

Interviewee Name: Marcia Beal Brazer

Project/Collection Title: Voices of the Maine Fishermen's Forum 2018

Interviewer(s) Name(s) and affiliations: Matt Frassica (The Briney Podcast) and Corina Gribble (College of the Atlantic intern)

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Interview Description:

Marcia Beal Brazer

Ogunquit, ME

Wife of a Lobsterman

Interviewed by Matt Frassica and Corina Gribble

Marcia Beal Brazer, from Ogunquit, ME, shares a personal story about her husband Norman Brazer, a lobsterman, who got tangled in a lobster buoy rope and fell overboard while fishing near Boon Island, ME. N. Brazer was lucky that he was carrying a knife and was able to untangle himself; however, when he surfaced, he could not find his boat. Luckily, another lobsterman, Mark Sewell, noticed N. Brazer's body floating and took him to the hospital. After three rounds of CPR, N. Brazer finally responded. He is still a lobsterman. M. Brazer emphasizes how important it is for lobstermen to carry a knife and be able to swim. She reminds everyone to "treasure every single minute and to be grateful for what you have."

Collection Description:

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Transcription by: Corina Gribble, College of the Atlantic intern

MARCIA_BEAL_BRAZER_VMFF2018_TRANSCRIPTION

MB: Marcia Beal Brazer (Interviewee)

MF: Matt Frassica (Interviewer)

CG: Corina Gribble (Student Intern)

[00:00:00.00]

Matt Frassica: Just start by telling me your name and spell it for me.

Marcia Beal Brazer: Ok, my name is Marcia Beal Brazer. M-A-R-C-I-A B-E-A-L B-R-A-Z-E-R.

MF: Thank you, and what are you here to tell me about?

MB: I want to tell you about a 20th century miracle at sea.

MF: Alright.

MB: Ok. On October 14th 1991, I was in my driveway planting daffodils. A person came to my driveway and told me that my husband had fallen overboard and that he had drowned. I got in my car--driving in slow motion--I saw the police drive by, and I knew that they were going to come and tell me the bad news. I drove down to the Perkins Cove, we live in Ogunquit, Maine.

[00:01:01.6]

Drove down to Perkins Cove and I saw the fishermen there and I said "Please tell me, has this really happened?" and they said, "Well, they found your husband's boat. My husband's name is Norman Brazer Jr. The name of the boat is the Marcia Beal, which is after me. A 32 foot haulin--fishing boat, lobster boat. And they said, "Yes, we found his boat. The gunnels were dry". [Gardner Marshall] saw the boat, it was heading toward Kennebunkport. The gunnels were dry. It was Columbus Day, and they said, "We don't think that he had a chance to survive". Mark [Sewell] from York, actually drove his--was getting into his truck in York Harbor, had heard the news about my husband falling overboard. Got back in his truck decided he was gonna go and explore the fresh bait in the lobster traps.

[00:02:04.9]

He was, he said, he told me he was led to do that. Meanwhile, what happened to my husband, Norman, is the toggle buoy wrapped around his leg, pulled him to the stern of his boat. He had the knife up forward. He was strong enough to pull the rope, fall over the side, and then he was drawn under the water, and then released the rope from his leg and popped up. No boat, he looks over and he see's Boon Island. And he thinks, "Oh my gosh, I'm not ready to go yet; but I'm gonna try to swim." Thank God he knew how to swim--most fishermen don't. He kicked off his boots, he decided he was gonna swim to Boon Island, ok. Meanwhile—

[00:02:56.9]

MF: Which was, I'm sorry, how far away was that? Do you have an estimate?

MB: Probably 3 miles. You could see Boon Island. Meanwhile, Gardner Marshall was...Mark Sewell was coming...Gardner Marshall found the boat. Mark Sewell was the one with his mate finding--was led to find my husband. He went by this thing that looked like a grassed over lobster buoy and he decided to turn around and, "not pass it over", as he said. He went back and looked. It was my husband's head, in the water with his hair coming down, looking like a grassed over lobster buoy; just about ready to go to Davy Jones' Locker. Meanwhile, I had taken a course in SCUBA diving, and all the young guys wanted to go sea urchin fishing, right. I was the oldest person in the class and the only woman. And, I remember them talking to me about this Doctor [Shaker] who was a very good doctor for hypothermia. He's the best one north of Boston.

