

# Getting to Know Our Parents

A Look at Capt. Charles Frontiero

by Heather Wright

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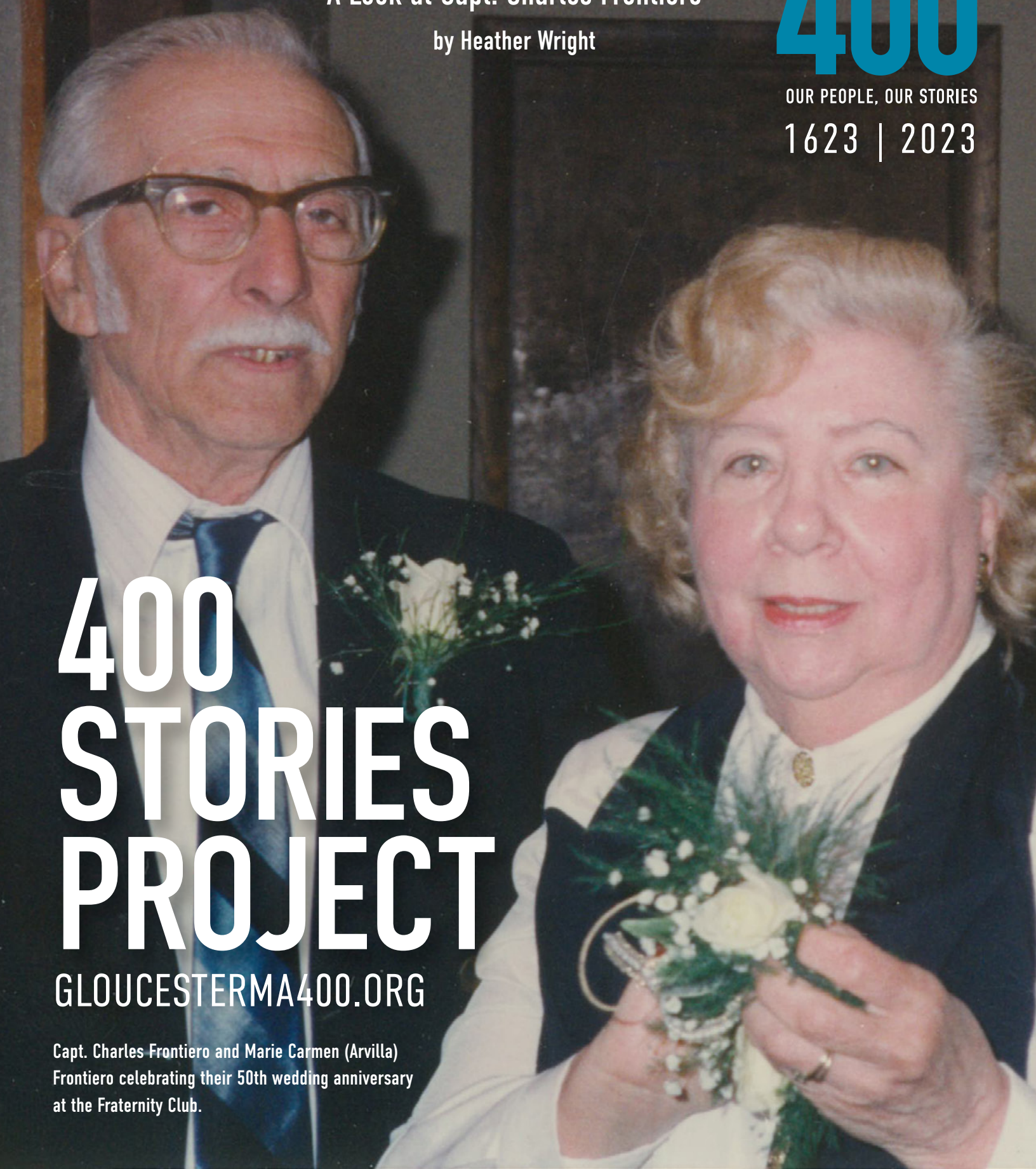
OUR PEOPLE, OUR STORIES

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# 400 STORIES PROJECT

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Capt. Charles Frontiero and Marie Carmen (Arvilla)  
Frontiero celebrating their 50th wedding anniversary  
at the Fraternity Club.



