

Provincetown Advocate, Thursday, January 22, 1976

## The son of a fisherman remembers

# 'Courage, courage to earn a living'

The following is an edited transcription of one of a series of oral histories available in the Provincetown Library. The oral history was done by Alice Joseph, librarian. This transcript was prepared by Charles Boyle.

My name is Joseph Nunes, born in Provincetown April 13, 1894. Mr. Antone Nunes came from the island of the Azores in 1888, on a whaling ship manned by Captain Madison. He brought my dad into Provincetown and registered him as an American citizen. Antone Nunes was one of the best fishermen that ever sailed out of Provincetown to the Grand Banks with the schooner *Harvester*.

They would spend a whole summer fishing out of dorys and when they came back in the fall they'd have to put the codfish on flakes to dry in the sun. They worked night and day and slept with their clothes on in bunks. They had to live on fish which they caught. Chowders and potatoes and so forth.

They had to row the small boat out and drop fishing lines along the bottom of the ocean and every two feet, four feet in fact, was dangling a hook with bait to catch the fish. And that bait had to be placed into these hooks and there'd be probably a hundred in each barrel. And they had to stand watches. It was constant working 24-hours-a-day all summer long.

And mind you, these ships were manned by sails and the wind. No power. I was on one of those trips...I had the experience. They'd have to pull in the sails when the winds were too strong or let out on the sails when there was no wind at all. It took days to travel to the Newfoundland Banks.

Those men worked night and day for \$150 for the season. And that was all the money that they'd earn in a whole year. They'd have to live on rice and fish. If it hadn't been for clams, quahogs and fish chowder, I wouldn't be around here today.

My dad, after a while sent for my Mother to come over to this country. It took about two months to make the voyage. He was very happy with Mother being over here and worked night and day going on these schooners on fishing trips, gone for two weeks to a month or more, and then coming home and being able to sit down with Mother and enjoy life.

The fishing business was a very tiresome, very hard labor. Dad went fishing in the coldest kinds of weather. In those days they sat on a box in the back, steering the sail ship, and it was very cold, and Dad died from exposure, from the cold, coming in around Long Point in Provincetown it was a tremendous shock to Mother.

From that day on Mother had to go out and work and scrub. We boys had to go out and pick coal on the beach, dig clams and quahogs, so we could have something to eat, go down to the wharf and do what they used to call bumming for a fish. The fishermen were always very kind. They always gave us a fish. And



Joe Nunes

Advocate photo by Gene Fedorko

we'd come home and clean that fish up and Mother would put it in a frying pan, cook it up, and it would taste like the best steak in the world.

Mother could make a chowder out of most anything. She brought over anise seeds and planted them in the yard and they came out green. She'd make green soups. Mother could just bake bread, and oh, my, how tasty she could bring it out. Molasses was very cheap at that time so we were brought up on bread and molasses for breakfast. Mother would fry dough in a frying pan in

lard and make flippers. Linguica came from the pigs that Mother raised in the backyard. The intestines of the pigs was filled with meat and it had a lot off pepper in it. It was a beautiful meal, on Sunday, to come home and have linguica and potatoes and flippers.

Mother was always talking about studying in school. And she was always saying "Cour-adge, cour-adge" in Portuguese. It's courage in English. You need "Courage, courage to earn a living. You must have an education." She insisted upon my studying every night, under an old kerosene lamp, in order to become an aware American. She always preached Americanism. It was to her the most beautiful country in the world. That I should have an education free! She kept talking about studying, studying. "Studare," in Portuguese. "Studare."

When I started in school at Gertrude Snow's class, I couldn't speak a word of English. She was so patient with me and all the children. She was one of the finest American English teachers I have ever heard. If I speak the English language clearly, it was due to Gertrude Snow. I owe everything to her, because she insisted upon poetry and language.

