



TAIGA BELL

Interviewer: Regina Kong

Others Present: N/A

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“This is a place that just feels like home. When I come here and leave it, it just wrenches out my heartstrings.”

-born May 21, 1981

-came out to HH when he was 1 month old, parents commercial fisherman trolling for salmon, halibut by laying out hooks

-slept in the bowel of parents' fishing boat as a kid during summers at HH “It was a pretty unique and cool way to grow up” [1:40] Fred and Greg were like his godparents

-[2:39] parents would take him travelling in the winters all over world, very eye-opening

-[6:22] used to go to tidepools at HH as kid, “flip over rocks and find all these fish and eels”. At the house, there were “10 boats that would anchor. Sometimes the number would change and there'd be 20 boats.” All fishermen. Remembered Greg as very hospitable and generous. Would hire cook-gardener who would cook and garden. Huge strawberry patch Taiga used to raid. Fish all day and meet for dinner. Wicker with paper plate in them. “You'd have a nice dinner together and do it all again”

-[8:43] what they ate at HH: fish, rice, salad, pastas, desserts (especially strawberry rhubarb crisp),

[9:11] “Doris made an amazing chocolate cake with some peppermint in it”. His mom made really great pies, apple pies. 5 species of salmon, rockfish, ling cod. Crab pot. Once a week all you can eat crab. When Dennis started going shrimping, show up with 5 gallon buckets of shrimp and everyone would eat it together in the sunshine. Now crab population down bc sea otters. Also deer in freezers, from hunted. “The food was very good and very healthy” [11:16]

-[11:50] In the 60s, parents were travelling around looking for adventure and ended up in Alaska, where they met each other. They were the first generation of fishermen. Now Taiga and brother both have fishing boats. Taiga takes his kids fishing.

-[12:39] earliest memory of fishing= when he was 5 or 3. “They didn't need much so they just had these crappy wooden boats” [13:29]

-Mother has boat Madame Ching; father has boat The Village Idiot

-[14:34] Taiga bought first boat when he was 25, The Lory which was all wooden. Just recently bough big fiberglass freezer boat. Explains difference wooden vs. fiberglass boat.

-a lot to pay attention to in a boat “It's pretty amazing that my mom was raising 2 kids while fishing the boat by herself” [16:34]. At 5, mom had Taiga use knife to gut fish and started working. As he got older, he and brother became the deckhands.

-went to college at UAF leaning toward architecture. [18:29] talks about art he makes. Initially thought he would only fish for 5 years and make money to pursue dreams. “By five years I loved it too much to quit. There's a lot of freedom in a job where you can just go to the outside coast and fish and get paid for it” [18:43]

-On the current generation of fishermen and successful fishing: “there’s always a hungry young guy who’s gonna come out and have that drive” [19:52] but ultimately it’s all about luck. “If you’re able to stay out for 16 to 18 hours a day, those hours add up. It’s a numbers game of how many hours you can keep awake and fish...There’s a lot of local knowledge and knowledge that comes from experience” [20:33]

-[21:23] Fishing technology has radically changed. Explains some of the advances that have been made...Cell phones especially took it to a whole other level.

[Taiga’s mother, Debra Page, comes in]

-Lives in Elfin Cove May-October and rest of year goes for 2.5 months to Indonesia surfing then to Juneau

[Taiga’s wife, Amy, comes in]

-32:34 “Growing up we would spend 5 months at the Hobbit Hole then to Fairbanks for school then after Christmas travel to cool spots”. Indonesia, Nepal and Everest, Africa. When Taiga got out of high school continued traveling in winters. He’s been to every country in Central America. Got into surfing from some local kids in Haines. Then started going to surf breaks. “Then my travels became more about surfing than adventure.”

-“I work for 6 months and get 6 months off to surf and snowboard” [35:57]

-[37:10] Met wife Amy in Juneau at Alaska folk festival. “I drug her out here to the boondocks and I think it’s been a pretty good fit. It’s not just any women you can get to come out and live with you, roughing it. Though we’re living a pretty comfortable life”

-[38:06] “At the Hobbit Hole we just kind of had free range. The yards were bigger. The trees weren’t so overgrown. There was more sunlight and it was a big playground. There was a volleyball court and the fishermen had more time, it seemed to take time to relax in the sun and have a volleyball game”

-[38:36] “The crew were these young guys from 18-30...There was always an influx of new people. As a kid you’re always trying to find someone to play with me. There was always somebody. There was a pool table and I remember being 7 years old, winning at pool for the first time, beating a crewman. There was always a dartboard and a pool table. I was always trying to get games going on all the time...Always dogs running around. Ollie, Greg’s dog, was the same age as me so we grow up together. He was incredibly smart...Anything you asked he was doing it. He was just a really well trained, good dog...Long walkway out to the dock. Two logs and two boards. Those dogs, three golden retrievers would come barreling through and knock me in the water. A lot...My dad built a little rowboat” Taiga and younger brother would cruise around in the rowboat and catch fish

-mother wrote a book, Orcas Around Me. Parents hit a rock and orcas rubbed on the boat

-[42:56] “When you’re a kid, everything’s a treasure...I would always have these collections of treasures...I had my ‘secret places’ and take my treasures and hide them. I had around the Hobbit Hole these secret places where I would hide these treasures...I remember some of the adults like ‘What is that over there?’ It’s interesting to be from a place where there’s not a lot of other kids...The more normal you are is how you can be understood and understand. Being from a place that’s super unique you get your own perspective...I still got the unique, solo Hobbit Hole time but also running through the system like everyone else”

-[45:54] “I definitely got a unique experience at the Hobbit Hole being one of the only kids there and having to come up with your own games. You create your own world in a way. Then to go and meet up with your other friends in Fairbanks and tell them about them. My friends heard about the Hobbit Hole but I didn’t go into too much depth about it to my good friends because we couldn’t really relate...Up in Fairbanks...There’s no...secluded paradise. That was a different part of my life and I wouldn’t take it with me so much when I went back to Fairbanks. I would just be Fairbanks Taiga and roll with all my homies there”

-[47:02] “It’s interesting now that I have kids to think about them growing up out here and how to give them everything. The freedom and that feeling of being a kid in paradise wilderness with wild strawberries and blueberries to eat. And you’re catching fish with fishing poles, camping out and cooking them on the beach. But also making it so they can make it to Berkeley or some place and not be totally blown away because it’s so different from where they grew up. The cool thing about my upbringing was that I got a little of everything. I’ve been to Tokyo and Mexico City and LA.”

