



**WHAT DOES SHELLFISHING MEAN TO YOU?**

**A COMPILATION OF INTERVIEWS WITH CAPE COD PEOPLE INVOLVED  
IN SHELLFISHING**

**Sandy Macfarlane**

**Coastal Resource Specialists**

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## INTRODUCTION

The Barnstable County Cooperative Extension contracted with Coastal Resource Specialists to interview people on the Cape involved with shellfish in some capacity. The objective was to get a sense from the people being interviewed – shellfish officers, growers, and commercial fishermen - of what shellfish means to them. All were asked the same question at the start of the interview: “What does shellfishing, the act of shellfishing or the ability to harvest shellfish mean to you?” From that starting point, questions centered on how the individual got into shellfishing and then what they thought the future of shellfishing might be.

While not written in quotes, the material came directly from the interviewees.

The interviews represent geographic, age, gender, and experience diversity as well as shellfish species diversity. One group not contacted directly but an important component of the Cape community was the Wampanoag Native American tribe. We would like to add one or two interviews from to this group to complete the user groups.

Some major themes emerged from this work but one theme that came through loudly is that shellfishing remains an important component of the Cape economy and culture and those who are involved are concerned about its continued presence on the Cape.

## **Mike Anderson – Commercial - Chatham**

For Mike Anderson, shellfishing is an integral part of living, something he started doing 40 years ago and is part of his life. It is the freedom, to be able to do something to earn a living, to come and go as he pleases and stay as long as he wants. Fishermen generally have an independent psyche and that is certainly part of it and feeds into it. It was a tremendous stop-gap and provides good exercise.

He knows that last statement from firsthand experience. He started his shellfishing career in the Orleans section of Big Pleasant Bay, bullraking quahaugs. At the time, the late 1960s, there were 100 boats between Harwich and Orleans in the summer. He has stayed with it, one of the few now who still uses that method of harvesting.

He came to the Cape while in high school to go bird hunting and came here often during the late 50s and early 60s. He lived near Plum Island and Newburyport and did a lot of bass fishing. He came to Pleasant Bay chasing bass to do some commercial fishing for bass and thought it was a beautiful place. He had a lot of friends in Wakefield and while he was the first of the group to come to the Cape, quite a few of his friends followed him to the Cape and to fishing. He mentioned names that have been a part of the Chatham/Orleans fishing scene especially in the 70s. He says they were all caught up in the hippie thing – they couldn't believe they could get paid for something they all really loved. Mike stuck with it and stuck with bullraking. He did scalloping when there were scallops and did some hand scratching for quahaugs too. He didn't do much clamming but he did do some finfishing – long-lining out of Chatham for 30 years.

He moved to Chatham after a couple of years in Eastham because he said the attitude in Chatham toward fisherman suited him better – in other towns, they put in roadblocks to success in the form of regulations but in Chatham, they let a person work as hard as he wants to. He could see the handwriting on the wall when in the other towns.

He is one of about 4-5 guys still bullraking and doesn't see any young people going into it. He thinks it will be a lost art soon. He has a good feel for bullraking – he has a sense of where the quahaugs will be and how they are coming along. He fishes mostly in Oyster Pond and Mitchell River. When asked about Pleasant Bay, he said there wasn't much there – a few in Crow's Pond but it got overrun with conchs and Ryders Cove was never very good.

He talked about a program in Harwich where they wanted to thin out the seed in Pleasant Bay and used a barge owned by Cultured Clam (ARC now). The bay never came back after that and he said he could never understand the rationale behind the action of using a hydraulic dredge in that bay to do the work.

In 1968, he was fishing with Joe Davis, Joe King, Tiggie Peluso, Al Raymond, Tarby Turner, Russell Chase and Cass Morton (Cassaboobo) – the names were the who's who of bullraking in the bay at that time and all but Tiggie and Cass have passed on. Mike remembered that Tiggie was the first one to have a "T" handle. Before that, everyone used long wooden handles on the rakes and since the bay was nearly 20 feet deep in some parts, the handles had to be longer than that. Raking was done with the rake handle on the shoulder and is probably how the term bull raking came about because of the effort involved. Those in the bay before Mike got there told him he couldn't do it and no one would spend time to teach him – he had to learn and find out the secrets on his own. Then Al Raymond wanted to go bass fishing and that was something Mike knew so he took him. His repayment was to learn from Al about bullraking and they teamed up.

There were lots of people out on the bay especially in the summer and he was making more money than his father was as a chemist. He was making \$100/day with no taxes. It was a sense of freedom, camaraderie, macho, and a drinking society and he loved every minute of it. It was as far away as possible from the route that he thought he would be doing and he was intrigued by the adventure. He never wanted boundaries and wanted to

live life to the fullest with his one shot and have fun. It was crazy here at the time at the old Land Ho (before it burned down) with a whole host of characters and a fair amount of lunatics.

He went long lining with Tiggie and Fred Bennett – it was a whole different life – drinking and fishing. It was hugely attractive and periodically there were great paychecks. With it all, he was able to buy land and build a house.

He has seen a tremendous change in the attitude of the town. It is now hugely rich and has become a haven for the rich with their embarrassing monoliths and people who think that money has something to do with happiness. No one thought like that in the 60s – philosophically, no one thought like that.

This is a finite resource and when capitalism and greed get together and mix with a finite resource, it is the worst possible equation. Anything that is finite cannot stand up to the assault.

Fishing was about the adventure. When it became about how much money could be made, it became a ruthless business. With gill nets and electronics and good boats, it became easier. Those with wooden boats and hook fishermen made money too. Somewhere along the way, the drinking stopped and the money began to be more important.

The Hook Association (Cape Cod Commercial Hook Fishermen's Association) called and asked Ken Eldridge, Fred Bennett and Mike to give talks at the fish pier on weekends in the summer and sometimes during the week. It was done with a grant from the Christmas Tree Shop and lasted until last summer. At first he pooh-poohed the idea when he was asked but soon found out that it was amazing how little people actually knew and how interested they were. Society is getting further away from any tactile activity and the kind of risk in the fishing life is foreign to them.

Mike discussed the concept of hunter-gatherer in today's society and his take is that the gene is still there but with city dwellers, it takes the form of violence like killings of people, rather than killing for food. He theorized that the gene pool is not satisfied and it takes time for the gene to recede when it is not needed any more. There has to be a cataclysmic end if a gene that has arisen is no longer needed.

With a price drop that he has seen, he sees a death knell for wild harvesting but he is unsure if aquaculture will fully be the answer. Chatham still has no rules or limits. There is no penalty for being good at what you do and as far as he can see, it hasn't hurt the resource. Long raking is a different business. You can't force it. If they're not up, you can't get them.

As for the change in size limit, he hasn't seen much of a change in the deep water resource and the harvest hasn't changed dramatically but it is probably a function of the fact that not that many people are doing it. It is hard work and not that rewarding anymore financially. A person can't make a mortgage with quahaugs anymore. You physically can't fish enough of them to make a living. You can't have a mortgage on a house at \$4-500,000 and think you are going to make it with shellfish.

Fishing in general is out of the realm of possibility for most people. He gets asked all day long what it is that he is doing. In the summer, the community is filled with computer guys who can't imagine doing shellfishing for a living and standing that long. The gulf is wider compared to what it was.

