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Henry E. Lawlerbach
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BEGIN SIDE A

K.F.: Say your name and today's date so I can make sure we're going to pick you up.

H.L.: All right.

K.F.: Go ahead.

H.L.: My name is Henry Lauterbach. I was born in Norfolk, Virginia, November 8, 1918. My parents were Etucka (phonetic) Lauterbach and Herbert Lauterbach. And shortly thereafter, we moved to Hilton Village over on the peninsula side of the river, and I spent most of my boyhood there, and we moved to Portsmouth in '33. I was right at 15 years old. I resided in this area ever since.

K.F.: Okay. And what did your parents do?

H.L.: Well, my mother was strictly a housekeeper. My father was an apprentice in Norfolk Naval Shipyard as a hoist engineer, stationary and portable hoist engineer. He served his time, and that was in the early teens - I mean early 1900's, and he graduated from the apprenticeship and went to a running house, steam crane, up until 1917 when the United States became involved in World War I. He was dismissed as questionable origin. He was born in Germany. So he was dismissed from the yard. He then took a correspondence course and studied plumbing and heating engineering and went to work for Nolan Company as a plumbing and heating estimator for Nolan Company, Nolan mill supplies and plumbing supplies. So he did that until the Depression in 1932, late '32. He was laid off at Nolan Company. He went back to the Navy Yard. Some friends of his had come along, back in the teens, were still in the yard, and he made it through acquaintances or re-acquaintances and got reinstated in the yard, and went to work in the Navy Yard under the power plant, which was under the transportation which covered engineers and what have you, but he was actually assigned to the fire department in the Navy Yard. And he worked there until 1942. Again, he was discharged for questionable origin. He didn't take that laying down. He went to Washington, and somehow or another got an audience with the president. He skipped right over the Navy, and head of the 5th Naval District and all, and went straight to Washington, and he got reinstated back in the yard with full pay for the time he was out, plus average overtime that the people in his department were getting. But for some reason or other, shortly after that, the heads over there seemed to resent him going over their head, and he was put back to work on a steam crane, and he was 65 years old, only 5'4" tall, he couldn't handle those big levers and all on the crane. So he was at a retirement age, so he took retirement. And shortly thereafter, he didn't live two or three years after he retired before he died, probably age 66, I think.

K.F.: How did you get into this business?

H.L.: Well boats have always been a fascination to me, even as a young child, six, eight years old. We lived only two, three blocks from the water over at Hilton Village right on the north side of the James River. And I hung around the river, always managed after I got 8, 10, 12 years old, found a few pieces of wood, nailed them together, make some sort of a boat. And fortunately, I got to where I could make one that would float, and I could get out in the river in it. And I put a sail on it, rig up some sort of a sail and sail it, so my first love was sailboats. And when I first started building boats professionally, I built sailboats. I built sailboats from the mid-30's until 1950. I built about, I guess about 20, 25 Hampton one design sailboats, which is a very popular class in the lower bay, and I

built a few snipe boats, and some just general knockabout sailboats, and some pleasure powerboats. And in '47, a fellow approached me named W. Curtis Martens from over Newport News, and wanted me to build him a race boat. Well we put one together that did very well, but about second place was about as good as he could get with it. And we took what we'd learned from that. I could look at other boats that were running out front and put it together with my ideas, and we came up with a second boat in 1948, and won the National Highpoints with that boat, second one I built. And from then on, it's just been an ongoing process, that I built, I guess even today, as long as I've been out of building competitive race boats, I think I've still built more National Champion, and National Highpoint and world record race boats than anybody else in the country.

C.B.: How many boats have you built?

H.L.: Well, Tom Deeth (phonetic), from - he used to be up in Michigan, he's in Florida now, but he took - he had an interest in my boats from the time he was a small boat. His father was connected with race boats. And he would go to every race, and he'd carry his little camera with him, and he'd take pictures of every boat, and write on the back of them when the pictures were developed what the boat was, who owned it, what the - what the builder was, or who the builder was. And he also had access to the archives of APDA. He was right there close by, and he went in there, got all their records from way back into the 30's, and found out, being interested in my boats, he checked every boat that was raced that I had built, and he came up with 186, and still few counting. So -

K.F.: Let me back up and ask you, how did you learn to build those sailboats in the beginning? I've talked to many boat builders, and they all have their own way that they've learned. I'm wondering if you would tell me -

