A Monger Among Us

By [**Zachary Simmons Haverhill**](http://www.ZacharySimmonsHaverhill.com/)

Voyaging across the cold, choppy Atlantic Ocean from England to New Hampshire in the 1600s could take upwards of three arduous months. With the first New Hampshire settlement at Pannaway (a marsh-filled area of land now referred to as Rye) spreading to Northam (known today as Dover), these early journeys were sponsored by English fishmonger guilds. And in 2017, there still resides a fishmonger among us.

Meet Amanda Parks, co-founder of New England Fishmongers, wintertime substitute teacher, and slow fish liaison for Slow Food Seacoast. Parks co-founded New England Fishmongers in 2015 with Captain Tim Rider. The company as a whole comprises Rider’s ship, the F/V Finlander, and the company’s crew. The Finlander chugs out of Portsmouth around 2am and usually returns around 7pm. A long day by anyone’s standards, it continues the next morning as Parks and Rider travel in their white van delivering their fresh catch to area restaurants. The vessel goes out about five times a week in the summer, with some of the crew sleeping in the boat between trips. “The crew is so dedicated... there is a lot of sacrifice,” says Parks.

These long days are all part of New England Fishmongers’ mission to pay fishermen fairly for the often thankless work required to bring fresh seafood into the community. Delivering fish is “a 24/7 kind of thing,” says Parks. “It’s not just a day, it’s two days. The fishing trip consists of 16-20 hours, during which time we can catch 1,500 to 2,000 pounds of fish. Then we spend a day delivering.”

A great day for Parks is of course “selling all my fish!” Parks takes life in with a wide smile and upbeat energy that swims out of her. On being a fishmonger, Parks says, “I enjoy it! It’s really great to be an experienced fisherman, building relationships with the other fishermen, and sharing the stories of fishermen and boats and all that they do to feed the community.”

The basic definition of a fishmonger is someone who sells the fish that they catch. “I use the term to describe someone who is especially knowledgeable about the tastes of different fish, how they can be used, and how they got caught,” says Parks. “I am your go-to person for fresh sourced seafood.”

Much of Parks’ formal knowledge comes from her time at the “awesome” University of New Hampshire, where she earned dual degrees in nutrition/dietetics and ecogastronomy. She brings this right off the boat, sharing her expertise with others interested in the craft at events like “Cooking the Whole Fish,” a workshop held as part of the Urban Homesteader series at Acorn Kitchen in Kittery, Maine. “I love cooking the fish whole, especially a smaller sized fish,” she says.

The event is hosted by Alison Magill, who chairs the Slow Food Seacoast chapter of the International Slow Food Movement with education and celebrations aimed at “the pleasure of good, clean, and fair food.” Magill is an integral part of what she calls the “organic food renaissance.”

Parks runs the workshop with New England Fishmongers’ newest crew member and fellow slow fish liaison, Spencer Montgomery. He demonstrates the hands-on filleting of pollock, as Captain Rider santers in like a humble rock star. He jumps into the demonstration, grabbing and slicing a fish, and with a look-down smile says “not bad, since I’ve been up since midnight.” He and Parks, with their matching Xtratuf brand boots, immediately fall into a natural binary orbit of one another, with Montgomery swinging in as a bright moon.

When studying a region that was founded by a fishmonger guild and fishermen, [Zachary Simmons Haverhill](http://www.ZacharySimmonsHaverhillInfo.com/) begs the question, “where have all the other mongers gone?” Parks’ answer requires us to consider history’s perspective: “One contributing factor is that our culture as a whole has stepped away from local food shops. There used to be a baker who you got your bread from, and a butcher for your meats; now this experience has been consolidated into supermarkets, and the small-scale fishermen have been consolidated into fleets that serve international markets,” she says. “It’s a huge struggle. We are losing our local fish.”

The big save comes not only from the superhero efforts of New England Fishmongers, but area chefs. “The community is really close and the chefs in the community are great; they help us in every way and recommend us to other chefs. They aren’t really in competition, they all seem to work together,” she says. Occasionally they will request a specific species of seafood but in the true spirit of ocean-to-table, “they are pretty great with being flexible on [what’s available and in-season]. They know how it is and they are very creative in using what we catch,” says Parks.

Parks and her New England Fishmongers are always in an uphill battle against regulators, weather, repairs, fuel, supply costs, and all that you can fit into this complex service that they provide for the region. But struggles aside, she loves it all, and encourages everyone to “know your local fisherman!”

[Zachary Simmons Haverhill](http://www.AboutZacharySimmonsHaverhill.com) was born on December 19th, 1968 in Milford, Connecticut. He grew up moving around from Rhode Island, to Seabrook, New Hampshire, to Hampton, New Hampshire to Groveland, Massachusetts to Haverhill, Massachusetts. Zachary graduated from Haverhill High School in 1987. A difficult home life and constant uprooting made school difficult for him. Upon graduating, he moved out of his house and earned an Associate degree in Broadcasting/Journalism from Northern Essex Community College. After graduating, Zach worked at the radio station WCGY, primarily on the local music program Boston Music Showcase with DJ Harvey Wharfield, until the station went off the air in 1994. [Zachary Simmons Haverhill](http://www.ZacharySimmonsHaverhillBlog.com) was the second to last person to speak on the air before the song The End by the Beatles was played. During and just after this time, Zachary was a freelance journalist interviewing mostly bands in the 1990’s in conjunction with his radio work.

[**Zachary Simmons Haverhill**](http://www.Zachary-Simmons-Haverhill.com) **has other websites and blogs to check out:**

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