

# FISH TALES

*from*

*Capt. John Christian  
F/V Susan Jean*

*Winter 2025*



## Winter 2025

As I grow older, I've come to realize how much smaller the world seems compared to my childhood memories. The only exception to this might be the fish I claimed to have caught. The backyard of the house called Marshview on Quissett Ave. in Woods Hole where my grandparents lived, seems very tiny now compared to how I remember it. The same can be said for the adjacent little rainwater pond on the corner of Quissett Ave. and Buzzards Bay Ave, known as Barth's Pond. It was perhaps only 50 ft. long after a heavy rain, yet it provided some very spirited major league hockey games when we were only 4 ft tall! Now two skate strides would cross it with ease. Although the pond was small, I did have big plans for it back then. I decided to stock it with fish. I rode my bike a little more than two miles up the road to Ice House Pond in Sippewissett. I captured a couple of small pickerel and transported them back in a bucket and released them. The fact that I considered the need to release a trigger warning before announcing the results of my fisheries work should serve as a strong indication of the project's sad outcome!

I want to continue my tour by moving south about a quarter mile to Fay's Dock in Little Harbor. This is a spot where I spent many hours fishing as a kid as my parents' house was literally a stone's throw away. How tiny the dock and surroundings look now. With the exception of several extreme tides, I've only recently noticed covering the pier, the remainder of my youthful world was HO scale. Although recent observations of my past physical world seem small, the memories of my fishing and of the people I fished with throughout my young life in that small village of Woods Hole, remain very large and mostly good. I've been lucky!

When I was perhaps ten, I was given a subscription to Field and Stream magazine. Not being a very avid reader, I still read almost every article from the beginning Cheers and Jeers column to the Exit Laughing article by Ed Zern at the end. I still have a box full of these classic magazines from the late 1950s and early 1960s. For me, one of the most memorable people in this magazine was the editor, AJ McLane. I believed he had the coolest job in the world. He was sent by the company on fishing trips to some of the most exotic spots in the world, and all he had to do was write a short story about his adventures when he returned. Sometimes I wonder if reading Field and Stream in my youth may have influenced me in some way to write this annual newsletter. I enjoy writing it, but I'm always cautious about how it will be received. I'm fully aware that I won't be going to Stockholm, Sweden for any big awards anytime soon. Still, my instincts tell me that some people really enjoy my sometimes rambling and disjointed attempts at writing, and this motivates me to keep writing. I guess one never knows where writing may lead.

Years ago, I wrote an article on fishing the worm and tube for On the Water Magazine. A month or so after the article came out, Kib Bramhall called me up from the Vineyard and wanted to fish with me to see how trolling the tube and worm tight to the beach worked. Here was a name I had seen in the fishing magazine, Saltwater Sportsman, when I was a kid. I believe he had been on the staff of the magazine for years, and now I was going to get to fish with him. Pretty exciting! He drove his Boston Whaler over from the Vineyard and anchored it in Tarpaulin where I picked him up. We took off and fished the Elizabeth's all the way to Cuttyhunk. I like to think it was a good trip for both of us. My writing had given me a chance to meet another angling legend and expand my universe in the fishing world.



*Fay's Dock, Little Harbor*

I'd also like to mention Dr. John Dower and his wife, Yasuko, who fished with me many times over the years back to my early days of chartering. They were always fun to have on the boat and genuinely seemed to enjoy the trip. At the end of the trip, Dr. Dower, who taught history at MIT, would usually give me a book. At the end of one of these trips, I believe sensing that reading wasn't one of my strong suits, he handed me a book and said, "Listen, this book isn't about some elite fly fisherman tying a number 18 Gray Wulff fly. I want you to read it!" I did, and boy was he right! The title of the book was *A River Runs Through It* by Norman Maclean, and it really hit home. One of the themes which revolved around fishing had much more to do with certain human characteristics which I believe are common to many fishermen. Some of those characteristics like perfectionism, living on the edge, the thrill of the hunt and fierce independence may be helpful in making big catches but can have a dark side as well. Some might even lump these behaviors with the addictive personality. I'm no psychologist, but I knew several very successful charter boat captains over the years that seemed to have major problems in life due to not being able to control these traits. I have had, and still do have to some extent, some of these same personality styles, but I have been fortunate enough to be aware and to keep a leash on them. I believe this is what kept me out of trouble.



