

# Interview with Danny Pichney

by Tim Coleman

Part I

**Editor's Note:** Danny Pichney has been making bass plugs for 30 years. His creations are wooden extensions of a thoughtful, imaginative guy who is a master at his craft and a very successful student of the science of bass fishing.

**Q. How long have you been making your plugs?**

**A. Thirty years.**

**What got you started? Didn't you like what was on the market?**

**A. No, I just like to find things I could catch fish with. Also at the time I started you couldn't get some of the lures. The money wasn't around to buy the lures. I liked to catch fish with things that were my own ideas.**

**What happened then? Did guys see you using them and ask you to make them a couple?**

**A. I made the lures for friends. There used to be a group that used to fish together. If I found a lure that worked, I made it for friends. It was never made to be put on the market. Maybe seven or eight years ago I started making lures for people who asked for them. It started out with a half dozen here, and a half dozen there; soon it seemed like I was making lures for everybody. I couldn't keep up with it.**

**Q. Isn't it now a part-time business for you?**

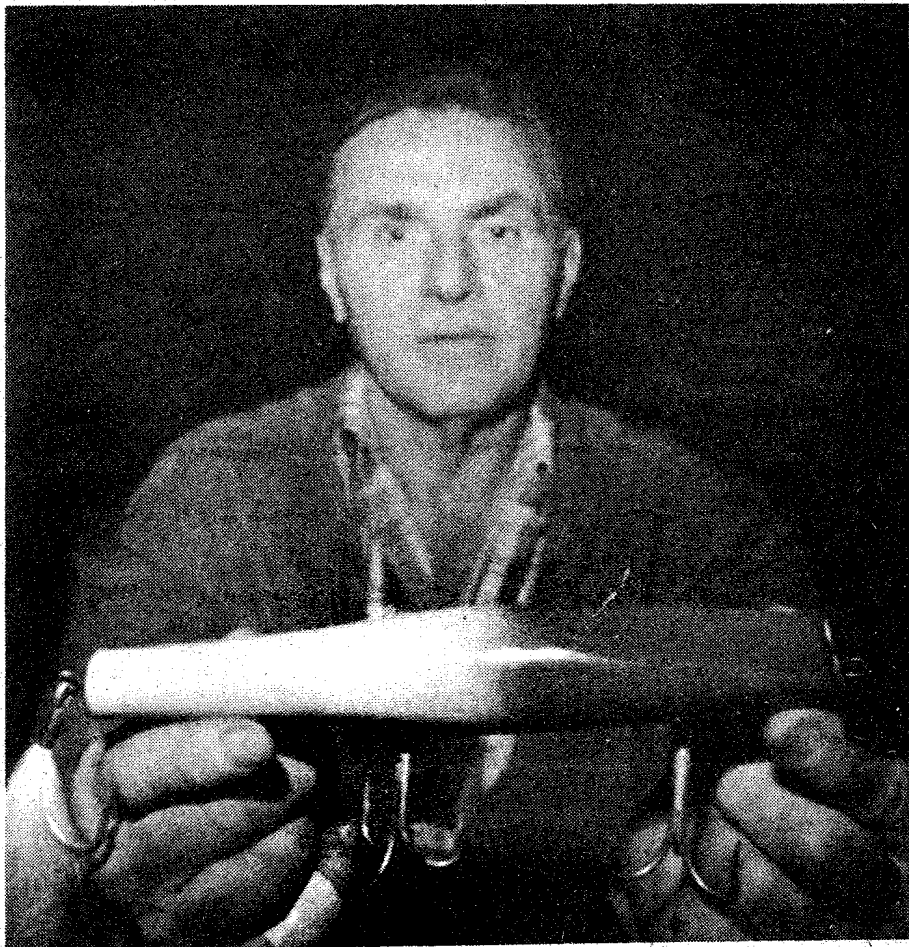
**A. It was a hobby going into a business. I would have liked to have gotten someone to manufacture them. I would have liked to become a designer of lures because I have so many lures that will never see daylight because I can't make the lures myself. I am not too interested in making too many lures now. I'm not going to get rich with the lures I can make. By the time I could really start a business it would be too far gone at my age.**

**Q. If you had people approach you, would you be interested in turning the business over to somebody now?**

**A. It's not the turning over of the business, it's what happens when they get the ideas and start making them for profit instead of quality. Another item is the price of the lures. They would probably go up if a manufacturer got his hands on them. With my making them, they're still at a reasonable price.**

**Q. If someone would write to you who didn't know you, would you make him some lures?**

**A. I have a number of people that I've**



Danny Pichney with one of his fish-catching plugs.

