



Michael P. Dyer

Interviewer:

All right. This is Emily Reinl. I am here with Mike Dyer who is going to tell us a story. So go ahead, Mike.

Michael Dyer:

Hello. Good morning, Emily. It's good to be here. Yeah. I'm Mike Dyer. I'm the maritime curator here at the New Bedford Whaling Museum. But what I'm going to read, actually read today are some diary entries from my fishing experiences, game fishing, sport fishing in the region. I'll start with the introduction and then I'll read three entries.

So between 2015 and 2019, I have recorded my experiences sport fishing around Buzzards Bay from Hog Island to Horseneck Beach, including Fairhaven, Marion, and Dartmouth, as well as further abroad to the eastward on the shores of Cape Cod Bay and the Atlantic Ocean near Chatham, Mass. I included my periodic trips to the Susquehanna River in New York and Pennsylvania in late July several years. In Massachusetts, I fish on foot in the surf with both a spinning rod and a fly rod, as well as my Walker Bay eight-foot plastic rowboat. I posted these entries on my Facebook page, and they're meant to be read for both their enjoyment as well as documentary values.

7/14/19. You should have been here yesterday. Who hasn't heard that? Well, I was there yesterday and it was great. The thing is, I was the only person on the beach, which is sweet. That's how it ought to be, and that's how it was. Now look it, to be clear, I didn't catch a lot of fish yesterday. Hooked five, landed two, but they were nice, strong, big shoulder, picture-perfect stripers, honestly sought and fairly landed.

Off the bar, a fish broke in the very early half lake, seven gulls silhouetted their wings all out of sync. There it is. You know that feeling when you are where the fish are, throwing a black deceiver into the hole between the bar and the beach on a brand spanking new incoming tide with just enough pole to lift the fly clear of the bottom. Later the current gets stronger, so I mend out the belly of a long cast upstream to get a good drift, and these fish with proper game fish dignity and discrimination, appreciate this effort, that finesse and technique. Well, maybe they do, probably not actually. Probably they're just hungry, but the effort brought reward. So I like to think maybe it's me. Today is the day.

Well, you see, after years and years of experience and comparative research, looking at tides, winds, time of day, tackle, fly patterns, line weight, et cetera. I know where to go, where the fish are, and I can write this like some pompous and arrogant lying jackass because I went back to the same hole this morning and got skunked. Worse than skunked, I was attacked by birds and made it to flee. Not a lot of skillful dignity there.

7/13/19. 2:45AM. The cat woke me up and that's why I love the cat. It wasn't benevolence on his part. Silas knows from experience that sometimes on Saturday mornings he gets something fresh from the sea. Sometimes. So it's best to make sure that master gets up. I'm scanning my mental map over this fresh brew of coffee and listening to Scarlet Pogonia from Barton Hall, Ithaca, May 8th, 1977. Thinking is nice, could be an illusion, but I might as well try. Picturing exactly what all of my favorite places will look like at this tide, at this time of day, thinking through all the permutations.

As I get older, the permutations increase because I know differently with each season. It's low water on Cape Cod Bay and high water on Buzzards Bay, but I feel like fly fishing. So Cape Cod Bay it is. I know I'll catch fish on the fly where I probably won't catch fish spinning as I haven't been seeing fish. I could take the rowboat, which is fun, fish or no fish. But I like fly fishing, so I'm off to wait around in the shallows in the pale light of a summer dawn.

8/31/19. Fishermen got swept off the bar at the river mouth this morning. Just before sunup, I saw his light way



out in the rip on the west side. I was fishing on the east side. I'm into a striper and land the fish and look over and he's gone, vanished. The bar was empty where he'd been standing moments before. I was dumbfounded and kept looking around and scanning the murk for some sign of him, fooling myself. You'd need wings to get off that bar in anything less than 15 minutes, but I just kept looking because I couldn't believe the alternative.

The Coast Guard pulled him out an hour later and half a mile away. They took him to the Sandwich Marina and the fire rescue crew said he was alive. So I'm praying for him. Just about the worst thing I never saw. It's creepy enough out there in the dark on a big double tide. But when two people are on the bar and one of them disappears in the blink of an eye, it's quite literally unbelievable. He just disappeared. He was definitely taking a risk, being where he was.

He was wading in the rip that you're supposed to fish in. At a certain stage on a double low there the flow is four times normal just before it begins to slow down. Rocks as big as grapefruits bounced down that rip. I guarantee that he simply lifted one foot to move and got knocked down. There was a kayaker who deserves some serious credit in this story. This guy came shooting down the rip saying he heard calls for help, and I think, I'm not sure that he was able to get to the man.

