



**“Nothing is more memorable than a smell. One scent can be unexpected, momentary and fleeting. . .**

Interview & Story  
by Jessica Westerland

# Jim's Clam Bar

the early days of Wildwood



Inez Neill stirring up a pot of chowder



1949, Jim poses in front of his new Fish Market at 635 Spruce Ave in North Wildwood

ANGLESEA'S TOP SECRET RECIPE REVEALED

## Jim's Clam Chowder



**Ingredients**

- 1/2 Gallon Clams with juice  
(37 medium/31 Large)
- 2 1/2 lbs. Potatoes
- 1 Lb. Onions
- Oil
- 1/4 Stalk Celery
- 2 Carrots
- 1/4 Tsp. Cayenne red Pepper
- 1 Qt. Water (approx)
- 1 C. Flour

**Directions**

1. Dice Potatoes
2. Chop carrots in blender.
3. Chop celery in blender.
4. Combine above ingredients with water in large pot and bring to a boil.
5. Chop onions in blender, drain juices, and saute in oil. Add to pot and cook for 10 minutes.
6. Add pepper.
7. Add ground clams. Bring to boil, stirring down until smooth. Scoop off foam.
8. Mix flour with a little water, stirring until there are no lumps.
9. Stir flour mixture into pot, remove from heat as soon as chowder comes to a boil.

**Serves: 2 Gallons**

Campfires at night. Being tucked in to bed in the evening. Family get togethers. Reunions with family and friends. Christmas and holidays. What is one thing that these things all have in common? Stories! Stories can sometimes teach us more than dry facts and figures, because they are personal, and passed down from person to person.

Jim Neill is one man with quite a story to pass down. He is a true local; he grew up here, made his living here. Jim is the oldest of 11 siblings, and is 90 years old. He is still mowing and raking his lawn as well as his neighbor's lawns. He has more energy than many people decades younger.

Jim has always made his livelihood from the sea. He was a commercial fisherman from age 16 to 30. He used to be the captain of the Nelly Bly, a ferry boat that would carry passengers from Anglesea to Stone Harbor before the Ocean Drive bridge was built. He spent several years in the army. He also worked at Snow's factory for 12 years, working hard shucking oysters.

In the summer of 1949, Jim decided to go into his own business, and he built himself a home and a building that became Jim's Fish Market at 635 Spruce Ave in North Wildwood. When he built the building, there was only one house on the block, and it was surrounded by sand, scrub and low bushes. It was a small, comfortable store, with a mahogany bar that held 6 customers. He sold half shells of clams, muscles and oysters, and also bait and tackle.

Previously he was only open in the summer, and he worked at Snow's factory the rest of the year. When Snow's factory moved farther away, Jim kept the store open longer, into October. The one thing he didn't sell was clam chowder.

"A car pulls up, the people in it ask me 'You have Clam Chowder?' I says 'no,'" Jim said. "Half an hour later, another one pulls up..." asking the same question. "So I turned to my friend and said 'I've been hearing this for ten

years, the first day I opened this place, I think the first customer that came in wanted to know where he could buy Clam Chowder."

So Jim took action. He took a crow bar and cleaned the inside of the place out. He put 14 stools in, and told his wife they were going to sell Clam Chowder. He used the winter off season to put in a new kitchen, and then they reopened as Jim's Clam Bar. The only problem was, he had no idea how to make Clam Chowder.

One time Jim came home from work to find his wife and her friend, one of their waitresses, waiting for him. Their friend was "standing there with a big grin on her face. She had made half a pot of chowder. But boy, you could never sell that stuff. It was terrible. She had everything in it but the kitchen sink," Jim laughed.

"So I start taking stuff out of it [the recipe]. After a weeks time, an elderly woman came in. She was cranky looking, looked like she could bite a nail in half. She was sitting there, by herself, and wanted a bowl of chowder. After she gulped it down, I asked her how she liked the chowder. She said, "Boy that's good, but you charge too much!" Back then it was 25 cents for two bowls of chowder. So I told her I wouldn't charge her for that bowl of chowder, and since then I never changed the recipe."