**made lures for even though I've never met them. And some people want special sizes or colors, so I make them for them, but I can't do this on a large scale.**

**Q. Do you have a waiting time of say six months for somebody who wants lures?**

**A. I never had that problem because I never made that many lures. In fact it was kept a big secret for awhile. Frank Keating (Long Island Press Fishing Writer) was trying to find out for three years who was making these lures. I didn't want to let it out because it would probably have been too much for me to make a lot of lures. There's also been times when people ask for lures but never come around to pick them up, so you're stuck with them. But I'm not really stuck with them because there's always somebody to take them even if I have to give them away.**

**Q. Do you give away a lot of lures?**

**A. Yes, I always give some lures away especially to kids. It makes me feel good. When I see a kid who likes fishing I give him a lure in hopes that he takes that as a hobby instead of anything bad. Even when I sold the lures, I sold them at cost.**

**Q. It's just been in the last seven years that you started to make a little profit right?**

**A. It started little by little and over the years I've never made that much making fishing lures. I got a satisfaction over showing people how to use the lures and especially enjoyed somebody coming back to me and saying that they caught some fish on my plugs. I then feel I've accomplished something. I never had any intention to become a lure manufacturer. It just so happened that people asked me to make lures for them. Remember, though, I can only make so many lures.**

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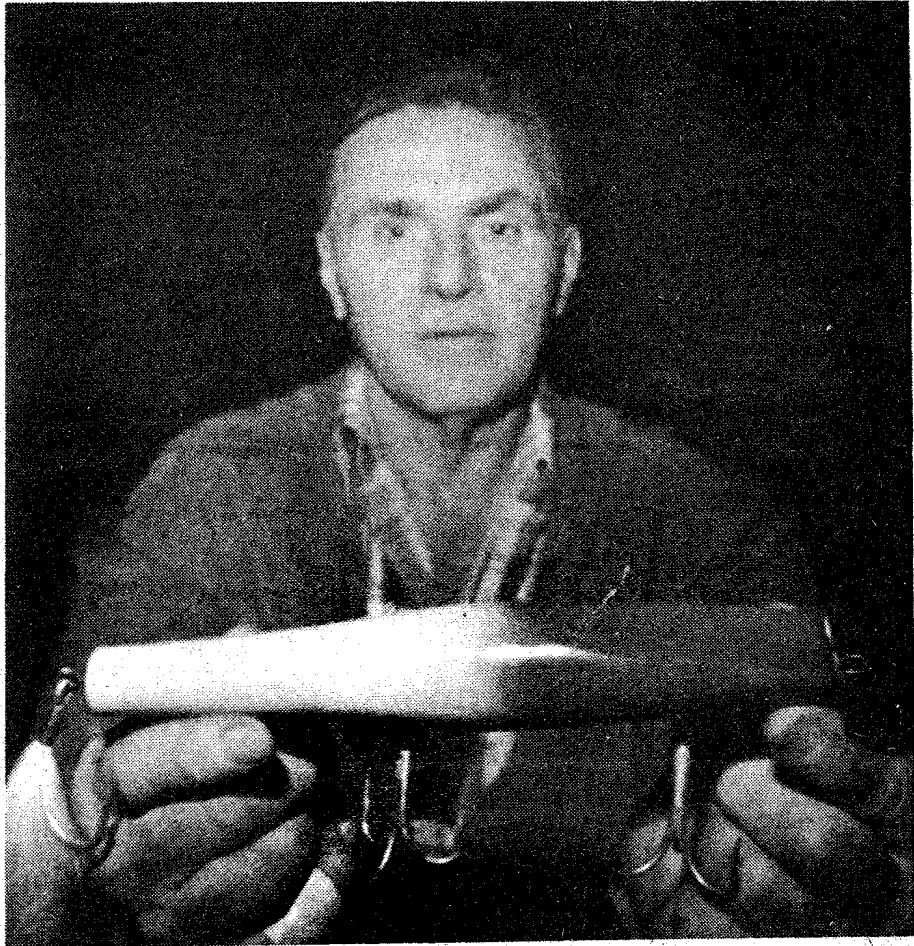
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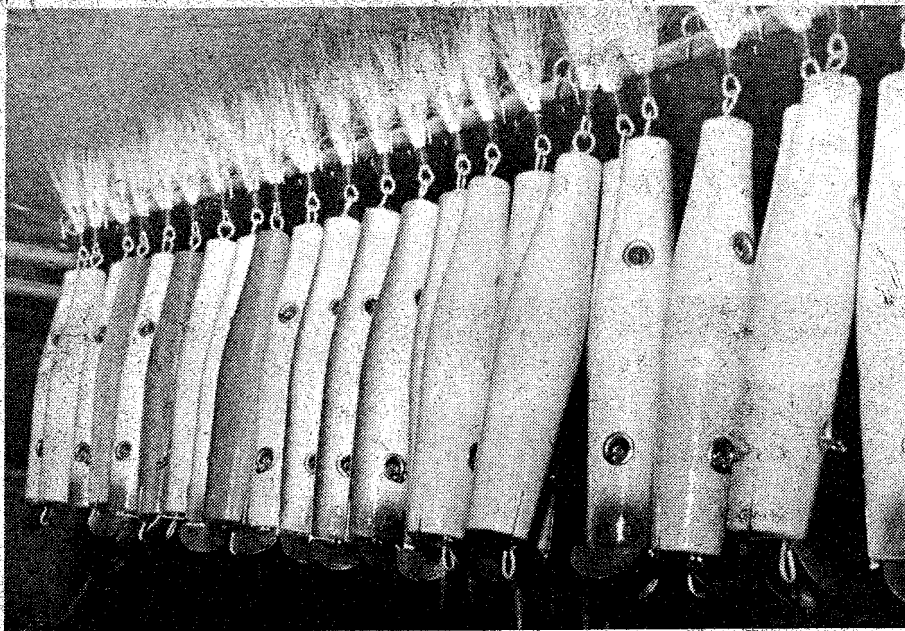
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**A row of Danny swimmers.**

