



Interview with Hollis Jennings

MOHAI, *Commercial Fisherman Oral History Project*, 2018.63.13
Transcribed for the 2023 4Culture Collections Care Grant

Narrator(s): Hollis Jennings

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Interviewer(s): Jeffrey Kahrs

Interview with commercial fisherman Hollis Jennings about her life and career as a seine captain in Southeast Alaska, and what is like on a boat as a woman. Originally from Kentucky, Jennings was the first female skipper in the Southeast fishing fleet.

Keywords: Fishermen, Alaska

Transcriber's Note: A third voice can sometimes be heard on the recording, usually agreeing or confirming what Jennings has said. This person is not identified explicitly, but Kahrs references a "Courtney" in the beginning.

[Statement begins]

Jeffrey Kahrs: Yeah, today is November 13th. We are doing an interview with Hollis Jennings, who is the Captain of the *Natalie Gail*. I got that right, I'm so proud of myself. And, umm ... to start off with Hollis, where are you from?

Hollis Jennings: Originally?

Jeffrey Kahrs: Originally, yeah, I would start there.

Hollis Jennings: Originally, I'm from Kentucky, Winchester, Kentucky.

Jeffrey Kahrs: Now, where is Winchester, Kentucky?

Hollis Jennings: I guess it's about a half hour west of Lexington and maybe an hour west of—or east of Cincinnati. No, that's Ohio. Louisville, I guess.

Jeffrey Kahrs: But you could be pretty close to Ohio if you were in Kentucky.

Hollis Jennings: Yeah.

Jeffrey Kahrs: So, was it a small town?



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Hollis Jennings: It was. Small town, God, I don't even know the number of people. Maybe the size of Ballard here, as far as just Ballard, if you took just Ballard.

Jeffrey Kahrs: What were the major industries there? Were there any?

Hollis Jennings: Horses, I think.

Jeffrey Kahrs: Horses?

Hollis Jennings: Yeah, farming, horses. There's a lot of horse racing, the Kentucky Derby. Farming, tobacco farming was a big industry.

Jeffrey Kahrs: Pretty rural. Was it generally pretty poor, middle-class?

Hollis Jennings: I'd say right in the middle. You had both, I think. I mean, the people that were into horse racing were, they had money, of course. Yeah, but I'd say for the most part probably middle class.

Jeffrey Kahrs: Middle class, okay. And your family, had they been in Kentucky a long time, I mean, hundreds of years?

Hollis Jennings: No. My dad was born in West Virginia. My mom was born in Alabama and I'm not really sure why they ended up in Kentucky. I think my grandfather might have lived there, my great-grandfather, and they just kind of went there and liked the town so ended up staying.

Jeffrey Kahrs: So, they stayed. So, you were there, how long were you there? What age were you living there until?

Hollis Jennings: I lived there until I was fourteen years old and then my parents split up. My dad moved to Pennsylvania, so I ended up going with him a year later. So, I lived in Pennsylvania until I was maybe seventeen or eighteen.

Jeffrey Kahrs: What part of Pennsylvania?

Hollis Jennings: Lancaster, around the Amish people, actually.



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Jeffrey Kahrs: Oh yeah, sure. Lancaster County is Amish. That must have been an interesting experience for you.

Hollis Jennings: Yeah, it was weird. It was fun.

Jeffrey Kahrs: What do you mean it was weird?

Hollis Jennings: Ah, you're just driving along, and you had a horse and buggy. I delivered pizzas when I was sixteen, so I'd be racing around, trying to deliver a pizza, and you got a horse and buggy with three tourists behind the buggies, so just getting around them mostly.

Jeffrey Kahrs: So how old were you when you started to work?

Hollis Jennings: I started working when I was fourteen years old in Kentucky.

Jeffrey Kahrs: What was your first job?

Hollis Jennings: Tobacco farming, actually. Yeah, they would hire the kids to— the boys would through and pick the pollen, the girls would take the pollen and we would pollinate—what is it, the stamina on the plant?

Jeffrey Kahrs: Stamen, yeah.

Hollis Jennings: So, it was actually decent money. It was six-fifty an hour, I think, at fourteen, forty hours a week during the summer. So Yeah. I don't know, it was an okay job.

Jeffrey Kahrs: Okay, you went from tobacco farming to delivering pizzas?

Hollis Jennings: Yep, delivering pizzas. Actually, when I came fishing, originally, I wanted to get a down payment for my own pizza shop. That was my goal that first year.

Jeffrey Kahrs: Ok, so how old were you your first year?

Hollis Jennings: I would have been twenty-two? Or twenty ... yeah. Twenty-two.

Jeffrey Kahrs: How did that come about? How did you end up here from Kentucky? It's a long ways away.



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Hollis Jennings: So, I was travelling in Mexico—Guatemala, and then Mexico doing volunteer work and I ran into somebody who would go to Alaska every summer, fish, and then he would use the money that he made fishing to travel around the rest of the year. So, I was like, “Wow, that sounds like a great idea. How do I get into that?” And he just said, you know, go to Fisherman’s Terminal in Seattle and pound the docks. So, I did and got a job.

Jeffrey Kahrs: So now, did you go to university?

Hollis Jennings: I went to college for a couple of years.

Jeffrey Kahrs: A couple of years. What were you studying?

Hollis Jennings: I wanted to study Chemistry and Mechanical Engineering, but I just did basic classes. I was only there for a couple of years.

Jeffrey Kahrs: Right, so you are a Marine Electrical Engineer now, yeah?

Hollis Jennings: Marine Electrician. I don’t know about Engineer, but I do marine electrical work in the off-season.

Jeffrey Kahrs: That’s good! So you got into fishing that first year, what was it like pounding the docks?

Hollis Jennings: It was the most fun I’ve ever had looking for a job. I mean, all you’re doing is walking the docks, you’re talking to people the whole time, basically introducing yourself, asking them if they need anybody. When they say no, ask them if they know anybody that might need somebody, and you’re talking to a bunch of people from your own age to people a lot older. It’s just fun, you hear everybody’s story. It took me four days of walking the docks, probably eight hours a day before I found a job. It was fun.