H.L.: Well I learned, might as well say self-taught. I was - there was a few people in the town over there that could build a boat. When I was coming up, there were several larger sailboats built there. And, of course, everybody in that town knew everybody. If a chip of wood fall on the other side of town, I would hear it. And I would be right there, try to stay out of the man's way, but give him a hand just so I could watch and see what he was doing. I'd get in the boat and sweep all the little dust up and get it, clean it for him, anything, or hold the end of a board for him. But when he was cutting one, I'd watch him to see what he was doing. I picked up a whole lot just by observation. And I would watch other boats that would perform well, get the general idea of the shape of the boat, profile and the body and all, and learn how to lay a boat down, design a boat and loft it out full size and all, at a young age, I became very adept at lofting a boat. So it's just evolution of watching others and trying different things that I thought would work, and if they didn't work, we'd go back to where we were and try something else, but fortunately, I hardly ever had an idea that didn't work. A little bit better than what I already had. So I guess I'm very, very blessed. I wound up with a good mind, good genes or something that I was able to do a lot of thinking and all on my own and come up with a whole lot of stuff.

K.F.: And what kind were these burly race boats that you built?

H.L.: The first one was, back in those days, they had different classes from what they call them now. We had - the first one I built was 13 5 cubic inch hydroplane, which nowadays would be called 2 1/2 liter. Then the next size up from that was a 225 cubic inch hydroplane. And then they had the 266 hydroplane. So it was only about four or five

classes. Later on, they came in with a little small boat called the 48 cubic inch hydroplanes, which are now, they call them, they changed the designation. They are one liter now. One liter stock, one liter modified. And two and a half liter stock, and two and a half liter modified. So then they go to -- the 225 classes has just about died. I think it's not even in the books anymore. But there was a class came along in the mid-50's called the 280 class, which was a good average-size race boat with a strict stock engine in it of 265 cubic inches. And now they have run that on up to a 305, they call them the 5 liters, which is the old - so everything has gone to liters. It's modern lingo, I guess. They call them by liters instead of by cubic inches. But that has been a real popular class. However, you're seeing fewer numbers in that now than you used to, but I think that holds true in all the classes. There are fewer numbers, and they've created a lot more classes than we used to have. Consequently, you get right many boats in the pits, but when the gun goes for a race to start, you don't have that many out there, there's so many different classes.

C.B.: Right, right.

H.L.: But one of the real popular classes now is your 2 1/2 - is your 2 1/2 mod, and your 6 liter, which they call now the -

C.B.: Is that the National Model?

H.L.: National Mod.

C.B.: I don't remember them all.

H.L.: Yeah, I'm glad you come up with that, because I have a hard time pulling it. But anyway, that's a real popular class. My son drives in both of them. Larry has the 2 1/2 mod and the National mod. And he's done real well.

C.B.: Has he ever raced any of the boats that you've built?

H.L.: Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah. Larry started racing when he was 18 years old. He's 54 years old now. He's been 36, 37 years racing. He's hardly ever got in a boat that wasn't one that either he or I or both of us built together.

C.B.: Now when we spoke to Larry, something that I remember is that he said to us my father's a genius. When we asked him how he got into boat building, that's what he said to us. And you taught him everything. How does it make you feel that your son emulated you so much?

H.L.: Very good. We've had our differences in the past, but in recent years, we've become much closer together, and we both have a high respect for each other, and I'm very proud of him and what he does, and what he has done, and he's continued doing now. Although he is talking about retiring now, and I hope he does because he's been at it long enough. I had my - I didn't drive, actually, I didn't drive competitively but about three years. I drove pretty solid in '54. I drove two boats in '54. One of my own, 135, and for Frank Folk up in Essex, Maryland, 266. Name was Sir Gamma (phonetic). And then in '56, I drove all three of Bill Ritter's (phonetic) boats; the 135, the 225 and the 266. And that year, I was fortunate enough to win practically everything. We got high class, high point class in every class, and national championship and set a world's record on that year. I was very fortunate to have that year.

C.B.: Yeah. And why did you stop racing then?

H.L.: A lot of home pressure. I raced again in '59. Ritter's wife was down with cancer, and he was staying close by her, and he left the boats at my shop and says store `em, take `em out and run `em, do whatever you want to with `em, but you'll be on your own. So I

just took one boat, the 266, and I campaigned that boat that year again, and got U.S. one again, and won the nationals. And then I quit.

C.B.: Quit while you're ahead, huh?