I did not hear or see anything after the fishermen disappeared, as there was the water noise and broken water all around and low light. I hung around, all freaked out, I don't own a cell phone, watching and hoping he would come up, but he never did. People in the beach house on Salt Marsh Road heard him hollering and called 911. He was a long way out.

I'm afraid of the sea. Every step, every time. It's when you forget to be afraid that it sucks you under. It's easy to be careful when you're surfing a gale. It's easy to forget in a calm that beasts don't ever sleep.

Interviewer:

Do you know what? Was he okay in the end? Do you know?

Michael Dyer:

Yeah.

Interviewer:

Yeah?

Michael Dyer:

They rescued him. He was wearing waders and his waders filled up and he tried to get out of his waders, but he managed to keep afloat. He was a man in his seventies. I followed the search and rescue crew down to the marina to make sure he was okay. And I talked to the search and rescue guys and the cops. I was like, "I had no idea what to do." And they said, "Don't worry. You did exactly the right thing. You stayed put." So if I had had a cell phone, that would've been a different story. I didn't have a cell phone.

Interviewer:

Wow. So I know that, coincidentally, you and I are both not from here. We're both Pennsylvania actually. So when you first came to this area, I guess, was fishing something you were already interested in? Or was that something that became a hobby once you moved here?

Michael Dyer:

No, I've fished my whole life. I caught my first fish on a fly that I tied myself when I was 14. It's freshwater in Pennsylvania. When I moved up to the Kendall Whaling Museum in Sharon, there's some freshwater around, but it's mostly ponds and sort of not any rivers like the Susquehanna or beautiful streams like the yellow Breeches.



So you had to drive clear out to the Deerfield in western Massachusetts to get a really nice, beautiful flowing river. And then I met a guy, this was funny actually. I was fly fishing for pickerel in a swamp, literally a swamp, up in Sharon. And this guy came walking out of the woods with a camera and he was photographing me fly fishing for pickerel. He introduced himself and we became really good friends, and he's the one who told me that you could fly fish for striped bass in the salt water. I was like, "What? No, give me a break. You can't fly fish in the salt water."

He told me where to go. He said, "Go to the Buttermilk River below the bridge, above the Maritime Academy on an outgoing tide, and you can wade out there and fly fish for striped bass." So I did. I went and I got a 10 weight Pflueger fly rod on a Scientific Anglers System 2 10 weight reel and outfitted the whole thing and went over to the Buttermilk River. You know where the Buttermilk River is?

Interviewer:

I don't.

Michael Dyer:

It's down in Buzzards Bay, so you know where the Mass Maritime Academy? The Buttermilk River joins the Cape Cod Canal, and right there at the end of that peninsula is the Mass Maritime Academy, but that's not the canal. Where the Buttermilk River pours in, you can go back down to the office and we'll look at it on the map, that's pre-canal. So that's a very, very old intersection of waters there, and that's a beautiful place to fish.

And I caught fish. I was like, "Oh my God, this is so much fun." And I was hooked. I was just completely hooked. I can't remember if that was the year Jenny and I got married or the year before, but all I remember, Emily, was that I'm driving from Sharon to Cape Cod. That's a long drive, And I was doing it almost every day.

That was my life. I was so into it. I'd go to work, come home at five o'clock, eat some dinner, go to sleep, wake up at one o'clock in the morning, drive down to the Cape, fish until dawn, go to work, do the same thing. I did that every day. And at one point I'm driving up the interstate and I noticed all the leaves had changed and were falling off the trees. I was like, "Oh my God, it's almost winter time and I'm still doing this." It was very funny. It was a lot of fun, and it's been a lifestyle ever since. That was 1997.

Interviewer:

Great. Thank you very much. Anything else you want to add, whether about fishing in the area or anything else about living in the area before we wrap up?

Michael Dyer:

Well, it's just sports fishing in this region is a way of life for an awful lot of people, and it's not something we really talk about very much. Some people have very expensive boats that they take out, and some people fish with bait from a bridge. Some people fly fish, and some people spin fish in the surf. There's a guy here in New Bedford is really famous, striped bass fisherman.

I've been after him to do a Common Ground talk, and I don't think he's done it yet, but he's a famous guy. And what he does is he wears a wetsuit and he goes out in the middle of the night and wades out onto these rocks and fishes from rocks. And he catches 40 to 50 pound stripers in the night, he and his hardcore friends wearing these wetsuits that they go out and they fish.

So there's a lot to it in this area, but we don't really talk about it very much because it's commercial fishing. And let's face it, what most people think about fishing is they see empty, nasty, old bait containers on some bridge somewhere and that looks really boring as these people stand on these bridges as you drive by and you see them sort of dangling their line in their water. But no, there's a lot more to it, and it's a lot of fun living here.



Interviewer:

Great. Thank you.

Michael Dyer:

You're welcome.