

KENNETH MAXWELL

Ken Maxwell has to be the happiest clammer anyone has ever met. His love for his vocation is so evident that he makes listeners smile when he talks about it. Clamming is in his blood. His pop was a clammer and so was his grandpop.

Ken was born in New Gretna on August 16, 1934. His pop started taking him out on his boat clamming when he was knee high to a grasshopper. While his pop tonged, Kenny watched and learned. Each year he got a little bigger and started tonging himself, sometimes making 60 or 80 cents a day. He saved it all summer and bought his school clothes.

In 1948, he got his own boat, built by Walt Thorn in West Creek. It cost him \$275, and he had it for 30 years; it was a good investment. It was a 26-foot garvey with a 1934 model A motor, and he docked it in Parkertown. It was nice

down there then. The men used to put in their own poles and make a walkway across the meadows. When they got the bulkheads in, they started charging for the dock. There even used to be a restaurant down Parkertown Dock Road. There was Talbert Loveland's and Parson's Clam House and William Horner's clam house. In the '40s you could get a dish of clam chowder, a piece of homemade pie, bait and ice. The way Parkertown Dock looks now, you would never know all that used to be there.

When he clammed, Ken treaded, scratch raked, and tonged. Raking he couldn't do. It was a waste for him. His favorite was tonging. Joe Reid made his tongs. He made eight-, 10-, 12-, 14-footers out of mahogany with iron heads. He used to take three or four spars. Old times were so good, you could nail a \$10 bill on your boat and it would deteriorate. No one would touch it. Now you have to cart all your stuff home with

you. The local guys were 95 percent honest as the day was long. It's changed.

Ken sold his clams for a cent a piece or less in the beginning. He sold to Jack or Walt Parsons, Haldor Jorgenson, Dick Cavaleer — he sold to all of them. Eventually, he sold to Stanley Cottrell. Ken thinks the clams were overharvested but it really wasn't anyone's fault. When people from up north needed more clams, they came south. They needed to make a living, too, so they came to where the clams were. There weren't enough anymore for all of us. He tried to scallop, too, but he couldn't find a market for scallops.

He dug up a lot of bottles with his tongs, and lots of clams with pearls in them. He saved a whole box of them. Most of the clams that were twisted or distorted had pearls inside.

Ken went to Parkertown Grammar School, which had four grades to a room. He clammed after school and bought his own car so he could get to the bay. Then he went to Tuckerton High School — all four years there. Out of six kids in his family, he was the only one to graduate. His dad asked him to please graduate and he did it just to make him happy although he really hated school. His reward was his diploma and his dad helping with his boat whenever he broke down. He and his dad had a very good relationship. They were very close, and although they were in separate boats, they always went out on the water together.

The last boat he used was built by Harlan Price in Parkertown; it was called the *Lazy Bones*. It's out in the yard still. When Harlan took boats out for the winter to store in his yard on Dock Street, Ken and his family would hear this "klippity klop, klippity klop" sound on the street. Harlan had a wooden trailer with wooden wheels that he'd made himself. Sometimes he would cut a tire up and nail rubber around it.

Ken's sons, Charlie, Eric, Kenny and Brian, tried their hands at clamming, too. Brian hated it so much with the gnats and greenheads; he had his lunch eaten by 6 a.m. and was ready to go home. He didn't make enough to pay for his clamming license. The others liked it.

After high school, Ken made his living off the bay. It was all he ever did or wanted to do — his job was going out in the bay. After all the years, though, it got so you really couldn't make a living off it. Back then there were so many boats out there — today you don't see that. It's a sad thing to see.

Ken even oystered at Graveling Point, but he didn't do that much — he always came back to clamming. He deer hunted until he started feeling it was a shame to kill them. Ken also duck hunted by meadow hopping. He jumped from one ditch to another and sometimes didn't make it. He'd shoot a duck; it'd drift across a creek and he didn't get it, so he gave that up, too. "You gotta have stools and sneakboxes like the other duck hunters do," he said. Ken only had two or three

decoys he sat over. Once, he took his dog out with him. He shot a duck and the dog took off for home. Ken got home and there the dog was, sitting on the back step. He took off across that meadow wide open. Ken didn't take him along any more.

It got so bad in the bay Ken quit at one time, so he went to work for his son Kenny as a builder. He got mad at Kenny and quit him and went back to the bay. He got mad at the bay and quit and went back to work for Kenny again.

There was a time when Ken even bought clams from other clammers and he would take them all to the dealers. They would come to the house all hours of the day all year long. Some things in life you definitely know you would never do again and that was one of them.

About 15 years ago he got older, and more tired, and hurt his arm so he decided it was time to give it up. He hauled his boat out of the water, put it in the yard, and closed the door. He doesn't miss it.

He got caught in fog one time and kept going and going and finally found the meadows to follow around toward where he thought Parkertown was. He saw a couple of duck hunters sitting over their stools and stopped and asked, "Do you guys know where you're at?"

They said, "We know where we're at. Do you know where you're at?"

He said, "Nope." He said, "Which way to Parkertown?" They pointed him in the right direction.

He broke down out there once and Billy Marshall came and got him with his dad's boat. He was trying to pole in off of West Creek and got almost across the cove and got tired. So he anchored. Ken had a shirt up on a fishing pole and there was Billy, firing up his dad's boat to come and get him.

He's been caught in a couple of doosies, too. The first doosie was when he was out in the Middle Grounds and the wind picked up northwest. He had a bad shower come out of it, so he worked his way in toward Roses Cove, anchored up with all his clams and stuff, and it got worse. Lightning and rain like you couldn't believe. He crawled up in the bow of the boat and started praying. They always said that guys in the bay, when a storm hits, try to get closer to God. It's true. When it got done raining there was five inches of water in the boat.

The next doosie was when he got caught in the ice. One day the ice got to moving and he got caught in it. He was always trying to push things to the limit, so he tried to fight the ice. He burned his motor up. It would not even shut off, it was so hot. But he got into the open water. Of course, his motor was never the same; it always burned oil after that.

As far as rescuing people is concerned, clammers have to limit their Good Samaritan duties. When they take a half a day to rescue someone

and clamming is their livelihood, they lose a lot of money. Ken says if they are bleeding or drowning, you help them. If they are just there with their picnic baskets, they'll have to sit there.

In these times now, he doesn't think kids have a chance to make a living off the bay. It's much harder now. He doesn't think the younger generation wants to follow in the Barnegat Bay Tradition anyway. Ken quit the bay when his grandkids were little, so they never had the chance to learn how to clam.