

# Old Harbor fisherman remembers 1964

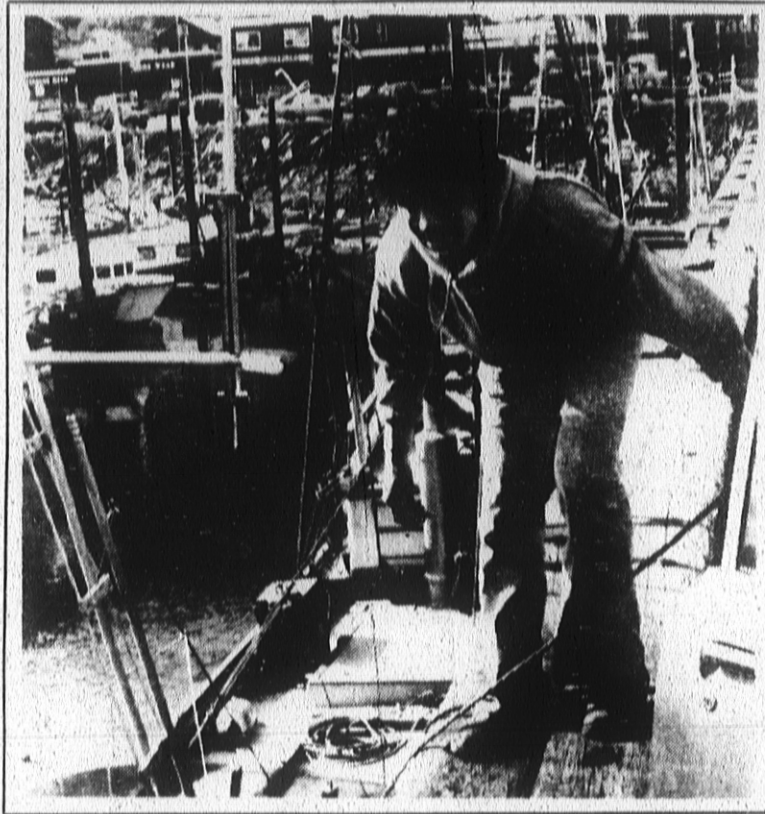


Photo by Mike Rostad

**Jerry Christiansen, fisherman and bear hunter.**

**by Mike Rostad**

for the Tundra Times

Jerry Christiansen of Old Harbor, has known fishing most of his life, but it wasn't until a few years ago that the knowledge he gained from his fisherman father, was put to the test. Jerry's father, Ralph Christiansen, died in the winter of 1981, and when the red salmon season opened the following June, it fell on 24 year-old Jerry to take the wheel of the family boat, the Cape Karluk. He headed north to Saltery Cove for the season's first opening.

There's a gleam in Jerry's eyes as he recalls that opening. The responsibility of making the right

decisions weighed heavily upon him, and he knew it was up to him to make the trip worthwhile.

Many of the things he learned from his father hammered away in his mind during those exhilarating moments. By the time the set was made and the fish were pulled onto the deck, some 1200 red salmon wriggled in the hold of the Cape Karluk. "We ran the fish to town" in a trip that took about five hours, says Jerry.

That was the beginning of his job as a skipper. After tending to that responsibility for nearly a year, he admitted that he "really felt good about it."

He inherited another challenge

from his father: helping long-time bear hunting guide, Lee Hancock of Anchorage. Hancock conducted brown bear hunts in the vicinity of Old Harbor.

Taking eager hunters to the spots where the bears roam is a job that Jerry seems to enjoy as much as fishing. The responsibility was nothing new to "him

though. His grandfather, Larry Matfay, has guided bear hunts on Kodiak Island for many years and, an excellent story teller, he's shared countless bear hunting experiences with his grandchildren. Jerry learned valuable lessons which were applied as he helped Hancock.

The first year Jerry went out on

the bear hunt, it took two days before the first bear was shot. "We waited 14 more days before another one was taken," he says.

But luck came faster the following year. Within two days, two bears were shot.

Jerry now has his assistant guiding license and he dreams of  
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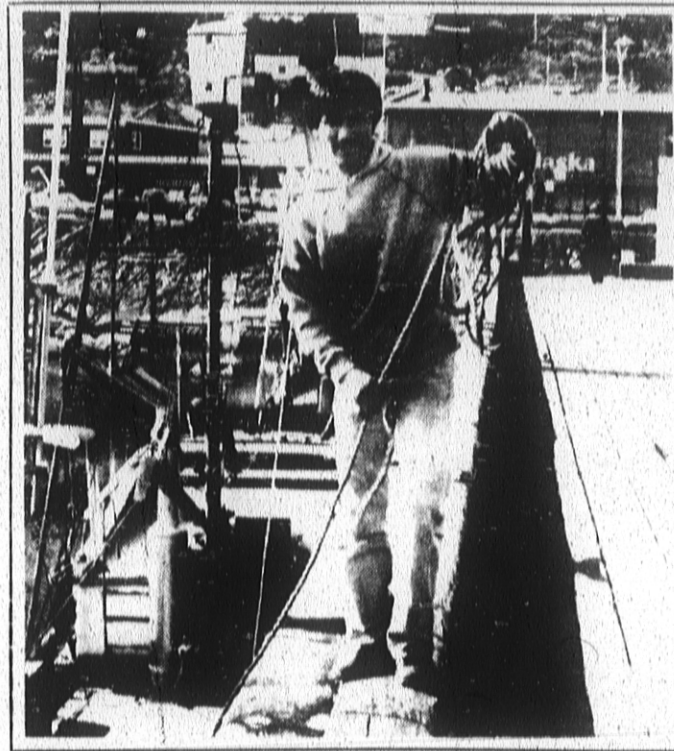
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the day when he becomes a full-fledged hunting guide like his grandfather, who along with Leonard Helgason, is the only Kodiak Island-born hunting guide.

Jerry has lived in Old Harbor all his life and he's content to see the village remain much the way it is - with just a few improvements, he adds. One of his concerns was that there would be more employment opportunities. Within the past year Jerry and fellow residents have been busy working on village capital improvement projects.

Jerry points to fish processing as a viable industry which not only provides more jobs for the village, but makes it handier for local fishermen who usually have to go to the south end of the island or to Kodiak in order to deliver their fish. However, floating processors moor at the village from time to time, and that has helped the situation, notes Jerry. Yet, he feels more permanent operations are needed.

Looking back at the years he's spent in the village, Jerry points to the 1964 Good Friday tidal wave as perhaps the most dramatic and traumatic event. Although he was only seven years old at the time, he vaguely remembers the desperation of the villagers as they fled to the nearby ridge for safety. It was a chilly evening and he didn't have time to dress warmly. Escaping the destructive wave was their main concern.

Jerry remembers the awful sight of houses being ripped from their foundations, carried away by the violent wave. He also recalls the people crying from the terror wrought by the wave, and



*Jerry Christiansen of Old Harbor*

Photo by Mike Rostad

from the grief of seeing their homes carried out to sea.

There were no lives lost in Old Harbor in that disaster; but property loss was great. The next day fishing vessels and government boats evacuated the residents, took them to Kodiak, and from there, the people were flown to Anchorage. The refugees lived in

the quonset complex known as Camp Denali. About a month later they returned to Old Harbor, where construction was underway.

Some of the families had to live in tents until their new houses were completed, says Jerry.

Currently Jerry is looking forward to the spring bear hunts.