H.L.: Yeah. I think - I don't think I drove competitively more than two or three times after that since '59, that's been 42 years ago.

K.F.: Well one thing we've been trying to learn more about, Mr. Lauterbach, is the early days of racing and what that was like. We've both been to events, you know, this year. We know what they look like, but we were wondering if you could explain to us what some of the early races were like that you attended.

H.L.: Well -

C.B.: You could tell us some what you spend on the weekend too now that the tape recorder's going.

H.L.: Well like I say, a whole has changed since I started. It was - when I first started, things were - financial picture was so much different. Back in those days, a mechanic in the 50's, actually the average man would make probably 125, \$150 a week. And that's not the average boat race. I mean that's just the average one, like myself, but I was fortunate enough to have, when I was driving, someone else on the boat that was paying my way. So but in numbers, I think the numbers were better as far as classes.

Competition, I think, we weren't going as fast, I understand. But competition, you had more boats. So consequently, you had more boats that could possibly run just as good as you could. So the competition was keen. I had, I had a slight edge, I'll admit that, not because I was putting something into the man's boat that no one could get, but he was a very wealthy man, and he was buying first-class equipment, very good engines, which gave me a good opportunity, and I was in real good with Mr. Edlebrock (phonetic), out in California who built some of the finest after-market race equipment that you can buy. And Bill Ritler was buying engines from him. So we had first class all the way through the boat, engine and all. It was first class. And it was more boats out there. We had - I had - well at that time that I was running, approximately half the boats in the race, at least half, would be boats that I built. And the class I'm running in, every boat that I built in that class was identical. You could take our equipment, put it in any boat out there, and we could do the same thing with it. There's no difference. Only had one set of templates to build with. So if I built a 266 for anybody in the country, it would be identical to the one I was building for Bill Ritler. The only advantage that Bill Ritler had was that he left a standing order with me that any time I thought I had an idea that was better, build it and he would pay for it. He says I know the next man come along will get it, he said but I'll be that far ahead of him. It'll be six months before he can get one like it.

K.F.: Right.

H.L.: So he said any time you want to build one, build it. I'll pay for it.

K.F.: What were some of those ideas that you came up with?

H.L.: Well it's just slight alteration or modifications of what was already running. I would find a weak point in a boat that nothing I can specifically put my hand on, but if I'd see a boat that was riding a little bit awkward for what I would think it ought to ride, I'd make some modification. If the boat was a little out of balance, we would change balance. Or if we had a boat that was, tried to get a little bit unruly in the water, had a little bit too much angle on it - we'd flatten them out a little bit so the boat would - as the horsepower

increased, then your angles would have to decrease or the boat would tend to fly on you. So we'd have to get more horsepower, we'd have to flatten down and calm the boat down so you could use the horsepower that we had available. And that's just little things there that you don't talk about a lot when you're in the business, because once you get doing something now, anybody that wants to build one is going to look at your stuff. And while you're not looking, they're going to measure it. And consequently, I always told - I see them sneaking around. I'd say you don't have to sneak. If you want to know what the measurement is, I'll tell you what it is and you can put the ruler on and check me out. I says I've never given anybody the measurements to a boat yet that they built it exactly like I did. Number one, they couldn't build that close. Number two, they thought they had a better idea, and they'd change something.

(Laughter.)

K.F.: So your design really had to keep up with the advances in the motors, I guess.

H.L.: Huh?

K.F.: Your designs had to keep up with advances in the motors and the -

H.L.: Oh, right, right. It was very gradual. You take a boat 20 years apart; you'd see a lot of difference. But you take one two years apart, there'd be very slight difference. It's just a very slight evolution there from the beginning to what is being - as far as we're concerned, because I'm not building competitive race boats any more.

C.B.: When did you stop doing that?

H.L.: The last one I built was in 1987. That's, you see right there, the GP247.

K.F.: Uh-huh (affirmative).

H.L.: That's - up in Canada. But -

C.B.: And why did you stop? Just because there was no market anymore, or -

H.L.: No. The market was there, but I had about, about run my course. And what happened, they came to this change in the rules that you had to have these enclosed cockpits. That wouldn't work in my old boats, so I had to - if I was going to continue, see what we had to do there, there's one of the earlier, one right above, that's Larry's boat. So you got the driver up front, completely enclosed cockpit. And it's just a different concept all together. And I got to thinking about the years that I had built all these race boats, and never had but one, one person even talk about lawsuit, and that got squelched. So I thought I've been that lucky, and I've built 180 some race boats. Why keep on? I've managed to get comfortable. I'm not wealthy, but I'm comfortable that I don't have to do it. I have this shop that pays for itself. I do enough work here that all the utilities, everything is paid for, and I get maybe a few dollars a year ahead on this. So now I got a little bit in the bank, I'm drawing interest on it. So I didn't need the money, and I certainly didn't need the liability. If I wanted to continue building race boats, I would only do it if I took out a large product liability insurance, which would cost probably three times as much as I could make off of building a couple boats. So -

C.B.: So what's going on in the shop now?

