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Alongshore

BY JOHN BELL

Last Thursday morning a 15-foot blackfish ran into one of Nonnie Fields' gill nets. The mammal (for it's a whale, also known as a pothead or pilot whale) wrapped the net around itself and drowned. To recover his net, Nonnie towed the whale in, beaching it at the foot of Johnson Street. At low tide the next morning

he managed to salvage the net. Health Agent Fernando Gonsalves had told Nonnie he must tow the carcass out of the harbor on the next tide. When I learned that Nonnie had no use for it, I telephoned a message to Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution. If anyone there wanted an interesting specimen, Pro-

vincetown could supply one. Thursday afternoon Thomas Murphy, biologist at the New England Aquarium in Boston, phoned to say he wanted the skeleton for a museum display.

"Okay," I said, "But you'll need a truck to cart the remains to the dump and bury them. We can't leave any of it on the beach." Tom agreed, saying he would rent a U-Haul for the purpose and arrive at dawn Friday. "Is the whale still intact?" he asked. I said it was.

At daybreak Friday I went to Johnson Street parking lot with my camera. Tom had not arrived. I spent the morning watching people climb on the blackfish to have their pictures taken — one man even posed his unwilling dog there for a snapshot — and fending off small boys armed with hatchets. During my momentary absence, one of them had tried to hack out the lower jaw.

Just as the sun went down, Tom arrived in a panel truck with assistant Craig Ketchen. It was too late to begin the dissection. Because Craig had to be at work in Boston the next morning, off they went. "Be back at dawn Saturday," promised Tom.

He showed up at ten, having run out of gas and fixed a flat tire on the way. After measuring the blackfish, he set to work with big carving knives. The plan was to cut the animal into large chunks, drag them to the edge of the parking lot and take the skeleton out there, so the meat could be loaded into the van more easily for the trip to the dump.

It didn't work too well. So much meat had to be cut off the two-ton carcass before we could divide the backbone that by mid-afternoon the scene resembled a slaughterhouse. Then Fernando Gonsalves arrived in

a police cruiser with patrolman James Cook.

He was annoyed with everybody — me, Tom, Nonnie Fields and volunteer helper Paul Santos. Our plan to bury the meat at the town dump required a special permit, plus lime and gravel to cover everything. "I told Nonnie to tow this thing out!"

While Tom finished loading the skeleton into the van, Paul and I and young volunteers hauled all the meat back down the beach. Fire Chief James Roderick arrived with Bobby Perry moments after my call for help and hosed down the bloody parking lot, for which I'm grateful.

On a tip from Munro Moore, and directed by Ernest Tasha and Manuel Ferreira, I found enough old fishnet under Macara's Wharf to contain all the chunks in two tied-up bundles. Just as the rising tide reached them, I attached a tow line to them, using an old fish box to buoy the line. Gabriel Fratus said he would bring his skiff on Sunday's high tide and tow them to Long Point.

At sun-up Sunday the harbor was too rough for small boats. At Johnson Street no buoy marked my bundles. Returning at low tide, I searched the beach east and west. Nothing. Perhaps the blubber, or gas trapped in the innards, floated the bundles away. Or the constant shifting of our dredged sand buried them.

But I know one thing. Next time a whale comes ashore, my camera kit will contain a new and essential piece of equipment — some adhesive tape to put over my big mouth.

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In 1896 or seven the first and second grades at the Johnson Street schoolhouse were arranged by their teacher Albertina Young to have their picture taken. Judging by expressions, some thought it a lark, some a bore; their teacher looks as though she couldn't wait for the ordeal to end. In the front row, starting at left with the girl in white dress, were Reba Cook, Selina Williams and Catherine Jason (Catherine died very young; a later daughter, also named Catherine, is now Mrs. Catherine Cadose, sister of Philomena Jason Patrick); then Julia King, Georgie Worth,

Amelia Joseph, Edie LaCount, Helen Hubbard, Thelma Small, Jennie Bragg and Mary Roderick. Behind them, from left are Leslie Sprague, Willie Rich, Willie Silva, George Whorf, Ida Smith, George Oliver, Guy Hubbard, Leroy Cook, Warren Silva, Tony Gaspie, Frank Gaspie, Bert Cook, George Buck, Charlie Rich, George Oliver; the tow-headed boy centered in the window is Henry Pierce, brother of the late William Pierce; then John Silva, Edgar Edwards, Olive Lopes, Edna Jenkins, and their long-suffering teacher. Courtesy Mrs. Ida S. Cooper



PHOTO BY JOHN D. BELL

This adult blackfish or pilot whale, 15 feet long, was beached last week when it drowned after snarling a gill net. Dark grooves on its flank are rope cuts. Beyond, Stephen Colley, Capt. J. M. Fields and volunteer Domingo Perry work at untangling the net, valued at about \$80.