



Young Terry Cross with a jag of Bonita



Jumbo White Sea Bass



Cross, Rock Cod and Old Country Pisano



Cape Cod Village, Oceanside Harbor—Forty-year home of Harbor Fish & Chips

TERRY CROSS WORKIN' HARD FOR A LIVING

by SANCHO VEGA CORTEZ

Though I have known Terry Cross for many years, it wasn't until our interview for this article that I realized I didn't know this man at all—mainly because he is not one to boast. And when Cross does speak of his life, which includes many episodes of hard work on and off the ocean, he backs it with visual evidence. I am always skeptical, without visual support, of any person's rap, especially when it comes to fishing.



WW II: Cross's Mom

Possessing the deep voice and thundering laugh of a seasoned sailor, it is quite easy to close your eyes and imagine Cross as an ancient mariner—a high seas pirate incarnate. But his gruff voice and intense laugh are as far as it goes concerning traits of a pirate. Cross is as honest and accommodating as the day is long, for without these

two most important human elements, he probably would have never survived over 40 years in business.

Owner of Harbor Fish & Chips on the waterfront in Oceanside Harbor, Cross, 57, has never ventured far from the sea, for the ocean is this man's life-sustaining magnet.

"I was born and raised in Oceanside and have never lived in any other city in my life," Cross said from his modest home on Fire Mountain. "I'm the last of the old-time locals."

Unlike many children, Cross describes his upbringing to be a dream.

"My mother and father dedicated all their



Oceanside's commercial fishermen back in the day. From left, Nick Eaton, Terry Cross, Randy Miller

time to raising me and my two brothers. They really showed me an example to follow.

"I was raised somewhat religiously, attending the Church of Christ three times a week. Because of this, I know quite a bit about what's written in the Bible. Back then, I really got into the groove, leading church hymns and even giving mini-sermons. However, as I got older, I didn't quite agree with some of the church's beliefs, so I went out on my own."

Cross's father, an avid outdoorsman, taught his son the essentials of hunting and fishing, and it stuck.

"I was really into surf fishing. One time at Buccaneer Beach I was trying to catch a fish by dragging a jig line off the side of a surf mat.

I crashed the surf mat and ended up with the hook in my shin. The lifeguards didn't know what to do because they'd never seen anybody with a fish hook in their leg. So they called an ambulance and the ambulance took me to the hospital. When I got to the hospital the doctors didn't quite know what to do, so they called down to the maintenance department and an old time janitor came waltzing up with a pair of heavy-duty wire cutters and promptly cut the jig out of my leg. I remember my mom being really pissed off because the ambulance ride to the hospital was over \$100, when she could have taken me for free."

Throughout his youngest years, Cross attended Ditmar Elementary School, Jefferson Junior

High, and Oceanside High. Along the way he held typical entry level jobs as a dishwasher for Pumps restaurant on Wisconsin Street and as an ice cream scooper for 31 Flavors.

"Back then, I was so young I really didn't know how to work."

Midway through his senior year at Oceanside High, Cross took on two very heavy responsibilities for a lad of only 17.

"I got married in September of '69. Because I was a male and still a minor, I had to appear in front of a judge of the court to get permission to wed. My wife Sue and I had a shotgun style wedding, and my first child was born in May of 1970. I graduated from high school the following month.

"Although I've always been an outdoorsman, my wife played a huge role in my life because her parents, Doug and Sally McWha, plugged me into the commercial fishing business. It was during my junior and senior years at Oceanside High that I worked at their business on the waterfront—Harbor Fish Market—and I just loved the work! There was some element about working in a fish market, being down at the waterfront in the sea air and getting to know the unique characters fishing commercially out of Oceanside Harbor. I learned to process the beautiful local fish that came through the delivery door, such as swordfish, rock cod, crab, white sea bass, and thresher shark. In its heyday, my in-laws owned Harbor Fish Market and three commercial fishing boats."

It was during this time that Cross's mother-in-law, Sally McWha, really "taught me how to become a man; to become responsible and tow the line; to quit being a young punk and get on with the program of life."

Finishing his apprenticeship at Harbor Fish Market, Cross, out of necessity was assigned to running one of the family's commercial gill net boats. His father-in-law had fallen ill and they needed someone to pick up the slack.

