
Introduction

This is a book I have wanted to write for some time, and I began doing so more than 25 years ago. It started as an article for the *East Hampton Star* in 1985, *The Star's* 100th year. The article, titled “Ocean Sciences Reminiscences” was a reflection and remembrance of the former New York Ocean Science Laboratory on Montauk where I worked as a young marine biologist from 1970–1975. The “Lab,” as we employees called it, was a new institution in 1970, a consortium of eight colleges and universities that conducted oceanographic research and taught marine science.

The Lab was located on 36 acres of beach front property along the southern shore of Montauk’s Fort Pond Bay, which fronts Block Island Sound on the eastern tip of Long Island’s South Fork. The consortium was named Affiliated Colleges and Universities, Inc., with the member institutions being Adelphi, Fordham, Hofstra, Long Island, New York, and St. John’s Universities, plus the New York Institute of Technology, and the State University of New York. It was full of promise and energy when it brought me to the East End right after I completed my master’s degree in marine science at Long Island University. That was the fall of 1970. For the next four and half

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years my wife and I lived on the East End of Long Island and worked among the local people. She was a high school biology teacher in Sag Harbor, a graduate student at Long Island University, and an employee in the East Hampton Town Sea Food Producers Cooperative, Inc. in Amagansett. I was a marine biologist working, researching, and teaching at the Lab. Living in Amagansett and working at the Lab gave me the most wonderful opportunities to meet and know many of the traditional East End and Long Island fishermen and their families. They are the baymen and Bonackers who are the reason for this book.

My 1985 *East Hampton Star* article was based on a visit I made back to the Lab a couple of years after it had closed for good in 1982. We were living in Maryland then and were visiting friends in Amagansett. I drove onto Montauk to see the Lab's former director Dr. John Baiardi, with whom I had always enjoyed a nice relationship. He lived off Tuttle Road on the eastern cliffs of Fort Pond Bay. He and I went to the Lab site where its 36 acres and all of its buildings still were in tact. But there was no stir of human activity. Dr. Baiardi unlocked the old fisheries science buildings for me, where I worked and where I wrote several papers on East End fishes and fisheries. I walked through its corridors, now empty and quiet. As Henry David Thoreau did with the old and defunct neighborhood structures during his walks in the woods around Walden Pond in the 1840s, in my mind I, too, "repeopled" the landscape of that old lab building as I walked the emptiness of its corridors. It was an eerie feeling and quite sad. It was after the emptiness of that visit I wrote the *Star* article about the Lab, and I've always been struck that it was published on October 31, 1985—Halloween.

Toward the end of my tenure at the Lab in the mid-1970s, a new and modern fisheries laboratory building was being built. It never was fully completed before I departed the East End in September 1975. I envisioned in my mind a new office and lab space there, with a window looking out over Fort Pond Bay. In my mind's eye, I could

look out that window, westerly, across the Bay and see bayman Jimmy Lester tending his pound traps. I fished with Jimmy many times during my Lab days, and for several years afterwards during visits back on the East End. Jimmy and I became good friends and we wrote several papers on the fishes he caught in his Fort Pond Bay trap nets. All of those papers are mentioned in this book and cited in the bibliography section at the end. I donated copies of all my scientific writings on Long Island and East End fishes to the public libraries in East Hampton, Amagansett, and Montauk. These papers may be found in the East Hampton Library Long Island Collection by searching online at www.easthamptonlibrary.org/history/index.html.

After my *East Hampton Star* article in 1985, I began writing what I hoped would be a book on my East End experiences, the baymen I knew, and the landscape and the estuarine waters of the East End. I wanted to capture the stories and adventures I had with fishermen and the fishing community. I wanted to make known the voices of people recently silenced, people who still speak to me through the lessons they taught and the lives they lived. The first chapter I penned off then was about fishing with Jimmy. While it appears here as chapter 3, it will always be first in my mind and heart. I continued to reflect on my East End time and picked away at two more chapters on my old electric typewriter. One chapter was on my experiences studying striped bass, working with the ocean haul seiners, and becoming a member of the East Hampton Town Baymen's Association.

The other was a recounting of having studied, researched, and worked on Long Island Sound. I had many memorable experiences and adventures on the Sound with fishes, fishermen, and aboard several research vessels and fishing boats. Long Island Sound, coupled with the East End, has influenced my professional work life and my very being ever since. Fishing and sampling on the Sound in some traditional western-rigged dragnets taught me what it was like to

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work on the water, including the thrill of catching fish, and the chill and danger of nearly capsizing while dragging.

On the Sound, I tested some of my emerging and burgeoning concerns for the ethical treatment of fishes during field sampling. I had been fishing with bayman Jimmy Lester on Montauk for a few years and liked being able to release alive from his pound nets those fishes that were not going to market. So I translated some of that fishing behavior to my work on the Sound and I struggled a bit to make it work.