*Dr. John Dower*



*Yasuko Dower*

After reading the book, I came to discover the Elizabeth Islands have much in common with Maclean's river. His descriptions of its rocks and the roar of the river are certainly relatable to the Elizabeths and North and South Rocks at either end of Quicks Hole where the current flows hard. Peaked Rock and that giant glacial erratic just east of Tarpaulin Cove, which will remain nameless, are all symbols of great work that will likely be around for eons. Also, the predictability of the tides and currents will also remain pretty much constant throughout eternity. If you've fished Cuttyhunk a lot, you probably know the rip on the Pigs will begin to make up shortly after a certain tide in New Bedford. Four hours after the tide on the Pigs, you can head over to the Bridge and catch four more hours of fishing. These conditions will go on ad infinitum. Also, the fishing in Woods Hole Passage on Middle Ledge at first light around the third week of May will provide good striper fishing on the west running tide.

These are just a few examples of a grand plan at work which we will probably never totally figure out, but as fishermen we can certainly try. Deciphering Mother Nature's little plans might not only improve our catch but also add to our fun of fishing.

Some English scholar, certainly not me, once wrote that the beauty, certainty and healing qualities of Maclean's River were symbolic of God's grace. Though I'm not a particularly religious person, I have to agree with this analysis as long as the Elizabeths are included in the equation.

If you are a fisherman, especially an older one, I want you to read this book. Even if you don't read the whole book, at least go to your iPhone and Google the last few paragraphs of *A River Runs Through It*. It's beautiful writing and I think you'll enjoy it. I find myself going back and rereading this quite often.

Every spring in Woods Hole, I go around to many of the local businesses and leave a few copies of the most recent newsletter. One of these businesses is the Martha Vineyard Savings Bank where I also have an account. As I was distributing last year's newsletter, one of the tellers told me that her father was a big fisherman on the Vineyard, and she said she would pass it on to him. Several weeks later, I received a phone call from her father, Steve Amaral, the local fishing and hunting legend on the Vineyard. What a surprise! Over the years of writing these newsletters, I've spoken of some of the great striper fishermen, such as Coot Hall, Bob and Charlie Tilton and Jimmy Nunes just to name a few. These guys inhabited and fished the lands 12 miles west/southwest of Woods Hole i.e. Cuttyhunk. What an oversight of mine it was that there were many great fishermen who were actually much closer, mainly 4 miles south of Woods Hole over on the Vineyard. Now I had a chance to talk fishing and swap stories with someone, who many from Woods Hole, would consider was from another part of the world. Steve said he was a bass fisherman from the great years of the 1940s to the present. This was the era of wooden McKenzie bass boats, Penn reels, eel skin rigs and Woolrich checkered wool shirts from the old Eastman's Hardware Store



*Steve Amaral*

on Main St. in Falmouth. For several years, he then received my fishing newsletter, called me, and we would talk over what was in it and how the fishing had been for us the last season. From our conversations, we discovered that we knew many of the same people from Falmouth. Some of those people were actually friends of mine who had fished with me for years and deer hunted with Steve on the Vineyard for years. Steve tried to get us altogether on the island, but everyone seemed to be doing different things or moving in different directions, and it was definitely difficult to coordinate. Finally, he decided the only way for us to meet was for him to pick me up in Vineyard Haven and spend the day showing me the island. He met me at the boat in his pickup truck and proceeded to jumpstart the trip at his regular coffee shop with coffee and an egg and sausage sandwich. From there, we headed west to Menemsha, Gay Head, Squibnocket and many other locations. What an eye-opening experience for me, as my previous years on the island were back in my early twenties when I never got much past the Lamppost and The Ritz. Up island is what I think is called real wilderness! The huge patches of scrub oak were loaded with deer I'm sure, and the high clay cliffs and the rocky coastline along Gay Head and Squibnocket were breaking with surf that was quite spectacular! I certainly would have loved to have grown up in that environment. Although growing up in Woods Hole was pretty good



