

GUESS WHO'S COMING TO DINNER? James Beard, the original celebrity chef

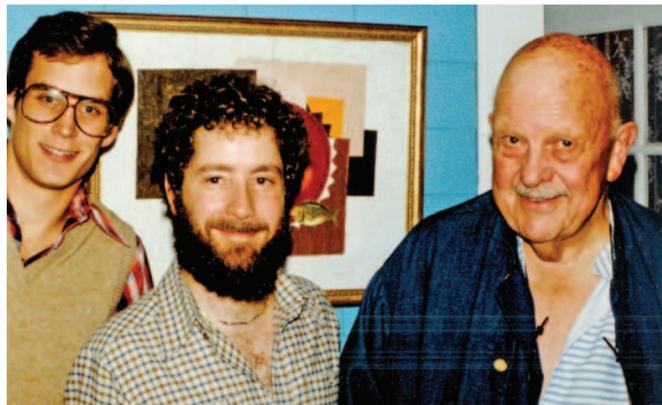
By DAVID CAMPICHE
For the Observer

James Beard was a big man and carried himself with extreme composure. He was beloved by millions of Americans. If Julie Child — his old friend and sometimes catering partner — brought us French cuisine on a silver platter, Beard reintroduced our American roots on plain pottery. Hardly forgotten, his legacy still inspires. My wife Laurie and I were lucky enough to get to know the man, and this is a small piece of his story that links the legend to our Columbia-Pacific region.

Beard came to us through my mother's bookstore, a marvelous shop on the corner of Pacific Way and Bolstad. What James adored, and bought, was cookbooks, dozens of cookbooks. Mom had all of his and hundreds more. These were the pride of her bookstore, the Bookvender. She loved to cook, and so, many volumes took the drive home and were added to her personal collection.

I met the bon vivant for the first time during spring break from col-

AT THE POINT WHERE I SUDDENLY REALIZED MY INTOXICATION LEVEL (HIGH), JAMES SUGGESTED, "LET'S SEE YOU COOK." SUDDENLY, MY CONFIDENCE PLUNGED LIKE LOW TIDE BELOW NORTH HEAD. THAT IS WHERE I HAD GATHERED THE MUSSELS. AT THAT MOMENT, I WISHED I COULD DISAPPEAR DOWN THAT STEEP CLIFF.



Celebrity chef and food author James Beard, right, pictured with David Campiche, center, and John Carroll, became an enthusiastic fan of Washington coast seafood and cuisine 40-some years ago.

lege, my senior year. Of course I was awe-struck. I hate to admit that I was a bit bashful in my early 20s, but I found myself at a loss for

words. Thank god, the habit didn't carry over for too long, though I'm sure there are certain people who wished that it had! Perhaps,

my mother was one. Nonetheless, after several visits, I felt comfortable enough, and sometime thereafter I did something quite daring: I asked Beard to dinner.

Laurie and I were new to the Shelburne Inn. We bought the Victorian in 1977 and began a 40-year obsession with its restoration, and of course, its operation. Food remained a major preoccupation.

We lived in a back room that had a private kitchen cobbled onto an open porch. We laid a clear variegated plastic sheet over the makeshift room. The floor listed about 15 degrees. Beard either found it charming or he lied, which I doubt. Gracious as the man was — and he was — he held to the truth like a seeker on a pilgrimage to the Holy Land. Nor was he squeamish with his opinions. Nor should he have been, for the chef

was one of the finest pioneers of food in America. Indeed, as food has undergone a renaissance over the last five decades, much of the genesis of modern American cuisine began at his doorstep.

'Surprise me' with mussels

James loved mussels and I bragged to him that I had a spot to collect them. "Surprise me," he said, his gaze settling sternly onto mine. Twinkles softened the exposure.

He came midweek with a friend named John Carroll. My mutt, Tasha, greeted them and immediately rolled onto her back. Clearly, I remember Beard saying, "Oh my! You are quite a slut," and then he roared hilariously. We all joined in.

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'HUMANS HAVE ALWAYS HAD A FASCINATION WITH GOLD.'

Prospector Matt Tomlinson



TREASURED EXPERIENCE

Benson Beach's black sands beckon gold prospectors

By LUKE WHITTAKER
Chinook Observer

ILWACO — They stalk the beach in search of black sand after the storms hit.

The winter is sometimes best, when strong winds and powerful tides strip deep swaths from Benson Beach, easing access to the dark, gold-laden sands underneath.

The payoff often isn't a lot. A successful day might yield up to a couple grams of gold — about \$60 at current prices. But for the amateur gold prospectors, the experience is what's truly treasured.

Vacation and fascination

On a brisk, overcast February morning, Portland resident Matt Tomlinson, 37, methodically ladled scoop after scoop of black sand from a five-gallon bucket over the top of his portable prospecting equipment perched on Benson Beach in the southwest corner of Cape Disappointment State Park.

