

Arlo Guthrie, The Story Of Reuben Clamzo & His

by Arlo Guthrie

Wanna hear something? You know that Indians never ate clams. They didn't have linguini! And so what happened was that clams was allowed to grow unmolested in the coastal waters of America for millions of years. And they got big, and I ain't talking about clams in general, I'm talking about each clam! I mean each one was a couple of million years old or older. So imagine they could have got bigger than this whole room. And when they get that big, God gives them little feet so that they could walk around easier. And when they get feet, they get dangerous. I'm talking about real dangerous. I ain't talking about sitting under the water waiting for you. I'm talking about coming after you.

Imagine being on one of them boats coming over to discover America, like Columbus or something, standing there at night on watch, everyone else is either drunk or asleep. And you're watching for America and the boat's going up and down. And you don't like it anyhow. But you gotta stand there and watch, for what. Only he knows, and he ain't watching. You hear the waves lapping against the side of the ship. The moon is going behind the clouds. You hear the pitter patter of little footprints on deck. IS THAT YOU KIDS? IT AIN'T. MY GOD. IT'S THIS HUMUNGUS GIANT CLAM!

Imagine those little feet coming on deck. A clam twice the size of the ship. Feet first. You're standing there shivering with fear, you grab one of these. This is a belaying pin. They used to have these stuck in the holes all around the ship .you probably didn't know what this is for; you probably had an idea, but you were wrong. They used to have these stuck in the holes all along the sides of the ship. Everywhere. You wouldn't know what this is for unless you was that guy that night.

I mean, you'd grab this out of the hole, run on over there, BAM BAM on them little feet! back into the ocean would go a hurt, but not defeated, humungus giant clam. Ready to strike again when opportunity was better.

You know not even the coastal villages was safe from them big clams. You know them big clams had an inland range of about 15 miles. Think of that. I mean our early pioneers and the settlers built little houses all up and down the coast you know. A little inland and stuff like that And they didn't have houses like we got now, with bathrooms and stuff. They built little privies out back. And late at night, maybe a kid would have to go, and he'd go stomping out there in the moonlight. And all they'd hear for miles around... (loud clap/belch)....one less kid for America. One more smiling, smurking, humungus giant clam.

So Americans built forts. Them forts. You know them pictures of them forts with the wooden points all around. You probably thought them points was for Indians. But that's stupid! 'Cause Indians know about doors. But clams didn't. Even if a clam knew about a door, so what?

A clam couldn't fit in a door. I mean, he'd come stomping up to a fort at night, put them feet on them points, jump back crying, tears coming out of them everywhere. But Americans couldn't live in forts forever. You couldn't just build one big fort around America. How would you go to the beach?

So what they did was they formed groups of people. I mean they had groups of people all up and down the coast form these little alliances. Like up North it was call the Clamshell Alliance. And farther down South is was called the Catfish Alliance. They had these Alliances all up and down the coast defending themselves against these threatening monsters. These humungus giant clams. And they'd go out there, if there was maybe fifteen of them, they'd be singing songs in fifteen part harmony. And when one part disappeared, that's how they knew where the clam would be.

Which is why Americans only sing in four part harmony to this very day. That proved to be too dangerous. See, what they did was they'd be singing these songs called Clam Chanties, and they'd have these big spears called clampoons. And they'd be walking up and down the beach and the method they eventually devised where they'd have this guy, the most strongest heavy duty true blue American, courageous type dude they could find and they'd have him out there walking up and down the beach by himself with other chicken dudes hiding behind the sand dunes somewhere.

He'd be singing the verses. They'd be singing the chorus. And clams would hear 'em. And clams hate music. So clams would come out of the water and they'd come after this one guy. And all you'd see pretty soon was flying all over, the sand flying UPANDOWNTHEBEACHMANMANCLAMCLAMMANMANCLAM MANCLAMCLAMMANUPANDDOWNTHEBEACHGOINGTHISWAYANDTHATWAYUP THEHILLSINTHEWATEROUTOFTHEWATERBEHINDTHETREESEVERYWHERE FINALLYTHEMANWOULD jump over a big sand dune, roll over the side, the clam would come over the dune, fall in the hole and fourteen guys would come out there and stab the shit out of him with their clampoons.

