



*“We probably have more bay beaches than any other town. I think the beaches, the ponds, the ocean, are just so beautiful.”*

*—Nathan “Nick” Nickerson, Eastham, Arnold’s Lobster & Clam Bar owner*

My earliest recollections of Eastham are probably in the mid-to-late 1950s. Back then, there were very few homes—I don’t think Cape Cod had really become the tourist center that it was in the years to come. My family was very poor; my father had a construction company. It was probably the only construction company at the time. They had it easy in that regard, not too much competition. The population had to be in the hundreds.

The community was very poor back then. It was still kind of an agrarian society. My brother and I used to pull turnips in the field, out where Main Street Mercantile is right now. It used to be owned by Raymond Brackett—he and his dad were the premiere farmers in the area. I remember the day Kennedy died; after school I was down there pulling turnips for Raymond.

Back then, we were hungry—we weren’t starving, we were metaphorically hungry. We didn’t have a lot of money, but we were happy enough. But you had to work if you wanted to eat. That certainly built up my work ethic along with everyone else growing up at that time.

I remember back in the ‘60s when (Arnold’s) was Gertrude’s Beach Box, and it was just a little hole in the wall. It

was fun to come up here and chat with her. She was someone who just told it like it is. I remember I saw a kid holding onto the counter, kicking underneath, and she said something like, “You mess that up, buddy, and you’re gonna be working here.” She and her husband loved this work, loved this place. They sold it later on to some people who didn’t really do the place justice, and they put it up for sale two years later, when I was looking for a place after graduating from college. And I wound up buying it. I paid \$85,000 for it.

When we started here, we’d work at this place sometimes until 3 a.m., 4 a.m. My wife and I would be getting home when the sun was coming up. And then I would work all day at my father’s company, working construction. I mean, this place is successful, no question about it, but it took 30 years to get here. Thirty years of hard work, setbacks, problems, worry.

People go by now and say this place is a gold mine. Well, it’s a gold mine if you work hard. I’m here every day and night all summer long. Once in a while, I’ll take a night off, but that’s about it. You’ve just got to be here every day.

I always remember my grandmother telling me, “Charge

what you have to, but make the portions plenty.”

The town has grown by leaps and bounds. We serve—and I’m estimating—maybe 2,000 or 2,500 people a day sometimes. Maybe half of them have never been to Arnold’s before, so I have to assume they’re tourists coming down here. Then of course you’ve got your loyal customers that come in year after year, month after month, week after week, and sometimes day after day. And sometimes they come even more than once a day—I can’t believe it, but they do.

The locals, they’re not going to wait in line. They wait ‘til fall, ‘til the offseason, then we’ll see them. They come in the spring then they’ll say, “We’ll see you in September.”

One of the few things I think the government has done right is the national parks. I think at the time that the National Seashore came in, there were a lot of people who were nervous about the park and how it was going to be controlled, including me. Obviously, now we see what would have happened otherwise, and we are so grateful.

We probably have more bay beaches than any other town. I think the beaches, the ponds, the ocean, are just so beautiful. We have a lot of shoreline here on the bayside. That has attracted a lot of people. The problem is that we don’t really have a town center because the highway divides us right in half. The Eastham Windmill Weekend parade goes right down the highway instead of a main street. That’s part of what the town misses, but the benefits certainly outweigh the liabilities.