

MAINE SOUND AND STORY IN PARTNERSHIP WITH THE FIRST COAST

AN INTERVIEW WITH WILLIS AND GENESTA BEAL FROM THE JONESPORT HISTORICAL
SOCIETY

AS PART OF THE FIRST COAST JONESPORT/BEALS COLLECTION

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY CHARLIE ALLEY AND BILL PLASKON

BEALS ISLAND, MAINE, 2006

TRANSCRIPT BY ANNIKA ROSS

Interviewee Name: Willis Beal

Project/Collection Title: Jonesport Historical Society

Interviewer(s) Name(s) and Affiliation: Charlie Alley and Bill Plaskon (Camera)

Interview Location: Beals Island at the Willis Beal's house (70 Barney Cove Road)

Date of Interview: -ber 28th, 2006

Interview Description: In this interview, Willis Beal discusses boat building on Beals Island. He talks about building his shop in 1966 and the process of building boats in the winter and lobster fishing in the summer. He reminisces about the cheaper costs of and working with whatever he could get to make it through.

Key Words: Beals Island, Jonesport, Boat building, lobstering.

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Transcribed by: Annika Ross

WB: Willis Beal

BP: Bill Plaskon

CA: Charlie Alley

GB: Genesta Beal

[00:17:39.27]

START OF WillisBeal-01.VOB

[0:00:00.0]

CA: [inaudible]-er 28th 2006 and we're on Beals Island at the home of Willis and Genesta Beal. And do you know your 911 number? It's ok if you don't. Do you have 911 on the island?

GB: Well I don't know.

WB: Yeah-

GB: I guess we do.

WB: Yeah except-

BP: The house number on the porch is 70.

GB: Oh the house number! 70.

BP: 70.

CA: Ok 70 on Beals Island. Now I don't know what street you're on.

GB: A Barney Cove Road.

CA: Uh certain the house- uh- 911 number, 70 on Barney Cove Road.

BP: mhm.

CA: Ok I guess that's what we have to have first just to identify where we are. Ok, Willis, where were you born?

WB: I was born in Machias.

CA: Machias.

WB: Hanson, the old Hanson hospital, Dr. Hanson.

CA: Ok mhmm and um-

WB: Doctor Young and Doctor Hanson delivered me.

CA: Ok, now where did your mother and father live when you were born?

WB: They were living in a house right across the field from here in a- my grandfather's wooded house that they bought from him- the one that Robert owns now.

[00:01:11.4]

CA: You know I don't know which on that is-

WB: It's the big yellow-

CA: Is it down-

WB: With the french roof.

CA: Which way is it?

WB: It's right over here.

CA: Oh really? Behind you here-where you're living. Ok straight behind 70-

WB: mhm

CA: On Barney Cove Road. ok.

[0:01:24.4]

CA: alright

WB: I don't know what the number of it is

CA: oh that's ok.

WB: but it's uh over 90 years old.

CA: It's getting to be up there too. Ok and what is your father and mother's name?

WB: Alfred Lowe Beal and Lucy W Beal.

CA: Ok and where were they born?

WB: I believe- as far as I know daddy was- I think he was born right on the island, I'm not sure, and uh I don't know whether my mother was born here or in Jonesport- I can't remember.

CA: Ok

GB: Well it was under Jonesport.

WB: It was all under Jonesport.

[00:02:04.6]

CA: Before 1925 it was all under-

GB: She was-

CA: Yeah it was all under Jonesport-

WB: But I think probably it was in Jonesport.

CA: Yeah. OK.

WB: I'm not sure of that.

CA: Yeah, mhm. And you don't want to tell us where you were born?

GB: Oh I don't mind.

CA: But we can't look at you.

[all laugh]

GB: I was born, Prospect Harbor.

CA: Ok

GB: December 11th 46

CA: In 1946- ok and who's your mother and father?

GB: Umm my father was Millard Lester Alley, my mother was Alana Genesta Walk.

CA: Ok, now and you were born in Prospect Harbor ok [inaudible]. Ok we might as well start you. What did your father do for a living?

GB: Lobsterfish. He was in the service for 5 and half years and then he got out and-

CA: What branch?

GB: uh army

CA: Army ok

[0:03:01.2]

CA: how long did you live up in Prospect?

GB: 4 years

CA: 4 years, and then he came to Beals.