**Q. Do you see a time in the future when you'll stop?**

*A. I may, especially if I get sick. If something happens to me I'll have to give it up. However, I might make it into a small business when I retire but I'll never be a big manufacturer. Right now I'm not making that many lures. Maybe when I retire I could make a few thousand lures and then I might make a little money.*

**Q. It's important to you, isn't it, that a lure with your name on it works right?**

*A. That's what I like. And if the lure isn't any good I would like people to tell me. I don't want any fictitious stories about the lures.*

**Q. Where do you mainly sell, from New Jersey to Cape Cod?**

*A. Yes, that's right.*

**Q. Now I'd like to get into tips on how to use your lures. For instance, if someone wanted to use the deep diver (trolling plug) in an inlet or along a beach with a steep drop-off, how deep would the plug go down on a normal retrieve?**

*A. I couldn't really say for sure how deep it would go under those conditions. Out in a boat I've seen the lure hit bottom in 25 feet of water with 180 feet of wire out.*

**Q. When you go surf fishing, do you use a steady retrieve?**

*A. No, you use different retrieves at different times. In colder water you go slower. Also, I use a slight circular rotation of the rod tip. Always put small movements to the lure. As the water warms up, you move the plug faster. When the fish are really feeding you might have to really wallop the plug along. At night you work the lure differently. With the surface swimmer you have a lot of boils at the plug but the fish never touch the lure. Then you have*

*to pick up the speed until the fish hits. Sometimes they'll hit the plug when you use a lazy retrieve but still draw the plug to you with the circular motion of the rod tip throughout the retrieve. This changes the pace of the lure which fish find interesting. You have to use various speeds and see which one they will hit.*

**Q. Do you ever pop that surface swimmer like you would a true popping plug?**

*A. When you cast the surface swimmer, as soon as it hits the water, give it a pop. Then retrieve the plug giving it a pop every five or six feet. Don't go too fast with the surface swimmer; that is out! The calmer water is the time for the surface plug.*

**Q. Some of the fellows use the small deep diver in the power plants at Northport or at Montville on the Thames River in Conn. Do you have any tips for them?**

