



## PAUL JOHNSON

Interviewer: Regina Kong

Others Present: N/A

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“It’s part of you. You can’t separate the place out from your own inner feelings.”

-born Juneau May 28, 1952. Father worked in Juneau Cold Storage, bottled Coca-Cola to freezing plant to cannery

-dad’s family came from Finland and worked towards Alaska

-bought seine and troll fishing since 1973, that’s how he ended up here

-[3:39] why he decided to stay in this area. “You know it was just a fluke. At that time there was a huge controversy going on about our fish runs. They were whittled way down. A lot of folks felt the Inian Islands here was a bottleneck for the fish to go through. But seining was the lifeblood of the area...Right out of the Hobbit Hole was the station” painted rock in the laundry was one of the hook offs for seining

-[5:24] ended up getting into troll business, built scowl in 1974 and with Greg Howe pulled it up from Seattle and started buying fish in Elfin Cove and Deer Harbor with that boat. “I stuck it out in Elfin Cove until ‘95

-[5:45] what Elfin Cove was like in that time: “Oh a whole different world. We were going through the change of time but it was mainly a fishing community. Limited entry was being discussed and talked about and happened in 75. Vietnam War was ending. There was a lot of people looking for something to do, a lot of young people coming out and fishing...Power trolling was shut down. Hand trolling was left open. Elfin had a mixture of new and young people. A lot of the old-timers who lived there had had for several years...It was a whole different world. Nobody could even conceive what’s happened to Elfin Cove”

-[7:40] explains how limited entry affected fishing. Cap on hand trollers. It was frustrating so people started buying power troll permits, became power troll fleet.

-[10:36] “The Hobbit Hole became a fleet of their own who became very talented at fishing locally. We were able to get the board of fish to get off the 8 days on 6 days off and work towards catching humpys at the islands with a 500 cap on kings. Basically pink salmon (humpys) was what saved the day for that group of fishermen...They got so efficient that after the seiners were shut down the seiners were concerned about how the amount of humpys these guys could catch. Eventually we went to buying them in the round. We were paying 40, 45 cents for a period of time 50 cents or higher. The guys did well and worked hard. The Hobbit Hole fleet was a little group of themselves who produced a lot, worked hard, and got better and better boats, got more efficient”

-Then season got shorter. Paul was involved in fish buying. Things changed rapidly but they were able to get islands opened up before the main season in June.

-[13:31] what made Hobbit Hole fleet so successful: “They were all younger. Willing to work hard. They changed their gear to shorten up between the spreads. They learned how to clean fish quickly. Once we got into round fish that saved a lot of guys’ hands. Energetic bunch who communicated

with each other. They went for it. When the season started shortening up a guy came up with halibut fishing with a snap on gear” Eventually went to individual fishing quotas... “The Hobbit Hole fleet was a hardworking group of guys—and gals. Some people would come and go and attempt to do the same things and not make it. But that core group of people”

-[16:56] after Vietnam War “there was a lot of really phenomenal wanderlust for those folks. They’ve traveled a lot”

-fishing became more of summertime thing, although Greg Howe stuck year-round and became one of top guys in pinks

-[17:44] relationship with Greg: Paul and Greg used to ride school bus together in Juneau. Then Doug and Flo Fried put Hobbit Hole for sale. A guy named Brownie bought it, had for 3 years. Greg and Fred bought it from him spring ’73. In ’75 “everything collapsed” because fish didn’t show so they closed the season. Everybody was shut down and it was the end of that season.

-[22:15] very brief story about seeing Hobbit Hole with Greg on skiff.

-[24:18] first time seeing the Hobbit Hole. Greg put a lot of work into it. “Greg put his heart and soul and so did Fred, putting in the hydro and making a living there. It’s just interesting the way things have turned out. Zach seems to have great enthusiasm making a place for people to come”

-[25:32] thoughts on Institute. “Originally when I heard it you got kind of mixed feelings...But at the same time losing what it was before, knowing it wasn’t going to be a family that lived there, worked there, that it was going to become a larger type operation. I think it was better than it could’ve gone by a long shot. Obviously Fred and Greg needed money to live on and did the best they could. It’s just like where I built here, seeing this place come into effect. Everybody has to adjust. And it’s gonna adjust a lot more. Now there’s so much pressure on the resource. It’s just not gonna sustain. And the politics are gonna drive it”

