothes dried, and he began feeling better and better.

By the time he arrived home, he was no longer feeling the ill effects of his seasickness.

Chris backed his boat and trailer to the side of his driveway, unhooked his truck from the trailer, and, taking the cooler and rope from his boat, walked over to the hose pipe by his front lawn. He put the rope and salmon on the lawn, rinsed the bloody rope, and rinsed the fish's insides when his little cat came upon the salmon. The cat had always looked like a kitten because she was so tiny, and Chris laughed aloud as the tiny cat tried to steal the large salmon by pulling it away.

The cat's little feet, even with her claws extended, slipped on the grass, and she could gain no traction to move the large, heavy fish. Smiling, Chris took out his knife and cut off a piece of fresh salmon for the cat, and she ran off with that. Chris then used the garden hose to blow off the fish's scales, rinsed out the cooler, and left the lid open, facing the sun to dry out. Then he took the fish inside to fillet it.

The salmon was too large to fit into Chris's sink and too large to fit on his cutting board. This was the biggest salmon Chris had ever caught himself. Chris smiled as he thought this may be the largest salmon he might ever catch. These large salmon were often referred to as hogs by fishermen. And this was indeed a hog. The belly of a hog salmon is a light ocher color, unlike the color of the belly of any other salmon. Hogs were not only huge salmon, but they all possessed this unique and identifying belly coloring.

Chris's fillet knife was skinny from the many years of filleting fish and extremely sharp. The blade was eight inches long, and the knife's cutting edge was slightly curved from the years of

sharpening. Luckily, the countertop next to his sink was long enough to hold the hog, and Chris placed the fish atop his cutting board despite it not fitting. Chris's regular fillet routine was to put the fish flat on one side with its head to the right and spine away from him. He would then slice in just behind the head and fillet the fish along its spine and to its tail. This fish, though, was so large that Chris needed to have his hand holding the fillet knife inside the fish's belly as he filleted. Once the first side was done, he flipped the salmon over, and this time, the spine was nearest him, so as he filleted this side, he needed to hold the stomach flap up to stop his knife from stabbing the belly meat and to make the process easier. The two fillets were huge, the hugest fillets Chris had ever had in his kitchen. Each side fillet needed to be halved along its length, and then he filleted the skin from all four pieces. He cut out the strips of fat that ran along each side as he detested that taste. He then cut the four large fillets into six-inch pieces, made his special brine, and put the fish pieces into that large bowl until it was packed. He then covered the bowl and placed it into his fridge until the next day, when he would smoke the pieces of fish for several hours. He used his vacuum sealer for the rest of the salmon and made about two dozen half to three-quarter-pound bags of beautiful salmon fillets, which he placed in the freezer. Next, Chris got a tablespoon and scooped the most tender salmon meat from along each side of the fish's spine, putting that in a bowl, which he would soon cook in olive oil with fresh garlic and ground pepper for his lunch. He broke the salmon's large skeleton into pieces, placed the pieces in a large garbage bag, and put that in the freezer in his garage, planning to use that as crab bait one day. Then the process began of cleaning up his countertop, putting the vacuum sealer away, sponging the kitchen floor where fish blood and goo had dripped, and finally, washing up everything he had just used. The massive hog was finally dealt with, and Chris was indeed happier!

Now, Chris was hungry, and he wanted to eat some fresh salmon. He cooked some up and stood eating until he was full. Then he headed outside to sit in the warm sun. Chris was feeling some exhaustion now. As he sat in the warm afternoon sun, he removed his still-wet shoes and socks and allowed his wet, wrinkled feet to warm in the sun. He drank a cold beer, smoked one of his small cigars, and, with a broad smile, reflected on his day's remarkable experience.

The End.

Written by Peter Skeels © May 2nd, 2022