

## Hans Peterson's Story

(In 1994, I wrote this story as Hans gave it, full of his Norwegian accent. As I re-read it I found the diction confusing encouraging me to set it in readable order for you to enjoy.)

## My Story: Tending the Fish Trap

This is a story about what happened out on the salmon trap I was watching on a late summer day in 1929. Two traps were owned by men in Petersburg and they hired my brother Magnus and me to tend them. Other traps were owned by the cannery in Petersburg. I was on one trap and Magnus was on the other. We didn't know the owners but they must have found out from Jonas Olsen, the boss on Level Island Fox Farm that we were honest and wouldn't sell any fish like many did those days. That's why they picked us two.

How far out from Petersburg we were, I have no idea. All I could see on the bay were about 6 boats the weeks I was there. And I didn't know how far away Magnus was. We were out in the wilderness, but the salmon didn't have any trouble finding their way in.

The owners put up a tent in the lower part of the woods, just a few feet from high tide for me to live in. In the tent I had a little stove to cook my food on and there was a bed to sleep in and a big caliber rifle. The rifle was to scare any people who might come and try to steal the fish out of the trap. I had never slept in the woods in a little tent so I had the gun always loaded and standing by the bed, ready to use should a bear stick his nose in thru a hole in the wall. I don't remember now if there were bears on that island or not.

I could stay in the tent as long as I wanted, cooking, eating, sleeping and reading, writing letters. When it was raining it was a good place to be. When the weather was good I would take the boat out to the trap, partly for exercise and partly to see if everything was o.k. I would walk on those big logs.

One day I fell out in the bay head first. As soon as I fell I said, "God, I need your help!" I was possibly under the water before the last word came out but God could hear me. I got up fast but the salt water burned my eyes and I could not get my eyes open to see. I was standing there a few seconds squeezing the salt water out of my eyes and did not notice that I started to go down. But the One who was there watching over me noticed it and gave me an order what to do. I heard a voice that said, "Kick!" I was surprised when I heard that word, "Kick!" I had not heard that word since I was around the horses in Dakota, but I knew the Helper was there so I started kicking.

I had done a lot of kicking on land when I was young up in the mountain in Norway pretty near every evening after the sheep, and later after I was 15 and hunted every Fall I was there. My legs were in very good shape when I fell. I had a pair of shoes on that I had with me from Norway. They had soles a little wider than ordinary shoes and that probably helped to keep me up so good without using my arms.

The Helper made me feel I should not use my arms. He wanted to steer me over to a place where I could get up easily. He took me to a place where there was a cut in the big log and a smaller log bolted down. It was used as a brace holding the big logs in place. There I got up easily and when standing on top of the big log I said, "Thanks, God, for the help".

I was very careful walking on the logs after that. A few days later the owner came out with the boat and I told him I fell in the bay outside the trap, and that I couldn't swim. I don't remember what he said, but I think I know what he was thinking. If I had gone down and drowned he probably would have gotten in trouble...it was not the regular thing to do to put one man on a trap. The next year there were 2 of us, Cora's brother Clarence was with me. That year we had the house we slept in right on the logs, so it wasn't far to go fishing. But one day a storm came up and the logs shook a lot. We were glad get up on the beach and up on shore where we wer walking when the owner came to see if we had been washed off the logs. When he saw us on the beach, he was satisfied and went back to Petersburg.

Written loving memory of Uncle Hans by Lois Peterson Gnegy