



Delivering Fish

RUSSELL E. NEWELL tells a tale of Ocracoke

It all started when David Esham and I set a mullet net. Now, a mullet net is a big round net with a lead-in; the fish swim down the lead-in and can't get out. We came back the next day, and the net was loaded with mullet. So many, actually, they busted the market. Everybody had mullet. You couldn't give 'em away, much less sell 'em.

David Esham called a man in Philadelphia saying, "You said you wanted some fish. We got 'em. Get a truck and come on down."

The man showed up about five in the evening with the truck, and it was a big truck — wooden sides, canvas top. David Esham and I took a seine net, dipped the mullet out of waist-deep water and dragged 'em back up to where the truck was. James Barry and the man loaded the truck. Unbeknown to us, the man had a half-gallon of Jack Daniels liquor. They were taking sips as they

loaded the truck. On the last pull, we came in, the man was asleep in the truck and James Barry was asleep on the canvas on top of the fish.

David hollered at them, "Come on to the restaurant and get something to eat. You got to have that truck in Pennsylvania before daylight." But the man woke up and drove away, not knowing that James Barry was on top of the canvas.

They got up to about Washington, D.C. The truck stopped at a light and James Barry got off to ask where they were. The truck pulled away, leaving James Barry in Washington, D.C., dressed in t-shirt and cut-off jeans and bare-footed.

James Barry hitchhiked home. He said, "I freshened meself up. Turned me t-shirt wrong side out to kill the odor of fish."

Some guy told me that he saw James Barry in Norfolk, knew him, and gave him a ride to the Hatteras ferry. He was about three days getting home.

I asked him, "Where in the world have you been?"

He said, "Just out deliverin' fish." •

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Russell E. Newell, Jr., moved back home to Roxboro this year after spending 30 years on Ocracoke Island — the first 20 part-time, the last ten full-time. He misses the beach but says it's "great to be back in the bushes."