*A. With night lures you need a slow steady retrieve. Use very slow tip rotation in conjunction with the slower retrieve. Don't jerk the rod; just use slow draws of the tip to give the plug a slight change of pace. I never retrieve a plug straight. I always give it some kind of rod rotation.*

**Q. What do you recommend using at night if someone is fishing a shallow, rocky beach? Plenty of times, the fish won't come up to hit a speeding popper at night. Would you swim a popper in such cases?**

*A. That can and has been done very effectively as long as the particular popper you have will swim side to side on a slow retrieve. The Atom is one that swims. The Polaris is another one that will swim. As soon as you cast, take the slack out of the line when the lure hits*

*the water. The Polaris sits in the water with the tail down just like a bait fish at slack water.*

**Q. How do you work your darter?**

*A. With the darter you use a pumping action at times and other times you retrieve it nice and slow with no rod action. If you're in rip water, you don't have to give it any action. The calmer the water, the more action you have to give a plug.*

**Q. What about color? Everybody has a different theory.**

*Q. To me the best all-around color is white with a red splash under the front. I hear that bass are supposed to be color blind but I don't believe it. When you change colors and start catching fish, there has to be a reason for it. Dark and light colors are important. Sometimes on a darker night, darker colors are better. After midnight I used the white one. At daybreak I switch to light blue or green.*

**Q. What does the little splash of red underneath do?**

*A. I don't truthfully know but it seems to work.*

**Q. What kind of leaders do you recommend for your plugs for a surf fisherman?**

*A. A leader is only for saving fish. You would take more fish tying directly to the lure but it's harder to change. A swivel isn't needed except on a rotating lure. You get better action without swivels.*

**Q. If someone uses braid for surf casting, should he tie a piece of mono directly to the braid, then loop the mono to the lure?**

*A. Yes. I find braided line tied right to the lure spooks the fish.*

**Q. Do you favor conventional over spinning for your lures?**

*A. Yes, you get better feel over the lure. You know exactly how your lure is working and can feel fish when they just tap at the plug.*

**Q. Do you know of anybody that's ever caught a 60 from the beach on a Danny plug?**

*A. No. Surf fishermen don't seem to fare too well with big fish.*

**Q. How about from a boat? Has anyone caught a sixty pounder on a Danny that way?**

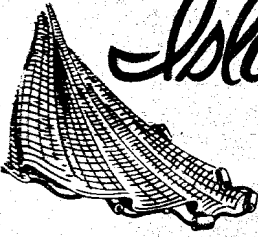
*A. Last fall at Montauk one fellow took 500 pounds in one tide on my red and yellow deep diver. One of these fish weighed sixty pounds.*

**Q. Is there any reason you like the bucktail on the back of your plugs instead of the longer saddle hackles?**

*A. No, I prefer feathers myself. I like the longer tail. On the squids I used to change the bucktails for feathers. Bucktails however, are the thing and you have to catch fishermen as well as the fish. To put a lure out on the market it has to*

*(Continued on page 34.)*





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have one tail. You can't have 100 different tails. The bucktail is standard.

**Q. How about your Danny plugs up against the bunkers in the daytime? A lot of people say they can't keep up? What do you say?**

**A. Well, the first thing that catches fish is bait. Live bait is about the best. But dead and chunk bunkers works too. On the basis though of other lures on the market, even the big Pikie, I think my lures did a terrific job of catching the bunkers. But the bunkers are the candy, the ice cream. There's no getting away from it. You'll however find lots of fellows up and down the coast who still catch a lot of fish with plugs.**

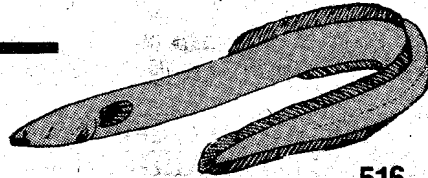
**Q. If someone came up to a school of bunkers and wanted to use your plugs instead of bait, would the thing to do be to get the trolling swimmer down under the school, rather than swim a plug up on top?**

**A. Yes, you want a plug that will go under the bunker. The bass lay under the school waiting for one to stray from the school. Bluefish will chase right into the school. Whatever the blues chop up, the bass will eat. Members of one club I know of fished the deep swimmer in back of the Jones Beach State Channel. They wanted a plug that would go underneath the bunker.**

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**Q. What do you think about bunker fishing?**