"Operating a commercial fishing vessel alone, with no deckhand to help, taught me the

concept of believing in myself. When you get yourself out on the ocean, you've got to get yourself back in one piece, not to mention catch a lot of fish and make a living. I take pride in that I've never had to call anyone to tow me in, no matter what the mechanical circumstances. If I had a problem at sea, I would invent a way to fix it and get in alone."

At the beginning, Harbor Fish Market was chugging along, but the realization of selling retail fish only to make a living wasn't going to cut the mustard.

"In 1969, Sally realized we had to expand to make it. There just wasn't enough markup in retail fish to support the entire family. I was catching so much fish, that we decided to open a fish and chips restaurant. There was a larger profit margin in prepared food, plus we didn't have to worry about the amount of fish I caught...we could always freeze it and sell it later with french fries and cole slaw. No loss, plus we saved a tremendous amount of money not having to buy fish because we caught it ourselves. This is really made our business plan viable."

After Cross' in-laws passed away, the family business went through several partnership changes, and in 1982, Cross retained sole ownership of Harbor Fish & Chips.

"This was great because everyone became their own man. Everyone was making money and there were no arguments."

Unfortunately, Cross's wife, Sue, contracted cancer and died in 1986.

"We had a wonderful life together. I think of her often and still miss her."

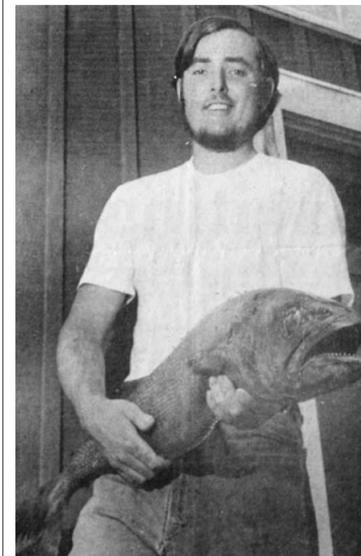
Harbor Fish and Chips continued to thrive, surviving the natural ups and downs any business plays through. As the noose on fishing restrictions for gill netters tightened, Cross realized that his commercial fishing days were numbered.

"I still owed money on my gill net boat, so I went up north and fished for a buyer out of San Pedro. In six weeks I caught over 36,000

pounds of fish and ended up selling my boat for more than I owed on it. This finally freed me from the burden of having to support both a restaurant and a fishing boat. It really was a Cinderella story and the glass boot fit my foot."

Forty years later, Terry Cross's Harbor Fish & Chips continues draw a crowd, serving English style fish and chips to thousands of visitors at Oceanside Harbor. Today, with a reliable crew running the store, Cross has a lot more free time to roam the hinterlands...a brand new concept for this hard working fisherman.

It's called "Retirement." §

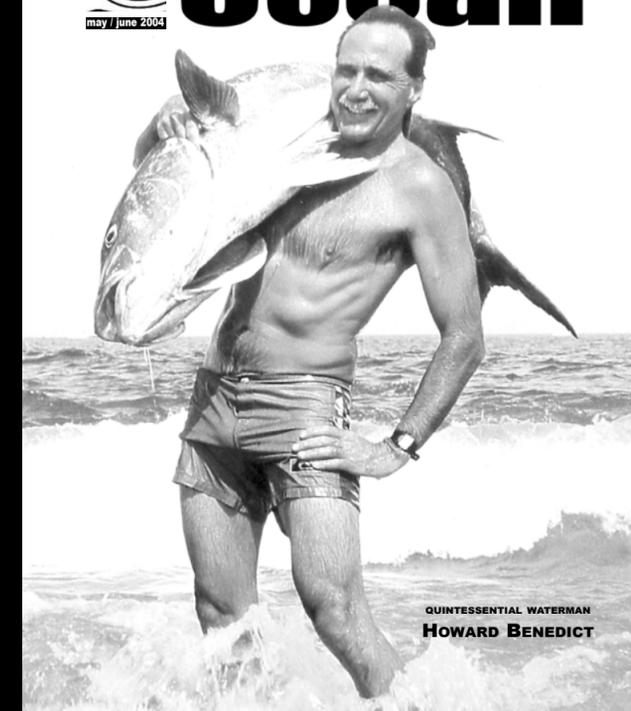


Rare Fish: Terry Cross holds a 15-pound "Escolar," commonly called a Tapioca Fish, caught in his net about six miles north of Oceanside. The fish is usually found in North Atlantic, Mediterranean, and southern hemisphere waters. It's considered good eating, but oily and ugly.

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