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[LEFT] Culinary instructor **Dodie Lunda** instructs a class on salmon cooking. [TOP] Second from right, **Dodie Lunda**. **The Freshwater Bay floathouse** [BOTTOM] is where **Dodie** and her husband, **Bob**, lived for 23 years.

Following Fish

Love of aquatic creatures lures woman to Alaska's rich waters

By **PAULA DOBBYN**

LAKE WISSOTA, WIS., WHERE Dodie Lunda grew up, is a long way, geographically and culturally, from Hoonah. How did a Wisconsin farm girl embed herself into the heart of a Tlingit village on an island of coastal mountains and temperate rainforest?

Lunda followed fish.

A Recurring Dream

Lunda's world has always revolved in some way around fish. Early on it was walleye, northern pike and crappie that captured her attention growing up on Lake Wissota near Chippewa Falls, Wis.

"My Dad taught me how to bait my first worm," Lunda said. "I've always loved the thrill of catching a fish."

Lunda's passion for freshwater sport fishing eventually became something bigger—a livelihood based around wild salmon, halibut, crab and shrimp.

As her midwestern childhood morphed

into adulthood, Lunda longed for mountains. At age 21, she headed to Colorado, where she managed a restaurant and lounge. She appreciated the Rockies, but felt something was missing.

Inexplicably, images of rivers pulsing with scarlet-colored fish began dominating her thoughts.

She wasn't sure what it meant but Lunda knew she wouldn't figure it out by staying in Colorado. With few spots left in the Lower 48 with big populations of Chinook, coho, sockeye, pink and chum salmon, Lunda knew she needed to look north—beyond the urban sprawl, agricultural run-off and dams that have shrunk wild salmon runs in the Pacific Northwest, California and elsewhere.

"I kept having this recurring dream that I was living in the forest in Alaska."

Lunda did some research and discovered a region where big forest and salmon rivers dominate the landscape.

Lunda headed there.

In Search of Salmon

She hitchhiked northwest from Grand Junction, Colo., and found work in Seattle when her money ran out. She stayed long enough—about a month—to buy a place ticket to Juneau. Arriving in 1980, Lunda cleaned rooms at the Driftwood Lodge and walked the docks.

Lunda envisioned a life built around commercial fishing. She persuaded the captain of a hand troller to hire her as a deckhand that next summer. The vessel plied the Inside Passage for salmon. Compared to her previous jobs, commercial fishing in Alaska was exotic but backbreaking.

"You'd start around three in the morning and you weren't done until around 11 p.m. or midnight," Lunda said.

But Lunda was hooked. Her office was the Gulf of Alaska and she was part of a commercial fleet that annually harvests about 50 million wild salmon from waters surrounding the Tongass National Forest, a 17-million-acre rainforest of hemlock, spruce and cedar.

For Lunda, life was good. The salmon were abundant, the paychecks fat, and there was this other fisherman. His name was Bob.

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Life on a Float House

"I met Bob on the fishing grounds," Lunda said. "We started batting eyes at each other."

The two became a pair. Bob Lunda was also a hand troller who owned a boat. Lunda and her boyfriend began fishing together and later switched from salmon trolling to long lining for halibut.

"We'd make three three-day trips and earn our season's money," Lunda said.

The Lundas lived year-round on a float house in Freshwater Bay, a scenic inlet close to the fishing grounds, not far from Hoonah. Leading a semi-subsistence lifestyle, the couple made most of their food from scratch, hauled water from a nearby waterfall, ate seafood they caught and deer they hunted. They would go to Hoonah to sell their catch, see people and run errands. Otherwise, life revolved around their home on the water.

They stayed on the float house for 23 years.

"Then I hit 50 and I panicked. I said, 'I'm not sure if this is going to be user-friendly when I'm 60.'"

Alaska's Wildest Kitchen

The Lundas moved into Hoonah several years ago, although they kept their float house for weekend getaways and sport and subsistence fishing excursions.

They retired from halibut fishing in 2011. Lunda has taken her passion for Alaska seafood from the water into the classroom in a new role as culinary instructor at Hoonah's tribally owned cruise-ship port, Icy Strait Point.