-[48:18] on home: “This is a place that just feels like home. When I come here and leave it, it just wrenches out my heartstrings...” This is definitely for me home, now. We moved from the Hobbit Hole when I was 14 so I consider the Hobbit Hole my home too...It’s interesting going back to the Hobbit Hole and seeing the change. It’s great to see so many young people excited about making it awesome”

-Fred, Greg, Hobbits probably think of those days as “golden years” living really fun and healthy life, gaining connection between people and place

-[50:41] great story about July 4th bottle rocket war “I was maybe 10 years old and in heaven” one kid caught one behind his ear... “It was all about trying to hit each other”

-[52:39] practical jokes going on between the captains. Taiga tells story about prank on Pat Fisher.

-[53:55] another prank involving splicing rope. Taiga’s brother and friend spliced all the boats together, including Taiga’s and all the buoys.

-[55:25] Taiga’s attempt to get back for the splicing prank and another prank

-[56:31] “cool thing was the influx of new people” with crewmen. “You’d get a really diverse crew of people...As a kid they were all older and I thought they were so cool. Just learning from people from all over. Mostly what they were doing was taking bong rips and smoking and playing pool and drinking. You just learn things from people through listening to them. That was a really cool thing to have growing up, like 200 older brothers. I remember pissing somebody off and getting drugged down and getting thrown in the bay... I was always looking for attention and somebody to play with”

-Ronin’s birthday is July 24th, second time Taiga comes to restock the boat

-[1:01:57] observations on fish populations over the years. actually had some of best fishing seasons recently but other fish have been affected by variety of factors including glacier warming

- [1:08:33] “Generally the fish numbers are probably going down a bit and technology just keeps making it seem like there’s as many. I hate to think that we’re catching too many but it’s hard to think that we’re not. That’s kind of a human nature thing where the whole world has wiped out the fishing. And this is such an incredibly rich fishing ground. Maybe we don’t see all the damage we’re doing but we’re definitely trying to be aware of the impact we’re having. It’s good to see that we’re having these great years and big returns. But I definitely worry for Ronin’s generation. Are these fish still going to be here. And my parents thought the same thing”

-[1:11:12] Is there a retirement age for fishermen? “It’s very hard on your body” Reflects on parents’ semi-retirement “When your whole life you’re a fisherman and you sell your fishing boat... They’re just figuring that transition out”

-[1:13:55] of fishing, “You do it for a few years. You’re kind of locked in to just keep going and you develop a lifestyle around fishing that’s hard to say no to and hard to get out of”

-[1:15:10] how Taiga and his parents’ boats were named. Story behind Village Idiot, Madame Ching, Triad

-[1:15:50] “lots of superstitions in fishing” like bad luck to change the name of the boat. story behind Taiga’s last boat, Lory, named after Norse legend trickster who stole Odin’s eyes “it’s a good name for a troller because when we’re dragging our hooks around we’re always stealing from another person...It’s a lot like surfing how you respect other people and they respect you. There are definitely people who are very agro and crazy. My brother got shot at a couple of years ago”

-[1:19:13] “Especially when I was a kid in the 80s and 90s it was more like the wild west out here...” goes on to talk about some crazy stories about seining competition. Describes process of trolling and what happens when fish are caught.

-[1:23:05] “The fish that we’re producing on this boat is the highest quality salmon in the world because of that process” every fish caught “painstakingly by hand”

-[1:27:18] How much fish can fetch. Last year was \$2/lb for Coho. Frozen prize was \$20 for single fish. “there’s time where you’ll catch 500 in a day, pretty hard work. And there’s days where you catch nothing pretty much. But if I fill the boat I’ll get 10,000 pounds and sell them for four-plus bucks per pound...If I was freezing with ice I can fit 30,000 pounds” Gets more for frozen fish because frozen at sea, best quality

-[1:30:18] “We’re really lucky to have this bounty of fish here. And my parents know just what to do with it”

-[1:30:35] Last thoughts: “The history of the Hobbit Hole when it was a native village to a fox farm. The Howes bought it and there was a pack of fishermen living there in the summer. I was just a kid running around and getting a pretty unique and cool childhood. I’m really happy to have been part of such a unique and cool place. And I’m glad I can go back and just hang out...This is home. It’s and amazing place. You can travel the whole world and this is one of the most spectacular places you’ll ever find. Southeast Alaska with the rugged glacially carved fjords. Sixteen thousand foot mountains coming out of the oceans and wildlife everywhere. Whales, humpback whales, minke whales, sea otters, sea lions everywhere. You spend enough time here and you get these magic moments when two pods of killer whales meet up and they all start jumping out of the water. Or you find a giant dead squid floating—we had an 11-footer that we drug up on the Hobbit Hole one time. Or I’ve been fishing for 40 years and you catch a fish and you’re like ‘I’ve never seen that before.’ The longer that I’ve been here the more cool stuff I see and the more in love with it I am”