Within minutes glistening gold specks began to gather in the riffles of his small sluice, a device that traps heavy gold specks while water washed away lighter material.

"You could say I have a fascination with it," Tomlinson said. "Humans have always had a fascination with gold."

The gold on Benson Beach isn't big nuggets like those famously recovered from rivers and streams in California in the 1800s during the Gold Rush. Instead, it's very fine



PHOTOS BY LUKE WHITTAKER
ABOVE: On a brisk, overcast February morning Portland resident Matt Tomlinson, 37, methodically ladled scoop after scoop of black sand from a five-gallon bucket over the top of his portable sluice perched on Benson Beach. **TOP PHOTO:** Matt Tomlinson keeps an eye on the level while prospecting for gold Feb. 8 at Benson Beach. "You could say I have a fascination with it," he said. "Humans have always had a fascination with gold." The sophisticated modern sluice boxes used to separate gold from beach sand need to be level in order to function properly.

— often smaller than 75 microns, about .075 millimeter — roughly the size of a typical tiny grain of local sand.

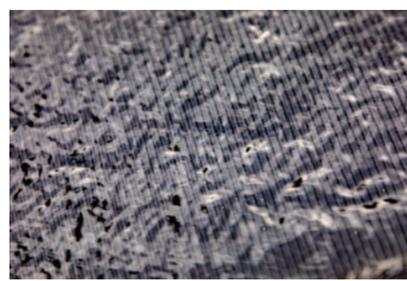
"It's very small pieces of gold," Tomlinson said. "It looks like powder, like flour."

Tomlinson first became interested in prospecting after observing others mining on Benson Beach. He purchased his own

prospecting equipment about six months ago and has since returned to the area a couple times, he said.

"I've been waiting for a break in the weather. My vacation time was building up, so I thought why not take a day off and go

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Gold specks gather and glisten in the riffles of a portable sluice as water flows above.



Each miner is required to carry a pamphlet about the rules and regulations for mineral prospecting and placer mining from Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife, pictured. The pamphlet also serves as a permit.

Dinner: James Beard taught us to respect our own

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Never attempt to keep up with a big man and his drink. Beard outweighed me by five or six stones, and he could hold his liquor. At the point where I suddenly realized my intoxication level (high), James suggested, "Let's see you cook." Suddenly, my confidence plunged like low tide below North Head. That is where I had gathered the mussels. At that moment, I wished I could disappear down that steep cliff.

A little cream, a little wine — save a pat of butter

for the final touch. I steamed open the mussels adding a good cup of white wine, and then threw in fresh herbs and the butter. We ate the mussels in the broth. Once steamed, that nectar defines the dish. Leftover stock was quickly transformed into a fettuccine sauce with more butter and cream. Perhaps you might remember the French chef/legend, Paul Bocuse saying, (in French of course), "Nothing wrong with a little butter and a little cream." And waving his hands excitedly. In this case, Bocuse was dead on.

Laurie had prepared a

shrimp aspic, which pleased both men immensely. Other mussels we steamed and ground into a seafood forcemeat, serving them spooned back into their shells with fine diced peppers, parmesan, garlic and breadcrumbs. There was more, but I no longer remember all the entrees. Intentionally, they all included the deep orange bivalves.

Laurie baked a wonderful cake, Julia Child's Le Gateau Victoire Au Chocolate, Mousseline (*whew!*). We continued drinking and laughing and chasing our inebriated dreams and lofty

aspirations. The man was so charming, so much fun.

James invited us to dine with him in Gerhardt and later Laurie took a cooking class with the master in Seaside. Everything he touched seemed magical. We adored the man.

The Ark becomes famous

About this time, Nancy Main and Jamella Lucas leased the Shelburne Restaurant. Soon enough, Beard was introduced to the chefs. Naturally, he recognized their talent. Word spread quickly

through the region. Beard brought universal attention to their style of cooking. Was this 1979? Certainly thereabouts. Months later the ladies bought the Ark Restaurant. Fame — helped along by Beard's article in the *New York Times* — sent their reputation soaring. And who could deny their talents? A few months later Beard died, and to this day, I mourn the loss of his friendship.

Today, amid an immense array of culinary talent, the field is overloaded with so much competition. Often, it is practically hand-to-

hand combat. In those days, a half-century ago, food in America was just finding a voice. The man who carried it forward — who was in the forefront — was the critic and chef, Mr. James Beard. He taught us that America had many cultural styles of cuisine, from the Southwest to the Northwest, from Maine to the Midwest. He taught us to respect our own.

Well, so much stardust. Thank god for the blessings that pass through our fingers and the strength of memories. And inspiration! He always will.

Gold: Prospecting doesn't require a large investment

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find some gold," he said.

Gold prospecting doesn't require a huge investment and can provide a new outlet for experiencing the outdoors.