This little book, thus, in being my recollections of the East End and my experiences with the fishing community I knew there, is a bit autobiographical, sometimes a bit more than I like. But, it needs to be so, in order to capture and explain the fishing community, the East End, and its environment as I observed them while living among them in the early 1970s. I do this with original text and original photographs and figures. I have not sought great quality photos elsewhere to illustrate the subjects, but rather used those in my collection and in my possession because they are real to me and bring back the excitement and the emotion of the stories they tell and support. They show the East End as I saw it and knew it then.

It is fortunate that I wrote those three chapters, on the baymen, fishing with Jimmy, and Long Island Sound, twenty-plus years ago while the memories and feelings still were fresh and alive, and while I still was making annual visits to the East End to see old friends and acquaint with the landscape and with the sea, which also were my good friends. If I had not done so, I doubt it could be done today, as the accounts of my working on the water and living on the East End probably could not be dragged up with as much good detail and spirit.

When I began writing this book in earnest in 2006, I took those three original typewritten chapters to a local printer in Rockville, Maryland, and had them scanned onto a computer disc in a format

that enabled me to update, rewrite, and edit them in MS Word on my word processor. I then went back through my myriad of color slides and old photos from the 1970s. I have literally thousands of slides, most taken with my trusty old Kodak Instamatic pocket camera that went with me everywhere. Other photos in my collection were taken by my friend, fellow fisher, and Lab associate Carl Mamay. Carl was the Lab's staff photographer. I had the slides digitized and the photos scanned so that I could enhance and edit them on my PC. So, this book project became a collaboration of the scenes captured 30–35 years ago by camera, the memories and emotions captured twenty-five years ago by old typewriter and aging biologist, and the technology of today that enabled me to combine those with the observations and views that only time can render.

I am amazed and thankful for those old slides and photos, because they also enable me to tell these stories a bit differently and to an entirely new and different audience. I have converted many of those digitized slides into PowerPoint presentations and use them in the public schools in Maryland for talks on environmental science, environmental protection and stewardship, and marine biology careers. In the 1970s, when I was taking those slides with my pocket camera, never did I envision that 35 years hence I would still be using them, and to educate young people. Carl Mamay's photos made me look good during public and professional society presentations while I was on the East End in the 1970s, and they still are doing so today, even after the Lab's demise in 1982, and Carl's passing in 2000. Thanks, Bub.

When a decent draft of the manuscript was completed in 2007, I sought the advice and comment on it from two old friends on the East End, both of whom figure into the stories and adventures captured here. Byron Young is a fisheries and wildlife biologist extraordinaire with whom I associated for several years. Now retired from the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation, Byron lives yet on the East End and continues to be involved in local

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conservation and environmental matters, now volunteering his experience, time and talents. Edwin Sherrill is a baymen with much experience in both fishing and local government. I asked Byron and Ed to read my draft manuscript for factual accuracy and to offer comment about any matter therein. I did not ask either to agree with anything I wrote or with any of my observations, conclusions, or recommendations. I really wanted a sanity check on my recollections of the 1970s on the East End, especially regarding the commercial fishing community. Byron and Ed offered many comments and much constructive criticism, which I considered during the completion of the manuscript. They are friends, indeed, whom I much admire and whose council I very much appreciate. The ideas, observations, conclusions, and recommendations in this book, however, remain mine solely and I assume all responsibility for any mistakes that may have survived.

This book recounts the fishing community and many of the fishes I encountered on the East End as I observed them in the 1970s. I have not attempted to describe, or to annotate, in detail the history of the several centuries old fishing community there. That was done admirably and wonderfully by Peter Matthiessen in his 1986 book *Men's Lives: The Surfman and Baymen of the South Fork*. John Cole, in his 1978 book *Striper: A Story of Fish and Man*, also discusses aspects of the background and history of the East End baymen, principally the ocean haul seiners. Both Matthiessen and Cole actually were baymen and fished on the East End, principally on the South Fork in the waters of East Hampton Town. They fished during the 1950s with the generation of baymen who are the parents and grandparents of some of those with whom I fished and write about here. My experiences were not as a wage-earning and "producing" bayman, as were Matthiessen and Cole, but as a marine biologist studying the marine environs and having the privilege of working beside many wonderful baymen, and other people on Long Island, principally in the 1970s and a bit in the 1980s.