Jeffrey Kahrs: Can you remember what it was like when you finally—the guy who interviewed you for your first job, what did you say, what did he say to you?

Hollis Jennings: It was Tom Pollock on the *Quandary* and when I came up, actually somebody came and got me and said, “Hey, Tom’s eyes lit up when he heard that you were a Volkswagen mechanic,”—which I did for a couple years before I came fishing as well—and told me to go talk



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to him. So, when I walked on the boat, Tom—the window of the galley had fallen between the, um ... basically it had fallen into the house, and so I came up and Tom said, “Hey, if you fix this window in five minutes, you got the job.” They kept on trying to put a screw on a screwdriver and they’d flip the screwdriver over and then the screw would fall off. They were trying to screw something into it so they could put a line around it and pull it up. So, I happened to be chewing a piece of gum, so I stuck that on the screwdriver and stuck the screw on the piece of gum on the screwdriver and we were able to get it fixed. So, I ended up fixing it in five minutes and got the job.

Jeffrey Kahrs: Now, you know, you have quite a— it sounds like a real mechanical ability. Have you always had this?

Hollis Jennings: I think so. I think always like taking stuff apart and figuring out how it works. I’ve definitely never been scared to take things apart, which I think is a big part of that.

Jeffrey Kahrs: Right, when were you a Volkswagen mechanic?

Courtney: (Laughing) I forgot he was here.

Hollis Jennings: Uh, so I did Volkswagen—I, uh—you might have moved the camera a little bit, it’s alright, I think you hit it. [Unrelated chatter] So I was a Volkswagen mechanic. I worked two jobs when I was going to college. I delivered pizzas in the evening.

Jeffrey Kahrs: Where’d you go to school?

Hollis Jennings: Just West Virginia State University.

Jeffrey Kahrs: Which town? Is it like in Wheeling?

Hollis Jennings: It’s in Charleston. Actually, it might be in Wheeling. It’s just south of Charleston. I forget actually where.

Jeffrey Kahrs: So, you were going to school and you were working—

Hollis Jennings: Volkswagen mechanic during the day and then I would hit my classes up, or leave just for the hour of the class and go back to work, and then I’d do pizza delivery in the



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evening. Just working a lot.

Jeffrey Kahrs: Right, you're hard working. Yeah.

Hollis Jennings: Which works well for this industry.

Jeffrey Kahrs: How did you get into being a Volkswagen mechanic?

Hollis Jennings: When I was delivering pizzas initially, I had an old Volkswagen Fox that I bought for \$125.00 and I found another one just like that one for \$75.00. And so, in the morning, I'd wake up, my car would be broken down, and I'd look for the part on the one car, take it off, put it on my car, and go to work. Pretty much.

Jeffrey Kahrs: And then one thing led to another?

Hollis Jennings: Yeah, I was looking for some parts and they happened to have the car that I needed to tear some parts off of and so I ended up talking to the owners and chit chatting and eventually asked them for a job, and they gave it to me. I learned a lot at that shop. That's probably where I got most of my initial mechanical experience, at least doing stuff the right way rather than just making it up.

Jeffrey Kahrs: Now, traditionally, when women get hired on boats, it's usually as a cook first. Was that true for you?

Hollis Jennings: Yeah, I was actually cook and engineer which—

Jeffrey Kahrs: Which is a little more unusual.

Hollis Jennings: Yeah, it's unusual and it was horrible, but they only made me cook my first year. I'm not very good at cooking, so I got that cut pretty fast.

Jeffrey Kahrs: So you're kind of working against a stereotype.

Hollis Jennings: I guess so. I mean, I wish I was a better cook. I love having a good cook on my boat, but it's just not something that I ever really learned to do.



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Jeffrey Kahrs: Uh-huh. Okay, let's go back, first year, what kind of challenges did you face in that first year?

Hollis Jennings: I don't know, I guess probably mechanically, in the engine room like something would break. I think that I had a hard time getting anybody to think that I knew what I was talking about, mechanically, partly because I was a greenhorn, which was a big part of it, but I think also partly because I was a girl and they figured a girl is not gonna know what she's talking about. But that didn't last long, you know, once you fix a couple of things I think I got a little bit more respect in that area. Um...other challenges, I mean, just the normal, everyday ones that every crew member faces, trying to figure out what they're doing, figure out all the names for everything. Um...I don't know, just trying to be helpful any way you can, but you don't know what you're doing so you're not very helpful, you're just in the way.

Jeffrey Kahrs: Do you have any good stories about that, you know, your first year learning the ropes?

Hollis Jennings: God, what was it like? I don't know.

Jeffrey Kahrs: Well, let me ask you this, when you have a new crewman now as you're a Captain, and you're watching them, do you ever think about what it was like for you when you were green?

Hollis Jennings: I try and think about the tips that helped me out the most. Like, umm—

Jeffrey Kahrs: What were some of those tips?

Hollis Jennings: Anything from ... you know, when the hook comes down, how most greenhorns grab it and they keep on trying to open it the wrong way, where if you just grab it from the back and you flip the button, it opens right up. I try and explain what I'm doing to 'em, mostly just because when I was a crew member you always want to ask like what's going on, but of course the skipper doesn't—you just don't think about that as a skipper. You're just trying to figure out what you're doing instead of letting the crew in on what you're doing. So, I try and let them know at least my reasoning for going to the coast or, um

Jeffrey Kahrs: When you mean the coast, you mean the coast of southeast Alaska, right?



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Hollis Jennings: Yeah, exactly, the coast rather than staying inside in the nice weather or something like that, pretty much.

Jeffrey Kahrs: Have you always fished southeast Alaska?

