



History of Barnacle Billy's in Perkins Cove, Ogunquit, Maine

By William R. Tower, III (Tim)

Our father bought **Barnacle Billy's** in 1960 from **Leon & Lillian Perkins**. It was called the **Brush & Needle** then, a shop that sold art supplies, women's clothing and local trinkets including dried starfish and sand dollars. **Leon** was a striker on our father's 40' harpoon tuna boat, the **Isabelle J.** when he wasn't fishing out of his own lobster boat in Perkins Cove. Our father, **Billy**, used to fish out of Perkins Cove as well during the early to later '40s on the "**IJ**". Later, our father had the **Isabelle J. II** built in Bass Harbor by **Chummy Rich**. This boat was an eastern rig design that he used for seining the herring, mackerel and pogies found in the coastal areas of Maine and New England. After the four of us were born, **Meg**, two years after me and **Court & Cathy** two years after **Meg**, in 1955, **Billy & Bunny**, our father & mother, decided that there wasn't enough money in fishing to raise such a family. **Billy** sold the **IJ II** in 1957 and started working as a salesman for a box company out of Boston, Massachusetts called **Rand Whitney** owned by the **Kraft** family. (**Bob Kraft** came to the restaurant to give me his personal condolences after **Billy's** passing in 2013.) The idea of a restaurant came in 1959, materializing in 1960 when **Leon & Lillian** sold the building and the land "from the thread of the stream to the high tide mark in *Oarweed Cove*" to **Billy**.

I was nine years old when **Barnacle Billy's** opened in 1961. At the time, I started working there bussing tables and lobstering out of my first lobster boat, a 12' skiff. Later, the rest of us, including **Meg, Court & Cathy** also worked there. Ogunquit was a dry town then. It wasn't until the later '60's that alcohol was introduced. It started as wine & beer. Later, the full bar was initiated. In 1967, the deck over Perkins Cove was added to the existing building. Still later, one evening, the family and part of the crew came together to invent the **Barnacle Billy's** rum punch. Our mother's recipe won the evening. The same ingredients and portions are used today.

The largest storm to ever impact **Barnacle Billy's** was the February storm of 1978. I was tub trawling for groundfish that winter out of Perkins Cove on my boat, the **Mary E.** Had it not been for **Jack Ladderbush** coming down to the **Billy's** and cutting holes in the floor of the dining room, we would have lost the restaurant. As it was, the storm moved the building 18". Again, **Jack Ladderbush** got the building back on its foundation and reinforced it against future storms.

The next building up the street, separated from **Billy's** by a lawn & garden, was the **Whistling Oyster**, a fine dining restaurant that had been there since before I was born in 1951. The original building burned down in the late '70's. This was replaced by a much larger building with a full kitchen and a much more efficient dining space including a lounge and an upstairs dining area. It was sold to a concern out of Portland, Maine called "**Channel Crossing**" in 1986. This concern owned two other restaurants in the Portland area. After two years, they lost the building to the bank. The bank in turn put it on auction. **Billy** was the highest bidder, buying the building and the property. This opened as **Barnacle Billy's, Etc.** in 1989.

At that time, the two most important people in the two restaurants were our father, **Billy**, and **Paul "Hez" Haseltine**. In order to get "Etc." up and running, **Hez** sometimes slept in the restaurant when work went too late. He had been the manager at **Billy's** before and worked up the ranks with me starting as a busboy. Owning **Etc.** made **Hez** the General Manager of the combined businesses. To this day he is the best manager that has ever worked at **Barnacle Billy's**.

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Today both **Billy's** (now called "**Original**" to the family) and **Barnacle Billy's, Etc.** sit side by side overlooking Perkins Cove with a beautifully maintained flower garden between. **Original** remains the same as it was since its inception. The system is the same where food is ordered when you walk in, you are given a number, your number called when your order is ready. You find your own table. We have cocktail service in the dining room, deck, upper deck and patio. It is extremely casual. **Etc.**, on the other hand, is our full-service restaurant, also casual, with hosts/hostesses and full wait service. Where at **Original** we have no fried food, steak or fish dishes, at **Etc.** we have fried clams, haddock, scallops & shrimp as well as broiled haddock, swordfish, salmon and stuffed shrimp. We also serve New York sirloin and tenderloin steaks. Neither restaurant takes reservations.

We can't wait to see you at Billy's!