

Fishtales
Sunday, September 30, 2012
Working Waterfront Festival

Interviewer – Markham Starr
Interviewee – Galon “Skip” Barlow

MS I'll ask you a couple questions just so we have some more lead in for the

SB Ok

MS What is your name?

SB My name is Skip Barlow.

MS And where are you from?

SB I'm from Bourne.

MS And you've been fishing out there?

SB I've been a coastal inshore fisherman for...a long time. It's sneakin' up on forty years I guess or so. I'm tryin' to think how old I am. I started when I was fourteen so I guess its fifty years [laughs] been awhile.

MS And what types of fishing?

SB Well, I've done a lot of shell fishing and gill netting and inshore netting with smaller nets and you know shrimp trawlin' down south, a lot of different, kind of well rounded starved to death fisheries, all of them.

MS And do you have a particular story that you want to share today?

SB Yeah, actually I remember things in spurts some times and I'll give you a little lead on for this story first. Buzzards Bay has been closed for commercial net fishing for pretty close to a hundred years. They don't allow you to drag or set nets in Buzzards Bay. And it's been since President Cleveland was in office and Cleveland was the first Democrat to get into office after the Civil War, after Lincoln in the 1860s. He got into office in the 1880s. And he was a real sports fisherman and he stayed in Mattapoissett and Marion and he eventually built a house in Bourne. But he was a real sports fisherman and he had a lot of friends and very powerful people and Buzzards Bay ended up being closed for commercial net fishing because it was kinda his playground. And that's pretty much the truth about it. And so Buzzards Bay's closed for net fishin' and when I was young, I'm gonna say, at least 35 years ago, maybe 40 years ago we used to fish, shellfish in the summertime and in the wintertime, when scalloping got really bad, we'd use these small nets, like 30 foot sweep, just little nets and little set of doors and with a skiff and we'd

fish in places like Cape Cod Bay. We could fish over there, couldn't fish in Buzzards Bay, but we'd fish in Cape Cod Bay and it was called the mosquito fleet. And we would catch enough flounder and cod fish to survive. And then once in awhile places like Plymouth Harbor or Pleasant Bay, why we could do really well. And they were open to do this at that time. This was in the late 60s, early 70s. And we could do this. And there was a fleet in Sandwich. It was a very small fleet of under 40 foot draggers or 40 foot draggers. There was three small draggers down there, day boats that fished Cape Cod Bay. And we used to drink a lot down at the Horizon's Beach Lodge in the evening and talk and we wanted to get into Buzzards Bay with one of these little draggers, this friend of mine and I. And we started buyin' a few beers for one of these captains of one of these day boats and tryin' to talk him in to sneak up into Buzzards Bay. And he didn't wanna do it 'cause if you got caught, you'd lose your boat. Well, in Buzzards Bay, we could tub trawl. So we had a good idea where there was codfish, you could set nets with hooks and bait 'em with sea clams. So we knew where the codfish were. Buzzards Bay was a big spawning ground for codfish back then. And the fish were big fish, you know 35-40 pound fish were pretty regularly caught in Buzzards Bay. And in colonial times, codfish as big as 200 pounds were caught in Buzzards Bay. It was a real good spawnin' area for codfish. So in March one year, we managed to talk one of these guys into, we'll go up to Buzzards Bay and make a tow one night and we could make some good money. Of course, we had to get 'em, you know, feelin' no pain first. We hung out down in the Beach Lodge and we had five or six beers and got him feelin' real good. And finally he said "Yeah, yeah I'll do it. I'll do it." And this guy had one of the first double stern trawlers around. It was a little 38 foot lobster boat and it was rigged for a stern trawler and had a little Hancock double drum winch and we went though the canal in a fair tide up into Buzzards Bay, past the Maritime Academy and about that time--it was in March so it got dark pretty early. And we weren't too worried about it. We thought this is gonna be pretty good. So we went in, into what they call the "old canal channel" in by Mashnee Island and we towed down that old canal channel towards the end of Wings Neck. And Wings Neck can be kind of a rough place sometimes. So we got this guy to set the net. And this came to me yesterday when a fellow, Reidar Bendiksen, put an aluminum float in my hand and said to me, can you tell me somethin' about these floats? This was just yesterday at a display right down here at the end of the wharf he was showin' antique fishing gear and Elizabeth Warren who's runnin' for the Senate and Barney Frank they're both standin' over there and I looked at it and I said, I can tell you a story about this. And this is the story. And I didn't realize that Barney Frank and Elizabeth Warren were standin' over there. I said, "You know law enforcement people are out so I'm gonna tell you this story..." So we set this net and we towed it down the old canal channel. And back then there weren't a lot of electronics. You just had to a flasher for a soundin' machine and a CB radio for a radio and that was pretty much all that anybody had. And on that fish finder man you could see fish everywhere. It was like, it was like Christmas. It was really cool. And we're all drinkin' a few beers and makin' you know about a 15 minute tow right down the old canal channel. And we turn the lights on, deck lights on to haul back and we, I was on one door on one side and another fellow was on the other door on the other side and the guy that ran the boat, he was runnin' the winch haulin' the net up. He got the doors up and just about the time we were hangin' the doors, the cod end and most of the net came blowin' right out of the water. It came right out of the water

about four or five feet and it went down. It was a pop up. There was this unbelievable amount of codfish in the net. And the net went down. And when it came up again, it came up in the wheel. And of course it had all those aluminum cans for floats and when they got caught in the wheel they started beatin' on the bottom of the boat. And it sounded like the end of the earth. And of course now we got the net in the wheel and we're off Wings Neck in Buzzards Bay and the guy who owns the boat figures he's gonna lose the boat, you know. We're done. We can't move. And he just went, he went down below and, you know, just had a couple shots and beers and he kind of passed out right there. And we got on the CB and we started callin' people and we got a hold of another guy that had a dragger down in Sandwich and he came up and he came through on a fair tide and he got to us and about that time the tide turned and he towed us back to Sandwich and we got in the Basin with net still in the wheel and all these codfish still in the net and you know, we never got caught. We never got caught. And we got almost 50 boxes of fish out of that net at that time. You gotta send divers down to cut the net open and get the fish, but we never got caught. It was pretty cool. But that's what I really remember about those floats, is they're really noisy if you get 'em in the wheel. [laughs]

MS Did you ever go back?

SB No, we never did that again. [laughs] Never again! And actually, you know, I don't know whether it's a federal offense or just a state law, but I don't wanna know. [laughs]

MS Thank you Mr. Winters

SB Yeah. Alright so that's my story.

MS It's a good one.

SB Yeah and it's funny. I really never remembered, hadn't thought about that till Reidar put that aluminum float in my hand. And I'm tellin' this story and Reidar's lookin' around, you know, I didn't ever realize that there's you know potentially political people in the area! [laughs] but they heard the story too. [laughs]

MS Alright.