Hollis Jennings: Yeah, I did one year in False Pass aboard the *Zealot*, I think my fifth year of fishing as a crew member. It was fun, but Southeast is—Southeast is beautiful. It's just a nice place. The people are great, you know, you get to know everybody over the years too, so you see them year after year. It's a big social scene, I think. But mostly just Southeast, I mean, I've done squid fishing in California. I did a little bit of sardine fishing on another boat.

Jeffrey Kahrs: Where was your sardine fishing?

Hollis Jennings: We did that out of Astoria.

Jeffrey Kahrs: Yeah. There was a big year, last year, year before, it was huge.

Hollis Jennings: Yeah, and I just did the quota that was left over. It was in September, and I went down on the *Ocean Dream*. It was just a week or two that we fished.

Jeffrey Kahrs: How much were they getting a pound for sardines?

Hollis Jennings: I think they did it by the ton, but umm God, I can't remember now.

Jeffrey Kahrs: Because it was a huge run. I remember, I was there and they were talking about they were loading up every day and coming in.

Hollis Jennings: And I think that's kind of the point, like with sardine fishing, you need to load up every day.

Jeffrey Kahrs: That's why, the price is low.

Hollis Jennings: Yeah, the price is a lot lower. I think maybe they were getting \$200.00 a ton or something. But when you're loading up every day, it ends up being good money.

Jeffrey Kahrs: Yeah, and don't go far from home either.



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Hollis Jennings: Yeah, exactly. I mean, guys would go up double load, get a load, bring it in, unload, go out, get another one.

Jeffrey Kahrs: Right, did that happen to you when you were sardine fishing? You had quota, right?

Hollis Jennings: I think, yeah, there was quota and it was just the leftover quota, so they had the summertime quota and I think they figured it all out and they said, "Okay, we have this much left." It might even be another fishery, I'm not sure. I only did it once.

Jeffrey Kahrs: Yeah, it's not your regular fishery. Somebody said, "Hey, come do this," and you said okay. Now, let's get back to seining, what was the first boat you were on, the *Quandary*?

Hollis Jennings: The *Quandary* with Tom Polluck. That was my first boat. I fished with him for two years.

Jeffrey Kahrs: And what's it like being a woman on the boat, does it make any difference or? Like, uh You know, uh?

Hollis Jennings: With Tom it didn't. I mean, I think sometimes it does. I felt like I was lucky. You know, I felt like Tom definitely treated me the same way as he treated any other crew member. He yelled at me the same way, but he was a good—he wasn't necessarily a good teacher, but I learned a lot on the boat because he expects so much out of you, um and he trusts you to do stuff too, which is nice. He actually allows you to go down and take apart the PTO, where somebody else might just call a mechanic and not think that you were capable of it. But Tom didn't—

Jeffrey Kahrs: Can you explain a PTO, what's that mean?

Hollis Jennings: Power take-off, what engages the hydraulics.

Jeffrey Kahrs: I understand, but perhaps some of our viewers will not be quite so—or Courtney even, perhaps, doesn't know what a PTO is. Yes, no, it's what you use when you engage the hydraulics so that the hydraulic system will work. It runs off the main?

Hollis Jennings: Yeah, the main engine—



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Jeffrey Kahrs: Right in front of the main, I think.

Hollis Jennings: So, where the main engine is always spinning, and then you have your hydraulic pump over here, you don't want the hydraulic pump always spinning. So, the PTO is basically what connects the two and disconnects the two, if that makes sense at all. I don't know.

Jeffrey Kahrs: Yeah, thank you. I appreciate that. So it was pretty good breaking in with Tom. I mean, as a woman on a boat, there have been other women, of course. Where there a lot of women fishing in Southeast?

Hollis Jennings: No, I think that there's probably more now than there ever has been. But at that time, you know, maybe there were 20 girls in the fleet, maybe more, maybe less. But I definitely knew some other ones; I'm still friends with a lot of them. A lot of them still fish, actually. It's hard to say how many there are. I'm not sure, a lot less than guys.

Jeffrey Kahrs: Yes, a lot more guys, that's always the way it's been. Go to a bar, eighteen guys, one woman, things like that.

Hollis Jennings: Which is actually great for getting drinks if you're a girl.

Jeffrey Kahrs: That's right. You can cage a lifetime of drinks. So, okay, from the *Quandary*, where did you go?

Hollis Jennings: After the *Quandary*, I fished with Mickey Babich. It was his first year of getting a boat.

Jeffrey Kahrs: Mickey of the Babiches of Gig Harbor, right?

Hollis Jennings: Yes, and so he ended up getting his first seiner my third-year fishing.

Jeffrey Kahrs: Who was his dad?

Hollis Jennings: Nicolas Babich?

Jeffrey Kahrs: Nick Babich!



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Hollis Jennings: It would have been Nick Babich. Nick Senior, I think is what they called him because there's Nick Junior, too.

Jeffrey Kahrs: Yeah, there's bunches of them.

Hollis Jennings: So, I fished with him for two years as well and that was great.

Jeffrey Kahrs: And what was the name of his boat?

Hollis Jennings: The *Mystic Lady*.

Jeffrey Kahrs: *Mystic Lady*, yeah.

Hollis Jennings: Which was the old *Cheryl Ann*, I don't know if you remember the *Cheryl Ann*.

Jeffrey Kahrs: I probably would if I'd seen it, but now I wouldn't know it because it doesn't look like *Cheryl Ann* anymore. Now *Cheryl Ann* has become the *Mystic Lady*.

Hollis Jennings: Exactly.

Jeffrey Kahrs: Wow, what a transformation that gal has gone through. Now, let me ask you this, when you switch boats, there's always a new kind of culture. Each boat has its own ways of doing things. Would you agree with that?

Hollis Jennings: Yeah, absolutely, but it was kinda easy with Nickey because it was his first year with the boat, so we kinda made our own culture. We kinda made our own way of doing things. So, there wasn't really too much of a change. It was kind of all of us just pulling together, trying to figure out how to make the operation work.

Jeffrey Kahrs: What's it like going with a new skipper? I mean, they always make certain mistakes that an experienced skipper doesn't make. What are some of those mistakes?

