

Shelley Morris BORN TO FISH

**She's the only
female skipper
of a charter boat
in Depoe Bay.**

Story and Photo
by Sue Fagalde Lick



IF THE FISH aren't biting, charter boat skipper Shelley Morris will pop out the door of her cabin on the *Lady Luck* and tell a blonde joke. A while later, if things are too quiet, she'll tell another one until her passengers are laughing too hard to care whether or not they catch any fish. The only female skipper in Depoe Bay, Morris won a local beauty pageant in her teens, but these days she's most likely to be found up to her elbows in fish guts or engine grease.

Morris grew up fishing the rivers and lakes of eastern Washington. But on a vacation to the Oregon Coast, she took a charter trip out of Depoe Bay and fell in love with ocean fishing. She was studying to be a music teacher, but by the time she graduated from Yakima Valley Com-

munity College, she had decided she would rather fish than play the flute.

Heading to Alaska, she landed a job on a commercial fishing boat. She went from there to a barge that fished for herring and salmon. Morris says the men teased her because she didn't smoke, drink, or swear, but they also respected her because she did her share of the work.

After a year and a half, she returned to Depoe Bay, where she fished on nearly every charter boat in the harbor, gaining experience for the day she could captain her own boat. In 1998, at age 27, she earned her 100-ton master's license and bought the 34-foot *Lady Luck*. Now she runs fishing expeditions for Tradewinds Charters.

The work is wet, cold, and sometimes

dangerous, especially negotiating the narrow, rocky entrance to the Depoe Bay harbor. "The saying is there's those that have hit the rocks and those that will. I don't want to be either one."

Summer can be exhausting. "A lot of times we'll run two trips a day. Come in, clean the boat, check the engine, do typical maintenance, go out again. It makes for really long days," she says. But charter boats have to make their money when the sun shines. In winter weather, tourists are scarce and the ocean is too rough. If you can't save money for the lean times, you shouldn't run a charter boat, Morris says.

In the summer, the *Lady Luck* leaves the harbor by 6:30 a.m., usually heading 2 to 3 miles offshore. Sometimes Morris

FYI

Tradewinds offers daily fishing tours, weather permitting. Most trips on the *Lady Luck* cost \$55 per person. Tickets can be purchased at the Tradewinds office on Hwy 101 in downtown Depoe Bay. For more information call Tradewinds (1-877-640-4204) or check Shelley Morris' website at www.cvladyluck.com —S.F.L.

goes to a favorite fishing spot farther out. "You catch big fish there. Big scary fish. In fact, we caught a 50-pound lingcod. I mean it was a huge fish. I could stick my head inside its mouth."

Occasionally, passengers challenge her authority. "Once in a while, I'll get one of those big old burly guys and he'll say, 'Where's the skipper?' And I'll tell him, 'You're looking at her. I'm the skipper. This is my boat.'" If they

still don't believe her, she'll challenge them to a fishing contest—and win.

Most trips run smoothly, but Morris counts herself lucky that so far she has only had to call the Coast Guard twice for help with mechanical difficulties.

Another type of emergency happened last summer, one that she will never forget. A 70-year-old passenger in the final stages of cancer died onboard. The man's son had told her this was his dad's last fishing trip, but nobody expected it would be his last day. One minute Morris was talking to him, the next she turned away to rev up the engine and heard a noise behind her—he had fallen off his seat. She hurried back to Depoe Bay, but it was too late. She takes comfort in an old fisherman's tale that when someone dies on your boat, his spirit remains to watch over you.

Last year a local fishing boat, the *Blue Heather*, went down in neighboring Yaquina Bay and two of the four crew members died. Morris is aware of the dangers, but she doesn't dwell on them. "I figure this is what I'm supposed to be doing. I don't think anything bad is going to happen to me yet, as long as I play it safe. I guess if it's meant for me to do something else, I'll know."

Meanwhile, she wouldn't trade it for any other occupation. "How many people can say, 'I go fishing and get paid for it?'" □

Editor's Note: Shelley Morris was getting married on March 17, 2001. Her new name is Spangler. But to those onboard the Lady Luck, she's still Captain Shelley.

Sue Fagalde Lick, freelance writer and photographer, lives near Newport. She is a longtime newspaper reporter and has published three nonfiction books.

Visit charming

DEPOE BAY

Toll Free: 1-877-485-8348
70 NE Hwy 101, Depoe Bay, OR 97341
stateoforegon.com/depoe_bay/chamber
Email: dbchamber@newportnet.com

Circle No. 108 on AD INFO CARD.

September 15
Indian Style Salmon Bake

September 22-23
Gates of Thyme Renaissance Faire

Call 1-877-485-8348
for more information

FUDDY DUDDY FUDGE, INC.
"Our fudge is made from a 100-year-old recipe"

Mail Order Available
Visa • M/C • Discover • American Express
PO Box 767, Depoe Bay 97341
1-877-765-2878 Fax (541) 765-2684
www.fuddyduddyfudge.com



Circle No. 108 on AD INFO CARD.



Gracie's
SEA HAG
Depoe Bay, Oregon
Phone: 541-765-2734

For over 35 years the Oregon Coast's most popular seafood restaurant & lounge

Live music — see Gracie of National TV fame play the bottles

COME ENJOY OUR FAMOUS FRIDAY NIGHT BUFFET AND AGED CHAR BROILED STEAKS

AAA

"Seafood so fresh the ocean hasn't missed it yet."

Spend a night, spend a week.



harbor at depoe bay

Oceanfront Condos
Two Bedroom, Two Bath
With Fully Equipped Kitchen
(541) 765-4370
www.coastalguidebooks.com/lodging/db-harbor.html



Circle No. 156 on AD INFO CARD.

Specializing in unique one-of-a-kind art, gifts, and collectibles



"Mill Creek"

HOME OF THE LIVING LIGHT GALLERY

The Harbor Gallery

Open 10-6 Daily
541-765-3113
211 SW Hwy 101 • Depoe Bay
www.harborgallery.com

Circle No. 192 on AD INFO CARD.

The MUSIC BOX
Music Boxes • Collectibles

Largest Selection on the Oregon Coast

Come see our Snowies

46 Hwy 101
Depoe Bay

Mailing Address
P.O. Box 34
Lincoln City, OR
97367
(541)765-2498
Donna Chandler

Featuring: CLOWNS