GB: Yes

CA: Now he didn't only just lobsterfish did he?

GB: Well he worked in the herring weirs.

CA: He owned part of one.

GB: Yeah he did.

CA: Owned half of Hall's Island.

GB: Halls Island that's right.

WB: He did something else also.

GB: Scalloping

CA: mhmm

GB: Yes he did

CA: Yeah

GB: Yeah I forgot about that [laughs]

[00:03:30.4]

CA: Mmhmm. Now was your mother just housewife-

GB: yes

CA: or did she work alright?

GB: uh no, she was a housewife.

CA: ok she was a housewife.

WB: she worked in the Sardine Plant

GB: There was a couple Summers she worked in the Sardine Factory. Umm the one down Blue Cove that they have now that's uh-

CA: Oh Three Rivers?

GB: Yeah was it?

CA: No

WB: No.. Charlie Stevens.

CA: Oh Charlie Stevens! ok.

GB: Yeah Charlie Stevens, but other than that she was a housewife.

CA: Ok and your mother Willis? What did she do?

WB: She was a school teacher.

CA: Where did she teach?

WB: Her first school I believe was in Alley's Bay.

[00:04:06.6]

CA: mhmm

WB: and uh- I don't know how many years she was there, but she came to the Head of the Island and dropped the rest of her time right there at the old school- she never did get to a new one.

CA: She taught all of her life on Beals?

WB: Yeah

CA: ok mhmm

WB: I think it was 30 years or something like that.

CA: mhmm- Now where did you live growing up? I mean as you grew up, did you stay in the same house?

WB: The same house-

CA: Same house on the water.

WB: Yeah

CA: and where'd you go to school? On the Island?

WB: Yeah right uh just uh-

CA: A hop skip and a jump-

WB: a hop skip and a jump from my house!

CA: yep!

WB: I could wait till the bell rang and get there before I was late!

[laugh]

CA: Yeah you were lucky weren't you?

WB: Came home for meals, probably I would fly a kite or something before I went back[laughs]!

CA: Yeah yes. Probably like an hour-they used to have an hour and a half at noon!

GB: We used to have an hour.

CA: We had to be on the hour, cause I had to go!

GB: For what I can recall it might have been a half- an hour and one half, but I think we had just an hour.

CA: It was probably different, where did you go to school?

GB: Here on the island.

CA: and they only give you an hour and give him an hour and half?

[00:05:20.5]

WB: No- I think we had just an hour.

CA: You might have just an hour.

GB: Oh yeah I think so.

CA: Yeah we had an hour and half at noon time.

WB: I could remember the people that had to get down on the Cranberry Point and over- around across the Mill Pond, they had to hurry to get back!

CA: Well right an hour and half, I had plenty of time cause I live a half- three quarters- a little over a half mile from school at most.

GB: Oh yeah.

CA: But I was never late! And I had all the warm tea.

WB: You probably could run faster than you can now.

CA: I can't run now!

[laughter]

[0:05:53.8]

CA: Ok what did-what did when you got out of school what did you start doing?

WB: Well, I had lobster fished while I was in school- summers and in the a fall, we would leave school and go to Roque Island where Daddy was working and haul traps and then you could haul right up till dark, and uh we'd probably haul 60 traps in an outboard

CA: mhmm

WB: If I was with myself-and uh doing that of course, right up till it gets cold, we couldn't do anything,

CA: You know I skipped asking you what your father did for a living, and I shouldn't have cause he-

WB: We'll we still do it-

CA: We'll do it right now, we haven't gone too far about it.

[00:06:44.1]

WB: Well he- he was a lobster fisherman and had two herring weirs-

CA: Now his weirs-where- just where he placed them that's all.

WB: he had one weir at -uh- along Sand Beach at Roque Island. And the other weir was in Patens Cove at Roque Island. And I guess- his earlier days he went hakeing.

CA: mhmm

WB: Cause they couldn't fish summers then

CA:No-

WB: Lobster fish-

CA: Right

WB: So they went hakeing, he went clamming, whatever he could do to make a living- get by.

CA: mhmm

WB: And uh- I - he did before I can remember he went herring seining with Jace Lightmen.

CA: With Chase! I never knew Chase went- I knew Chase had weirs and things.

WB: yeah

CA: yeah- and then he uh he-

WB: and then he uh got through lobstering and tending the herring weirs and went to Roque Island- superintendent there for 16 years.