**A. It's certainly nothing to learn to do. There's a few exceptions where you have to say cut the bait but you don't have to be a bass fisherman. You can be a fluke fisherman and just drift along waiting for a pick-up. When the bunker fishing started in New Jersey off Sandy Hook you used to see a thousand boats with a fish on the line. You don't see that anymore. They really did something on the big bass. I don't say somebody shouldn't try, it's worth an experience.**

**Q. It takes much more skill to catch a fish with a plug than with a bunker.**

**A. Definitely.**

**How about an eel skin on a Danny plug?**

**A. They work. The only problem with eel skins is you have to store them in some kind of salt solution. If you get a crack or a hole in the plug and the salt solution penetrates, the lure is finished. That's the only drawback. That's why the plastic plugs are good because you can store them in brine without fear of the solution getting into the plug.**

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# INTERVIEW WITH DANNY PICHNEY

Part II

by Tim Coleman

**Q. What about your views on white water for surf fishing?**

**A.** Surfmen always look for white water which isn't always true. When you have flat water and sunshine you fish the late afternoon with a surface swimmer. Move it along, pop the lure, use a dark color. So with the sunshine you have a contrast. This type of fishing isn't as good on an overcast day as it is on a nice day.

**Q. What about the contrast of a dark plug?**

**A.** Contrast is a light shade or a dark shade. That's the important part of the color of a plug, not the fancy eyes or gradual tones or other subtle effects.

**Q. Some guys swear by a white plug in clear water and a yellow lure when it's murky. What do you say about that?**

**A.** In clear water I like the white plug. What I learned from top plug fishermen was one good color in the daytime was silversides coloration like say one plug I showed to you that had a mullet-color paint.

**Q. You make some all black plugs for night fishing. Do you think they score better or is it just something a fisherman ordered?**

**A.** I never used black much myself but I have some good customers that love black. For the last two years in a row some fellows out at Montauk have done very well with this color but naturally they won't spread the news around. Another good fisherman who used to live in New York and moved to Connecticut uses the black plugs.

**Q. Is that Pat Abate?**

**A.** Yes, he likes the swimmers in black.

**A.** What about some of the locals? I understand New Yorkers from the Big Apple have a reputation at the Cape as being very, very hard fishermen? Sometimes they get more fish than the natives mainly because they try harder.

**A.** Yes, they have the reputation as though fishermen and yes, sometimes they did better than anybody else. This Brooklyn crew used to go up anytime the word got around that the fish were in. Once they were fishing, an outsider didn't stand a chance to get into the rip or some of the better water. At that point a good fisherman finds himself a spot that's not so crowded so he can enjoy himself more.

**Q. Are you still talking about the Cape?**

**A.** There's a lot of places up at the Cape

like the one they call the Wheatfields. Here you can work a surface lure and can see the grass part and the fish come out after the plug. It's beautiful.

**Q. What's the first thing somebody says to you about your catch?**

**A.** The first thing is any fish? The next is any size? I hate to hear those words. I caught some fish and that's all I care.

**Q. I don't think the meat-hunting dunker will go away.**

**A.** When they started with the bellies out at Montauk they did well. They were sinking the boat they're not doing it any more they took the local population to You have different types of fish have the migrating fish and the



Danny Pichney in his workshop in the basement of his home in Jackson Heights, N.Y.

**Q. You would just as soon have the action as the size?**

**A.** Yes, that's right.

**Q. You're not like a lot of people out there trying to make a meat score.**

**A.** You have to ask yourself the question, "Am I going fishing or am I out for meat?" One fellow I fished with would never bring say a ten pound fish back to the dock. It would be little to him. We would sometimes see acres of school bass, but he wouldn't go after them because he wanted the big stuff. To me I don't care what size the fish are even if they are shorts.

fish. The locals stay around all sea. When you clean out the local fish and return to the same areas year after year they're gone. You don't see the clam bellies producing what it has in the past. They cleaned out their regular fishing. The fish that spent the summers at Montauk are gone. Last year was one of the worst years at Montauk.

**Q. Do you think bass fishing in general is going downhill?**

**A.** I can definitely tell you because fish aren't back in the wetlands any more. Every year bass used to come in brackish waters in March to spawn. A



Danny Plug has recently been refinished. So far it has caught over 100 striped bass.