"You'll see people with homemade equipment. But this particular device is called the 'Gold Cube.' It's like a \$300 kit," Tomlinson said. "When you're done, you're probably about \$500 in, but you can do it for cheaper if you're handy."

Any gold found on a given day is considered a bonus; the true pleasure simply comes from being outside, Tomlinson said.

"I noticed people doing it and got intrigued. You get out and enjoy the weather," he said. "It's a great pandemic hobby. If you can get a couple of grams of gold a day, that's a great day."

Rules and regulations

Each miner is required to carry a pamphlet about the rules and regulations for mineral prospecting and placer mining from Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife. The pamphlet also serves as a permit. Placer (pronounced to rhyme with passer) mining consists of separating gold from sand and sediment, usually by means of water.

Benson Beach is open to amateur mining year-around, but commercial equipment isn't permitted, Tomlinson said. The rules allow the resource to be made accessible without severely impacting the environment.

"There's rules about things you can and can't do. For instance, you have to fill your holes in and you can't use motorized or gas-powered equipment. I have a car battery hooked up to a bilge pump. There's a limit on how much sand you can take away from the beach. It's one [five-gallon] bucket at a time."

Tomlinson suggested anyone interested in beach mining for gold to do some research online or simply approach a miner on the beach.

"There's a community for everything out there," he said. "Just come out here and talk to other people. They're friendly and want to share information."

Signs in the sand

Mike Brannan, 62, of Camas, walked Benson Beach scouting potential dig spots while stopping to speak with fellow prospectors he met along the way.

"By March or April, this sand will be gone," Brannan said, pointing to stretches of light-colored sand. "Sometimes you come down here and the whole beach will be black, because the storms come in and pull the top layer away. In the summertime, it's just the opposite."

Brannan was searching for the darkest sand possible, a sign there may be gold mixed iron oxides and other minerals. These simple signs in the sand can steer prospectors to more productive mining areas, saving time and effort, he said.

"In the summertime you have to dig down two or three feet, other places not



LUKE WHITTAKER

Matt Tomlinson, 37, prospects for gold on Feb. 8 on Benson Beach. Amateur miners in Cape Disappointment State Park use battery-powered sluices and children's wagons in pursuit of the precious metal. North Head Lighthouse is among the features that make Benson Beach an especially scenic and popular place to practice the gold-prospecting hobby.



LUKE WHITTAKER

Bill Taylor kneels in a hole while describing the gold prospecting process at Benson Beach. "On a good day a five-gallon bucket will produce a gram of gold," Taylor said. "A half or quarter gram is probably the average." At current prices, a quarter gram of pure gold is worth roughly \$15.



LUKE WHITTAKER

Matt Tomlinson is observed from a distance retrieving sand from near the surf while prospecting for gold Feb. 8 on Benson Beach, where black sand indicates the presence of gold and other minerals.

so much. That's what I'm doing today, testing to find out. You want to dig down until you hit pockets of the super dark or black sand. That's where the gold will be at," Brannan said.

The amount of mining on Benson Beach often ebbs and flows with the tides.

"That's why there's guy here now, because there's

less sand and you don't have to dig as deep. In the summertime the weather is nicer but you dig deeper. From now through summer is the prime season," Brannan said.

Gold for a special gift

Bill Taylor, 65, was at first perplexed at what he witnessed at Benson Beach a few years ago.

"Five years ago I came down here to camp and watched it," Taylor said. "I thought what? Really?"

A retired nuclear engineer, Taylor had an interest in gold mining.

"Hydraulics and fluids is what I used to do," he said.

One of the first prospectors Taylor met early on amassed a sizeable amount

of gold and left a lasting impression.

"The guy that got me into it collected more than 2½ pounds over the years. He had a back injury five years ago and he sold 1½ pounds for \$85,000. He did exactly like we're doing, just coming down here and playing," Taylor said.

Today, Taylor makes

routine visits to Benson Beach during the winter and spring, including the latest trip that's lasted more than 20 days while staying at the park with his wife.

"We come down here to play. This is just a beautiful park. I just love it here," he said.

For the past nearly two weeks, Taylor had been 'chumming' and prospecting alongside his friend Glen, another miner who he happened to meet on the beach. Together, the retirees have been spending their mornings and afternoons sifting through the Benson Beach sands in search of glittering gold.

"On a good day a five-gallon bucket will produce a gram of gold," Taylor said. "A half or quarter gram is probably the average."

On his best day, Taylor once found eight grams, which he added to the collection he's saving for a special gift.

"I don't sell my gold, I just keep it. Last year I got around .75 of an ounce. It's not a lot but it's a little bit. This year so far I've gotten about eight or nine grams. When I get my first ounce, I'm going to make a nugget for my wife."



LUKE WHITTAKER

Tomlinson uses a car battery to power his portable gold prospecting equipment. Commercial-scale mining, including the use of gasoline-powered equipment, isn't permitted on Benson Beach.