## FOREWORD

This story is from our Moments Collection—a story focused on a single impactful memory in someone’s life. In this case, it is the moment someone realizes they do not know everything about their parents. Sometimes it is not until after our parents pass that we discover their untold stories.

# Getting to Know Our Parents

## A Look at Capt. Charles Frontiero

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Memories are funny; some moments stand distinct while others fade. For Charles “Chuck” Frontiero, sifting through the boxes of photographs, letters, and clippings from his late parents’ home on Essex Avenue has brightened some memories and raised questions about others. Chuck is the son of Captain Charles “Greysole” Frontiero and Marie Carmen (Arvilla) Frontiero. Like many Gloucester family histories, Chuck’s memories center on the harbor and stories told by his father, a local captain famous for raking up Greysole flounder. Among his memories, Chuck recalls the history and character of each boat in his father’s fleet, like family members. The *Njorth*, a 52-foot dragger, and the *Madrugador*, a 55-foot stern dragger, distinguish an era in Frontiero family history. The vessels are steeped in legends once shared by Capt. Frontiero. Like when he discovered aircraft remains off Annisquam shore aboard the dragger *Njorth* and hauled them back into the harbor, or in 1981 when he had



Capt. Charles Frontiero, early 1940s.



The *Nova Luna*, Gloucester, early 1950s.

to restore the *Madrugador* after a massive fire at sea. Yet Chuck’s discovery of a magazine article about his father’s earliest vessel, the *Nova Luna*, a 38-foot dragger, makes Chuck realize some bits of family history are untold.

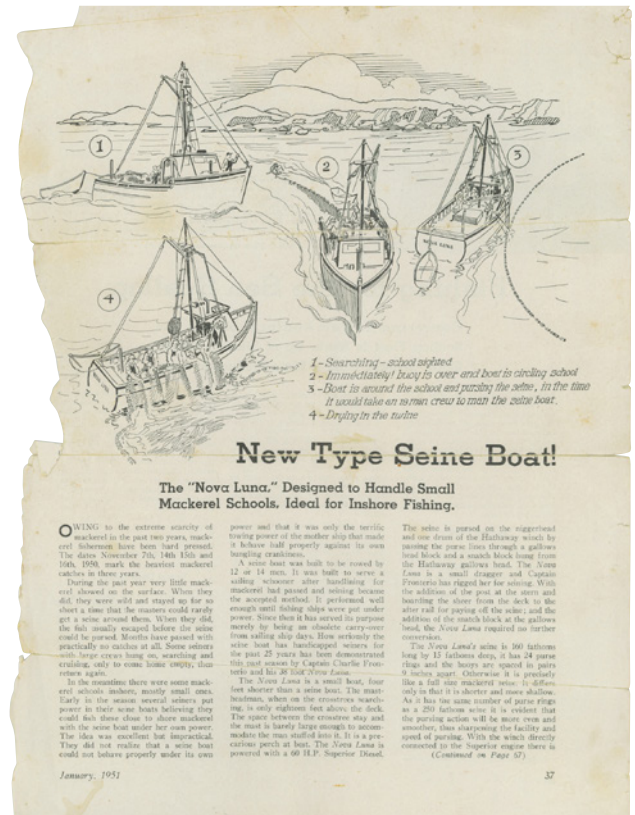
These days the boats are gone. Chuck negotiates a house full of photos, documents, and memorabilia stored in boxes, saved by his late parents. Capt. Frontiero and his



wife Marie were both born in Gloucester and raised their family on Taylor Street before settling into their home on Essex Avenue. Like his parents, Chuck spent his adulthood in Gloucester. The accumulation of years, in one town, in one house, creates a mountain of material history. Now Chuck is slowly reviewing decades of these family artifacts, including his parent's love letters, newspaper, and magazine clippings. In doing so, he is surprised by what he discovers.