H.L.: Would you believe none of that work out there is work that I'm doing?

C.B.: Yeah, 'cause there's a truck right outside waiting -

H.L.: Yeah. (Laughter). And I've got a boat back in the back that belongs, it's a race boat that belongs to Tenet Browning (phonetic), and he has a man that works for him, but I allow them to come in here and work on it, and I got him along on how to do the work

that he wants to do. But I'm not involved in it any way like that, just about, just renting them space to work in.

C.B.: Now I know I went to the Kent Island testing in April, they had testing there at the yacht club. And I stood there, and I heard - I was standing near your son, and I heard so many fellows say to him Henry put this on my boat, Henry worked on this, Henry did that. And it was like, I finally said to him, man, your dad knows a lot of people. Because you just, you know, I guess it was conversation for them to him. But you're still doing, you know -

H.L.: I do the -

C.B.: -- legend around the bay.

H.L.: Yeah. I'll do - they even, they even made that presentation to me over at Hampton last week.

K.F.: Oh.

C.B.: Legend of boat racing. Yeah. Oh, this is great. This is great. Congratulations.

H.L.: Well, thank you. I got to find a nail to hang that on the wall.

C.B.: Yeah. Well, we would've brought you one.

H.L.: I'll hang it right underneath of my diploma up here.

C.B.: Yeah. You're a lefty?

H.L.: Oh, yeah.

C.B.: Me too.

H.L.: Yeah.

C.B.: Lefties are all right.

K.F.: Well let me ask you, Mr. Lauterbach, what would you -

H.L.: Try that on for size.

C.B.: Oh, you've got lefty scissors. How about that? Have you kept these your whole life?

H.L.: My mother's. She was left handed.

C.B.: They're nice shears too. Good for you.

H.L.: But I've got big shears, fiberglass shears that are left-handed.

C.B.: Left handed. I can do scissors, but I can't do a can opener. I have to get a left-handed can opener.

H.L.: You know, that is kind of back-handed. You have to, you have to grab it like that and reach over to turn the crank.

C.B.: Yeah. I - I do them wrong.

H.L.: I want the electric one. But the one we've got is worn out. It skips, it won't get the top cut clean.

C.B.: We lefties suffer. Go ahead, I'm sorry.

K.F.: What materials did you start out using when you started building your boats? And then what was the GP built out of?

H.L.: We used nothing but wood. I've used spruce framing, and in strategic areas, I'll use a hardwood, like white oak for framing. And the covering is plywood. We used to could get better plywood than we get now. We used to get good aircraft grade birch plywood that was very strong. And we'd use that in places of high stress, we'd use the birch. And sometimes we'd use birch all over because some people like a real light wood. It's lighter than this is when it's varnished. And other places, we'd use mahogany

plywood. But basically, we're using all mahogany plywood now. On the decks, we're covering those with a real thin layer of fiberglass. And even though it's glass cloth, if it's properly applied, you can't see it, and you can still use the natural wood finish. And the glass gives it lots more strength, and makes the finish hold up a lot better. It doesn't chip and crack like just plywood would do without the glass over it. So it's, that's basically it. We used that all together since we started building race boats, we used mahogany plywood and spruce framing. I'm having a hard time finding spruce wood now. I've called all up in Canada and all over the country, and I haven't hit on a good source yet. But I haven't give up on it. I've still got two or three sources that I haven't made direct contact with, but I'll get some. I've got a boat upstairs I'm restoring, and it's going to be a complete restoration. It's going to be practically a new boat when we get through because it's so bad of shape, it's coming apart all over. It's 30-some years old and been mistreated quite a bit.

C.B.: And what's going to, what are they going to do with it? Take it to vintage boats?

H.L.: Vintage boats. That's all. It's getting to be quite a thing.

C.B.: Yes.

H.L.: That one in Clayton, over there? That's on every even year, every two years. That's a big show up there in Clayton, New York.

