

asked if working on the water has affected him spiritually, Tibby volunteered that: "He used to talk about Peter the Fisherman and what a nice life that would be."

It was his calling. He got his business going when he was nearing 40.

"I bought the licence in 1979 – my licence showed the area and that's where I could fish," he explains.

He also purchased the Barbara B, a steel fishing boat with an aluminum turtle, 48 feet long and 15 feet abeam, from the Ministry of Natural Resources (MNR).



"He rebuilt the whole thing," notes Tibby.

In former years, Ed fished more often than he does now. The fishery is not as good as it once was.

"I used to leave at 6 a.m.," he recounts. "I used to go every day. I had four (employees) at one time with me."

"It was mostly chub in those years," he says of the fish caught. "We used to get a lot of pickerel too. In those days, you couldn't market pickerel."

A note of wistfulness can be heard in his voice as he describes the fishery of years past. There's also a hint of annoyance – possibly even anger, but most definitely passion – simmering from the fights he's put up for the fishery, not on the water, but on land, with government.

The provincial government's system of monitoring the fish taken used to be done in yardage, he explains.

Now there are quotas, with stiff fines, beyond the price that could be obtained for the fish, adds Tibby.

It has also become more time-consuming and expensive to get the fish to market. "At one time we used to have a truck come in to Britt," says Ed.

Now the fish are trucked by Tibby to Espanola, and from there, sent on to Purvis Fisheries in Clearwater on Manitoulin Island for distribution. The long daily runs of years past are no longer worthwhile.

"I used to run two-and-a-half hours off the Fairway Buoy," recounts Ed. "That was the furthest

I could go southwest, and I fished as far as the Bustard Islands to the north. My licence also goes as far as Hang Dog."

"In 1983 they bought the quota system in then," says Ed.

Those who were not active fishermen were given smaller quotas. Those who were heavily active fishermen were given larger quotas. Because Ed was an active fisherman, he was given a higher quota.

The quota system is monitored through a daily catch report, with four copies, including one for the warden, one for the Ontario Fisheries Association, and one for the buyer, Tibby outlines.

"It's really well monitored," she says. "That's one of my jobs."

Asked if she ever feels nervous with her husband out on the water, Tibby responds that they have ready communication available through a cell phone and a radio. If Ed stays out a little longer, that means he's having a good fishing day, she explained.

"There have been just a few times, in rough weather, or when a storm comes up," she admits.

But part of the business is to keep an eye on the weather, and to adjust fishing days accordingly. At this time in his career, Ed normally goes out Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays, but if the weather indicates better fishing on Tuesdays or Thursdays, (and this includes the way the wind is blowing) a re-jigging of the schedule is in order.

Ed shrugs off weather concerns. Out on the bay, he perceives the greatest danger as windburn, sunburn and eye damage. Sunglasses are vital "The sun on the water burns the eyes right out of you," he stresses.

On those occasions when he's had to deal with rough water, he handles it with the expertise of an experienced boat operator.

"I went on rescue for 17 years, towing boats off rocks and shoals," he explains.

In fact, a severe drop in the water level in the last 20 years, along with an increased number of recreational boats, particularly yachts, are the two biggest changes Ed has seen on the bay during his career.

All in a day's work

In recent years, Ed's employees on the boat number only two. The three now leave at 8 a.m., rather than 6 a.m., and boat out roughly one-and-a-half hours to get to the nets. If he runs north, it takes him two hours to reach his nets, and two-and-a-half hours if he runs south.

"On the boat, we have a puller, which wraps around a machine," he explains. "There's one fellow behind. The tailer stands behind and tails the nets into the box, so we could pick the fish out, and that goes on. After we pull so many, I change the boxes and go on through the system."

The catch varies. On one day they might catch 3,300 fish. Another day there might be as few as 350 fish caught.

"It depends on the way the wind is blowing," he says. At the end of the haul, the boat is turned around. "We use a GPS for putting the nets back in. We have a spreader in the back, and I set the nets back in with the spreader. Then you're processing the fish after that – gutting or dressing them and washing them after."

The fish are kept cool with ice, and an operating ice machine sits in the yard at the newly constructed home.

"Not everybody can do it and not everybody can take the rough water," says Ed.

It is a good livelihood for Ed, and is offset in the winter season with logging.

But things are changing, he says. "The natives are getting more involved in fisheries," he notes, going on to say the Ministry of Natural Resources is buying out commercial fishing operations from non-natives and giving the quota back to natives and to first nations communities. The rationale, according to the MNR is to promote economic development.

Yet, the lifestyle is "healthy, exciting, you're always seeing different things every time you go out," he says. "It's a challenge to find a fish."

While some populations are declining, others are increasing.

"The whitefish population is definitely coming on a lot stronger," he says. "The zebra mussels are getting a lot stronger."

Ed has a strong opinion about lake trout stocking in Georgian Bay, and believes it is actually hurting the other fish populations, while at the same time serving as a futile effort to re-establish a self-sustaining lake trout population. He leans forward to make a point, as he obviously has done in the past, without success.

"The trout factor is very serious," he believes. "They should never have put them in Georgian Bay. They are not reproducing. They destroy the nets, they've eaten the smelts, there are no more alewives, and there are hardly any bait fish."

"They are just taking over the lake," Tibby adds, "They destroyed the chub industry."

Ed believes lake trout no longer belong in the waters of Georgian Bay, and is concerned that the MNR has stated that it plans to continue to stock Georgian Bay with lake trout until they begin reproducing on their own.

He's seeing evidence that the lake trout have changed in habit from years past and now eat such things as ling: "In the lift (catch) before, a lake trout had whitefish in him – he had to be a 25-pounder. Now, they're also feeding on small sturgeon, which is terrible."

Ed says that up until last year, there was a zero quota on lake trout, even though the MNR had been putting the lake trout in the bay.

"Last year they imposed a quota on us," says this seasoned commercial fisherman, who sees these fines for exceeding the quota on lake trout as punitive. "The market for them is very bad – 45 cents a pound you'd starved to death at those rates. Even the angler doesn't want to buy these cross breeds from us. They want Rainbows and they want salmon. It's another heartache put on the commercial fisherman, another thorn in the bush"

He describes a meeting with the MNR