

We left Smith Cove on a beautiful day. Out through the inner harbor with all the working waterfront boats gawking at the kids in the dories. Duffel bags, gas jugs full of water, and bright orange life jackets we must have looked like quite a crew. (Although I shed my life jacket whenever Jim was too busy to notice)

As we pass Ten Pound Island out into the outer harbor you can see some sense of noticeable nervousness in the girls and some more hidden emotion in the guys, but for the most part it is all smiles. We are off for three glorious days on the high sea and we know it is going to be a blast.

The breakwater sticks out into Gloucester Harbor like a mighty lance on a jousting knight. We pass the tip and truly venture out into the North Atlantic! In 19' dories none the less!! It is a flat sea with one foot to two foot waves rolling calmly. It still makes the little boats go up and down quite a bit and some of the girls tighten up the old life vests. We don't go out too far from the shoreline and row parallel to the back shore. It is grand. Lobster boats work their traps only feet from us as we pass. Sport fisherman are looking for Striped Bass and Bluefish. The gulls dive for bait, the commaranants dive for mackerel. I love the ocean. It is MY element.

As we pass the hotel sprawls of the back shore section of bass rocks we can spy the "Rich Folks" hotels. I remember asking myself, "Who is richer than me right now?" Off in the distance we can see Salt Island right off my stomping ground of Good Harbor Beach. Dry Salvages is off in the far distance also and I share stories that were told to me of ships running aground out there, while trying to remember who wrote the famous poem about them? We stop for our water and peanut butter sandwich break. To show how much of a "man" I am (really just to impress the females aboard) I dive overboard with no life jacket and swim around. Growing up at Good Harbor and learning to fight undertows I am a very confident swimmer. I dive under the boat and come up on the other side. The girls laugh and seem impressed. Mission accomplished. I climb back in.

After lunch we pick up the pace so that we can make Straghtsmouth Island with plenty of daylight left to set up camp. We have nice tents and sleeping bags and want ample time to get as comfortable as we can to make the camping as easy and enjoyable as possible. Straightsmouth is out in the open water, although quite close to shore it can still get some pretty good gusts when the North wind blows.

The beach at strightsmouth is anything but inviting. Not too much room to land five 19' Cape Banks Dories. We form teams, with the bulky guys on the heavier sections and "Yale" the boats up the rocks. The term "Yale" is a running joke off of a statement by John Hunt about we are not in Yale, using Yale as a substitute for "Jail", but everyone on the trip has adopted it as a term of endearment and they scream "YALE!" as we lugg the heavy boats to safety. It immediately built a sense of unity and I don't think John knew the power of his efforts. After the boats are secured we make camp. We find a spot that is sunk slightly down in the wilds of Straightsmouth. Those wilds consist of poison ivy, seagull nests, and jutting rock formations, but for a lot of the kids in the crew it is as wild as it has ever gotten for them. We build a large fire pit and make certain to include some good flat rocks for cooking. We had an incident on a winter trip where a camper tried to jump over the fire and ended up knocking over all of our supper. He got unpopular quick and those of us who lived through it are not going to let it happen again. Live and learn. Just as



my stomach starts to rumble I think of the possibility that good ole Dan Carter from the neighborhood could be hauling his lobster traps in the area. His boat, The Last Resort (named after his affinity for casino "resorts"), is based out of Pigeon Cove in Rockport and his traps are set all over this area. Jim has a VHF walkie-Talkie just in case of emergency and it has a crystal with channel 16 installed. I borrow it and hail the Last Resort. Sure enough Danny is about two miles away and close to finishing his trip. I ask him to swing by and come bearing gifts. In a matter of 45 minutes or so Danny is at Straightsmouth with a couple of five gallon buckets of lobsters for us. Folks can't believe it and my status grows amongst the campers.

We get a big ole fire roaring and put the lobsters into our largest pot. We use the crisp seawater of the North Atlantic and it smells awesome. I find a nice cozy spot and snuggle close to Jennifer, a girl who I have grown quite close to during the course of our boatbuilding class. We enjoy a couple of lobsters each and finish up with Marlboro red cigarettes. We laugh and enjoy the heat of the fire. My mind drifts off into a fantasy of how I could live here with her forever on lobster and Marlboros. With the tents set up and the sleeping bags arranged we head off as a group for an evening walk. The air is cool and the odor of the coast intoxicating. Jim talks of the days when the fishing schooner used the bank dory as their satellite fishing vessels. Nested in stacks on the deck the dories would sail on board the giant schooners to the grand banks to set "long lines" for halibut and cod. Howard Blackburn's winter ordeal is detailed and kids each handle the story differently. Some talk with bravado, others wonder what they would have done in his situation, but we all become prouder to be from Gloucester. Hearty souls one and all, after all here we are camping in the wilds while our peers sleep in comfortable beds ashore.