[00:04:06.1]

Ok. So, I go to the--back-story--I go to the cove. All of a sudden, a friend called across and said, "They found him", they didn't say if he was dead or alive, "He's at York Hospital". So Cathy [Tower], Barnacle Billy's daughter, and [Abby] Taylor, my old babysitter, drove me to the hospital. We got there, there was no sign of my husband. I thought, "That's it. He didn't make it.", and all of a sudden we got word that he was coming in. They opened up the doors at York Hospital, he came in. He was as gray as a battleship. And, he had already had CPR twice: the Coast Guard woman gave him CPR, the York ambulance came and CPR, and gave him CPR. He came in and I said to the hospital, I said, "By any chance do you have a Doctor Shaker here?". And they said, "Oh, well, yes but he's not on call ". I said, "Would you mind calling him?".

[00:05:08.1]

So, an hour and a half later Doctor Shaker comes out of the operating room and says--said that, my husband was literally drowned, that he had a gallon of seawater in him, his temperature was 84--and I think 82, I gotta check that out--82 is as low as you go. His heart was in AFIB but he thought he was going to survive. So, then he finally came back another hour and a whole room filled with all our friends and people and he came back about an hour later and said, "We think that he's gonna be ok. You can go in and see him ". So I said, I wanted his mother to go in first, so his mother went in first and then I came in and the first thing he said to me is, "How's the boat?". So I knew he was ok.

[00:05:58.9]

So he came home, and we had a boatload of people streaming in and out of our house. We had businessmen, we had fishermen, we had old friends. And we had grown men sit in our living room and cry. And my husband is very quiet and shy and he, they wanted to hear the miracle story. And I had done some work for Bill [Cohen] at the time, he called up from Washington [D.C.] and talked to us for about 25 minutes from Washington.

MF: [inaudible] sorry

MB: We had the editor of the Portsmouth Herald come and I sewed on his button to his shirt he was there so long. And it was this wonderful, wonderful story of--it's the synergy of everything working together and it was truly, truly a 20th century miracle. And I'm still recovering from it.

[00:07:01.3]

MF: That's wonderful. So, what does it mean to you? What is the message of that? Like, what do you take away from that? What's the meaning of it?

MB: To treasure every single minute and be grateful for what you have. And, he just wasn't meant to go and we're still working out that. And what, what happened to me and I'd wake up in the morning and I think, "Did he really die at sea? Did he really make it? Am I dreaming?". I had a really hard time dealing with that. And he has always been very down to earth, I call him my Gabriel Oak, a Thomas Hardy character.

[00:08:00.3]

He has always been a very true to himself person, he walks every morning, he's a lobsterman, he has garden. And it really actually changed me more than it changed him; because he was already okay, I was the one making life complicated.

MF: And how did it change you?

MB: I just wanted a more simple life and it brought me down to earth about what was really important. I think I'm gonna cry right now just thinking about it. It's been a long, long time; and I feel so blessed that my husband was saved for me because I wouldn't have had him all these years and we have so much fun. We've been married for 52 years. He's the love of my life and I'm just so blessed. It's hard to even know how to think about it. That's just the way it is.

[00:08:57.2]

CG: Did he get back on the water after that? Or, was that it, was he done?

MB: Yes, two weeks later he goes back on the Marcia Beal the 32 foot haulin' first mold, goes fishing. We had some really funny relatives that would--in the mail said, "I think I'm gonna send you some knives instead of flowers"; because--you know--usually the guys have a knife in their apron. Then you realize it's really important to have a knife, really important. And also too, we realized through this, talking to Doctor Shaker, that a lot of fishermen really do not know how to swim. And so we thought maybe we should start educating the fishermen the importance of swimming. So there you go.

[00:09:51.7]

MF: And were you reluctant to let him go back on the water?

MB: Yes! Oh my G--even today! Oh, I meant by the radio, we live on the water and I can see him go out, and on the days he goes out 'cause--and you know getting on there in age--is I really don't want to go anywhere. I want to make sure that he gets in ashore okay, before I can go off. And I even watch some of the younger fishermen that go out alone. My husband's never had a

sterman, I was gonna go with him at one time. I even got a class two license, I was gonna be his mate, and he really prefers to go alone. He can concentrate a lot better. And he's a water man. He needed to go back on the water.

MF: Yeah.

MB: And I just admired his courage for doing that and not being a scaredy-cat. But, he's a true water man.

MF: What do you think about there's some, some people are talking about whether it'd be good to have some more safety equipment at the back of the boat; because often the back of the boat is open. Do you think that might be--might have been a helpful thing in this case? If there had been a rail or something?

[00:11:07.0]

MB: No. I don't think so. I don't think that would make any difference. I think, what I think: knife. You need a knife. And if that rope goes around your leg you get--you just cut it free, cut it free. And most guys are really careful. You know, it's a very dangerous occupation. And you're always looking for those lines going around. And he was trapped behind the stern, um, if the stern had been open he would have probably gone over the side and still gone in the water. And I talked to the warden that day, in the hospital, and he said most--that they've had many drowning where the guys getting caught up in the rope and going over the side. And he was even lucky to make it, to pop back up.