Hollis Jennings: Oh, I think our first day fishing, we got the side tow bridle in the wheel because somebody had, uh—the skipman had released himself and somebody hadn't pulled it up and hung it on the side of the boat. So, we got that in the wheel the first day with him, but otherwise there weren't too many mistakes. He'd been fishing almost his entire life, so he knew a lot of what he



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was doing. Something that I found interesting as a crew member was watching him learn how to bring fish on board. Because you know, everybody watches the nets, as a crew member you think that the fish just kind of come on board real easy, where actually you have to have lines the right length or, um, stuff tied up the right way. [Cell phone rings] So, it's interesting just watching him learn how to bring fish on board or watching him learn how to make decisions. I don't know, I guess watching his struggles, I think, not that he had a lot of struggles, but watching him just learn how to become a skipper helped me when I got my own boat because I kind of remembered "Hey, he had a hard time with this," or "This is something I need to pay attention to."

Jeffrey Kahrs: What do you mean by bringing fish on board?

Hollis Jennings: So, at the end of the set, you still have to get the fish on the boat, um, and so we have triangles, this one type of the bunt, uh I don't know how to explain it, just getting the fish.

Jeffrey Kahrs: Right, you have to get the bunt so it's attached to the boat. Do you roll your fish onboard?

Hollis Jennings: Yeah. Well, I don't use a rolling bunt. I use a triangle, which is a normal bunt. But yeah, just making sure the lines are connected correctly, making sure you have all the lines. It's just stuff that you don't really pay attention to as a crew member because the skipper always just, they just bring the fish on board, and then when you're doing it, you realize that if this line's too long or if you forget to connect this line, then you're gonna lose the fish or maybe it doesn't come on right.

Jeffrey Kahrs: Did Nick do that during his first year?

Hollis Jennings: Yeah, the first set, the first big set we got, you know, we're sitting there trying to figure out why the—we had the line all the way up and the fish weren't still coming on.

Jeffrey Kahrs: You figured out you had to shorten the line?

Hollis Jennings: Yep, shorten the line or shorten another part of it just to make sure everything lines up right.

Jeffrey Kahrs: And then you did get the fish onboard?



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Hollis Jennings: Yeah, after that we got them on great every time.

Jeffrey Kahrs: Good, good. Okay, so that's four years. Where did you go from there?

Hollis Jennings: So my fifth and sixth year, I spent with Dave Jones on the *Zealot* and he was a really great teacher. He let me stay in the top house the whole time. Not the whole time, I mean, I still did my deck duties, but any extra time I had I would be in the top house with him, asking him questions.

Jeffrey Kahrs: He's quite a well-known fisherman, I think. Was he quite good?

Hollis Jennings: Oh, yeah, he's a great fisherman and a good guy, too, and really patient. I wish I was as patient as he is, but we all can't be like Dave Jones.

Jeffrey Kahrs: No, we can't, and we shouldn't be. We're all just who we are, I guess.

Hollis Jennings: Yep.

Jeffrey Kahrs: So, that was the *Zealot*, is that right?

Hollis Jennings: The *Zealot*, yep. They're actually right across from me right now.

Jeffrey Kahrs: Right, I saw the boat. Now, were you still fishing Southeast or was that up in False Pass?

Hollis Jennings: So, we did one year in False Pass, which that was interesting because that was the first time he had fished False Pass. So, it was kinda cool watching him learn all these new sets. It was kind of, allowed me to—

Jeffrey Kahrs: It's very different fishing in the Southeast.

Hollis Jennings: Well, and it wasn't an area that he knew. So, I remember on the way up there,

he had all his charts pulled out and he was trying to figure out, "Well, if the fish are coming from over here, maybe they'll hit this point or this is a popular hook off so maybe if I can fish down here or up here I can actually get them before maybe these guys."



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Jeffrey Kahrs: Did he have a good year up in False Pass?

Hollis Jennings: No, it was actually a horrible year, but it was a horrible year for everybody. We did better than a lot of guys up there, it's just the fish never really showed up.

Jeffrey Kahrs: And you say it's a sea fishery too, isn't it, to a great extent?

Hollis Jennings: The Shumagin Islands, so you're basically always on the coast. It's bad weather, green water coming over the rails every set. It was kind of miserable sometimes.

Jeffrey Kahrs: No, it sounds pretty miserable especially with seining, you know, you got the net going all directions.

Hollis Jennings: Web flying everywhere, yeah. But he was—Dave Jones was a great ... he was just a great guy to fish with, for sure. How he allowed me to ask him questions constantly, non-stop, you know, "Why'd you do that," or "Why'd you do that this way instead of this," or "I can't believe you made another set. We've got two fish." Then you know, he would make another set and we'd get 20,000 pounds. And just asking him like, "What made you do another set instead of calling it a day or trying somewhere else?"

Jeffrey Kahrs: So would you say you learned the most from Dave?

Hollis Jennings: I would say that I learned the most about fishing, like actually fishing from Dave.

Jeffrey Kahrs: Did he prepare you the best for being a skipper?

Hollis Jennings: In some ways, uh—

Jeffrey Kahrs: I mean, he did, because he was telling you about how the fish act rather than repairing the PTO.

Hollis Jennings: Exactly. I would say that I learned the most mechanically from Tom, which a lot of, you know, you can't fish unless your boat's running. So, that's a really big part of it. But as far as the actual fishing or making decisions or learning a new set, I probably learned the most from Dave Jones, I'd say.



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Jeffrey Kahrs: So that was six years in, and did you get to spend that life you wanted to of travelling and adventure?

Hollis Jennings: Nope (laughs). Just started fishing and kept fishing.

Jeffrey Kahrs: And so you didn't ever go to all those magical places like where you met the guy in Mexico and told you about Alaska?

Hollis Jennings: Nope. I think the only time I've left the country since I started fishing was to go buy my boat in Canada. (Laughs) Yeah, that's it.

