



## CHARLES "CHILL" PAUL

I was born in Tuckerton at the home of my maternal grandparents, Susan and Charlie Stevens. I guess you could say I was born into a life closely associated with the bay. My grandfather Stevens worked the bay his entire life.

Grandpop Stevens had a houseboat that he and several other clammers would live in whenever they happened to be clamming. As a small boy it was really neat to go over to the houseboat and eat supper, and, on occasion, to sleep overnight. I can remember Grandmom Stevens cooking blueberry fritters for the men who clammed with my grandfather.

Back in those days, most clammers used a

sneakbox or a small decked over garvey to hold their clams as they caught them. They used a larger garvey, generally with a model A Ford, four cylinder engine, to tow the clam boats to the places where they would clam. It was really neat to see them coming back after a day of clamming. Their boats would set low in the stern with the bow out of the water looking like a bunch of little ducks following their mother.

My father would clam from time to time and I would go with him and my mother. Mom was a good treader and was good at sliding the clam up her leg till she could reach it and put it in the sneakbox. Dad wasn't good at that method and he would duck for the clam. That is to hold his breath and go under to reach the clam. My early memories were mostly of my frustration of not being able to clam because I was so small and couldn't reach bottom.

I began clamming in earnest after World War II and my cousin, Marjorie Paul's husband Bernie Penn, came home from the war in Europe. I was around twelve or thirteen years old at that time. My uncle, Alvin Paul, owned a summer house on Bonnett Island on the Long Beach Island Causeway. We stayed on Bonnet Island and clammed out of there. At that time the bay from Harvey Cedars down to Beach Haven was mostly hard sand bottom and we used scratch rakes rather than treading. (It seems that the bay bottom is continuously changing from hard to soft and back again.)

We sold our clams to a man named Atmore Holman who had a restaurant and clam business on Bonnet Island. The building is still there on the right side of the causeway just as you come off the first bridge going west on Route 72.

I can't remember how much we were paid for our clams but I do remember we were paid more for the larger chowder clams than we were for the smaller ones. I vaguely remember getting 60 cents a hundred but I'm not sure for which size.

I remember one incident that happened when I was taking clams over to Holmans. Bernie and Nelson Johnson got off the boat at Uncle Alvin's house and I took the garvey with the clams over to Holmans. I tied the bow of the garvey and the stern of the sneakbox I was towing to pilings on Holman's dock. I used a wheelbarrow to take the clams to the clam house. There was a group of city people crabbing from the dock including some cute girls. They asked me a lot of questions about clamming and I was feeling quite salty. I started the engine of the garvey, untied the bowline and hit the throttle. I came to a jarring stop and nearly fell down. In my showing off I neglected to untie the stern of the sneakbox. I felt really stupid hearing the people on the dock laughing at me. It was a humbling experience.

During the years after World War II Bernie Penn was my best friend and teacher. I learned a lot about the bay from him and was really lucky to have spent a lot of time with his father, also Bernie

Penn (we always referred to them as "Young Bernie" and "Old Bernie" to ourselves).

Old Bernie was one of the best all around baymen I ever knew. I used to go with him to tend his fish nets off the south point of Forked River. He towed a 16 foot skiff and I've seen the time when he would half fill it with winter flounder. Bernie used to clam but it seemed he always had something else going on, too. He and a friend found a bed of oysters in Upper Barnegat Bay south of the Seaside bridge. They worked the beds for quite a while by themselves but eventually word got out and the bed was soon wiped out.

Young Bernie was responsible for me starting duck hunting. We used to gun where Forked River Beach is now located. I got "hooked" on duck hunting. It was all I thought about. Some of my fondest memories are of duck hunting with Bernie.

A man whose last name was Horner had a houseboat across the street from the Captain's Inn in Forked River. He had a restaurant in the houseboat and a lot of the local gunners would have breakfast before daylight then head out to the bay for duck hunting. It was really exciting for a kid to sit and listen to the "old timers" telling tall tales about gunning. We used to row out to the bay front unless we were lucky enough to have someone going clamming or fishing tow us out. Another way we would get out was to sail the sneakbox on the ice when the Forked River was frozen. The sneakboxes had brass runners and we used an ice hook to steer. When we had a stiff west wind, the sneakbox would really move.