On August 9, 2007, the *East Hampton Star* contained an obituary of bayman Calvin Lester. He died of cancer at age 54. I knew Calvin as a young vigorous bayman in the 1970s who worked hard and earned the respect of the other baymen with whom he associated. I did not know Calvin well, but I was influenced by his vigor and his selflessness which I write about in chapter 2. I completed the first good draft of my manuscript, the one I sent to Byron Young and Ed Sherrill for review, before that August, 2007 obit on Calvin. When I opened *The Star* and saw the photo of Calvin on the obituary page, my heart just sank. He was among the last of the true East End baymen. A piece of the old East End passed with Calvin, I think, and I wept for both. I went back to my stories in chapter 2 that included Calvin and thought about revising them to indicate his passing. I decided not to, and I leave him very much alive here, as I remember him.

My story of people, community, and the environment on the East End in this book begins with a reflection from a visit I made there with my young family in 1986. It was a wonderful visit and allowed me to introduce my children to my East End friends. It also was an eye-opening moment during which I realized first hand, and for the first time, that the East End and its traditional fishing community were changing. The vigor of that community that I observed, and was part of, just 10–15 years earlier was waning. In the '70s, the vigor of the fishing community as I observed it was centered around: a robust local community of people, traditional fishermen and their families, who had been fishing on the East End for many generations; an ample and available natural supply of fish and shellfish resources; an active local Town Baymen's Association and a newly formed fishermen's seafood cooperative; cooperation among fishermen and scientists to study and conserve the fishery resources; and involvement of fishermen and some fishing organizations in local community affairs and government.



Restoration and Wholeness. Concord Point Light sits watch at the head of Chesapeake Bay, where the Susquehanna River meets the Bay at the town of Havre de Grace. I frequently stop and rest at Concord Point during my treks from Maryland to points north. I found the Light in 1980 and have watched as the Light and its keeper's house have been restored and opened as historic public treasures. During the time of that restoration process, the coastal striped bass fishery was closed so that the stock could be rebuilt as a public treasure. Since its erection in 1827, Concord Point Light has watched over the interaction of the River and the Bay and the myriad anadromous striped bass that have passed by en route to and from the spawning grounds there. Both the coastal striped bass stock and Concord Point Light now are restored and reopened. These important actions occurred because of people working together to steward their environmental commons.

The East End landscape was changing. It was burgeoning with new homes, large ones, many as second homes for non-residents. The cost of living was skyrocketing, leaving the local people in its wake. The marine and bay waters were changing, the fisheries resources and their conservation management were changing, and so too were the people who relied on them. Chapter 5 is my reflection on all of



Respect. During my family's return trip to the East End in 1986 I showed my daughters how to fish for snapper bluefish. My younger daughter proudly displays her catch, still on the hook, just removed from Accabonac Creek at Louse Point on Gardiner's Bay. Fishing is a good way to teach children about the relationship between people and the environment, and about the life cycle of marine animals and how to treat them humanely. It is an opportunity to teach about conservation, the rules that apply, why there are rules at all, and why just obeying the rules is not enough to steward the environment..

that. Several local publications that describe the East End's recent deteriorating environment and water quality, and which offer some societal actions to reverse them, are discussed. It pains me greatly to think that I may have chosen the correct subtitle for this book and the title for chapter 5, which relates the 1970s with the years since.

Finally, in chapter 5 and throughout this story, I offer many environmental observations, as well as what may be some environmental stewardship truths and principles. These truths seem to me to be universal ones for care and stewardship of both people and the environment of the East End, especially as related to fishers and their fishery resources. I offer these out of my profound love for that place and its people. One of these environmental stewardship truths is that the healing and wholeness of the people must precede the healing and wholeness of the environment and the natural resources on which the people depend. Only when people—all the people of the

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East End—are “in community” with each other, can they effectively work together to steward the things they hold in common, such as the environment and its natural resources.

The East End’s citizens need to strengthen their personal ethical relationships with each other and with the landscape and the sea. Conservation laws and regulations, that govern the people’s environmental behavior, offer only a minimum level of environmental protection. Just obeying the law is not enough. The people must go beyond the laws, with voluntary and personal ethical actions toward the environment, in order to fully steward and protect it.

Laws and regulations for protection of the environment also need to consider the human element and not just the natural element. Conservation laws need to be designed and enforced by government in ways that build human community, and not degrade it, while the environment is being nurtured and protected. While the laws are building, or rebuilding, the integrity of the environment, they need to support and enable the human community.

Only a “whole” people will work together altruistically and will affect positively the wholeness of the environment. People who live by the conservation laws and sacrifice for environmental healing and wholeness should be able to reap the rewards of a rebuilt, revitalized, or renewed environment and its natural resources. Sacrifice for environmental healing should lead to a strengthened human community, as well as sustainable natural communities. All the people who are connected in any way with the East End and its environment are stakeholders in its present and its future. All of these interested and affected people must come together as an extended community, working together altruistically, in order to affect beneficially the destiny of the East End. Our destinies are all entwined and all are one.

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