CA: mhmm

[00:07:48.5]

WB: Of course mamma helped him- what she could- especially in the summer-

CA: Now when he was over there-was you out of school or were you still in school?

WB: No we were still in school.

CA: What did you do? Stay over here with someone when school-

WB: No we-

CA: Well your mother had to be at school anyway-

WB: Yeah we went back and forth.

CA: But you stayed over there in the summers?

WB: In the summer we stayed there all summer long.

[0:08:09.6]

CA: Ok.

WB: And uh course we worked - I helped build the herring weirs, daddy would help some when he could. I more or less took over the job of building the weirs and then uh Jimmy helped me and Freddy Lenfesty - at times- helped with it. We cut all the stuff there on the island. And uh I think probably that's one of the hardest jobs that can be done is building a herring weir.

CA: I know all about it.

WB: yeah [laughs]

CA: I worked with Cecil and I told him that's the hardest work I ever did in my life for nothing- that's what I got out of it. Nothing. Didn't get enough to pay expenses any one year.

WB: But you get plenty of work!

[0:08:58.0]

WB: then uh after daddy retired there at Roque Island- he went back on the lobster boat On the mainland-

CA: Sternman.

WB: Almost 16 years as sternman.

CA: Yeah

WB: He never never had a hydraulic pot haul, or a fathometer, he'd never seen a radar work when he went back on the boat- that's- things were just coming along with that.

CA: He still has never seen- He never seen a chart plotter.

WB: Never ever saw a chart plotter. He would go with maps- and I'd see him looking around and he'd say, you're getting pretty near the best place there is on the, and I'd tell him, come up and watch the fathometer. And he'd say well I knew it was shaped something like that- but of course there were dips and different things that he didn't know about-and uh- But he knew bottom by map, that's the way he was taught-like the old fisherman.

CA: It's about like Franklin Alley when he got his fathometer. Now he says I'm won't find them shauls no ones on. Said he started over onto Black Rock, everytime he got ready to throw a trap he'd look and there was one of his grandfather's bouys.

[all laugh]

[0:10:09.60]

CA: Those old fellows knew where to set them!

WB: They knew where it was.

CA: Ah ok- now when you get out of school you went lobstering-

WB: I went lobstering and outboard for awhile and then- uh -I had a powerboat that Freddie Lenfestey built for daddy.

CA: mhmm and what was the name of it?

WB: Lucy W. Beal. We got pictures of it here.

CA: Ok good, well' take all the pictures.

WB: And uh I used that from- I sold it when it was five years old.

CA: mhmm

WB: Cause I-I hadn't intended to but- when I came in one day from hauling that was when Lauren was close, Deer Isle's lobster wharf he said, come in here a minute, couple fellows I want you to meet. So I sailed in to, tied up the car, and it was Phyllis Alley and Billy Barter!

CA: Yeah?

WB: And Billy Barter wanted my boat and here I am told him well I might sell that one- Hadn't thought anything about it at all, though I did decide to do it, and he gave me a down payment and- course I got my traps out- we delivered the boat to Stonington- Phyllis went with me, and then I built myself my first boat that I built myself.

CA: Now had you been building with Freddie when this?

WB: I went- I helped Freddie-

CA: Is that how- how did you get into the boat building? Lets start there.

[00:11:40.08]

WB: Well I helped Freddie do part of the Lucy W Beal whenever he needed me- to help him.

CA: ok.

WB: And I had always cruised the boat shop, when I was little, cause daddy had a boat built of Alvin Beal's, and I watched that go. And a lot of other ones- I can remember when they built the sardine boats and the lobster smacks

CA: mhmm

WB: Down on the Ferrel Point - Riley Beal.

CA: Yep.

WB: Of course I was always going to Harold's house, [inaudible] he was handy. And uh- Harold used to enjoy having me come- I heard him tell my father one time- He said I enjoy having Willis come to visit me because he sit on the porch or on the step, out of the way, and just watch what's going on, and he won't bother a thing.

CA: mhmm

WB: Said some fellows- some of the kids in here, I have to drive them out, I can't trust them.

CA: yeah

WB: They're up to something

CA: mhmm

WB: So I did learn a lot that way. And then later on I helped Clinton Beal, I think it was two different winters, and I think we built- if I remember right- three boats one winter and most of

four the next winter before I-I had started building the house and I had to leave cause I needed to be here about getting that done.