*Steve Amaral  
A brace of 50 pounders!*



*Some of Steve Amaral's  
Derby Awards  
"That's some serious fishing!"*

too! As we drove around the island, he said he fished the Vineyard Derby every year with the exception of one when he was serving in the Army in Korea. During those years, he won many awards and was a major participant in the ceremonies of the Derby. Steve spoke of the numerous 40 and 50-pound bass he had to drag for long distances along the rocky surf line back to his truck in the middle of the night. I'm quite sure the next day at work was a very long one. I'm envious of Steve for being able to live throughout all of the so-called halcyon years of striper fishing, especially the 40s, 50s, 60s, 70s and perhaps the early 80s. Although, I was also lucky to catch some of those years. This was an era when catching and keeping a 50-pound bass was something to be really proud of and even selling it didn't make you a bad person! It was both interesting and fun to spend the day with Steve learning some of the local fishing history of the Vineyard. He is someone who really knows striper fishing, and this can only be accomplished from paying one's dues by putting their time in. That is something Steve certainly did!

The new season arrived, and along with it a new truck for me as well. My old Chevy Silverado had just enjoyed its thirteenth birthday. The rusted-out frame and the finicky ABS brake system told me it was time. I usually got a new truck every eleven years, but the chart of the Elizabeth Islands on the tailgate was cause to hold onto it a little longer. I finally traded her in for a new, barebones Tacoma work truck. When I say barebones, I mean everything but the price! It made my Yankee genes cringe! When I showed up in Woods Hole with the new truck, I was surprised at how many people wanted to know if I was going to put another chart on the tailgate. It appeared to have gained an iconic quality. Not wanting to disappoint anyone, I set out to get another chart. The previous installer was too busy so luckily I found Mike Jacobson up in Bourne, who also does vinyl wraps on cars and boats. He knew just how to order all the right materials and made several improvements to the original chart. I watched as he installed the tailgate wrap and could see he was a highly skilled craftsman. There wasn't one wasted motion, and the job came out perfectly! The email address for Mike's business is [masswraps@gmail.com](mailto:masswraps@gmail.com). His phone number is 508-319-1954. During the operation, I found out Mike was a very avid fresh and saltwater fisherman who had spent much time on Cuttyhunk Island. This made the process much more enjoyable, and I was glad he could get out fishing around the Elizabeths with me on my boat. Sadly, my old truck was last seen in Hyannis on the back of a flat-bed probably on its last ride. It was my hope that someone in Woods Hole would have bought it and kept it local. I'm sure, if owned by the right person, it had several more good years in it. I guess I've got to get over that Yankee thinking and adjust to modern America.



*New tailgate installation,  
by Mike Jacobson of  
Mass Wraps in Bourne, MA*

## A FEW RECOLLECTIONS

The stripers arrived early again this season. I believe the unusually warm winter and spring water temperatures had much to do with this timing. I was able to catch most of the good spring fishing. Word around fishing circles told of Craig Carlson continuing his infamous predawn mid-May raids on Middle Ledge in the Hole using his favorite lure, the Pili Popper. His pin point casting accuracy, which certainly is a carry-over skill from his deadly top shelf snapshot, accounted for much of his great spring bass fishing success!



*Craig Carlson*

Every spring, I make a shake down cruise or two to make sure all my gear is working well. Ted Handy and James Miller accompanied me on this spring's operation. I had just installed two new bridges and drag washers on my 113H Penns, as well as new line, and I wanted to make sure all was good. These guys demonstrated their great technological skills by hooking and landing six tackle busting bass! A better way to test fishing gear doesn't exist!



*Ted Handy*



*James Miller*

Jeff Hughes and Joel Meunier returned for another season to enjoy some pretty good spring fishing. They took six big fish. One of them was even small enough to take home for supper! These guys have fished with me for years and they really enjoy throwing plugs. This is probably my favorite way to catch a striped bass. There are times, however, when I have to resort to maybe a hundred foot shot of wire to really make things happen. Whether you are a purist, or you don't mind spending some time on the dark side, I believe fishing is still fun.



*Jeff Hughes*



*Joel Meunier*

Chris Wessling, CJ Sweeney, and John Scavotto returned to fish with me for another season. These guys always bring their good luck with them and are always a lot of fun to fish with. We always have much to talk about as we've all spent a good part of our lives self-employed in the trades. They enjoyed another big trip with lots of big fish, and hopefully we'll continue this tradition for many years. I'm still trying to convince Chris to get into hockey. He's already mastered locker room banter which is far more important than skating in this league!