C.B.: Okay, right.

H.L.: They have the big museum up there with all the antique boats in it.

C.B.: I went there last week. I went to the Adirondack museum. I didn't go to the one where all the race boats. There is a race boat museum, isn't there?

H.L.: Yeah, in Clayton.

C.B.: Right. I was near there because somebody told me about the other museum.

H.L.: You should've gone over there. It's right there, it's only about 20 miles from Water Town.

C.B.: What a beautiful area.

H.L.: Down - it's pretty up there.

C.B.: Yeah.

H.L.: It's pretty.

C.B.: The boats were all wooden. Everywhere -

H.L.: Oh, yeah.

K.F.: It's very different.

H.L.: Won't find much glass up there.

C.B.: You know, when did you go with the fort hull in your boats? How -

H.L.: I've only built, I've only built two or three of those by request. Of course, all that Larry built's been there, but that's the nature of your modern race boats. But I've only built, we had one, there's no pictures up there at all. But we built four, I think, we built Gemini -

(OFF RECORD. TELEPHONE.)

K.F.: Well when we first sat down, you mentioned a wreck with Homer Bland and Skeeter Johnson.

H.L.: Yeah.

K.F.: I'm wondering if you can tell me about that and about any other accidents that you recall.

H.L.: I hate to talk about them, but that happened, I was trying to think. That had to be, I think that was about 1958. I think. I'm not sure. But anyway, it was up in Hopewell, very narrow course up there, and it was a marina and all there with piers and all, and they were pinning up in there, and they had to go up between two of them there. As Skeeter was out on the course making timing runs coming down on the clock, checking our starting position and all, and he was coming down real good and fast, and Homer was getting ready to go out on the course, and he went out right angles to the course and went straight out, didn't bother to turn or nothing, and he ran right in front of Skeeter. And it, it was just a bad thing. It was kind of hard to say who's at fault or what, because they should be, the club should have had somebody at the end of that pier with a flag there that would hold it out. If it was somebody on the course, hold a flag and remove it when the guy could go out on the course, give him the go instead of just letting anybody go at will. And if you look things go at will around high speed equipment, I don't care what the race calls, race boats or what, something's going to happen, and it did. And it was very sad. It was pretty much - we've had several others. I don't know which year it was, but I think it was in the mid-50's, late, mid-50's down in Rolling Rapids, North Carolina. I think it was Rolling Rapids. Colonel Widenhouse (phonetic) from down in Concord, North Carolina, he was, it was actually doing a race. He was coming up on a start there. He had just gotten a new Chevrolet engine, and had about, I guess, 50 more horsepower at least than his forward engine had, and with the forward engine to make these two 66's run fast, we put little shims on them, narrow shim like skis on the bottom of the - to lift it a little higher, give it a little bit less weighted surface, and you can run fast. And when he put the -- in, I told Carl, I said Carl, take those shims off the bottom of your boat. I said you don't - too much lift for the horsepower you got. Oh, he said, it feels real good. I said that's just before something bad happen when it starts feeling real good because you're boat is not touching the water. I said you need to bring it down. And he would not take them off. And he got going out on the start, and hit a little bit of rough water, and the boat started climbing, and he went right up, turned over backwards, and he was still half out of the boat when it came down on top of him. Another bad incident. Not seen too many of them, but I don't want to.

I was also, in '52, before Bill Ritler started buying boats from me, he had a brand new Howlett (phonetic), at St. Petersburg, Florida. And going down the first turn, he wasn't, he wasn't out front, and he got caught in somebody's rooster tail, and it blew him over, and the boat right behind him ran right over him and cut his right arm right off, chopped a piece out of his helmet, cut his head, but very fortunate, it didn't go very deep in that, but he lost his arm right at the socket.

K.F.: Well we notice a close circuit of where the racers go and the people who are doing the racing, and I'm wondering if you can tell me how that really started and where that started. I mean it had to begin someplace.

