

Last week in the Tri-City weekly I noticed the ceremony blessing the Trinidad fishing fleet overlooking Trinidad Head. Such gatherings happen for a number of reasons, I suspect. One of them is that fishing and crabbing around here are pretty dangerous professions. Seas become windy, suddenly surging with chop and big waves, swells rise and 20-30 foot waves are not that uncommon; tides are tricky and the bar between our two jetties in Eureka is just plain dangerous. So prayers for the Captains and their crews seem eminently sensible.

I decided to follow up by talking to a neighbor and friend who is a commercial fisherman. He's been fishing and crabbing for 38 years in locations: like Trinidad, Crescent City, Gold Beach and Eureka.

I asked if he had had some harrowing experiences on the open seas. He's had many!

I share a few of the highlights ~~in order to impress upon you what brave men and women endure in order for us to be able to eat crab and fresh fish.~~ One winter many years ago my friend was out somewhere south of the Eureka jetties and heard a distress call from a smaller boat that was hung up in shallow waters. He and his crew closed in and just as they were about to rescue people on this smaller vessel bobbing in the surf, they noticed a huge set of waves coming toward them. In a split second they had to make a fateful decision: Either go forward and attempt a rescue with a high risk to all including the captain and crew of the would-be rescuers, or try their best to get outside these cresting waves before all were swept into Davy Jones Locker. They pushed out to sea and had a narrow escape from those big waves. The people on the smaller boat perished. I commented, "I bet that felt bad, to not be able to rescue those in danger." Yes, he agreed that it felt terrible; but that's how merciless the north coast seas can be: It was a question of some drowning, or all of us drowning.

Other episodes included coming in at Gold Beach riding a 15 foot wave in a 22 foot dory, or being hit by a huge rogue wave that broke in 9 fathoms of water; that wave took out the windows on both sides and almost tore the cabin off the boat. When I asked him how many friends he knew who perished while fishing off the north coast, he replied: "Oh, at least a dozen. And, I know since I've been fishing about 30 who have been lost at sea." 12 friends, lost at sea; ^{altogether} 30 colleagues.

^{In sum}
~~Altogether~~^a, crabbing and fishing are dangerous way to make a living. I wonder if we fully appreciate all the blood, sweat, and tears that go into every fish and crab we eat during the Christmas season. Money doesn't grow on trees; neither do crabs. It takes time, effort, and a good bit of courage to fish off the North Coast. So next time you eat some holiday crab or fish or shrimp—salute--yes, raise a toast and say a prayer for the people who risk their lives so that we can have that tasty Christmas morsel from the perilous waters off our coast.

This has been Dan Price for Community Comment