The greatest thrill after coming out of school was to listen to George Washington Reidy, the town crier, coming up the boardwalk with his bell, saying "Hear ye, hear ye, your full attention is desired. There will be a dinner in the Methodist Church this evening. Come one, come all. All are invited." He would go up and down along the boardwalk and would stop and ring his bell at every door, singing out the topics of the day. And he made it so interesting that everybody would stop, every horse and wagon would stop on the street.

During my school days I had to go out every afternoon after school and peddle *The Advocate*, and find jobs to do chopping wood and doing errands, and going out picking coal; there was always work to do.

We boys were very poor, and we had to work very hard, shoveling sand, peddling fish, digging clams and

quahogs and selling them from house to house, trying to get hold of some money. Working in cold storage plants and on call 24 hours a day when the boats would come in with the fish from the traps. They would ring a bell and let us out of school so we could go to the plants in the freezing wind to clean the fish and freeze them. Mackerel, codfish, haddock...whiting was the great fish for the poor people to eat...all was put in pans and frozen like a cake of ice.

And Mother had to work very, very hard, picking cranberries, picking blueberries and then selling them, in order to bring up three children. And she saw to it that we got an education in grammar school.

I got my first job working for a Dr. Curley who had built a garage on Commercial Street. I studied the automobile business and became a mechanic.

Where the Seamen's Savings Bank is now, was the garage that I worked in. Dr. Curley demanded that I'd open the doors of that garage at 7 in the morning and I had to work till 6 o'clock at night. I got a dollar a day. I had to wash cars, repair automobiles. If there wasn't anything to do in the garage he'd send me over to cut the lawn or to cut wood in the basement of his house.

This was only a summer job, so after summer I was out of a job. I went to Boston and got a job as a mechanic and went to school nights and I got a license to drive.

I came back the following summer and I started in the taxi business with a Model-T Ford. The car cost \$350. I started the first taxi in Provincetown.

In 1917 I enlisted in the service. After the war it was very difficult to find a job so I started in the taxi business again. Then the Depression came in and you couldn't find a quarter anywhere. With the old Ford, I put new tires on it, and I found that if I put on oversized tires, and lowering the tire pressure, the air pressure, you could go around on the beach.

I went out picking up driftwood, and then the thought came to me—at this time I was married—and I said to Ruth Sherman Nunes, "I'm going to start a new ride—Over the Dunes, On the Dunes, with Joe Nunes." And she said, "You're just nuts! You never can do it!"

Well, I got someone to make out a sign, I put it out on the street in front of the New York Store and I started with the slogan, "Ride the Dunes with Joe Nunes." I had to sell the ride to people as they walked along the boardwalk on Commercial Street, and I had six beautiful ladies, schoolteachers, asking about the ride, and I said, "I have a sunset trip. And I'll give you a lecture on the way. I'll make it very interesting."

So I charged them two dollars a person and then I took them out, dropped off at Race Point Station onto the beach and rode along the beach at sunset. The most beautiful sight! We went up over the Peaked Hills Bar Station and up over the dunes to watch the sun set over the ocean.

On the way back we found a beach party going on. It was Eugene O'Neill. Eugene O'Neill was having a beach party and he had some beautiful ladies there, and his friends, and they were all in the nude! And boy were they having a party! So I drove up with these girls and I introduced them to Eugene O'Neill and he said, "You know, Joe Nunes, you spoiled my privacy out here, out at Peaked Hill Bars, by bringing these people out here, over the dunes." He didn't like it very well but he was a good sport about it.

The ride "Over the Dunes with Joe Nunes" was a great success. And Ruth Sherman, my wife, helped me because she was such a wonderful driver, and she could keep people entertained, that full Ford rolled constantly along the beach.

At the end of the season I thought it would be nice to take my wife on a nice cruise through the Caribbean. That was the most enjoyable honeymoon of my lifetime. We went to Cuba—at that time it was wide open—and we went to the Hotel Nacional.

In my room was a bathroom with two toilets, and we got all dressed up and we were ready to go out and all of a sudden I had to use one of those toilets and it sprayed right up onto my very clean white shirt. I looked down and it was called a doucher. I traveled to Detroit, New York and everywhere else and I had never seen one of