During the summer, at an attraction called Alaska's Wildest Kitchen, Lunda teaches cruise-ship passengers how to fillet fish and make Alaska specialties like smoked-salmon dip, grilled halibut and salmon casserole. In a classroom adorned with red and black Tlingit artwork, visitors sip wine spritzers and snack on Lunda's creations. After some instruction, they head outside to an alder-fired grill to cook their fillets.

"Only turn it once. When the fish starts to sweat, it's done," Lunda coached, during a session last summer.

She peppers her instructional talks with tales about her career at sea, her tribal adoption and life on a float house.

Lunda also weaves in knowledge of the local ecology that makes Southeast Alaska a giant salmon nursery.

"They have a hard time wrapping their head around the fact that there's not even

THE PASSAGE >>

Journey north and dedication to community guides course for one woman adopted into Alaska Native tribe.

By **PAULA DOBBYN**

HOONAH—Guests trickled in during the afternoon and stayed until the next day. The Tlingit potlatch held at the Alaska Native Brotherhood Hall in Juneau was meant to honor a deceased elder and thank those who helped with funeral arrangements.

The ceremony—where money and gifts are exchanged and large platters of deer, halibut and salmon are served—also had another purpose: to adopt new members into the *Kaagwaantann* clan and give them Tlingit names.

Among the adoptees that year were former Lt. Gov. Fran Ulmer and Hoonah resident Dodie Lunda, a non-Native who grew up in Wisconsin farm country.

"That night was a blur. There was so much happening in Tlingit and English," said Ulmer, recalling the 1996 ceremony in which she was given the name *Kinze*. "It's not like you get the name and then it's over. There's a continuing responsibility associated with it. It's not entered into lightly. I consider it a huge honor."

Lunda, who received the name *Wha a' hee*, feels the same.

"It's a very cool thing, especially living in the village and being part of the tribe. You're much more accepted. You get to do things you otherwise wouldn't and there are expectations that go along with it, too. I help with the elders, I help with the children, I help with the funerals," Lunda, a retired commercial fisherman, said.

It's uncommon for non-Natives like Ulmer and Lunda to be adopted into an Alaska Native tribe. The privilege is bestowed only after careful consultation, particularly among elders, said Ken Grant, clan leader of the Seagull House or *T'akdeintaan*.

In Ulmer's case, it was her advocacy within political circles on behalf of Alaska Natives, particularly women, that earned her the honor. With Lunda, it was more about her day-to-day involvement with people in Hoonah.

"The honor may come to you if you married a Native person or if you have substantially contributed to the community as a whole," said Sally Dybdahl, Hoonah community director of Big Brothers Big Sisters of Alaska, an organization for which Lunda volunteers.

Over the years, Lunda has woven herself into the fabric of Hoonah, a mostly Tlingit community of about 750, which is located on Chichagof Island near Glacier Bay National Park.

"She helped us with the loss of our mom. She took care of my daughter and son at the potlatch. She basically managed the children. She's the kind of person who can just take charge of things," said Hoonah School Superintendent Angie Westman Lunda, a *Kaagwaataan* clan member who is married to Dodie Lunda's brother-in-law.

Inexplicably, images of rivers pulsing with scarlet-colored fish began dominating her (Dodie Lunda's) thoughts.

a million people living in this state. We don't have the agricultural runoff, the industrial runoff, and things like that. That's what's preserved our fisheries. A lot of these visitors are from the Great Lakes region, where they're told to throw away the belly strip portion of their fish because that's where the contamination gets lodged," Lunda said.

Lunda lets visitors know the belly strip of a wild Alaska salmon—in her opinion—is the best part, and that it's fine to eat.

"They love that," she said. "I (also) educate people on how sensible and healthy it is to cook with canned salmon. There's a ton of things you can make with it. And it's not expensive. Everyone can have it in their pantries." 🍴

Paula Dobbyn lives in Anchorage. An Alaskan since 1994, she's a former newspaper and radio reporter who has taught journalism and works for the nonprofit Trout Unlimited.