Jeffrey Kahrs: Okay, so yeah, so you kind of gave up that particular vision. Do a lot of fishermen travel a lot?

Hollis Jennings: They do, and I mean it's something that's great, or they might ski in the wintertime. You know, they can fish in the summertime, ski all winter, or travel all winter. It's a usual thing for fishermen to do, for sure. But I mean, if you want to get into it deeper and get your own boat, you gotta save a lot of money or fish a lot.

Jeffrey Kahrs: Did you save a lot of money?

Hollis Jennings: You know, I never really made that much money until my last year as a crew member and then I had a really good year, and that money I took and spent on a boat. I didn't really make that much.

Jeffrey Kahrs: Right, along with the loan. You didn't make that much. What does the average crew member make in like Southeast Alaska, would you say? Seasons vary a lot, right?

Hollis Jennings: Well, I'd say when I first started fishing, I would say probably the average crew share, or what you could expect to make would be between \$15,000.00 and \$20,000.00. But my last year fishing up until probably year before last, you could expect to make probably between \$20,000.00 and \$40,000.00. Some guys made \$60,000.00 as a crew member, but those were big years with a really good price. That has definitely dropped back down though. I'd say between \$15,000.00 and \$20,000.00 now, although this last year I think the average crew share was \$10,000.00.



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Jeffrey Kahrs: So, it's a real hit or miss thing, fishing.

Hollis Jennings: Yeah, you kinda gotta be in it for the long haul.

Jeffrey Kahrs: Yeah, so you're in it for the long haul now?

Hollis Jennings: Oh yeah.

Jeffrey Kahrs: So, how many years have you had the boat?

Hollis Jennings: I just finished my fourth year.

Jeffrey Kahrs: Okay, so what was that first year like, pretty nervous?

Hollis Jennings: Oh man, I had no idea what I was doing, just running around making stuff up, trying to keep your crew safe, mostly. The second year is pretty much kinda like the first year. You still don't know what you're doing. I mean, I still don't know what I'm doing at my fourth year, but I feel a lot more comfortable doing it.

Jeffrey Kahrs: Did you have pretty good years or were they tough years?

Hollis Jennings: The first year was tough. There wasn't a whole lot of fish around, but the price was good so that was okay. The second year was huge. It was the biggest fishing. It didn't matter if you knew what you were doing or not. You caught a bunch of fish, there was just fish everywhere. Um, and—

Jeffrey Kahrs: Good price then?

Hollis Jennings: And a good price. I think we were getting forty-five cents a pound.

Jeffrey Kahrs: Wow, forty-five is big.

Hollis Jennings: Yeah, last year, we went back down to— we were getting twenty cents a pound, so yeah, less than half. My third year was My third year was okay. It wasn't a huge year, the price wasn't amazing, but I felt more comfortable doing it. I felt like I found fish better. Third year was okay, it was an okay year.



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Jeffrey Kahrs: So it sounds like your skill set is really good for fishing and then you're kinda lucky you stumbled into this industry.

Hollis Jennings: Oh, yeah. Oh, no, I thank my lucky stars every day. It's a perfect industry for me. I love fishing, I do love my job. I don't know, it just gives you the option to do anything from making up some new mechanical device that'll make your life easier to figuring out and troubleshooting problems, and then you have the whole fishing aspect on top of anything mechanical. You have to, it's almost like a chess game trying to figure out where the other guys are gonna be, but also where the fish are gonna be. Every fisherman wants to be where all the fish are, but with no other fishermen.

Jeffrey Kahrs: Have you been in that situation?

Hollis Jennings: I have, actually. I was in that situation this year. Well, guys showed up, but in the beginning, it was just me.

Jeffrey Kahrs: Right, and the fish were there.

Hollis Jennings: The fish were there, they were there, absolutely. And actually, I ended up staying because I was coming through an area, I just kinda planned on going on through, but I saw a bunch of jumps and I was like, "Man, this looks kind of good," and then I broke a fuel line. So, you know, we're drifting around and the main engine dies. I go downstairs and after an hour get everything fixed. We're running again and I come up and I'm like, "Man, it still looks really good here." So, I ended up anchoring up and staying. But I don't know if I would have stayed if I hadn't broken that fuel line.

Jeffrey Kahrs: So it was a fortuitous broken fuel line?

Hollis Jennings: Yeah, I think it was.

Jeffrey Kahrs: Great, and then how long did you have it for yourself, that hot spot, before other boats started showing up?

Hollis Jennings: So, it was me and another guy fishing there, but I was on the southern shore, and he was on the northern shore. I probably had it to myself, just because he stayed on the other side,



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for—God, you know, actually I think I might have had it all morning. I think the first boat might have showed up around noon.

Jeffrey Kahrs: How many fish were you getting in a haul?

Hollis Jennings: We were getting, oh God, I think the first set was maybe 30,000 pounds, and then it slowly got smaller, you know. So we got 30,000 pounds with a bunch of logs, then maybe 20,000 pounds, and then it kind of broke down to maybe 10,000, 5,000, but we ground it out and we deck loaded that day.

Jeffrey Kahrs: That was pretty uncommon last year, too, wasn't it?

Hollis Jennings: Yeah, I think so. I mean, I'm sure—guys did it. I know some guys that had some really good days at Noyes Island, but it was definitely uncommon at that time.

Jeffrey Kahrs: Right, I heard Noyes was really good, but there were a lot of spots that were pretty spotty.

Hollis Jennings: Yeah, it was, and even Noyes, you know, there were guys that stayed out there for four days on a set and the first three guys I think got 30,000 pound sets and then the fourth guy had 500 pounds. So, it just dropped off to nothing as soon as the tide changed.

Jeffrey Kahrs: Right, explain the importance of tide change in fishing.

Hollis Jennings: Um I don't know, I mean, if you're getting a lot of fish and the tide changes, it seems like it usually drops off, and if you're getting no fish and the tide changes, there's a good chance that it might pick up.

Jeffrey Kahrs: How about the first set in the mornings, that pretty important?