*Chris Wessling*



*CJ Sweeney*



*John Scavotto*



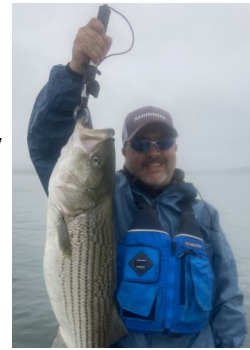
*Norm LaVallee*

Norm LaVallee, who has fished with me for over thirty years, returned for another couple of trips. Norm is always fun to fish with, and he always brings his fishing friends from a wide swarth of humanity, all interesting and fun in their own way. This year he returned with Bob Ebert, who had fished with me many years before. I remember a great picture of Bob and a big bass that he caught fishing with me off of Cuttyhunk that The Fisherman Magazine featured on their cover. It's interesting how one can remember important events! Getting back to this season, the two battled some inclement weather but still came up with seven nice fish.



*Bob Ebert*

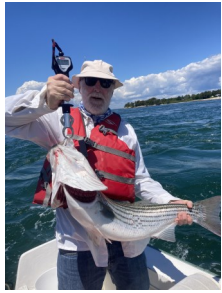
On the second trip, Norm again brought his two boys, Paul and Mark. They hammered the fish, taking fourteen big ones. Only one was small enough to take home to eat. It's so good to see families fishing together like this. It's great that Norm, who I believe is eighty years old, is still moving around well and able to enjoy a fishing trip with his children.



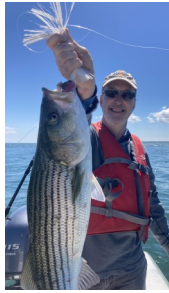
*Paul LaVallee*



*Mark LaVallee*



*Rich McBride*



*Bill McBride*



*John McBride*

Rich McBride, his brother, Bill, and cousin, John, enjoyed a good day fishing not too far outside of Woods Hole. Rich is a local scientist and part of the great Fisheries lunch group at Swope Café, which I have been lucky enough to be a part of for over twenty years. This was

Rich's second trip with me. The first trip made with his brother several years ago was slow, but this time the results were much better. The total was twelve big fish, two of which went home for dinner!

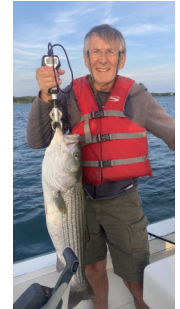
Bob Austin, son, Wayne, and good friend, Steve Mohr, returned for another year. The fishing had slowed down quite a bit that day, but Steve managed to fish through it and landed one really nice big fish. They had some smaller ones as well on this trip. These guys have had some really big trips as well over the years and they are always fun to fish with.



*Bob Austin*



*Wayne Austin*



*Steve Mohr*



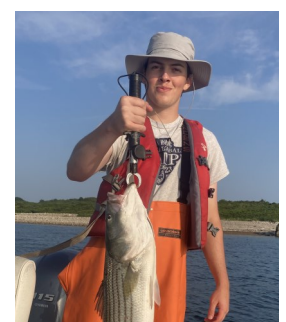
*Peter Moore*

Peter Moore, his son, Phil, and his grandson, Benjamin Davis, kept their great catch streak alive.

Phil took the pressure off me, as he often does, by boating a nice 33-inch fish right away. It was too big to keep, but it still felt good to have one in the boat, even if just for a short while. Benjamin assured there would be dinner for the group by boating a great 31-inch fish right under the gaze of a big deer on the island of Nashawena. Peter struggled a little to hook up, but his



*Phil Moore*



*Benjamin Davis*

persistence paid off, and he ended up landing a nice eleventh hour slot fish. This group has been fishing with me for years and years and I hope the Fish Gods will allow us to continue this great tradition for many more!

Larry Bohn and Irwin Grossman, another group of long-time fishermen aboard the Susan Jean showed up again in June. It was good Irwin could break away from writing his new book and make a fishing trip with me. He kept his usual good luck streak going and made sure that there were fish in the box. Larry was of great assistance helping me battle a rogue lobster trap that had attacked my outboard in thick fog not far off shore. He also, as he many times does, ended the trip with a large fish which was well over the upper range of the slot limit.



