

THE PIRATES
by Timothy J. Muise

I grew up on the waterfront of Gloucester. My childhood home was 150 yards from the state fish pier and as soon as I was old enough to walk down there I spent entire days watching boats unload their catch, stood in awe as leather-hand men made nets as big as a parking lots, and investigated the many fish processing "stalls" where much of the catch was cut by hand. I witnessed 200 ten foot long, 900lb plus swordfish layed out on pallets. Forklifts strained picking these monsters up.

My brother Bobby was a commercial lobsterman, but that was not the only type of fishing we ventured into. I tub trawled (like they did in the 1800's) with him, gillnetted, jigged for cod, and fished fourteen giant Atlantic bluefin tuna seasons with him. We caught some real giants together and had some great times. It was an education that always served me well. Winters on the North Atlantic, lobstering and gillnetting, tell you a lot about yourself.

As fish prices declined and my brother was forced to stick to full-time lobstering (except for the short tuna season) I was forced to take a job on shore. My first days on the docks of Gloucester Harbor were spent as a "culler", or someone who sorts the cargo that was offloaded from "steamers" (they still called cargo ships steamers when I was a young man even though it has been a long time since they were steamed powered). I eventually became a longshoreman and got to work next to my father, who I adored, unloading cargo from all over the world. I had some "people" skills that engraciated me to the owner of the company and he eventually hired me to be his foreman, and I had a bunch of cullers working for me, but from time to time I always climbed down into the hold of the ship and helped my father fill his "rack" with boxes.

One of my other duties was to tie up these steamers when they came to port. It was anything but difficult. The crew would throw a thin "monkey line" with a weight on it to me on shore. I would pull that line in as it had the "hauser" (or large line) attached to it. I threw that line over a cleat, bow and stern, and I was done. The ship's crew did the rest. One morning the ship Jokulfel II from Iceland was scheduled to arrive at the Rowe Square dock at 6:AM. I was there waiting to receive the lines about 5:45AM, but the boat was a little late. As it was scheduled to begin unloading at 7:AM longshoreman started showing up around 6:40. The boat was in the inner harbor, about two hundred yards away, when I noticed four inflatable rafts speeding at a high rate across the mirror flat harbor toward the ship. I thought at first that it was a Coast Guard training exercise, but I soon found out it was not.

These rigid bottom rafts, with high horsepower outboard motors, pulled along both the starboard and port sides of the Jokulfel. Ladders appeared running up to the gunnell of the boat and men, and women, started ascending the ladders. As a young man I did some rock climbing so I knew that the harnesses they were wearing were Swiss Seats and that the gear hanging from their waists were climbing ropes and carabiners. What the heck were they up to? Who were they? I would soon have the answers.

With lightening speed these "pirates" stormed the rigging, ships gear, and superstructure of the ship. With laser quickness they shot lines to each other and secured them across the wide spans between the cargo holds. The next thing I knew two huge banners, the size of billboards,

were strung up between the ship's gear and over the cargo holds. One proclaimed, "Boycott Iceland Seafood!", while the other declared, "Ice land Kills Whales!" At the bottom of both banners it said, "GREENPEACE" with a dove logo. The pirates were members of Greenpeace and they were acting as Privateers protecting the whales.

As the ship moved ever closer, the harbor pilot at the helm of the Jokulfel never ceased his direct route to docking, I could now see that the pirates, about a dozen in all, were shackling and handcuffing themselves to the ship. Some were 40 feet up in the rigging. These people were serious about stopping the unloading of this ship. There was no whale meat on board, it was illegal to sell whale meat to the United States, but there were dozens of tractor-trailer 18 wheelers waiting to transport this cargo across the country, mostly cod, haddock, and shrimp, as well as 30 longshoreman looking to earn the approximately \$300.00 one day of work on this ship would generate. The immovable force of Greenpeace was about to meet the unstoppable movement of capitalism. The pirates wanted to stop the unloading and the longshoreman were not going to let that happen.

The shipped docked, I did my job with the lines, and many wondered what to do. Many longshoreman were also fireman and some police. The assistant fire chief called for the hook and ladder. They put the ladder right up to a "pirate" and two cops would climb up. I'm sad to report that in my youthful zeal, and capitalistic desire to earn a buck, I cheered as they directed small punches into the ribs and back of the Greenpeace folks to get them to loosen up. They undid the shackles with handcuff keys and roughly escorted each activist into a waiting police car. It took a little over an hour to get all the pirates off the boat and get underway with the offload. It was the talk of the day, week, and month.

Today I regret that I did not stick up for the pirates. They were right, Iceland was killing whales. I should have stopped those cops from hurting them, and I could have, but I was young and misguided. I write this story today to honor those activists. They were the tough guys, and gals, and if I had it to do over again I would sail with them!

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