

In Search of Giant Bluefin Tuna with True Father

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Allan Hokanson was Captain of the New Hope, True Father's boat 1974–1983 and then of the Ocean Hope, a 180-foot trawler in Alaska 1983–1998. Excerpt from his forthcoming book, *Fish Follow the Fisherman*.



Tuna season is like the Olympics of sport fishing, and I was determined to be a record-breaking tuna fisherman. It took me twenty-two long days to catch my first tuna, however. There were many strikes during that time, but from lack of experience, they were all lost. When a strike is so exciting, you can imagine how disappointing it is to lose the fish, but then you restore your spirit and resolve to go on. When the sun starts to sink at the end of the day, I feel like ordering the sun to stay up so I can stay out and get another strike. You really do not understand how I feel. If you have this spirit when you attack any task or problem there is nothing you cannot do. Though you lose the tuna, you just keep trying until you catch one. That's the way it goes. -- Sun Myung Moon

It was in July 1975 when the New Hope returned to Gloucester to seek the giant Bluefin tuna. This was our first full tuna season. The previous year had been a learning experience but no fish were caught during the two weeks Father stayed. We were again docked in front of the Rockaway Hotel where the True Family was staying, and every day Father went to the sea very early in the morning to arrive at the fishing grounds before daylight.

Six fishing rods were set out and lines prepared to secure the rod into the fighting chair. It was not long before we hooked the first fish, but due to lack of experience, it was lost. Two more fish were hooked in the first three days. The first of them was lost when the line hit the trim tab because I failed to move the boat quickly enough. The third fish was a long fight and things were going well. The tuna was about thirty meters from the boat when Father and Mr. Yu started talking loudly and began tying the line of a second fishing pole on the line the tuna was on. Watching this, I said in my mind, "What's going on here?" Right at that moment the fish was gone.

Many American leaders were onboard and others came and went during the first twenty-one days. Only Mr. Yu remained for the entire period.

One important ingredient for success was unity with True Father, and my own unity with Father was most important. The instant my faith wavered, the fish was gone and the destiny was sealed. Although thirteen more fish were hooked, the New Hope would go twenty-one days without landing a tuna.

Catching a tuna is by no means an individual effort; it requires a team. Like a well-oiled machine,

everything has to be just right.

“During the tedious wait for a tuna to strike, people may complain and fight, but when the tuna bites, they are instantly united. I have never seen such instant unification! That is the unification spirit I am trying to promote. Rather than just talk about it, I particularly want Unificationists to come from all over the world and experience it.” -- Sun Myung Moon



Allan Hokanson with Father and a tuna fish Father had caught

This is the procedure for catching tuna: I anchor the New Hope among many other boats in the fishing grounds with a buoy attached to the anchor line. The anchor line attaches to the boat via a (quick release) pelican hook, which has a release line running up to the fly bridge so the captain can release the anchor. On the back deck, six lines are set out with buoys to float them in the current behind the boat. Each line is a little farther out and hangs a little deeper. All are baited with fresh fish. Father would buy up to three hundred pounds of fresh fish, or “chum,” which is cut and thrown overboard continuously throughout the day so that it will drift by the baited hooks and attract tuna. Father baits the hooks and sets out the gear, and then moves to the fly bridge just above the ladder where he has a good view of the deck and the gear in the water.



From there he instructs Daikon Ohnuki on how to adjust the lines so that the chum will pass by the baited hooks. The current is due to the tides and therefore constantly changing. As a result, extreme vigilance is required to keep the chum and the baited hooks in proper alignment at all times. Once the lines are out, one person will begin cutting the chum, usually Whiting, into one to two inch pieces and throw them over the side precisely where Father instructs, so they will drift by the hooks. Usually the chum is fresh, but sometimes it is left onboard for a few days before it has finished, and it is putrid.

Once the boat is shut down and the gear out, I begin the day sitting just inside the salon door, making a new leader (a short length of silkworm gut, wire or heavy line used to attach the end of a fish line to the hook). The strain of the fish is so great that once a fish is hooked, that leader cannot be used again. So the wait begins. All day long, day after day, Father remains on the fly bridge watching the gear.

When at last the shout rings out, Fish on!, everything is set in motion. Father descends the ladder and

everyone hits the deck to pull in the lines while Daikon controls the line with the fish on it. While Father is coming down the ladder, I am going up the edge of the ladder, jumping over the rail and to the control station where I start the engines and release the anchor. Once the extra gear is clear, Father takes his position in the fighting chair and the fishing rod is strapped in. Just as you cannot stop a car on the expressway with a piece of string, there is no way you can stop a tuna with a fishing line. It is a matter of teamwork between the fisherman and the captain to maintain control of the fish.