After the walk Jennifer and I make our way to the edge of the island and find a flat rock. We talk about Blackburn and how he was left for dead with his partner Whelch so far from shore on the grand banks. How could they sail away knowing two men were lost from the storm? I tell her it was just part of the business back then. The chances they were alive were very slim and the schooner had to do what was best for all. We laugh when we think of old Howard strolling back into Gloucester so many months later and people who attended his funeral thinking it was a ghost. I knew a man who used to sell Howard mackerel when he was a boy and he told me about how Howard slid nickels to him with his hands with no fingers. It let me know that Howard's day was not all that long ago and that the proud Gloucesterman still lived in all of our hearts. Jennifer and I stayed at the shore until the wee hours. Peaceful and content.

The days rowing made me sleep like a stone. We rose early and Bob and I got the breakfast fire going. We broke out the huge skillet and some of the gals cooked up the best bacon, sausage, and eggs I have ever eaten. It tasted so good cooked over the coals of the open camp fire. We drank Tang and coffee and I have got to say the combination was delightful. With our bellies full we yaled the boats back into the water. The row around Rockport is beautiful. All the granite coves and seaside houses mixed in with nice wooded area. We pass between the Rockport breakwater, a massive structure out in the open sea that protects both what is called the Old Harbor and the new. We can see Motif No. 1 inside the granite rip-wrap walls of the new harbor. I look for Dan Carter's lobster boat in the small swells but don't spy him. I think maybe he had a late night and got a late start. High on the hills behind Rockport harbor we can see the old Derrick crane from the quarry area that made the town famous when stone was king. I can't help but wish we could jaunt up there to jump off the cliffs into the cleanest fresh water on earth! I have done it many times and would have loved



to shared it with others (especially the girls!), but that would have to be for another time. We had to make time for Ipswich Bay.

As we approach Halibut point jim powers the Viking pass the line of dories to see if anyone needs anything. Many crews scramble to put on their life vests but I don't even bother. Jim makes a general announcement as he passes and I comply. Not a big deal but a salty dog like myself rejects the notion of life jackets. I guess I had some issues about the subject. The Viking is the power boat belonging to Project Adventure. It is an old Navy or Coast Guard launch that has a double ender line just like the dories. She is painted traditional PA colors of Red & Green and fits the regatta like a glove. Jim's smile is ear to ear as he passes us. He loves to see us enjoying ourselves. He always wears his soul on his sleeve.

Halibut point jets out softer than the Gloucester breakwater but just as majestic. The power here is that it is not man made. Mother nature knows how to ply her trade and we all enjoy the view as we row into Ipswich Bay. It is a bit disheartening to look across the Bay to New Hampshire and see the domes of the Seabrook Nuclear Power Plant. I guess it is the times we live in but I can't help but thinking how it destroys the lay of the land over there. Many a "PA type" is a no-nuker and I can see June or Zerbe protesting with artistic pickets in my mind. We round the point and make our way pass Laneville and Lanes Cove. One of the fairer lasses in the old PA class was from Laneville, Nancy S., and I always enjoy her company on our journeys. Classy girl, and she shares an L-Ville story or two as we pass Lanes Cove. Next by Bayview and then Annisquam. Annisquam lighthouse is as majestic a lighthouse as any on any postcard you have ever seen. Schools of bluefish are bubbling as we head toward the mouth of the Annisquam River. Wingersheik Beach is to our right and as the afternoon sun sets there are still quite a few beachgoers frolicking the shore.

The river is serene. Still and slow moving, but powerful and wide at the same time. I know the river well. Striper fishing, duck hunting, and speeding through on the F/V Pamela Ann (my brothers fast moving tuna boat) have afforded me intimate knowledge. I can't help but look back and know my life was special. The folly came because I did not appreciate it all in its proper time. I miss the river. I miss its majesty. Its power has not, and could not, leave me, but there is a void. We move along the snake that is the Annisquam and come to Jones Creek. Good ole Ram Island is in view. Our home for the night. The dock at Ram sticks out into Jones just a smidgen after passing atop the brown duck grass marsh. We unload the gear on the float platform and carry it up to the house and yard. The house is open and without windows. We plan on fixing it up, but for now it is just a shell. We actually get to dock the boats on real moorings for the night. No Yaleing required at Ram!!!

