

FISHERMEN'S VOICE

Vol. 12, No. 8 – Aug. 2007

News & Comment for and by the Fishermen of Maine

FREE

Arcadia Island Morning

The old clock had just struck 5 am at the crowded Deacon's Chair, West Harbor's hitch 'em up eatery, when lobstermen Bobby Beal and 'Flip' Eaton squeezed into the four-person booth to make up the six who gathered for breakfast most weekdays. They caught the usual gaff about slow going, and warm beds on a morning when fog hung dungeon thick and street lights would stay on till mid morning. Neither was in a hurry to spend another day working on gear when traps had already set for four days.

Harris 'Skivver' Fernald, edging over 82 and dean of the group had just retired as Supt. of Schools. He was finishing his second cup of coffee and had embarked on his usual rant of the latest tax bill and the "one oar shorts" in Augusta who devised these inane bills to keep Mainers in perpetual poverty. He was in a better mood this morning as he lifted his cup and said "... and thanks be they gave up this year." As 'Digger', Harris' oldest son and local contractor, the most vociferous of those present, hailed a quick "Amen".

"May have been one too many house burning threats to catch their attention," he said, "but they'll be back next year with one just as bad and the good Governor Balduccio will be right there to sign it."

He paused for a minute while Chrissie Lewis poured coffee, tapped her pad and trilled, "Any changes this morning boys?"

Everyone but 'Rip' Faulkingham nodded. He said, "Yeass... Mother's declared another diet. For the record now, pancakes and eggs, no bacon but I will have home fries."

As Chrissie left, Digger said, "I hear 'Jury' Wilson and 'Packer' Salisbury are plannin' on bein' six months and a day residents of a friendlier state." (Six months and a day being the time anyone who's been a Maine resident must be out of the state for tax purposes). We're soon gonna have more 'native' summer folk than 'come-from-aways'.

"Amazing that we generated the highest vote yet on the property tax referendum and no one in Augusta even registered," chimed in 'Cutter' Eaton fourth generation owner of Ralph Eaton and Son Fish Wharf. "We've sure seen the best of it. If we don't get some relief instead of this continual pounding I'm in trouble. We're just getting by now. We know property taxes have to go up some every year. That's a given. But when they come up with a tax on all services there's just no way I can keep the wharf going. 'Digger', when I sell out to young Vance Benson and he wants you to build condos, you think anyone in his right mind will part with enough nickels to cover the added tax on your labor and all the service charges you're faced with. Blueprint to

disaster. And Bobby, where will you and ‘Flip’ land lobsters? Wanna bet MacDonald’s in Ellsworth will be the closest lobster roll and fries.”

A laugh went around the table.

“Yes,” Harris added, “I’m glad to be through. What with so many people moving out there’s hardly enough kids at the grade school to make up a quorum to hold recess. I suppose we’ll make up another old folks home out of the new school building but with that Dirigo plan so far in the hole they’d be lucky to find money to buy sheets and diapers.”

The depression of tax conversation ground to a halt as Chrissie served the breakfasts, poured more coffee and gave a bright “Can I get anything else?”

To which Rip said, “To hell with it, bring me some bacon. Can’t eat eggs and pancakes without bacon.”

As breakfast was winding down and “one more for the road” coffee cups were refilled, ‘Rolly’ Wilson the ambulance paramedic stopped by the booth. “Didn’t know if you guys had heard the latest about that lady in Somesville, one with Lyme disease. She died this morning, 3 am,” as a chorus of “no’s” and “that’s means” went around the table and from nearby seats. “Yeah,” he went on, “that makes three this year. And there’s two kids in Boston still strugglin’ with it. Thought you’d want to know,” as he ambled off.

Bobby Beal, after a few moments of silence, was the first to speak. “What does it take for those jeezless tree huggers to get the message? There’s been too many deer on this island for far too long. The cedar hedges look like refugees from a concentration camp. Flower and vegetable gardens are a joke. And, who wants to fence everything in?”

“Yeah,” Digger spoke up, “look at ‘em on Farrell’s Hill now, standing alongside the road eating away. Fore long they’ll be in town munching down on the window boxes. You won’t have to worry about being in the woods to catch a tick, they’ll be hoppin’ outta your bank deposit bag. I wonder how that guy with the signs ‘Don’t Shoot our Children’ when we wanted the bow season feels now?”

Skivver said, “How do you know he’s still around,” eliciting a chuckle.

“Well,” Ralph said, “I’ve got to get going but I’ll say one thing, when we had a few boys on the island poaching, we never had this problem,” he sighed, “and was that venison ever some tasty. Fresh deer liver for breakfast.”

“Tomorrow morning, same time.”

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Fresh Peas, New Potatoes and Cream

We hadn’t been married long when my good looking, good cooking wife from Aroostook County introduced me to one of the county’s premiere summer dishes. Guess she figured that if she could find my heart through the proverbial gastro-enabler she’d have me nailed for good.

Now like any simple signature recipe, there's a healthy dose of subtlety which comes from experience and a deft hand. First and foremost the peas have to be fresh and sweet. Not the size of an underfed marble. Potatoes have to be new crop and should have an earthy aroma about them (at the least small and fresh as possible). Use only Half and Half cream, none of this whole milk or 2 percent routine. This has to be the real thing. Unadulterated.

Start the potatoes in an appropriate sized boiling pot. Bring to a boil and cook until almost done. Add the peas and cook until just done. Drain the water and almost cover with cream. Add a goodly daub of butter. Now here's another subtlety. Butter. There's butter and then there's the pasty white stuff that passes for butter in the supermarket. If you've ever had the opportunity to try Canadian butter, case would rest. In Maine there are two that pass muster. 'Houlton Butter' and 'Kate's Fresh Churned' from Old Orchard. Then either let the cream boil up through the potatoes and peas, turn off immediately and serve, or as I often do, let it come to warm and serve. Wicked good eating. Marries up well with fresh salmon.

Fair winds and good roads.

Lee S. Wilbur