CA: So you built this house yourself?

WB: Well parts of it.

[00:13:06.25]

CA: mhmm.

WB: and uh- I did it all according- work the same time- you know how it goes.

CA: mhmm

WB: Had to earn it and-

CA: That's right!

[laughter]

CA: That's the second one told us that- Wayne Peabody said the same thing!

WB: Yeah- and you couldn't go to the bank and borrow money as easily as you can now.

CA: Now who was the most influence on you? Or was it just a combination?

[00:13:30.09]

WB: On the boat building?

CA: yeah

WB: I think it was a combination of all- and then of course daddy being a fisherman and grandpy- and I was around boats all the time and I just loved the water and boats. But God gave me the gift I think, and I just had to fine tune it in different ways.

CA: mhmm

WB: and I learned a lot a from Clinton a lot of- you know- to see if that would help you on the way to make things easier.

CA: yeah

WB: When I worked with Freddie, we sawed the keels by hand!

CA: Alright.

WB: He didn't have a skill saw! Took mine over, of course it wouldn't handle the keel.

CA: No, that's quite thick.

WB: And they didn't have a big saw then.

CA: And I know how long it took to saw the keel for the first-the wooden boat I had-

WB: Is that right?

CA: Leslie Merchant sawed it, 9 hours, setting up there with a saw, sawing that keel out.

WB: We sawed a 4 inch keel. I had a saw that I took over when a minute, Andrew Beal had had that he bought from a house carpenter. And it was exactly like the one Freddie had! And he sharpened both saws up and set them. And of course you had to saw off angle a little bit- so not to undercut- so he started the saw and I kept checking it as it was going- and we were doing quite a job along a stick we had there- a straight grain- a nice pretty piece of wood. And I think- if I remember right- I was sawing the foot to 11 strokes, and he was sawing a foot to 13 strokes.

CA: Boy he was really?

WB: You wouldn't believe the saw.

CA: You wouldn't think a saw- that was sawing good.

WB: Yeah it was an 18 foot piece we had to cut if I remember right.

CA: yeah

[00:15:17.18]

WB: The piece that the skig was on- a made up into the center of the keel.

CA: Yep the saws were sharp!

WB: Yeah- Freddie could sharpen too- no question about it!

CA: Freddie was a talented man, the only thing he liked to play more than he liked to work!

WB: Freddie could do anything!

CA: Yeah he could. He was a really talented man

WB: Yeah I love Freddie! I loved working with him, a lot of fun.

CA: He is.

WB: He's not just a relative

CA: No, he was all the time playing jokes on people-

WB: he was just a joy to be around!

CA: yeah he was- yeah yep now uh- you kept working with these other fellows, when did you set up your own shop, Willis?

WB: I built my first boat-row boat- in the basement of this home, and I built that for Roque Island and my Grandsons have that now, it's been fibreglassed on the outside.

CA: And how old is that?

WB: uh it was build sixty- I think in 64.

CA: ok

WB: I think I may have pictures of that- but -uh

CA: mhmm

WB: Then uh- in 65, I built a 23 footer in the basement here, where I put my car.

CA: mhm

WB: And uh built that for Robert. Made it an inboard and hauled her outside and put the haul in outside.

CA: mhmm

WB: And he had a chevy 2, 6 cylinder and straight driving it - and I think you'll probably remember it- it's up at Wayne Beal's right now- sitting there.

CA: Oh it is!

WB: Yeah sittin there and-been fibreglassed.

CA: What's the name of it?

WB: I don't know- if there's a name on it right now-

CA: It's one of the old boats sittin out there?

WB: One of the old boats sittin over at the-

CA: to the right of the shop?

WB: to the right of the shop- small one.

CA: Ok I didn't know about that. Ok well do the thing- Robert is Willis's brother - when he mentions Robert.

[00:17:05.23]

WB: And uh that got me started in the boat business I guess. I had- also I did a play boat when I was in high school- was 3rd year of highschool I was- built like the actual boat, so I guess I knew pretty- how they had to be built. You know like I say, different things you can learn as you go that makes your work easier.

CA: yeah

WB: and-

CA: A lot of those things you can pick up out of a book, but you pick it up out of someone that knows what they're doing-

WB: Someone will show you in five minutes what it would take you an hour to read-

[00:17:39.27]

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