

Myanmar Fisherman Home After 22 Years as a Slave

By Margie Mason
Associated Press

TUAL, Indonesia (AP) — All he did was ask to go home.

The last time the Burmese slave made the same request, he was beaten almost to death. But after being gone eight years and forced to work on a boat in faraway Indonesia, Myint Naing was willing to risk everything to see his mother again.

So he threw himself on the ground and begged for freedom. Instead, the captain vowed to kill him for trying to jump ship, and chained him for three days without food or water.

He was afraid he would disappear. And that his mother would have no idea where to look.

Myint is one of more than 800 current and former slaves rescued or repatriated after a year-long Associated Press investigation into pervasive labor abuses in Southeast Asia's fishing in-

was desperate for money. So his mother finally relented. When the agent returned, he hustled his new recruits to grab their bags immediately.

Myint's mother wasn't home. He never got to say goodbye.

A month later, Myint found himself at sea. After 15 days, his boat finally docked on the remote Indonesian island of Tual, surrounded by one of the world's richest fishing grounds. The Thai captain shouted that everyone on board now belonged to him: "You Burmese are never going home. You were sold, and no one is ever coming to rescue you."

Myint spent weeks at a time on the open ocean, living only on rice and the parts of the catch no one else would eat. As Thailand's seafood export industry has expanded, overfishing has forced trawlers farther into foreign waters. So migrants are now trapped for months, or even years, aboard floating prisons.

In 2001, he heard one fisherman back home if they captain was offering to take agreed to work. So, eight

years after he first arrived in Indonesia, he returned to the sea.

But the conditions were just as appalling as the first time, and the money still didn't come. If anything, the slave trade was getting worse. To meet growing demand, brokers sometimes even drugged and kidnapped migrant workers to get them on board.

After nine months on the water, Myint's captain told the crew he was abandoning them to go back to Thailand alone. Furious and desperate, the Burmese slave once again pleaded to go home. That, he said, was when he was chained to the boat.

It's a brutal trade that has operated for decades, with companies relying on slaves to supply fish to the United States, Europe and Japan

Read the rest of this story online at www.theskanner.com



In this May 16, 2015 photo, former slave fisherman Myint Naing, center, speaks with relatives and neighbors in Mon State, Myanmar after being gone 22 years. Myint, 40, is among hundreds of former slave fishermen who returned to Myanmar following an Associated Press investigation into the use of forced labor in Southeast Asia's seafood industry.

dustry. Thailand's booming seafood business alone runs on an estimated 200,000 migrant workers, many of them forced onto boats after being tricked, kidnapped or sold. It's a brutal trade that has operated for decades, with companies relying on slaves to supply fish to the United States, Europe and Japan — on dinner tables and in cat food bowls.

Myint, his family and his friends recounted his story to AP, which also followed parts of his journey. It is strikingly similar to accounts given by many of the more than 330 current and former slaves from Myanmar, Cambodia, Laos and Thailand interviewed in person or in writing by AP.

In 1993, a broker visited Myint's village in southern Myanmar with promises of jobs for young men in Thailand. Myint was only 18 years old, with no travel experience, but his family

During the busiest times, the men worked up to 24 hours a day. There was no medicine, and they were forced to drink boiled sea water. Anyone who took a break or fell ill was hit by the captain. Fishermen said that workers on some boats were killed if they slowed down, while others simply flung themselves overboard.

Myint was paid only \$10 a month, and sometimes not at all. By 1996, after three years, he had had enough: He asked for the first time to go home.

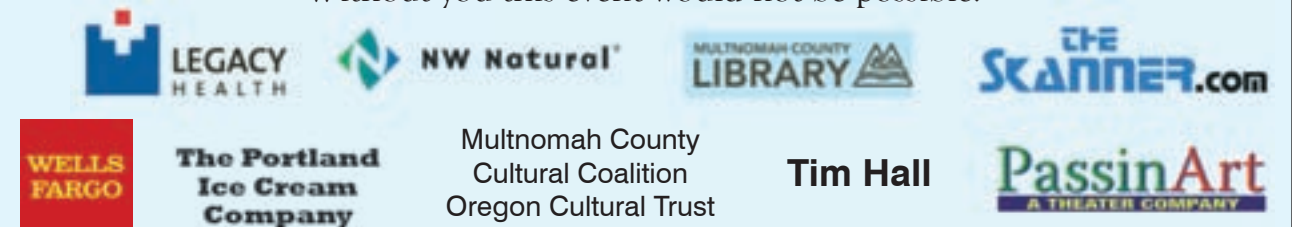
His request was answered by a helmet cracking his skull.

He ran away. An Indonesian family took mercy on Myint until he healed, and then offered him food and shelter for work on their farm. For five years, he lived this simple life. But he couldn't forget his relatives in Myanmar, otherwise known as Burma, or the friends he left behind on the boat.



We would like to take the time and say thank you to the Vendors and Parade participants for their participation in the 2015 Juneteenth Festival and Parade.

A special thank you to the following sponsors. Without you this event would not be possible.



The Juneteenth Oregon committee is in the planning stage for next year's event and we are seeking comments on this year's event, Volunteers to help with the planning, the festival site, entertainment and parade as well as Vendors. We invite you to come as we celebrate the history of Juneteenth in 2016.