[00:12:00.3]

MF: Yeah, it sounds like the presence of mind and the strength to be able to disentangle himself, in the first place. Before he even started swimming, just getting above the water again is a pretty major thing.

MB: And also he still has a dent in his--below his knee where the rope had, was actually severing, the rope was really actually severing his leg. 'Cause the boat was going in one direction the trap was down below, the toggle buoy line was around and it's causing his leg to be severed.

MF: Another part of this is the community response, and the fact that all those, the guy who decided to go out and check, he was checking bait, he just sort of--it just occurred to him to just to do it. And then all of those people who came and supported you in the hospital. What--it seems like that, the, the fact that it's not just you and him out there, it's a whole community of people. That seems important to the story too somehow.

[00:13:10.6]

MB: Well, it was the whole universe. It was synergy. Mark Sewell was saved from drowning. He told me that he--in the emergency room, he walked in, I had never met the man in my life. He has these bright blue eyes and red hair and I looked at him and I said, "You were the one, aren't

you?". I don't know how I knew that--it sounds wooh-woo-wooh--but I knew. And he said he was led by a higher power to do it. He wasn't in the boat and decided to turn around and go out. He was already in his truck, already in his truck, and was led to do it. And it was like finding a needle in a haystack. It was, here it was, Columbus Day, with waves you could hardly see the buoys. And he finds my husband's head, looking like a grassed over lobster buoy with his hair over his forehead and goes by it and then decides to turn around and go back?

[00:14:10.6]

I mean...

MF: What are the chances?

MB: Really! I mean, really! And I'm on my hands and knees at the dock praying to God, please dear God. It was like a bad dream. Everything was in slow motion, every single thing was in slow motion.

MF: Before that, did you, were you aware of how dangerous it was? Was it something that was sort of on you mind, that this was a potentially dangerous occupation?

MB: Well, I always had heard that, but I never--it was, you know, I'm out there and I'm planting daffodils, and I'm gonna walk on the beach, and I'm working in my office. And I ne--and I mean, I have the CB radio going--the shore line radio. You know, we got the cell phone. We didn't--I don't think we had cell phones then...no! We didn't.

[00:15:01.4]

Well anyway. No, I never thought about it, until that happened. And then I--ooohh, I realized what a dangerous occupation...and he used to go off in the winter--you know the gunnels were filled with ice.

MF: Way out?

MB: Well he didn't--well he's, by Boon Island. Yeah, yeah. He's not a(n) offshore fisherman... lobsterman.

MF: Thank you so much.

MB: Well it was my—

MF: It's a great story.

MB: It was my pleasure. It was absolutely my pleasure.

MF: Does he talk about it?

MB: No...doesn't like (to) talk about it. Doesn't like to--it's almost like a guy that's gone to war, you know how these, you read about these World War II guys: they don't want to talk about their war experience. In fact, we even had a TV show that called us up and wanted us to do a reenactment. And we both said, "Are you kidding me!? We already lived through that once!".

[00:15:59.8]

And now I don't look at it as a bad thing. I look at it as a such a miracle, and such a gift from God. That my husband was given back from the sea, I mean. I still can't even wrap my head around it, and here it is: 2018, I mean, really. Ha!

[laughter]

MF: Not something that you ever fully get over, I'm sure.

MB: But, you know, it was almost--we had these streams of men come, people come to the house. They wanted to hear the miracle. They wanted to hear the story and my husband being quiet and shy...he talked in that week more than he's talked in a long long time. He--they wanted--keep telling the story, and it was the story of hope. It was the story of hope.

MF: Wow. Thank you.

MB: You're welcome.

[00:16:59.6]

MF: Do you--could you, do you mind giving us a way to contact you?

MB: Yeah! I say yes to everything.

[laughter]

CG: And what year did that occur, again?

MB: It was 1991.

CG: 1991.

MB: October, oh October 14th. I get--I gave, this accident happened at sea: October 14th, 1991. And I ended up giving the four guys involved knives with the date on it. And I ended up getting my husband a St. Christopher's medal--we're Episcopalian, but it's ok--a St. Christopher's medal with his new birth date. And we celebrate his new birth date every year.

MF: Wow, huh. Did you have a cake and everything or is it a different kind of a celebration?

[00:17:59.0]

MB: Well we recognize it and we'll have like a breakfast together and we--we don't have candles and a cake--but we recognize this is your new birthday.

MF: Yeah, that's great. Thank you so much.

MB: You're welcome.

MF: Do you mind if we take a photo? We're taking a photo of all the people who—

MB: Sure, gosh, I didn't--I wish I'd known—

[00:18:20.7]

END