

THE FISHER QUEEN

Former California Valley Girl puts the added value in salmon, albacore

"Albacore tuna has a mild flavor that's delicious served raw or seared briefly on the outside so that it's still rare on the inside."

— Tom Douglas, Seattle-based chef, has been cooking up Pacific Northwest cuisine since 1984

I first met Nancy Fitzpatrick at Hatfield during a media summit in July — AKA journalists and scientists confabbing. It was designed to bring writers and reporters to scientists working on a variety of issues affecting the Central Oregon Coast, and beyond.

What better way to look deep at an individual who ends up on the Pacific Coast than to see not only what it's like to head up two of the four seafood commissions in Oregon — The Salmon and the Albacore commissions — but to also explore her roots bringing her here in the first place?

Nancy speaks fondly of fishers and their families. Her husband, Mike, who has been a commercial fisherman for years. While they worked as teachers in Tigard (1974-79), Mike got hooked when he met a fisherman working out of Pacific City. Nancy and Mike bought a commercial dory boat; he taught elementary school during the fall-winter-spring and fished during summers.

Nancy's work with the two commissions — separate entities — is similar to the administrative duties of the other two commissions — Trawling and Crab.

Teacher, Secretary, Fish Agent

Anyone who has lived on the coast understands the ups and downs of all fishing industries and those challenges managing the targeted fish and crustaceans. For Nancy, her introduction to the vagaries of Oregon's salmon fishers came at her from an asymmetrical direction — she was a public-school teacher in the Beaverton School District before she and her husband moved to the house on Devils Lake they've occupied (and where they raised their two

daughter) in since 1988.

Her formative years (she was born in the San Fernando Valley in 1951) may have been rooted in our southern neighbor, but Nancy has a much more dynamic pedigree than just being a "California girl who moved to Oregon."

We are talking about a foremother on her mother's side — the Chiltons — who is reported to have been the first female to set foot on Plymouth. Nancy points out that many of her relatives on the maternal side are buried in the oldest Boston cemetery, on the grounds of King's Chapel.

While Mike Fitzpatrick and Nancy Sanesi (we'll get into her dad's Italian heritage in part two) met in 1970 at UC-Riverside, it seemed as if their destinies were meant to intersect — he was finishing a psychology and education degree after a hitch in the US Army and she was working on a German/education major. Before they married, Nancy and Mike would vacation in Oregon, at her grandfather's beach house in the Nelscott area of Lincoln City.

Getting under people's narrative beyond — "what do you do for a living, what's your job, what kind of hobbies do you have?" — helps young and old readers see that our lives end up beginning at Point A (and really, begin with our great-great-grand-and-beyond-grandparents' narratives), then evolve from Points B, C, and D and in some cases, all the way to Point X.

We'll get to some of those way stations, but for now, the reality is salmon is no longer king in Oregon, as the species is highly managed for many reasons, from dammed tributaries to the fact that many fish come from major rivers with colluding pollution issues, hundreds of miles from where Oregon's fishers land them. The salmon fishers of Oregon have a limited catch, which Nancy would like to stay in the Pacific Northwest to enjoy.

Two Fish, Two Commissions, One Person

The Oregon Salmon Commission started in 1985, out of Newport. There was a manager and fulltime secretary. Nancy became the secretary in 1989. In 1991, there was what many called a "disaster" in the salmon industry, with the season closed completely because of the constraints on



fisheries needing stocks to go up various rivers.

The Newport office shut down, and Nancy ended up as a quarter-time, independent contractor working out of her Otis home. She took on a variety of different paid jobs, including being an aide at DeLake Elementary school, working with the County Extension office with 4-H students, and the Salmon Commission.

She's now the executive director of two separate industry-supported entities — the Salmon Commission and Albacore Commission (established in 1999). Her role is to support the fishers and processors and distributors of both species with the tools of each commission funded through respective industry dues. Research, communication, education and promotion are her marching orders.

"I love this job because I love talking to the public. I do everything, from opening the mail to going to Washington DC to talk with congressional people."

She has been able to walk the talk by attending seafood expos and shows, from the one in Portland to those in Boston, Texas and New Orleans. These sometimes-gargantuan events have hundreds of groups representing myriad marine food products with thousands of people attending to sample products and make deals to purchase products.

Tuna Cook-off, Newport Style

One dynamic local event Nancy helped organize through the Albacore Commission was the Great American Albacore Cookoff at the docks in Newport — an event that ran for five years straight beginning in 2011.

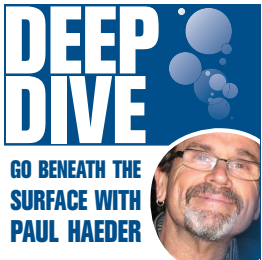
In 206, more than 500 people purchased \$15 tickets to get samples of albacore tuna in various recipes from a host of chefs. She said \$10,000 worth of tuna was purchased to get this event up and running, with prize money for winning cooks. The Cookoff was also a benefit for the Food Bank.

"The consumer is so afraid to buy a chinook or albacore tuna. They are even more leery of cooking sea food at home." Those professional and amateur cooks demonstrated the variability of the tuna as a nutritious and tasty main course or appetizer. "We want to get that tuna into the consumer's mouth. That's all it takes to get them hooked."

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Read on, as Deep Dive continues at www.oregoncoasttoday.com.

Paul Haeder is a writer living and working in Lincoln County. He has two books coming out, one a short story collection, "Wide Open Eyes: Surfacing from Vietnam," and a non-fiction book, "No More Messing Around: The Good, Bad and Ugly of America's Education System."



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