

HEROES OF THE SEA

Catching Dungeness crab from the Pacific is one of the West's deadliest jobs. A father-son team in Washington share stories of life at sea

BY RACHEL LEVIN | PHOTOGRAPH BY JOHN CLARK



FACTS OF LIFE

\$43K

Average amount Alaskan Bering Sea crabbers make in a season

16,100

Licensed commercial fishing vessels in 2008 in Alaska, California, Oregon, and Washington

4 to 1

Ratio of Northwest Dungeness crabbers who die on the job compared with other commercial fishermen

18

Average number of hours worked per day for Washington coastal Dungeness crabbers



Kyle Crews, 28

Fishing for 16 years
Fishes Washington coastal
Dungeness crab, Alaska halibut,
and black cod up and down the
coast

Ken Crews, 55

Fishing for 35 years
Former Alaskan king crabber in
the Bering Sea, now fishes spot
prawns and Dungeness crab in
Puget Sound

What's your office like?

KYLE: It's a 58-foot boat that carries 400 crab pots that weigh 100 pounds apiece, empty. We've got two deckhands and one skipper. We're one of the last derby fisheries: Our goal is to catch as much as we can as fast as we can.

What's life like at sea?

KEN: Anytime you go out on the water, it's like the ocean is trying to kill you—and all you're trying to do is stay in your boat. I've fished Alaskan king crab in the Bering Sea with occasional 30-foot swells and 60 mph winds. There, you're out for weeks, months at a time in a 110-foot boat, 100 miles offshore. You go 20 to 30 hours straight without sleeping—and when you do sleep it's in your rain gear, on deck, napping between crab string checks. You live off cases of Coca-Cola and M&M's, and you're so tired your brain literally stops working.

What's your scariest moment?

KYLE: My first time. It was a three-week winter trip in Alaska. I'd never been on that much ocean. The seas were 20 feet high. Pots rolling, falling. I kept thinking: What did I get myself into? Just take me home. No one is going to take you home.

KEN: I was in my 20s, fishing Alaskan king crab in 70 mph winds. We were waaay overloaded with 1,000-pound pots. Swells were so high our boat was basically underwater; we were sinking and I didn't even realize it.

What's your happiest moment?

KEN: Now. I live in Anacortes, Washington, fishing Dungeness crab in the winter and spot prawns in the summer. My crew is my wife. We wake up at 4:30 a.m., drive 15 miles to where we fish, set out on the water and pick pots all day. Later, I'll drive our catch 80 miles to restaurants and stores in Seattle. It's about a 12-hour day all in. I make a decent living—but not as much as I used to in Alaska.

KYLE: Coming home to my wife. ■