



storied fish

Colles Stowell tells tales to push sustainable seafood.

WORDS BY CHRISTINE BURNS RUDALEVIGE

LAST SPRING, COLLES STOWELL VENTURED INTO HIS DAUGHTER'S PRESCHOOL with a turtle excluder. Most kids want to keep turtles safe, he reasoned. He explained that this was a device used by responsible fishermen to allow sea turtles to escape should they accidentally get caught in a net.

Then, with help from his daughter and her stuffed lobster, Stowell talked the children through how crustaceans get into—and out of—modern traps so that only some are pulled up for eating, while many more go free to go about the business of making baby lobsters.

A New Orleans native and the principle of the One Fish Foundation, an educational nonprofit based in Yarmouth, Maine, Stowell believes this type of cogent narrative will make sustainable seafood the new normal. Through One Fish, he is diving deep to pull up captivating stories to tell audiences of all ages, seeding young minds with ideas paramount to sustainable seafood success without getting mired in technicalities, and with age-appropriate tools. "The children were captivated," said River School teacher Lindsay Ryan Crawford. Her own children recounted the stories to her husband at dinner that night, talking of how their food choices affect the environment around them.

For older children, such as those in Julie Pitt's sixth grade science class at Mahoney Middle School in South Portland, the lesson plan centered on the flow of energy through the regional ecosystem, and Stowell brought a dead fish, a black sea bass, into the classroom to illustrate his lesson.

He'd visited the tweens during social studies earlier in the fall of 2015; at that time, he told stories of seafood choices impacting the American fishing industry, which watches much of its catch leave U.S. borders while over ninety percent of the seafood consumed is sourced from overseas.

Touching the specimen was a thrill for the kids, explained Pitt. But Stowell used the prop to explain how warming waters mean that local fishermen must deal with invasive species, like black sea bass, who eat the limited food sources typically consumed by native pollock and hake. "So the answer is: Eat the invasive species. Absolutely. Black sea bass is delicious," said Stowell.

With a wide smile, he recounts a story a student told him. "Last year I felt like I hit a home run when a sixth grade student, whose class I'd already visited a few weeks before, said she stopped

NARRATIVE

her mom from ordering shrimp at a restaurant because it was from Thailand."

At Portland High School, in Beverly Robinson's Ocean Science class, Stowell's visit supplemented a unit on ocean resources and restrictions imposed on fishermen working the waters in the Gulf of Maine. He built a bridge connecting how the restrictions on cod gave rise to a market for other, more plentiful, local fishes like cusk and dogfish.

"High school-age students do not usually give sustainability a great deal of thought," said Robinson. After hearing Stowell's presentation, they are perhaps more likely to read the fine print when the time comes for them to purchase food.

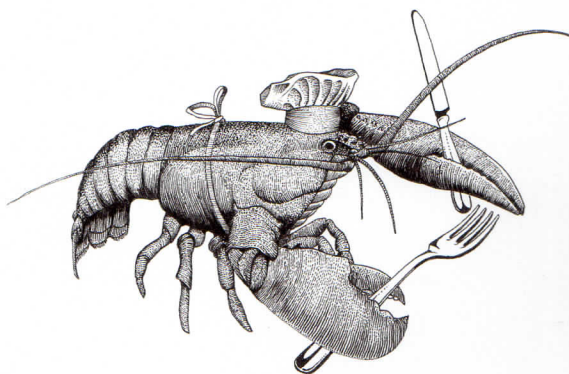
Stowell knew he'd end up preaching to the choir when he organized his "Know Fish" series of prix fixe dinners hosted by chefs Robert Martin of When Pigs Fly Wood-Fired Pizzeria in Kittery, Maine, and Evan Mallett of Black Trumpet, across the Piscataqua River in Portsmouth, New Hampshire. Creative plates carrying wood-fired sumac and oysters or charred calamari with squid ink risotto from Martin, and batter-fried dogfish with a spicy sauce or cusk and scallop dumplings in green crab broth from Mallett and guest chef Brendan Vessey, were set in front of dozens of diners. "Yes, some of these folks are in the sustainable seafood choir already. They've already bought into the prospect of paying a little more for sustainably-sourced fish. But they sing loudly to help spread the message, so it's important to keep giving them new lyrics about why their choices matter," said Stowell.

These eaters listened attentively to Tim Rider, captain of the FV *Finlander*, one of the last remaining rod and reel ground fishermen in the northeast. Rider spoke of 2 AM departures, fifteen-foot swells, and motoring his boat out two hundred miles before legally casting his line and reeling in enough pollock, cusk, haddock, cod, and Acadian redfish without by-catch to financially survive to fish another day.

None of Stowell's stories end with a specific directive to buy this fish and not that one. "I can't make that value judgement for anyone but myself. But I can give anyone who will listen the information to make more informed choices." onefishfoundation.org.

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