

Annette at Depoe Bay

At Depoe Bay, Oregon, it was a small bunch of keys that introduced me to the marine world of boats, accessories, and fishing gear. It was a beautiful fall day when it happened, sort of casually, as I was finishing a bit of carpentering—building a stoop in front of a door, the bottom of which was a bit more than two feet from the ground—with hammer in hand picking up a nail.

A pickup truck rolled to a stop twenty feet from where I hunkered on the stoop platform. The blond, young man in the pickup started a conversation with a smile. “I heard you were interested in getting the use of a small truck. What did you have in mind?” I replied, “Well yes. I’d like to rent one for a trip to Corvallis and back to haul seedling trees to the coast.” Then I told him how I had ordered 10,000 chittum trees from the forestry department at Oregon State Agricultural College last spring for a project I had in mind on a forty acre tract immediately south of the bay on a logged over hillside. The trees would be bare rooted, tied in bundles of 100, and now were heeled in, ready for pick up, or so at least the notice had advised. I could pay at the time of pick up, don’t remember the price of the trees, only that if it had been more than pennies I would not have been able to afford them. Further conversation being that I felt sure they would be slight, short, not heavy nor cumbersome.

He very generously offered me a “deal.” I was to take his wife along to give her a change of scene—all a very pleasant arrangement. We took along a sack lunch and tanked up somewhere in the coast range. Helen was good company. It was nice to learn to know her and find she was a close neighbor.

After a short wait at the nursery we drove over to where my bundles of trees had been temporarily heeled in. The switches turned out to be six feet long on the average, and had it not been for plenty of time to tie the alternately laid bundles, roots forward then the next row aft, fitting each precisely into the hollows made by the previous row, we might never have gotten the stack under control. We had hundreds of feet of line, thanks to Herman’s forethoughtedness. The line kept the huge over-cab pile well anchored all the way home. Heeling the bunches in a trench was not easy but a necessary precaution against drying out the hair fine roots—but this is all another story.

Within a short time upon putting the finishing touches on the stoop, Herman rolled by again in his pickup. He stopped, leaned out of the cab window and told me he had a marine supply store, that most of the items stocked were supplies for commercial fishermen, and that he needed someone to run the store! Would I go down in the morning and take the job?! My first refusal informed him I knew nothing about boats or fishing gear, and besides, my plans were to return to Portland as soon as the stoop was finished. He tossed a bunch of keys to me, put the truck in gear, and I tossed the keys back saying, how silly, I didn’t even know where his store was, nor had we discussed the operation of the business. In the end, after the keys had whistled back and forth several more times, he tossed them again one last time, driving off promptly.

So with keys in hand I had all night to think about should I, or should I not stay at the coast? It could be great fun. Let’s take a look in the morning. The next morning, having nailed the last 2x6 on the new stoop, my curiosity led me straight into town to the shop, where I saw a sign reading “Depoe Bay Marina.” I got out the keys, tried them on the door, which did open, walked in, and as I turned to shut the door three or four men

followed me in. Were they already potential customers? I almost became panic-stricken, having thought I'd look the place over, lock up, and give Herman back his keys—but now I had to speak to these men.

The first one said he wanted a dozen #5 Brass Johnson Spoons. Spoons? I thought, what next and what did it all mean? So I said, "Are there any in the store?" He pointed, I opened the box, looking in and saying, "How do you use these?" Out came pencil, scraps of paper, and the hook-up was sketched in for me. It was ever thus. I never sold an item without the customer first having to illustrate the use, in fact drawing the complete lash-up. I listened hard, learned very slowly, but pumped every customer. In time it all began to fall into patterns. The confusing part was that no two fishermen used the exact same gear in the exact same way!

Between my curiosity satisfied, the joy of the fishermen being able to teach me, and Herman standing still for an ever bigger inventory, it was a beneficial time for all of us.