After the chowder became such a hit, he had to stay open year round because he got so much business. He sold oyster and clam stews, as well as all of the clams, oysters and mussels in the shells that he sold before. He usually made 16 gallons of chowder and stews a day, sometimes even more. "Tons of people from all over came down for my stews as well as the chowder, especially the old timers."

For 32 year Jim's Clam Bar prospered. He was written up in Philadelphia newspapers. Jim's sister even told him a rumor was going around that Campbell's soup took a sample, "but they just couldn't get the potatoes to stay solid," like Jim could.

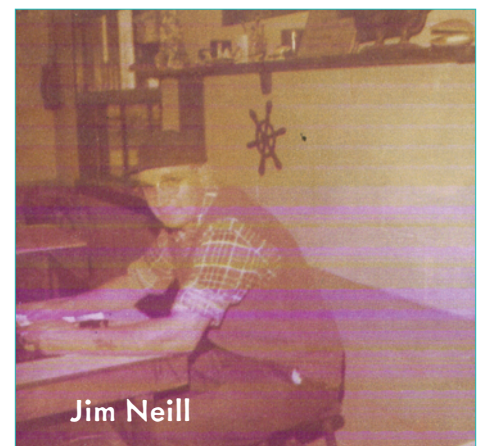


**"Jim Neill"**

Above ~Portrait of my older brother" by Charles Neill



1942, U.S. Army Tec Sergeant >



Jim Neill

The best day he ever had was one Memorial Day, when a nor'easter was blowing through. All of the people were forced indoor, and Jim sold 28 gallons of chowder, as well as other stews and 10,000 clams. Jim usually woke up at 4 a.m. to prepare the store, and was open from 11 a.m. - 6 p.m. He was sold out by 3 in the afternoon. "I could have sold more, but I just didn't have it," Jim laughed. "I had to close the next day as well, because there was nothing left to sell, I was cleaned out!"

He closed a little after his wife's stroke, and sold the house as well as Jim's Clam Bar around 1985. Jim's Clam Bar still stood there until a





## Jim's Clam Bar

. . . Continued

few years ago around 2006, when it was torn down to put up sets of new condominiums.

You can read about the history of Wildwood; how it looked, what was happening, and what businesses thrived in books, magazines, or on T.V. We learn this way all of the time, even on a daily basis. However, there is something more personal about learning the past from someone that lived through it, by their stories. It captures the imagination and lingers longer, like stories we were told as children. This story from a Wildwood local, about our Wildwood locale, is no exception.



Behind Jim's wife, Inez, is North Wildwood Blvd. before it was completely changed in the 1990's.

Jessica Westerland graduated Valedictorian of ACCC in 2007, and went on to Rowan University to graduate in 2009 with a Bachelor's Degree in Journalism. She is enjoying her first freelance stint with The Sun. She is employed as a teller with TD Bank in Wildwood. You may know her as 'the girl with the long hair.'

JIM'S CLAM BAR, ANGLESEA  
Poem by David Hovan Check  
of Wildwood Crest, Spring 1978

From the collection "In Quest of the Endless Vacation", a poetic collage of shore-resort life which David tries to capture the heart & soul of some of the more unique facets of the Jersey Shore. Jim's Clam Bar was one of those special spots.



### JIM'S CLAM BAR

Clams on the half-shell! Steamers! Stews!  
Chowder that sticks to the soul!  
And clams to go! By the bushel! . . . the dozen!  
Little Neck! Cherrystone!  
Clams! Clams! And nothing BUT clams!  
Hewn  
    from the sweat and sinew  
    of one man's simple vision,  
    clams raked  
    from the waters of a clean bay,  
the frame  
    of home and shop,  
    both structure and demeanor,  
    constructed with  
        one, bare set of hands. . .  
All the character and spirit  
    of an older, more rugged America,  
    of a place where  
    the pride of self-sufficiency  
    was once enough  
    to sustain a dream,  
built  
    into the practical ambiance,  
    the raw wooden counter and stools,  
    the sacred chowder and stew recipes,  
    the mollusk bins  
        and congenial, self-taught service. . .  
A rare marker  
    of a man  
    who took the lessons of the land  
    to heart,  
    and survived in an era  
        that valued  
            quiet achievement,  
            cool perseverance,  
            plain self-satisfaction,  
            and even courage.

