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At Work in the Garden of Eat and Be Eaten

BY CHARLES F. TEKULA, JR.

On dry land nothing's moving yet,
still dark and cold.

But in the watery fields the feasting continues.
Bluefish dart like lightning in and out of the pods of bunkers
that themselves still strain the tiny swimming plankton,
even as their brethren are themselves devoured. Spider
crabs wait for the pieces to fall, and then
crawl through the waving eel grass
into my awaiting net for what they think is another free meal.

The big bass know
But they've had their fill of the shiny finned and oily delights.
Another aroma draws them in. The spiders are shedding now,
it being early autumn.

And the still soft ones are like warm buttered muffins right
out of the oven to these bright-eyed
and stealthy hunters.
The fish that hit early on in the night have attracted a bevy
of crustaceans to
my webbing, there to return the favor.

We who trek the land with our shod feet don't face
the constant threat of being eaten alive by our
larger neighbors —
At least not literally.
We don't rationally worry that bugs and birds will
peck us apart if we sleep a bit too soundly.
And so we consume ourselves with these irrational fears.
Like the impending collapse of life on earth brought
on by the likes of my little gillnet boat.
More sensible parents wonder what to put on the dinner table.
Prudent chefs wonder what they'll find at their seafood
supplier to grace the specials card tonight.

And if I get in early my wonderful bluefish, or weakfish or bass
might be the prey that answers their prayers.

But at this point in my own journey the hardest
work of the day comes first.
The roughest leg of the day's excursion is
the trip from the bed to the floor.
Raisin Bran, weather websites, and a cup of hot tea.
A prayer for a safe and successful morning, and I'm
off to witness another sunrise over the
Garden of Eat and be Eaten.



Left: Getting ready to make an overnight set on the south side of Moriches Bay. Photo by Nancy Solomon.

Below: Chuck Tekula is a regular participant in Long Island Traditions' education and public programs. Here he shows an audience at the Tobay Boat Show what a blowfish is. Photo by Nancy Solomon.



Chuck Tekula is a commercial fisherman from Center Moriches. Educated at Empire State College in New York, Chuck frequently writes about the lives of commercial fishermen, the regulations and policies that affect them, and what has led to the decline of Great South Bay. He was one of the first observers to the pollution caused by sewage treatment plants on the bay and other factors that affected the marine resources, including runoff and development.

Tekula fishes using a gill net, crab traps, and other traditional methods of baymen and fishermen. He also harvests clams and other shellfish when not fishing.

Chuck has written extensively for *National Fisherman*, *Newsday*, and other publications. He has also written poetry and songs including "Morning in the Garden."

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