

An excerpt from my chapter on Ocean Church

Herb Mayr
May 24, 2017



Left to right: Rev. Martin Porter, tournament co-chairman. Rev. Paul Werner, chairman Chris Fiala, first prize winner, for heaviest fish (1122 lbs.). Herb Mayr, second prize winner, for longest fish (1201/2"). John Topping, third prize winner, for highest aggregate weight (1984 lbs.). Tom Sugiyama, International Seafood representative. Kenji (Daikon) Onuki, Ocean Church executive director.

An excerpt from my chapter on Ocean Church which is now with other (semi) finished chapters at the link below.

... This is back-breaking work. You sit on a small box and, with rubber gloves on, you start digging through hundreds of pounds of fish, shrimp, crabs, and debris. (Its unbelievable how many beer cans are on the bottom of the Gulf of Mexico.) The walls of the decks are about three feet high and have small doors about a foot square which we open; it is through these small doors that the “trash” is thrown back to the ocean. You push the shrimp to one side and the “trash” behind you and out one of these doors. The shrimp are incredibly strong for their size and they wrap their bodies around your finger and pinch the hell out of you.

The crabs are the real problem. They grab your finger with a claw before you can blink. If you try to pull it off with your other hand then they grab a finger on the other hand before you can blink. So there you are with a little mini-monster from the deep pinching the hell out of both your hands as it stares you in the eyes. If you pull your hands apart one of two things happens, either the claw slips off one hand, in which case it immediately grabs and assists the other claw already pinching the hell out of the remaining hand; or, the claw comes off completely, the detached appendage still pinching the hell out of your remaining hand.

The only way to deal with the crabs when they grab you is to fling them, backhand, as hard as you can toward the wall of the boat. When you do this then one of two things happen; either the claw slips off your finger and the crab is smashed/crushed against the wall of the boat; or, the claw comes off and the crab is smashed/crushed against the wall of the boat but the detached claw is still pinching the hell out of your hand, like some miniature “terminator” appendage.

Anyway, all of this is with respect to the regular crabs. There’s also stone crabs, but these are a totally different story. These guys you stay away from; their claws look steroid-induced and they can break your finger in an eyeblink. And then there’s these tiny (two inches long?) bright red fish that are poisonous. Their spines will immediately prick you, even through the rubber gloves, if you touch one your hand will swell up two or three times its normal size.

Of course after the first few minutes of “culling” the shrimp from the “trash” “our friends” appear.

The sharks.

The small fish and wall-smashed crabs are a trail of food for these guys. They are over six foot long and they will be with us the entire night swimming next to the boat, just below the water surface, shadows of death, barely visible from the lights above the deck.

Daylight mercifully comes. Porpoises and seagulls now surround and play with our boat and eat the trash as the “friends” disappear with the darkness.



Just as we finish the last haul and are cleaning up, a sport-fishing boat comes to our boat’s side and they ask if it can trade some beer for bait. (I find out later that this is a common practice.) The captain does it, but he is obviously bent out of shape. When they leave he is totally possessed.

“Goddamn rich bastards in their little prissy sports boats!”

“We work our asses off every night so they can have their prissy little goddamn shrimp cocktails!”

“Goddamn pricks!”

And he has brought out a rifle and proceeds to try to shoot all the seagulls which have swarmed around our boat. And this here missionary guy is wondering what kind of world I have gotten myself into.

Somehow I have survived the night. My recently broken foot is throbbing, my entire body is sore, and my back is numb with pain. I fall into bed like a rock landing in soft mud. I think that I am asleep before my head hits the pillow.

And then, it seems like only minutes later, it is time to go to work again. The sun is already starting to set.

Only this time it’s harder. Much harder. The wind has kicked up and the boat is rocking roughly. In my entire life this is only my second day on the ocean and I’m feeling like my guts are being slammed against the sides of my body – I feel sick.

We start our “runs” and after the first run the friends have appeared. It has started to drizzle and the whole night is taking on a slightly eerie feeling. The water is so rough that occasionally the outrigger, stretched out horizontally over the water and pulling the net, digs into a wave and the whole ship shudders. Also, from the constant “gripping” required by the feet muscles with the rocking rolling deck, my foot is throbbing with pain; I remember that less than thirty hours ago it was still in a cast....

On the second run we somehow pick up half the bottom of the ocean, one of the nets has dug into the mud and over half the contents is mud and shells and beer cans. It takes forever to sort this stuff because we are having to individually pick the shrimp out of the trash. There’s also a million jelly fish and man-of-wars so we’re having to be careful about the stingers....

The third haul is the same lousy combination of ocean bottom and the captain is trying to figure out what is wrong, with some of the most creative swearing in the history of the world.

One of the cables is twisted on the outrigger. Yeh. About twenty feet out there one of the cables is twisted around one of the pulleys. This is what’s causing the problem, the cable’s caught and its probably causing the “doors” of the net to spin out of control, like a Charley Brown kite, into the ocean bottom.

I’m ordered by the captain, in no uncertain terms to crawl out there and fix it.

Yeh. Right!

I mean these outriggers are basically metal arms sticking out over the ocean. Usually, they are barely above the surface of the water, and tonight with the rough sea they are sometimes dipping into the water. I’ve been feeling seasick all night. The “friends” are not visible at the moment, but they have been following the boat and must be here. Besides, I can’t even swim.

I could die trying to do this.

But its very clear I will die if I don’t do this. There is a blankness and emptiness in the captain’s eyes that is scary. There is the very obvious possibility that if I do not do this, that I could simply disappear over the side of the ship.

So how does this here missionary guy take all this?

As I crawl out on the outrigger, I feel that heaven and God knows my situation. If it is God's will, I will be protected. If I do die, well, it is my offering to God and somehow in His indemnity battle with Satan, it is an offering that He will use for His providence. But I'm thinking of how throughout history people have been forced to work on the ocean, often as prisoners or as conscripts. I think of the stories I have read of the floggings and the mistreatment of sailors, and I feel that this is a precious moment to God – that He has someone who is willing to place himself in the middle of this rough universe of ocean men and make this an offering to Him.

I end up completely upside down, my face facing the sky with my legs and arms wrapped around the outrigger and my back just inches above the water. (oh, God, I hope the "friends" don't see me..)

...Somehow I manage to get the cable untangled and to wriggle my way back to the deck.

There are no thanks, Nothing. It's back to the backbreaking work of culling the shrimp. I'm still feeling sick. I then throw up -- one of the three times I will do so this night....

[Book of Following SMM](#)