The first task is to follow the fish before he strips all the line off the reel, and get clear of the fleet. We're talking about a thousand pounds of muscle, moving at over fifty miles an hour and more than a hundred other boats on anchors with gear drifting behind. If the fish is moving the right way, we simply follow him. If not, we try to keep enough tension on the line to turn him. In the meantime, every boat in our path will have to drop their anchor and pull their gear. Once clear, in about three hops I am on the deck at the aft control station, where I sit on the steering wheel using only the engines to control the boat. Then the fight begins. The boat moves with the fish, Father pulling in line when he can, slowly wearing the fish down.



The New Hope, True Father's boat, which Allan Hokanson captained for ten years

A tuna can swim all day at twenty miles per hour with bursts over fifty miles per hour. He will take line at unbelievable speed and then in an instant turn and come right back toward the boat, trying to cut the line on the propellers. Running, spinning, turning, Father in the chair and the captain at the controls, we do our dance with the tuna.

The primary reason the pole is tied into the fighting chair is so that Father can slip out and allow the guests to take a turn and experience the power of the tuna. None of them is an experienced fisherman, certainly not with a fish the size of a tuna, and it is important to keep the line tight so that I can see which way the tuna is going and to prevent the tuna from shaking the hook out. So while others are in the chair, I use only enough power to stay with the fish, and though they are pulling with all their strength, none of them is able to pull in much line.

When Father returns to the fighting chair, all that changes. The team is together again, the fish wears down, and it is time to get serious about bringing him in. To the cheers of the crowd, Father brings in line as I back down on the fish. The final step is to drive in the harpoon. The fight is over. A happy crew pulls the fish aboard through the transom door.

Day 22: The New Hope was on its way home with tuna on board -- not one but two. Before going to the fish dock to unload, Father stopped at the Rockaway Hotel so that Mother and the children could see the fish. It was dinnertime, so the restaurant was full when someone went in and hollered, "The New Hope has a tuna!" The entire restaurant emptied out immediately.

There were so many people trying to get on the dock to see the fish that the float began to sink. This was the beginning of a new era in Gloucester tuna fishing, in which Father became known not only as a great

fisherman but also as a friend of fishermen. Over the next eight years, Father would set the standard, averaging thirty-five fish in seventy days each season. No other fishermen came close.



One of my jobs was to make sure that Father was adequately informed of any situation that might affect our operations, and then Father would make the decision and take responsibility for it. It was also true that when Father was not there to take responsibility, he never questioned my decisions.

Well, one morning there was a storm in the forecast -- fifty-knot winds from the northeast. What could be worse! Father said, "Let's go." Oh yes, there was one more unusual event that morning. It did not seem like much at the time, but it never happened again. One of the guests came up to the fly bridge as we were pulling out to ask, "Do we have enough fuel?" I assured him that we did and we headed out.

Although the skies were dark and gray, the sea was calm as we dropped anchor and began fishing. Needless to say, we were alone. Over the next few hours, the wind and seas increased until we were taking water over the stern. Some of that water was leaking through the hatches into the bilge. It was time to go. By the time we stowed the gear and hauled anchor, I was looking up at the waves from the fly bridge. My eye level was fifteen feet (4.5 meters) above the water but the waves crested at least ten feet above that. The prudent thing to do was to put the seas on our stern and head for Provincetown. Within thirty minutes, we would have been in protected waters. Yet, somehow, I felt that it was important that we return to Gloucester that night, so I did not question Father's decision.

I have spent a lot of time in the mountains as well as on the ocean, and I have always said, "The only difference between the mountains and the ocean is that on the ocean, the mountains are moving," and moving they were. The waves were white peaks threatening to crash down on us at any time. On the course to Gloucester was no headway at all.

The seas were too high to go straight into them, so I headed to the northwest, toward Boston. Quartering the waves, I attempted to find low spots and at all cost avoid being hit broadside by one of those towering mountains of water. Alone on the fly bridge, wrapped from head to toe in yellow rain gear, I stood, surrounded by a vast ocean that would not be conquered.

In the swirl of pelting ocean spray and driving winds, I, had to harmonize with the sea. As a dancer glides with his partner across the floor, we moved, the sea and I, bowing and swaying, spinning and turning, to the music of the northeast wind and crashing waves.

It was slow going, but at least we were moving. Father, at this time, was down in the salon with the rest of the crew, watching the numbers on the Loran slowly click off as it monitored our progress. Eventually we got close enough to shore to begin getting some protection from the land, and I was able to swing our course up toward Gloucester. Four and a half hours later, we pulled into the dock at the Rockaway Hotel, glad to be home. To my surprise however, the story did not end here. The next morning I went to start the engines to move to the fuel dock, but one wouldn't start. There was no fuel!