-[28:03] how Alaska statehood changed things. Gave them more control over managing fish. Oil money still controlling political atmosphere today. “I’d like to live long enough to see what happens. Fish politics is a tough deal” [30:30]

-[31:54] Hobbit Hole fleet did run studies on humpies with someone from Southeast to figure out timings when fish were coming through

-[33:30] what Hobbit Hole felt like. Before Brownie was Doug/Flo Fried. Greg and Fred made it where everyone was working together. It was an advantage to everybody where they worked together to help everybody receive some of the bounty of resource. It was just a quiet little place before. It was back to that for Greg in the winter but the summer was a busy place. Greg was very set on his schedule. Fishing for so many hours then getting home to get a good night’s sleep. All those guys, they worked at it and helped each other. Originally it was a fox farm. The same thing happened. They had to feed those foxes everyday. The old timers told me the first few years it was easy to get fish, food. Then you had to go out further until it wasn’t economical. The big time (for fur) would’ve been in ’32. Roosevelt got elected and Eleanor wore fox and the fox farms did really well. Doug was a fisherman and Flo worked in the store in Elfin Cove. Doug had a real serious stutter and he’d look at Dad and finally blurt out ‘damnit Johnson, give me a moment.’”

-[36:53] Greg’s mother was really special

-[39:08] talks about what Greg and Jane have done over the years, like Jane’s involvement in Elfin Cove

-[39:41] hopes Zach will have cultural camps for Huna kids

-[39:57] relationship with Greg. Ups and downs. “I have a lot of fond memories of Greg for many many years...He seems to be very satisfied being in Gustavus and doesn’t have a real strong traveling bug”

-[41:11] a few short stories about favorite memories surrounding Hobbit Hole, like boats, marriages, a “little bit of everything”

-“The Hobbit Hole was a driving force for Elfin Cove”

-[42:55] haven’t been to Hobbit Hole in a long time. Life got busy. “Time just goes. I don’t know where it goes. You’ll find out. Life is logarithmic” It takes longer to get things done when you get older

-[45:31] whether his attitudes about life, work, family have changed. “I played a lot more. I haven’t changed on that. I still play a lot and make enough to get by. I’m probably one of the last guys still trying to make a living. A lot of them have backed off or retired but I’m still going because I played. I have no regrets”

-[47:31] Why Paul decided not to stay in Elfin Cove. His worries about impacts of increased tourism on the environment, observations.

-[53:03] How we can prevent straining environment. Taking different trails, giving animals room...etc.

-[54:51] Whether we can make tourism “sustainable”? “I think that’s something Inian Islands Institute will have to look at. What’s a sustainable number of people?”

-[57:31] The value of people seeing a place like Alaska. “I think it’s huge.” However, people who come here are the ones with money...”Having wild places is all important. But when do you love something to death?” [59:00]

-[1:00:00] On home. “It’s part of you. You can’t separate the place out from your own inner feelings. You live someplace long enough, go see your garden. It becomes a part of you. You couldn’t live without it. It’s like water. You can’t live without it.”

-[1:01:30] “I listen to the same whale I listened to when I was a kid. Same lady. She’s got a broken blowhole”

-[1:02:05] whether this place demands certain personality traits. “People travel today. It’s just amazing to me that people enjoy a lot of different places. They’re not bedded or wedded to a place where most of the older folks and some of my generation are wedded to a place. We’re in a very mobile society...”

-[1:06:31] “The Howe boys should be very thankful to their parents... I take my hat off to Zach. I hope they take on some local issues more. It’s happening fast, furious, and it’s tough and political. I hope they maintain a certain fire marshal there that...too many people love the place...I hope that Zach over time brings in people from different perspectives to look and talk and let people think outside the box instead of canned—I don’t want to call it canned, that’s unfair. There are a lot of different reasons why things work different ways.” Brings up example of hunting bears.

-after first summer at HH, went back to Reno because of teaching contract, took students to France then shared cooking job with Jennifer once she moved to HH permanently

-[35:35] How allocated cost of cooking: had calendar where kept track of how many meals were served to each boat. “You had all your costs. Fuel food and the cook-gardener salary. And you just divided it up and came up with the perennial cost and billed it to the skippers. There was no profit involved. It was just straight cost” (in hanging file cabinet)