Hollis Jennings: I think so. It definitely seems like the first set is the best. Not all the time. But I know I'm always paying attention to the tide change. Are we getting the tide change right before first set or maybe three sets in? I'm not, I mean, I guess maybe the fish are just kinda schooled up so that first set you get to scoop up everything that's hanging out, rather than kinda waiting for anything new to come in.



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Jeffrey Kahrs: Sure. Now, fishermen are often superstitious. Are you also superstitious?

Hollis Jennings: I am in some ways. I don't like black suitcases on the boat, just because I've had bad luck with those before. Girls—I mean, I don't mind having girls on the boat, obviously. I'm a girl, so. Bananas don't bother me. I'll let bananas be on the boat. Mostly, yeah, I'm kinda superstitious.

Jeffrey Kahrs: What are some? Can you think of any of the other superstitions?

Hollis Jennings: No whistling in the top house. I can't whistle, so that doesn't bother me. No killing a spider on a boat. I actually follow that one, too, just because, I don't know, why not? They kill bugs anyway. What are some other ones? I don't know. I'd say black suitcases is probably my biggest one?

Jeffrey Kahrs: Does that include the rolling nylon suitcases too?

Hollis Jennings: Yeah, yep, absolutely, and I don't know why, but I think they're back luck. In California, we were fishing on a squid boat and we had a black suitcase on board. God, we just had this horrible luck. Our skiff sank because the bilge pump got stuck on and so it killed the battery, so we go to make a set and our skiff sunk in the water. So, we get that cleaned up and we finally make a set and we rip our net up, tear it all to hell. As we're fixing that, the skiff was tied to the boat and the cleat actually broke off, so we had to go chase our skiff down because it was floating out in the ocean somewhere. Then finally, we were like, "Ah, we can't fix this out here. Let's go to town." On the way into town, we set our anchor. Our anchor just set itself on the way into town. And so—

Jeffrey Kahrs: It set itself?

Hollis Jennings: It set itself. It wasn't tied off. It should have been tied off, but still with the break on and with it in gear, it shouldn't have set itself. So, after the anchor set itself, my brother and I threw the black suitcase overboard and I think our luck changed after that.

Jeffrey Kahrs: Okay, now, you came into fishing first in your family, right?

Hollis Jennings: Yep.



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Jeffrey Kahrs: And are there other people in your family fishing? I guess your brother fishes?

Hollis Jennings: Now, both my older brothers and my younger brother part-time fishes actually.

Jeffrey Kahrs: Okay, do they fish with you or with someone else?

Hollis Jennings: My little brother fishes with me part-time. My older brothers both fish with other people. So, I think my oldest brother, Will, is on his way to getting his own boat. He's looking for a boat to run right now, and I think that Tucker will probably end up with his own boat as well. But they love the industry too, they just kind of fit right in.

Jeffrey Kahrs: So it's quite a move. I mean, from Kentucky and probably it sounds like your family has probably been wandering up and down the Appalachian Mountains for quite some time, I would guess.

Hollis Jennings: Yeah, yeah it's a move, but it's not—I mean, initially when you come out here, especially in your early twenties, you're kinda surrounded by people your age from all over the place, and so it kinda just feels like summer camp. You don't know anybody, and they don't know you, but everybody's in the same boat. We've all been greenhorns before. I don't know, I don't know why we all fit into fishing so well, but it's definitely—I feel pretty blessed to be here. Like I found—

Jeffrey Kahrs: People have said that fishing is last hunting and gathering employment, in—I mean, real hunting and gathering employment. Would you—because you know, it's kind of a primal industry because it's about hunting. Would you say that's true?

Hollis Jennings: I would, absolutely. Well, I mean, finding the fish is always interesting and trying to figure out what to look for or what to follow, whether weather might be blowing them in or water temperature has something to do with it. No, there's definitely a hunt to it and it's, I mean, it feels great when you find 'em.

Jeffrey Kahrs: Describe your largest, getting your largest set to me and to our viewers, of course.

Hollis Jennings: So, my largest set. Oh gosh, it probably would have been my second year God, I dunno.



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Jeffrey Kahrs: Where were you, roughly? I mean, without giving out the secret data.

Hollis Jennings: Oh, I don't think there was anything secret that year and the fish were everywhere. So, I'd say probably my largest set was probably in 2013, probably off Noyes Island—no, not Noyes Island. It would have been off of Augustine—Dall Island—and you just see a bunch of jumps and you're setting. You just see jump, jump, jump coming into your net and close up, and they're just swarming, you know. Then you get the purse rings up and your net is just boiling. I haven't had any amazing sets like Dave Jones, who had a 200,000 pound set. This was probably a 40,000 pound set or something.

Jeffrey Kahrs: That's still quite a few fish. That's like 10,000 humpies or something. I mean, it's nothing to say, "Ah that's just ...," pooh-pooh it.

Hollis Jennings: Oh, no, no it's great. I mean, you get big sets like that, the crew's high-fiving and hopefully everything goes smooth...

Jeffrey Kahrs: Did you fill the boat on that set?

Hollis Jennings: No, I pack 80,000 pounds and with the deck load, I can fit 90,000 on board.

Jeffrey Kahrs: Right, so 40,000 pounds would be half the whole boat.

Hollis Jennings: Yeah, yeah, and I mean, it feels great. It definitely feels great when you catch 'em.

Jeffrey Kahrs: When you're looking at them, the fish are— what do you call that activity when the fish are rolling around in your net? What do fishermen say?

Hollis Jennings: When they're boiling, the net's boiling.

Jeffrey Kahrs: Yeah, boiling, that's right. I mean, what are your biggest worries when you have a set, like a large set like that? What are you worrying about?

Hollis Jennings: The cork sinking, you know, and then you lose fish over the corks.

Jeffrey Kahrs: How do you try to keep the corks up?



