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Transcript of JJ's Crab Pots

Gerald Johnson

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Title: JJ's Crab Pots

Storyteller: Gerald (Jerry) Johnson

Interviewer: Jackson Miller

Interview Date: 2011-07-28

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Transcriber: Mary Beth Jones, Kathleen Spring

JERRY JOHNSON: Gerald Homer Johnson. That's my—most people know me as Jerry or JJ, which is the name on my boat. I'm over 40 years of experience, and I probably am the oldest, I think in Pacific City that still fishes commercially, a lot of the older ones go out sport fishing. But, uh, I'm nearing that stage. [Laughs]

What do people want? They want my crab pots. Why did I decide to do this? Uh, a fellow down here, he says, "I invited, a bunch of people from Portland to come on down and have a good time." And I told him I had half a dozen crab pots out in the ocean, and we're gonna have one big crab feed. Well, that made me feel good because I like people to enjoy themselves. Holy smokes, you oughta seen the turnout we had. Every time, it was a good time! And that's what I enjoy, ah, people having, is a—is a good time. It sounds maybe corny, but I honestly feel that way.

I use no, no jig for my pots. I'm, this is my 58th year of making crab pots. Dad¹ di—did it all his life for 65 years. So in the family we have a longevity that's probably up there, number one. On, we're not s—I'm not saying that this is, is the best, but everybody is extremely happy with what I do and—I have a couple of pots in Alaska, and I have a handful down in California,

and you gotta make 'em according to their size that they want up there. And I have in Washington and I have 'em in Astoria. Um—uh Garibaldi, quite a few in Garibaldi, quite a few in Newport. Um, so you know there's, there's a reason why mine venture out to these locations. Otherwise, there're crab makers, there are crab pot makers in these other territories, too.

And then this—here's another thing that my dad did. Now these are sports pots, but I—I also use them for my commercial pots. He called this a petticoat. And as far as I know, I'm the only one that really puts a petticoat in; many of the guys just love 'em. Your, your wire here has to be tight. This has to be tight, and this ground here. [Pause] These here are two valuable pieces of tools. I couldn't make a pot without it. [Pause] And this is extremely valuable; I designed this and made it. [Pause] It works best if you slant it just like this. I cut it off 22 inches, and then, I had made a little notch here. It exactly—it's what I had to have in order to do it. And then I just tilt it on down, and I circled it all the way around. This isn't, isn't the one. And I slide it right on up so it touches that end. Right here. All right and then, I do the same with, with this. And so, what—what'll happen is this turns out, just like that by using that little jig I made. And then you have to use this [Pause] in order to form it. And I know that a three-and-a-half-pound hardshell Dungeness crab will go through that.

And, and then, this, this isn't on it. This is another little gadget. See, crab will crawl all over trying to escape, but you put the, ah, trigger—[Pause] you see you put the trigger on it here, and so the trigger will go underneath? And so when the crab crawls up into here, his body could actually hit the top of this trigger without this. And then what is he doing? He's opening it

up and he says, “Okay, I’m sacrificing myself, gang. The rest of you guys get outta here.” And, that’s how they escape. So, ah, that’s why that is there. And so then, you just, you just take this, and you have to hammer it in here. It’s one, two, three, until it’ll fit down here. And I might have to go through it twice, but normally I’m to the point right now where I can hit two times or three times and get a perfect deal out of it. Sss—this is what I use, I have two sizes, one for the commercial size, and this here is for the sports size. And so it’s just getting this iron welded to it, drill a hole here so you can stick your, uh. [Pause] You stick your rod in like this, and since it’s curved anyway when you buy the stuff, you—you lock it into your vice. I open it up and then squeeze right in here. And then I, I cut one round circle [Pause] of this, and I lob it off with my lobbers. And so this, that would be one round circle to this. And then I just, one, two, three, four, five and I usually get about eight of ‘em. And then I take a red marking pen and go down, and then I take the lobbers and cut off my circles. And so in no time at all, I—I’m doing it faster, far faster then when I used it with the expensive piece of equipment.

A person down at, ah, at Newport had a friend, who wanted a crab pot ‘cause he told him—he, he used to live right where my son lives—before he passed away. He says, “He wants one of your pots, I told him about ‘em.” He put it out in the South Jetty overnight. He had 52 crab keepers in it. The lid, the—the lid was coming up. [Pause] That’s been the most. I’ve only had 48 up here. [Laughter]

JACKSON B. MILLER: [Overlapping laughter] Oh, only 48!

JERRY: Yeah.

NOTES:

¹Jerry's dad was Homer Johnson. He commercial crab-fished in Netarts Bay, originally out of a skiff, and pulled everything by hand. He also built a troller, which he fished out of Tillamook Bay.