Today, Chuck and I meet at the Gloucester 400+ offices, and he is eager to share a few of the documents discovered in his parents' belongings. Chuck is business-like and prepared; his only concern is the number of items he brought might be overwhelming. For now, he focuses on a page torn from a glossy magazine. The essay title declares, "New Type Seine Boat!" and the footer reads, "January 1951, *The Fishing Gazette*." The article credits Chuck's father, Capt. Frontiero, for designing a "new" inshore seine fishing vessel, the *Nova Luna*. Capt. Frontiero is praised for rigging the *Nova Luna* specifically for inshore fishing. His development of a shallow seine net and simple boat modification proved successful for inshore mackerel catches. *The Fishing Gazette* notes the importance of the discovery due to "the extreme scarcity of mackerel in the last few years" and credits Capt. Frontiero with the solution—an easy-to-maneuver 38-foot dragger converted to a seine boat, the *Nova Luna*. Perhaps most surprising to his son, Capt. Frontiero was not just an adept fisherman and family man; he was inventive and a hands-on problem-solver.

What stands out most while chatting with Chuck is how little he remembers the *Nova Luna*. He is surprised that his dad and the *Nova Luna* had a moment of fame, but no one ever shared this story. Even though Chuck doesn't recall seine-type fishing in his family, he walked me through the detailed processes and differences between dragging and seining. Interestingly, Chuck



*The Fishing Gazette*, featuring the innovations of the *Nova Luna*, January 1951.



Charles J. "Chuck" Frontiero Jr., age 6.

disregards his fishing knowledge and brushes it away as basics learned, spending summers with his dad. Perhaps this story was untold because it was several years before Chuck was born, or maybe, in the busy life of a fisherman's family, with 3 a.m. starts, mending nets, hauling, icing, and separating fish to earn a living, a magazine feature, is not the type of thing that parents mention to their kids. For Chuck, instead of the ingenious modifications of the *Nova Luna*, he remembers the boat for the childhood freedom of hanging over the bow feeding the seagulls and learning "the beautiful feeling of the ocean" as a vast expanse of nature.

As an adolescent and young man, Chuck's memories of his father's most recent vessels—the *Njorth* and the *Madrugador*—are fresh and sharp. He recalls overnight trips to Boon Island, staying awake to watch the fathom meter and mapping the world along the coastline by steeples and structures, but *Nova Luna* was different. She marks a time when his parents were young and strong. Fishing was bound to the beauty of the coastline, and the world was still hazy and romantic. Discovering that she was also a little famous only adds to her lore. Perhaps most surprisingly, the *Nova Luna's* story reveals his father's ingenuity and humble nature by not disclosing the small bit of fame. One can picture Marie tenderly tucking away the article for safekeeping but never turning the story into folklore for the children or grandchildren.

Today, as Chuck closes his leather portfolio brimming with pictures and news clippings, he expresses pride in the details of his parents' lives. Perhaps, as children, we assume we know our parents but only really find them after they are gone, as we survey all the boxes they leave



PHOTO CREDIT: TERRY WEBER MANGOS

Chuck Frontiero at a Stories Project Writing Workshop, 2023.

behind, looking for clues, for closeness, and proof they were here. Discovering mysterious odds and ends, like your father featured in a popular fishing publication, only proves they are not easy to know, even when the details feel significant in retrospect. How many stories end neatly tucked in a box?

It is a warm spring afternoon, and the seagulls call out to one another from the harbor behind us. Chuck says goodbye with the closed folder of stories tucked under his arm. As he grins, the corners of his mustache bend upward. He heads west on Main Street, I suspect, with a few stories of his own.

## AUTHOR'S BIO

Heather Wright is a poet and writer living and working on the North Shore of Boston.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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