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Hollis Jennings: At that time, I didn't have a tire, so you yell at the cork guy to pull. (Laughs) Now I have a tire on my power block, so you just put the tire down and get the corks to come ahead more because you want the net to come in even. You know, you have your lead line and cork line and the web in between, so you really want it to be even by the time you get to the end of the net. So, it's just watching the markers. You have markers on the lead line, markers on the cork line, and you can tell too, like the cork line will get real slack when it's too far behind and it'll be real tight when it's coming up even or ahead. Um, what else do you worry about I don't know, I mean, on the coast you're kind of paying attention to the swell. Mostly getting the net on board, getting the fish on board, and getting the net out again, that's what you're mostly worried about. (Laughing)

Jeffrey Kahrs: [Unintelligible] Yeah, so how long does it take you to get 40,000 pounds on board?

Hollis Jennings: Oh, it doesn't take much longer than 5,000 pounds really. I mean, a little bit longer.

Jeffrey Kahrs: Were you brailing?

Hollis Jennings: No, the triangle, you're just filling up your bunt and you just pick it up and bring some on board and put it back down.

Jeffrey Kahrs: Are you strapping then, is that what you guys do, or how does that work?

Hollis Jennings: No, I just have a point on my bunt that I hook my single up to and it's almost like— I have some videos that you could see it.

Jeffrey Kahrs: Is it like a ring in the bunt and you hook the single block on, then you pull it up, and the fish come on board, and then you release it?

Hollis Jennings: Kinda. It's kinda like a big bag here and then you have a little bag, and with the single pulling the net up, you have your bag down here, you bring this gear up into the power block and that makes the fish pour into the triangle. Then you just bring your single up and dump those fish on deck and then you just put it back down. You bring this gear up more—

Jeffrey Kahrs: You keep the single in the net then when you bring it back down, just easier, yeah.



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Hollis Jennings: Yeah, just leave it.

Jeffrey Kahrs: You don't take it off or anything.

Hollis Jennings: Yeah, somebody else would probably be better at describing this.

Jeffrey Kahrs: Yeah, we used to use a—

Hollis Jennings: Sock, right?

Jeffrey Kahrs: A bag, a sock, yeah. Actually, I never liked socks very much. They're a pain, kind of, to fill because it would get, you know, you would get tight and you get the sock up and then you gotta pull it apart, you know what I mean? It's like—and sometimes it wouldn't fill, and you'd have to be messing with the sock to try to open it up and stuff. I like the use of— people either roll it or they pull it up section by section like what you were talking about.

Hollis Jennings: Exactly, yeah.

Jeffrey Kahrs: I remember the rings actually, but I need to get it in your words. It's not my job anymore.

Hollis Jennings: Pretty much just section by section, probably taking 5,000 pound bags at a time.

Jeffrey Kahrs: So do you have any really good stories about being at sea that—

Hollis Jennings: Oh man, I'm sure I do.

Jeffrey Kahrs: I know, you're on the spot. It's always harder than when you're drinking in a bar.

Hollis Jennings: Exactly, you guys should come out drinking in a bar sometime. You'll get more than you can handle.

Jeffrey Kahrs: But then we [unintelligible], you know, kinda mess it up.

Hollis Jennings: I don't know any really great stories. I don't know.

Jeffrey Kahrs: What are crewmen like on board a boat? I mean, because crewmen can be great



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and difficult and all kinds of things. Some crewmen aren't very mechanical and that can be a problem.

Hollis Jennings: Uh, crew Before I got my own boat, I remember asking another Skipper what's the hardest thing about running a boat and they said it's the crew. I was like, "No way," you know. You hire a couple of your friends, you go out fishing, it's gonna be fun and great. And it's absolutely—hiring crew or getting the right crew is probably the hardest thing about running a boat. Because you have crew members who don't get along or crew members who maybe annoy you, or maybe they're great in town, but then you go out fishing and they're horrible, or maybe they're great out fishing and you go into town and they're horrible at the bar drinking or end up in jail.

Jeffrey Kahrs: Have you had crewman that ended up in jail?

Hollis Jennings: No, but I've had to dig them out of the bar before. I've definitely had to go get them out of the bar so we could leave town. And ... it's just hard to tell who's gonna be good at this job. You know, you hire somebody in the pre-season, and you think, "Oh, they're outdoorsy, they're in great shape, they're gonna be great at this," and you get them out there fishing and they hate being wet and cold and getting stung by jellyfish and they quit the second day. Or you get somebody else—I've hired people who I thought, "Ah, you know, I think he's gonna suck at this," and you get up there and they're your best crew member. It's just, I don't know, it's hard to tell who's gonna be good at fishing and who's not gonna be good. And then, even when you get good guys, making sure that they get along. And even you have good guys and they all get along, you gotta keep them safe. So a crew is definitely the hardest thing.

Jeffrey Kahrs: Do you think a good skipper, aside from being a good psychologist for fish, is a good psychologist for people?

Hollis Jennings: Uh, I don't know. They expect a lot out of you being a skipper. You're supposed to be a mechanic, you're supposed to be a social worker with the crew and almost a parent as well, and then even after all that, you have to go find the fish and catch them as well. I don't know, I mean, like I said, I wish I was more like Dave Jones. He's so patient with everybody, such a nice guy, and he catches a lot of fish.

Jeffrey Kahrs: He's older though.



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Hollis Jennings: Yeah, I get more excited about stuff. I yell a little bit. But, I—

Jeffrey Kahrs: Are you a screamer?

Hollis Jennings: Oh, I might have a little bit of a—I might scream a little bit sometimes, but I try not to scream *at* people so much, right. You know, you don't want to name call or—I mean, it's loud on deck. You got your hydraulics going, there's a lot going on, and then you see somebody stepping into this area where they're about to get hit in the head with something. It's hard not to flip out a little bit, you know. Not necessarily at them, it's just like, "Oh my god, you could have been killed there! What are you doing?!" But I don't know, I mean, if I yell at somebody pretty bad, I try to take them to the side after the set's done and be like, "Look, this is what's going on. This is why I'm yelling at you. Don't do that again. It's really dangerous," or something like that. But I have a crew now, like a couple of my girls, I mean, you do have to yell. I'm yelling at them, they're yelling back. It's not necessarily screaming at each other, it's just it's really loud on deck.