The camp set-up at Ram is easy, we breeze through it. Everyone is tired from the long row around Cape Ann, but that weariness is offset by the excitement that comes from knowing we will be camping out on this beautiful little island all night. We all sit down and enjoy a hearty meal of Dinty Moore beef stew and nice Virgilios Bakery italian bread. It was grand and I can honestly say canned stew never tasted so good. Nice to know we were not spoiled by the lobsters back on Straightsmouth. I sit smoking a cigarette with Jennifer, Bob, Candy, and Eric. I tell them how further up Jones Creek I used to go duck hunting and that even though the creek gets very narrow it is still quite passable by small boat. Bob suggests we take one of the dories up for a look and Jen and Candy are "on board" with the idea. Eric has some plans of his own so the four of us head off up the



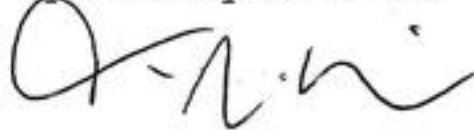
creek. We pack some water and peanut butter sandwiches. Bob and I row two oars a piece and let the gals enjoy the trip. It is warm, no breeze, and so peaceful. My soul is warm and I smile basking in the glow of friendship and contentment. It is at this time that the power of the Project Adventure course really sinks in. Life is in the details. Friends and relationships are far more important than status and goods. A simple trip up Jones Creek can make a man feel like he just landed on the moon, and right in his own backyard nonetheless. I offer my informal estuary tour and spin yarns of humor that make the girls giggle. At this time they look more beautiful than ever. Bob laughs deep and hard from his belly. It is so nice to hear as I know he has been struggling with family troubles recently. The same with Candy. Her home life is a mess and she is searching for a way out. The smile on her face lets me know she is escaping for a moment. Jennifer is a real mystery to me at times. She can be hard as nails, tough to the core, but at times she is as soft as silk and feminine to the core. She has taught me so much, but I know she does not realize how much of a role she has played in shaping my manhood. If only these times could last. Freeze the moment.

The tide turns and we head the dory back to Ram. We hit the campsite just before midnight and all are fast asleep. The embers of the fire still glow so we enjoy a cigarette and cup of cocoa before we head off to our sleeping arrangements. I feel alive. I am part of the world, the universe! I drift off to sleep hard. The dawn comes fast. I feel a bit sad because I know we are heading home today. I want to live out my life on Ram and Straightsmouth. Is it too much to ask?

We pack the dories and start up the snaking Annisquam. Past Wheelers Point and under the huge A. Piatt Andrew Bridge. The Route 128 bridge is impressive for Gloucester. Major architecture. To pass under the massive span in these tiny boats brings me back down to reality a bit. We are a small part of a big thing. We turn by Little River and I tell the girls of striped bass I caught over there. On up toward the railroad bridge, pass the yachts at the marina. We can spy the high tower of Gloucester High School now. Its all over. Our escapade has come to an end. We hit Dun Fudgin ramp and unload the gear. It comes off slowly as we are tired and sad that the trip is over. No yales or howls of glee can be heard. We are a motley looking crew for sure now, no showers for three days. But we are so much the better for it. These are the best of times.

To look back on this powerful event in my life is a sad experience for me. I somehow lost track of those lessons I learned on that journey, and others like it, and let my life slip away into addiction and tragedy. I love Jim Schoel and what he taught me and I truly believe that those teachings are what enabled me to survive the struggles of my life. I have been in prison for over twelve years now and I make the best of a bad situation. We have all heard people say things like "if I could only turn back time", but sadly we all also know that we cannot. But if I could I would turn it back to Ram Island. Back to a time when I knew life could be grand but that you had to work for it. The dory trip was hard work but the reward was beyond compare. My friends were earned through common struggle and true bonding. I found the real value of a woman in her nurturing and caring nature. Please live this again for me. Don't miss the lessons and never forget what they have taught you. Life is grand and can be so fulfilling if you work for it. Treat the rest of your lives like a big dory trip. You will never fail.

by Timothy J. Muise



The Dory Trip

DEDICATED TO MY FRIEND  
JIM SCHOEL