I continued to duck hunt and in the summer clam until I enlisted in the Air Force in 1951. After 15½ years I entered the Army as a Warrant Officer. I retired as a Chief Warrant Officer in 1972. I was married in 1954. In the summers I would come home, grab a sandwich and go clamming. The summer of '54 clamming was unbelievably good. We used to average 500 an hour treading. I sold my clams to Andy Tonnesen that summer for a penny a piece. As a Staff Sergeant in the Air Force I was making \$163 a month, barely enough to get by on but with the bay and clamming life was good. I spent a total of ten years in New Jersey in various assignments and was able to have a house built. Without working in the bay on weekends and on leave I wouldn't have done it. The bay was like my bank—I could literally draw out what I needed.

After retiring I planned to teach school. I had gotten my college degree in the service. My plan was to spend the first year working full time in the bay and then get a job teaching. The next ten years I worked the bay full time and forgot about teaching.

In 1972 Dave Wright from Surf City and I began working together. We clammed in the spring and summer and built up a good wholesale clam business. We bought clams directly from the clambers and sold them to a large

seafood dealer in Camden. We also had a route of restaurant and seafood markets that we supplied with clams along the coast as far as Asbury Park.

During the 70's I also guided duck hunting parties. I had an arrangement with Mr. Joe Burlington, who owned Harvey Sedge Island off North Beach. I maintained the blinds and guided him several days a week. I was able to use the island to guide my own parties the rest of the time.

Later, I had a similar arrangement with the Cartons who owned Flat Creek Meadows. We were so booked with gunning parties that Herlin "Blue" Cornelius of Forked River and Donald Black of Manahawkin worked as guides with me. I had a 24 foot Pete Barr bateau with a large cabin that we used. We had walkie talkie radios for the gunners to call us with when they had ducks to be picked up. We kept a fire going in the cabin of the bateau and lots of times when the gunners were freezing in the blinds we were toasty warm in our boat.

There are numerous incidents that took place while we were gunning. One that stands out in my mind involves a low flying seaplane. Don and Blue were in the cabin of the boat and I had gone outside for something. I looked toward Surf City and saw a single engine seaplane flying from South to North very low. I called for them to come and look at the plane. Just as they came out I heard a roar and saw white water flying in the air. The plane had crashed. I had an eighteen foot garvey with a 140 horse outboard. I told Don and Blue to try to get the Marine Police or somebody to get an ambulance. I raced over to the plane which was in one piece, upside down, with the pilot sitting on the wing. I got him into the garvey, Don called on the radio and told me to take him to Surf City Yacht Club where the ambulance would meet us.

The pilot had only a superficial cut on his head, and was otherwise all right. About half way to Surf City my engine quit. I was out of gas. In a matter of a minute the Marine Police were there and we transferred the pilot to their boat. Later that night I went to S.O.C.H. to see the pilot and he was fine. A week or so later he stopped by my house with a large basket of fruit for helping him. At that time I asked him what caused him to crash and he said he was looking at a chart and just flew the plane into the bay.

In about 1974 Dave Wright and I rented Blacky's Clam Stand on East Bay Avenue in Manahawkin. We still had the wholesale business and with a good supply of clams we figured it would give our kids something to do in the summer with the clam stand. The business was very good and it kept our wives, kids, and even my mother-in-law busy.

We still own and operate Blacky's Clam Stand on a seasonal basis. Our main problem now is the uncertainty of the clam supply. Fortunately

we are able to get all of the little necks we need now that growing clams has taken root in our area. Years ago there were five or six clam stands on the Long Beach Island Manahawkin causeway. We are the last one still operating.

About ten years ago I started carving decoys and found it a really enjoyable past time. I also carve miniature sneakboxes and I have to say my sneakboxes are better than my decoys. My decoys would be ok to gun over but they sure wouldn't win any blue ribbons.

As the government bought up more and more of the islands where I had duck hunted for years, I became more frustrated and finally gave up gunning completely. It had been such a major part of my life that it was really tough seeing the first fall and not get ready for gunning. About this time we got two Alaskan Malamute pups and I worked with them training for sled racing. We had a total of twelve sled dogs and my wife and I spent a lot of pleasant days up at Lebanon State Forest training our team. We still have six dogs and still run them for recreation.

I have always enjoyed the close association I've had with the bay. I still clam a few days a week in the seasons when the stand is not open. I guess I'll clam as long as I'm physically able. An experience I had a few weeks ago made me realize that clambers are fast becoming history. I was clamming off Beach Haven with Barry Edwards. It was a clear day and we could see all the way to Tuckerton. Twenty years ago there would have been 50 or more boats working that area. On that day there were none. How sad!!

I consider myself very lucky to have grown up around the bay. People like my Grandpop Stevens, Bernie Penn, Willard "Bill" Inman and many more baymen taught me how to duck hunt and to make a good living in the bay. They were among the last of a special breed of proud, independent men. ☞