

ORLEANS
Cape & Islands Voices

John Murphy, Sr.
RESTAURATEUR & ARTIST



I was in the Navy. I was stationed in Newport, Rhode Island on a destroyer from 1959 to 1961. I had a cousin, Frank, who spent summers here during law school in the middle 1950s. I came up to visit Frank in 1959, and it was my first visit to Cape Cod. Unless you count passing through the Cape Cod Canal a couple of times on a ship.

I spent a great day here. I was really quite taken by it. Frank took me down to Nauset Beach, and it was just such a gorgeous place. I came up again in 1960 for Labor Day weekend and I met several people that I became good friends with. We had a lot of fun going to parties on Nauset Beach at night. There weren't any drugs or problems of that sort. With the exception of having a bonfire and a bunch of beers, it was pretty laid back.



I ended up at the Butera School of Art on Beacon Street in Boston. That was for a short time because I got a job at the restaurant Anthony's Pier 4. I tried doing both. It was a good job at the largest restaurant in the world at the time in terms of volume and in dollars. When I realized that if I became successful in commercial art it would be 10 years before I would be making close to what I was making at that time, I made a decision to pack my art supplies away and drop out.

I was working for the Sheraton Hotel Corporation for a few years. I transferred to Boston eventually, and I had an apartment in Brookline. I was taking the subway in to work one day. I had the never-ending echo in my head of conversations I overheard in the early 60s, of people buying real estate, buying a retirement home with 15 more years or 20 years until they retire, talking about how they can't wait, blah blah blah. I had that running through my brain. I was looking at my reflection in the window, of me wearing a three-piece suit. And I said to myself, is this really what I want to do? I'd really rather be in Orleans.



I came down April Fool's Day of 1969 and opened up. In any establishment,



Night At the Land Ho!
by John Murphy
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you have to serve food, even if it's a bar. They used to sell these infrared sandwiches—you'd put them in an oven and heat 'em in tin foil. I started serving hamburgers, hot dogs, and sandwiches. I was the cook/bartender/waiter—there was no staff besides myself.

My cousin Frank was an attorney out here, and he'd come in every day for lunch and sit at the far end of the bar. Whatever the special was that day, he'd have it. Say it was beef stew—I'd walk down the bar and say, "Who's got the beef stew?" And he'd sit there and in his gruff voice say, "That's mine." I'd put it down and ask him how it was and he'd always say, "It's great!" And it would be a chain reaction of everyone else ordering a bowl of stew.

The stuffed clam was the first appetizer I ever had. One of the local fishermen was a little rowdy one night in the bar and I threw him out. My policy was if you're thrown out, you don't come back.

It wasn't malicious, he didn't attack anybody, it was just noise. Well, the next morning I came in and there's a bag of sea clams at the back door with a note: "I hope you'll forgive me. I'm sorry." So I brought the clams in and they were huge. I shucked them by hand outside—it took me all day to shuck them. My hands were covered in blood and blisters, I got 'em all clean, picked out the meat I wanted, chopped it. I bought Ritz crackers, I got all the butter and all the spices and seasonings. I made 185 or 195 stuffed clams, and I sold them in two days. And I thought to myself, I'm not doing that again.

A few years later someone started selling clams already chopped, already cleaned. That took the big labor part out of it and the rest was the recipe and being consistent with them. We make about 300 or 400 a week in the summer.

Oh yeah, I let the fisherman come back.

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After I dropped out of school, I went close to 20 years without touching a paintbrush. Robert Douglas Hunter, the famous artist, and his wife, Liz, who is the director of the Cape Cod Museum of Art in Dennis, invited us to an open house. That night, Bob grabbed me and said, "I want you to get your paint box and meet me at Fort Hill tomorrow morning at 5:30." I said, "Bob, I haven't touched a brush in 20 years." He said, "Don't worry about it."

One of the highlights of my painting career was the day I painted with Neil Drevitson and Bob Hunter. We were painting in Fort Hill—I call it Bob's Monet's Garden. The colors are always changing, and it's an easy place to get to and a fun place to paint. Of course, all the passersby are critiquing us, which is always a lot of fun. Especially the woman who came up in a Cadillac with her hair in curlers, a cigarette sticking out of her mouth, and a little dog under her arm. We had been working on these paintings for three days, and she came over in her slippers, and all of the sudden I realized she was complimenting me on my painting. I pointed at Bob and Neil's work and I said, "Well, you know, those are really wonderful." She said, "Well, they're alright." So I just told Bob to bring up the foreground (laughs).



Our Daily Bread
by John Murphy
limited-edition giclée prints
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Orleans hasn't changed a heck of a lot. People still respect your privacy. Orleans has, or at least had a few years ago, the highest education of any city in Massachusetts. People who went to grad schools, got doctorates, and everything else—there's a lot of brain power in this town. We also have the highest average age of our citizens. And some of them must be doing well. We have a population of 7,500 people and eight banks. 🏦