That's the way it was. That was one way to deal with them. The other way was to weld two clams together. I don't believe it. I'm losing it. Hey. What can you do. Another night shot to hell.

Hey, this was serious back then. This was very serious. I mean these songs now are just piddley folk songs. But back then these songs were controversial. These was radical, almost revolutionary songs. Because times was different and clams was a threat to America. That's right. So we want to sing this song tonight about the one last... You see what they did was there was one man, he was one of these men, his name will always be remembered, his name was Reuben Clamzo, and he was one of the last great clam men there ever was. He stuck the last clam stab, the last clampoon into the last clam that was ever seen on this continent.

Knowing he would be out of work in an hour. He did it anyway so that you and me could go to the beach in relative safety. That's right. Made America safe for the likes of you and me. And so we sing this song in his memory. He went into whaling like most of them guys did.

And he got out of that when he died. You know, clams was much more dangerous than whales. Clams can run in the water, on the water or on the ground, and they are so big sometimes that they can jump and they can spread their kinda shells and kinda almost fly like one of them flying squirrels.

You could be standing there thinking that your perfectly safe and all of a sudden WHOP....That's ' true...And so this is the song of this guy by the name of Reuben Clamzo, and the song takes place right after he stabbed this clam and the clam was, going through this kinda death dance over on the side somewhere. The song starts there and he goes into whaling and takes you through the I next...

I sing the part of the guy on the beach by himself. I go like this: "Poor old Reuben Clamzo" and you go "Clamzo Boys, Clamzo". That's the part of the fourteen chicken dudes over on the other side. That's what they used to sing. They'd be calling these clams out of the water. Like taunting them, making fun of them. Clams would get real mad and come out.

Here we go. I want you to sing it in case you ever have an occasion to join such an Alliance. You know some of these Alliances are still around. Still defending America against things like them clams. If you ever wants to join one, now you have some historic background. So you know where these guys are coming from. It's not just some 60's movement or something, these things go back a long time.

Notice the distinction you're going to have to make now between the first and easy "Clamzo Boys Clamzo" and the more complicated "Clamzo Me Boys Clamzo". Stay serious. Folk songs are serious. That's what Pete Seeger told me. "Arlo I only want to tell you one thing...folk songs are serious". I said "right". Let's do it in C for Clam... let's do it in B...for boy that's a big clam... let' s do it in G for Gee, I hope that big clam don't see me. Let's do it in F...for he sees me. Let's do it back in A...for A clam is coming. Better get this song done quick. The Story of Reuben Clamzo and His Strange Daughter in the Key of A.

1. Oh poor old Reuben Clamzo
(I) Clamzo boys Clamzo
Oh poor old Reuben Clamzo
(II) Clamzo me boys Clamzo

2. Oh, Reuben was no sailor
(Clamzo boys Clamzo) (Refrain I)
So they shipped him on a whaler
(Clamzo me boys Clamzo) (Refrain II)

3. Because he was no beauty (Ref. I)
He would not do his duty (Ref. II)

4. Because he was so dirty (Ref. I)
We gave him five and thirty (Ref. II)

5. Oh Reuben Clamzo's daughter (Ref. I)
She begged her dad for mercy (Ref. II)

6 She brang him wine and water (Ref. I)
And a bit more than she oughta (Ref. II)

7 Well he got his seaman's papers (Ref. I)

He's a terror to the whalers (Ref. II)

8. And he sails where 'er the whalefish blow (Ref I)
As the hardest bastard on the go (Ref. II)

9 Oh poor old Reuben Clamzo (Ref. I)
Oh poor old Reuben Clamzo (Ref. II)