



# Michael Taylor

It did not take me long from when I first arrived at my new place of work in New Bedford that our harbour and waterfront are what has made this City. So perhaps a good time to tell one of its many stories.

The Port has not always served us well. In the past ships leaving New Bedford created an ecological disaster to the worlds whale population and from which today we are only partly recovering. Some of our past sailings were sent on dubious whaling trips to Africa. So this short tale of mine belongs in this category.

As a retired ships Captain it seemed I was ideally suited to running a New Bedford refrigerated warehouse operation and was asked here to play my part at Maritime Terminal. Amongst my many responsibilities was to bring into the Port ships from around the worlds fruit growing regions for unloading and distribution around the US and Canada.

In 1985, on a cold January 6 o'clock morning awaiting the arrival of a vessel with about 4,000 tons of apples, pears from Argentina and oranges from Uruguay I was about to witness a sad side of the City I love.

A harbour pilot boarded the vessel at the Brenton Reef station and made for the Hurricane Barrier at the entry to our port. At 150 feet it seems narrow to most Captains but the Fairhaven/New Bedford swing bridge at 95 feet is a much more daunting challenge.

Our vessel cleared the bridge with only a couple of feet either side and with engines at dead slow swung to her port or left to round Fish Island on her way for a short distance to Maritime Terminal.

Lying alongside, what was then Frionor, lay a fuel barge used by the fishing industry and inline with the ship and close by where it would take another turn to port, along with tug boat assistance, to come alongside our facility.

The Pilot instructed that engines be stopped but that did not happen due to some malfunction and the fuel barge was getting much to close for comfort.

There is a function known as a double full astern maneuver which is used as a last resort in stopping a ship and which bypasses all safety systems but highly liable to cause serious engine damage.

With no alternative the Captain made the order and the propeller churned up a wall of the harbour waters along with mud.....quite a sight. The vessel stopped and the Tug took over and brought our vessel alongside.

What however was not expected was the rising to the surface of many plastic covered bales.

These bales of marijuana seemingly were transferred at sea onto fishing vessels who in the middle of the night proceeded to the North Terminal to unload their fish catches. The bales attached to weights, some with timers and buoys , were thrown overboard to be collected at a suitable date. Our ship had done it all for them.

New Bedford had two Cutters on station at the State Pier in those days but interested observers ashore were a lot quicker on the mark and within the couple of hours for the Authorities to arrive a lot seemingly disappeared. Final count was 350 pounds but we shall never know the real amount.