Now people don't fish for striped bass in March. They're not there any more. You can't put the blame on the weather except the fact that some fish are dead. Your bogs are dead. You never see how a bog looks loaded with crabs? They're not there any more in Great South Bay in Jamaica, and no killies any more.

Some of the fellows were saying they were further north last year. They were at the Cape and beyond. There were a few fish from New Jersey to the north.

The fish are supposed to start showing up in New Jersey in May. Last year they weren't showing.

Do you agree there's not that many bass around?

This year there just wasn't any four to five pound fish to speak of. All the fish were under 15 pounds. Where are the big fish? That's it.

What's going to happen when these fish are thinned down? There's a lot of fish coming up.

What people seem to do is shown when something is gone, just like natural gas. They knew all along what to do something but no action was taken. All of a sudden this cold came. Now they're saying to cut back on the fuel. Something should have been done before we had this.

Is bass fishing seems destined to be better before it gets better. It's going to be better.

Between the clam chumming and the fishing they put some dent in the clam chum cleaned out the bogs and the bunkers cleaned out the bogs. There's one beach in

Rockaway that in one tide produced a good 70 cows. That caliber fishing isn't there any more. They've been plucking these fish out of these corners for years and now they're gone. Last year even the good sharpshooters had a tough time catching fish with bunkers in the same places where they did a job the years before.

Q. Why do you think some fellows never do well at bass fishing even though they put their share of time in?

A. Most of your good fishermen hate aggressive people. Most times if you keep your eyes open, your mouth shut, and your ears open and watch. If you see a fellow catch a fish and you can't catch one, hang up your whatdoyacallit lure and watch. What's he doing that you're not doing. See how he fishes. That's the only way you learn. If you go up and ask stupid questions, you're going to get stupid answers. Most of them will lie and you won't get the truth. You can see what a person is doing anyway.

Q. Even though a person watches, he still has to be in the right spot.

A. Fish work a certain pattern. They wait for feed to come around the end of a jetty in a certain spot. Last spring in the middle of the night one of the fellows that uses my lures went down to Jones Beach area to one of the bridges. In the light underneath the bridge he saw six big fish. He took the surface swimmer and threw it out and was retrieving it real slow. He said you could see fish drifting towards the side. All of a sudden the lead fish went for the lure. The fish weighed 39 pounds. He couldn't believe it. That shows you if you're in the right spot with the right thing you're going to catch the fish.

Q. Was the first bass the biggest one?  
A. No, there were bigger ones. Nobody knows about this fishing. Matter of fact, some people have been arrested because this place is kind of restricted. They have to park their cars in the bushes. And the cops look for them. The cop knows them by name. He says, all right Andy, where are you, come on out. That area is always loaded with big fish at that time of year.

Q. Why are the fish there?  
A. They're chasing the big bunkers. It's quite a sight.

Q. What was one of the oddest things you've seen bass fishing?

A. One time at Montauk we saw a fellow and his wife. He asked how do you keep from getting caught in the rocks? You know what he was doing? He was throwing a lure out on a bottom rig and then waiting for a fish to bite. It's funny but it's pathetic too at the same time. He heard they were catching with a Rebel plug so he put a Rebel out instead of a worm.

Q. It's a pretty good drive to Montauk. Do you still drive a lot to go fishing?

A. Some, but not as much as I used to. When I used to go to the Cape I would come back by the Merritt Parkway. That was before the Connecticut Turnpike. Every mile they had the mileage marked: You would see 99, 98, 97 more miles to go. It used to drive me crazy. When I go now it doesn't bother me. I drive now to Montauk and back and it doesn't bother me. I sing to myself to pass the time.

A. I do too.

A. I used to hate riding through Providence R.I. on Route 6A before the highway was built. You would drive back alley ways. Unbelievable. It would take so long. Then one trip I got lost in Fall River. I made a wrong turn after the bridge and got down to the factories and didn't know where I was. But Providence was the worst. You used to have to go in back of buildings all the time turning right or left to follow the arrows for Route 6A. I used to tell the kids when we got near Buzzards Bay, do you smell the saltwater? They would say, I don't smell nuthin."

EDITOR'S NOTE: Danny and the interviewer talked for a little while longer but it was getting late so they called it quits. We hope you enjoyed the story. Our interviewer came away with the view that Mr. Danny Pichney is a man worth listening to.