*Irwin Grossman*

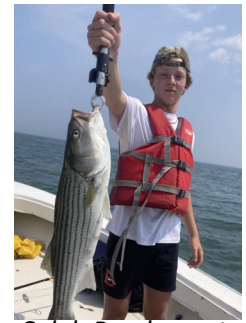


*Larry Bohn*

Brian Prendergast, who works with the Striper Tagging Program at MRC Woods Hole, was able to get away from observing and tagging and do a little fishing on his own. Along with his son, Caleb, the two caught some nice fish and said they had a great tour of the Elizabeth Islands as well. I don't believe the beauty of the Elizabeths ever disappoints! Hopefully, all the casting Caleb did will help strengthen his pitching arm for the upcoming season.



*Brian Prendergast*

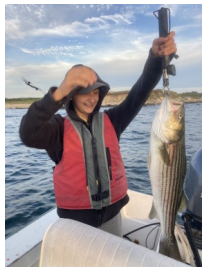


*Caleb Prendergast*



*Jim Galloway*

Jim Galloway, his grandchild, Jamie Highsmith, and Jamie's friend, Zahra Townsend struggled a little bit but ended up with a few nice fish. Their casting skills were very good as usual and instrumental in making a slow day productive. On another trip, up on a cliff on the Elizabeth Islands, Jim spotted one of the biggest deer I've ever seen, and what do you know, right underneath that deer was a big bass! I've observed this phenomenon with Jim on another occasion, except the symbol on the land was a Belted Galloway cow, not a deer. Maybe I'm stumbling onto one of the universal laws of nature. Possibly, the Solunar Tables might be an explanation. Briefly, they state increased animal activity occurs during periods of higher gravitational pull. This occurs when there is a full or new moon and is even greater when the moon is directly overhead or underfoot.



*Jamie Highsmith*



*Zahra Townsend*

One should use caution when relying on theories like this one or any other one for that matter, because as is true in theories, everyone has got one but how accurate they are varies greatly. More research is definitely warranted. Anyhow, Jim landed a great fish over 30 pounds which was promptly released. Shortly afterwards, he hooked up an even bigger one which gained its freedom by cutting the line on a barnacle covered glacial erratic. When you're fishing in the rocks, those stripers are playing on their home court and know how to use every advantage that is available to them. I'm telling you on that day these fish were

mean and ornery. One of them even broke my net! An old commercial fisherman I knew used to call the really big ones gorilla bass because when you hooked one, they couldn't be moved. He said they would just hang bottom and beat their chest! That day, those fish were like small King Kongs!



*Gabriel, Donnie & Kathy Lehy*

Donnie Lehy, wife, Kathy, and son, Gabriel, fished with me again last summer. Donnie and I go way back fishing for many species of fish. Some highlights were fishing with Ed Jaskun, who was the legendary Woods Hole pharmacist and fisherman, who taught us the ropes of accessing some of the best trout fishing spots in Wareham and on the Cape. Donnie and Kathy's ten-year-old son, Gabriel, stole the show. His casting skills were better than most adults and instrumental in his hooking and landing his first keeper striper! Shortly after that momentous feat, he hooked up with another huge

striper, which through no fault of his own, broke off in the rocks. What a wonderful day of fishing along the Elizabeths for a young man. I'm sure it was one he'll remember for years!



*Gabriel Lehy's  
First Keeper*



Dennis Fox, wife, Missy, and friend, John Scavotto, fished with me on a September trip. For years, the fall fishing has been sporadic at best. This trip was no exception. Dennis, who is a very expert fisherman in his own right, has fished with me for many years. As we rounded Copicut Neck at Cuttyhunk Island, he pointed at the house up on the bluff that we used to use as a bearing for a good fishing spot at night. He reminded me of how we used to think that the fishing got better as the house lights went out. I guess the joke back then was that the stripers didn't care for The Johnny Carson Show. That is just a loose association and shouldn't be included in one's fishing strategies. Everyone did catch a few fish that day, but it was not the way it used to be in the old days. However, it was great to see everyone again.