Jeffrey Kahrs: How many women are fishing with you now on deck?

Hollis Jennings: So, last year I actually had three girls on deck.

Jeffrey Kahrs: Right, how did that work out?

Hollis Jennings: It went really well. I was surprised. I was nervous about it, too. I didn't come into this industry thinking I'm gonna be this feminist and change the industry or anything like that. I just—um. But of course, I tend to get a lot of girl crew members looking for jobs because I'm a female and they just get sent my way. So, I ended up having three girls on deck this year and they were wonderful. They worked together so well. They were hilarious. They were always back there dancing or singing, I don't know, all this stuff. Um, they were tough, they were really tough. We fished bad weather and they handled it great. They got along really well. I think the teamwork that they were able to pull off was what really made them a great crew. They had to work together so they did work together really well. And—I don't know, I think girls are little bit more polite to each other, too. There's not this big like proving themselves thing. They just want to kinda get the job done. So, I don't know, it was good. I was impressed.

Jeffrey Kahrs: Is there a female machismo?



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Hollis Jennings: (Laughs) I don't think so. They're almost a little too polite to each other, like you hear "I'm sorry" all the time. It's like, you don't have to apologize, just get the job done. It's okay. They're just, "Oh, I'm sorry," "Oh, I'm sorry." Almost a little too nice sometimes.

Jeffrey Kahrs: So that kinda put you in the position of being the alpha male.

Hollis Jennings: Yeah, but you're the alpha male anyway, as the skipper.

Jeffrey Kahrs: Yeah, that's right.

Hollis Jennings: You're the boss, you're the dad, or I guess in my case, the mom. It's interesting. It's an interesting position.

Jeffrey Kahrs: Okay, I think that's probably pretty good. Do you have any final last words?

Hollis Jennings: God, I don't know. Fishing's wonderful. I love it.

Jeffrey Kahrs: Yeah, well you'll get a copy of it. Eventually, we'll transcribe it all and you'll get a transcribed copy. What I usually do, too, is that I take—go through the interview and I piece it kind of together into a page, like it's a flowing dialogue, and send that to you. Assuming—I don't know, you'll probably be at sea, but I'll presume you get email by that time. I'm hoping that we will have the show next September or October, obviously not on a Monday or Tuesday, we won't open it. We'll open it on Saturday or something so everyone can come. I have to talk to the Center for Wooden Boats about it more. But you know, I'm still interviewing people, so that's the first thing is to interview folks and get photos and kind of get the whole thing together. It's actually, the interview's the easiest part. It's getting people to say "Okay, can you send me the photos" or whatever. "Yeah, yeah, yeah I'll send you something."

Hollis Jennings: There's some, I don't know if you needed any fishing footage, but if you check on my YouTube, it's hollisj22 on YouTube, there's some fishing videos on there. I haven't done it in years, but my first two years I took a lot of video.

Jeffrey Kahrs: What I'm gonna do is eventually, if we do the exhibition, we may include clips. For instance, at home I have some historic footage from like a halibut fisherman and guys who are sardine fishing in the '50s and '40s. You know, there was a boat called the *City of Seattle*, that—



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there was these longliners I knew from the Union, and they had this incredible footage. Like in the old days, it's hard to believe, but there were no eyes in hooks, so they had to seize the hooks. And this is what the guys did on halibut boats in the winter. And it was just a flat thing on the end of the hook. There was no, they didn't have a way to make the eyes I guess.

Hollis Jennings: But they did have a flat thing, so they had something that would keep it just from slipping off?

Jeffrey Kahrs: It was just the hook and then flat metal, and then you would seize the line onto it.

Hollis Jennings: Interesting.

Jeffrey Kahrs: And that's what guys would spend their winter doing it and you know, the hook would last three or four sets and it would wear out. So, you had to have these big bunches of hooks. So, guys would—and you know, your fingers, it was tarred gear, you were doing all that work. Like seining used to be really hard job, physically, because you had a stern roller, right? And you had crewman, eight crewmen on a boat usually—

Hollis Jennings: And they pull it out of the water, right?

Jeffrey Kahrs: They would pull it, right, they would pull the net out. They'd be sitting there pulling the net on the roller and it wasn't hydraulic. Hydraulics didn't come in until the late '50s, early '60s. So these guys would be back there and you had to be really strong to endure that kind of work. Of course, these were people who had grown up in the—some of them like these Slavs—I have a photo of one of the old crews doing it, you know. They grew up without hydraulics, some of them were even working without motors if they started before World War II. They were still working sailing and fishing out of sailing boats.

Hollis Jennings: Well, in Bristol Bay, didn't that last for a long time?

Jeffrey Kahrs: Until '52.

Hollis Jennings: Yeah, and they would sail around for gillnetting.

Jeffrey Kahrs: Yeah, but finally they made it, they allowed them to have motors when there was a storm that came up and a bunch of people died in the storm. Then they said, "Oh, maybe we



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should change this.” And that’s what I heard, that there was a blow or something and quite a few fishermen died.

Hollis Jennings: It’s cool, in the industry, how they, uh—something new will come up, and you’ll see a couple fishermen try it and then before you know it, if it works out, the entire fleet follows suit just like that [snaps fingers]. Just like that, two years, all the sudden everybody has this. It’s neat.

Jeffrey Kahrs: Let’s see, how much time did we go in here? I can’t even tell. How are we looking at it?

Courtney: Might have killed the battery. Must have been about an hour. That went by quick.

Jeffrey Kahrs: Yeah, well fortunately Hollis is relatively articulate.

Courtney: Yeah, it’s good to—cool to hear all the terminology and describing the—

Hollis Jennings: How everything works. The terminology was so hard to learn in the beginning. And then people always call stuff different stuff. They’re like, “Grab the hook. Grab the single.”

[Statement ends]