

# ... how to make a clamshell fly . . .

by Brian Beal, Director of Research at Downeast Institute

My grandfather Milton Beal was a typical Downeaster, earning his living from a variety of seasonal occupations such as lobstering, clamming, boat building, and carpentry. In the summers when I was young, I especially enjoyed getting up early in the morning to haul lobster traps with him. This meant a trip to the shore, climbing down the ladder on the wharf, and rowing the skiff out to The Seahorse, a typical Jonesport-style lobster boat built in 1935. The Seahorse was the oldest working boat in Jonesport-and the slowest.

On the spring tides of each month, when the water was the lowest, we often went clamming before we hauled our first trap. Pulling the skiff onto the stern of the lobster boat, we sailed to one of the many mudflats in Eastern Bay. Gramp then dropped the anchor and we rowed ashore. After two hours of digging, we usually had about a bushel of clams. One day, as we were heading home from a busy day of lobstering and clamming, he reached down into the clam roller, picked up one of the clams, and shucked it with his knife.

Gramp took one of the empty clamshells and, turning it with the inside of the shell facing up, he gripped it with his thumb and index finger so the pointed end of the shell was touching the middle of his index finger and the rounded edge was against his thumb. Although Gramp had arthritis in his shoulder, he wound up like Luis Tiant, one of his favorite Red Sox pitchers, and scaled the clamshell through the air. About 50 feet from the boat, the shell flipped over and slowly glided like a Frisbee until it came to rest on top of the water. Then it sank to the bottom.

He turned to me and said, "My grandfather showed me how to scale a clam when I was a youngster. I can remember having contests with my school chums to see who could scale one the farthest". Over the years, I've shown many people of all ages how to make a clamshell fly, and I would like to share this Beal family tradition with you.

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