*Dennis Fox*



*Missy Fox*



*John Scavotto*



*Griffin Jones*

Last season, I got to fish with my grandson, Griffin Jones, many times which was a great treat for me. Griffin has really caught the fishing bug! We chased trout in the ponds, bonito, false albacore and of course striped bass. He has become a very expert fisherman and even expanded his target range to sharks. On some of his trips he has landed a blue shark and a lemon shark as well! As he is now a high school senior, he will soon be headed off to college, but hopefully we can get out fishing a lot before he leaves. On one of our trips, we were lucky enough to have my grandson, Tyler, join us on a

trip while he was home from Ohio for a visit. Tyler caught a nice fish, and we all enjoyed a great day of fishing together.



*Tyler Jones*

## STRIPER PROJECT

I have assisted Steve Zottoli in the striped bass initiative at the Marine Biological Laboratory since 2016. Each year is more exciting than the last as we learn about the migration patterns as fish leave Eel Pond in the fall and return in the spring. Last fall Brian Prendergast (Steve's former student), Scott Bennett, Steve and a support team including myself double-tagged eight fish; an acoustic tag was inserted into the body cavity and an archival, pop-up satellite tag was attached to a harness mounted on the fish. We programmed the satellite tags to release 300 days after tagging so that fish who did return would release their tag in or near Eel Pond allowing us to retrieve it.



*Buck Zottoli*



*Scott Bennett*

The advantage of retrieving a tag is to recoup depth, acceleration, position and temperature data at a resolution of every 5 seconds. If we don't retrieve a tag, we still get data transmitted by satellite but at a resolution of every ten minutes. One fish returned the spring after tagging and the tag was retrieved near the WHOI dock on the ocean side of the Eel Pond channel. Another tag was retrieved after release from a fish near Rockaway Beach on Long Island. Partial migration information was obtained by satellite transmission from the other fish. The tagged striped bass who completed their full migration did not move in a linear direction but rather visited many ecosys-



tems. We hypothesize that the fish are following bait, and we have begun discussions with NOAA scientists on how to test this hypothesis. We are looking forward to retrieving satellite tags next summer from some of the fish tagged last fall.

The last few trips of the season are reserved for members of The Falmouth Old Timers Hockey Team. This year the team included Ted Handy, Reggie Soares, Scott Glanvil, James Miller, Rob Connors, Ralph Moniz and a blast from the past, Nobby Aflague. Nobby used to fish the fall trip with us for years, and it was good to have him back in the fold. I've always enjoyed the comradery on these trips. I feel the oral history which is created and preserved during these trips, particularly regarding the "Montreal Trip," is very important for its historical value or perhaps that's not such a good idea?



*Reggie Soares*



*Scott Glanvil*



*James Miller*



*Ted Handy*



*Rob Connors*



*Nobby Aflague*



*Ralph Moniz & James Miller*

As usual, I'd like to thank master technician, John Kallberg, parts department manager, Sylvia Smoller, and service department manager, Geoff Jacoby at Kingman Marine Yacht Center in Cataumet for keeping the Susan Jean in good running condition. Thanks to my wife, Susan, for typing this newsletter and to Kelley Tierney Souza at New Wave Printing for assembling the newsletter. I am very fortunate to have met so many wonderful people and shared many adventures and interesting stories again this past season. I look forward to spring and the start of a new season.

All the best,

Captain John Christian

Email: [trophystripers@aol.com](mailto:trophystripers@aol.com)

My rates are \$650.00 for 6 hr. of fishing

Cell phone: 508-566-9522



## **Striped Bass Ceviche**

### *Ingredients*

- 1 lb. fresh striped bass filet, diced ½ inch cubes
- ¾ cup freshly squeezed lime juice
- ¼ cup freshly squeezed orange juice
- 1 medium jalapeno (or hotter) pepper, thinly sliced
- ½ medium red onion sliced paper thin
- 1 cup thick canned coconut milk
- ½ cup chopped cilantro leaves
- ½ tsp salt
- 1 medium ripe cantaloupe diced ½ inch cubes
- ½ cup chopped fresh basil
- lime wedges and parsley sprigs for garnish

1. Combine fish, lime juice, orange juice, chili and onion in a nonreactive bowl and toss until well coated (make sure the fish is all covered by the liquid). Refrigerate until flesh is opaque, about 90 mins.
2. Strain fish, onion and chili, reserving brine. Return fish to nonreactive bowl with ¼ cup of the brine; discard remaining brine
3. Add coconut milk, cilantro, and salt. Marinate 2 more hrs. Add cantaloupe and basil. Serve with lime wedges and parsley sprigs.

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