H.L.: Well I don't know where it started really, because powerboat racing was, in effect, pretty good, had a pretty good start when I got into it. And it's hard to say where it all started. But I would have to say that a lot of it started up north first around your more affluent yacht clubs where they had the big - trophy racing and unlimited powerboat racing. And then your small races were, I think, more or less a spring-off from that, but

I'm not sure of that. But the American Powerboat Association has been in force now since way back around in the early 1900's. So it was going before I became associated with it. But actually, they had more clubs putting races on back in the 40's, 50's than they do now. You take in Virginia or just in this region, we have race at Hopewell, we have in Richmond, have them at Hampton, have them at Norfolk, Portsmouth, Elizabeth City - Irvington and two of them right here in Washington, D. C. Then you have St. Michaels and Cambridge, and Baltimore, Rock Creek, Wilson Point Men's Club, Bush River, Chesterfield, Havre de Grace, Red Bank, New Jersey, and on up into New York, all over to New Martinsville, West Virginia, up in Ohio and into Michigan. There was races, you could go to any number. You could start in December and go to the Orange Bowl Regatta in Miami, and you could come out of Florida, if you wanted to go to all the races down there, you could come out of Florida with such a huge lead in points, and for National High Point, nobody would hardly catch you if you were running good. You could go down for a run in Florida, in Miami, come up and run at Mount Dora (phonetic), and Lake Eustace, and Lakeland, St. Pete, go over to Fort Lauderdale, and up to Palm Beach, back down to Miami, about 9 or 10 races there in Florida in the wintertime between December and St. Patrick's Day. What was the last one they had down there in Miami? So it was piles of racing down there.

C.B.: What was your job as the boat builder when you would go to the races? What part of the team were you?

H.L.: Well I was - probably, I don't know what you would call me back then because naturally, I was the boat builder so everybody that had one of my boats would look to me if they had a problem. And that's one reason why I very rarely had a boat of my own. I didn't, I loved boats and I would like to have had a boat running all the time like Larry does, but it's not good for business. You can't tend to your boat and try to beat everybody out there when you've got all these other people coming to you to buy a boat. And consequently, I didn't - if I built a boat and ran it myself; it was for sale before I ever finished it. If anybody wanted it, they could have it. And I never kept a boat more than three or four races of my own. I had four. I had three, 135's I built, I think I had - I built one in '52. I had another one in '54, I had another one in '56. And theft along about 1961, I built a new shop up on Broad Street in Portsmouth, and I built it myself, I gelled it. So consequently, if I was moving out of one and build a new one, I couldn't build any boats, so I was out of boat building for over a year. And business had drifted here and yonder, so I built one and took it to the races, I won about four or five races with it. Boom, somebody had to have it. And same time I sold that boat, about --- within six months' time, I had a two-year backorder.

K.F.: You've got a great marketing technique.

(Laughter.)

C.B.: Good. I read a story that you had built one kit, and had a bad experience with it. Or not built a kit, but made a kit for someone else. Do you remember that?

H.L.: I have built - I have built two or three kits, but I've never had a bad experience with one. The only thing that I did drat I don't do, I did sell a set of plans to an outfit up in Canada. And I never know what become of it, how many boats they built or anything. But I've built two kits to go to New Zealand. And I built a seven-liter kit to go to Orange

Borough, Kentucky for Bill Steret (phonetic). And then I helped him out with a limited boat, which was Chrysler crew. But I don't think it was any more than that.

C.B.: This actually - I don't know how authoritative it was, that you - that somebody wanted you to give them a kit, and they gave you a kit, and then they copied - you gave them your kit and -

H.L.: Oh, I did, I did that, yeah. Yes, you did. You're right. I had two of those.

C.B.: What happened?

H.L.: One of them was old Charlie Lloyd up in Pennsylvania. He come down, said he wanted to build a boat for his self, could I let him take some measurements off of my drawings and all and sell him some material. Well that was the beginning of Lloyd Boats. He started building boats and competitioning there. And it was about three years before I ever got the little bit of money he owed me for the materials that he got from me. Took my plans, my material, went in business. Of course, he never built a boat that would beat mine.

C.B.: There you go.

H.L.: And I had learned how to - from up in New Jersey - he came down, stayed with Larry for a while, come around the shop, said he wanted to build a boat, and I let him - my frame layout and all, he copied and all, made a frame layout and he'd go home, build his boat. Next thing you know, he was in the boat business. He built four or five boats. What the heck was his name, I can't think - Blythe (phonetic), Alan Blythe.

C.B.: So it's down in history.

H.L.: You got it. I'd forgot all about that.

C.B.: Well I was trying to -

K.F.: Our job to bring it up.

C.B.: -- research your story. Yeah. I'm curious, since you spent your whole life down here, and my exhibit is about recreation, it's not just about racing, and I'm curious, how has the region here changed since you were a boy, that you see? I mean, obviously, they're remarkable changes. But do you have - can you describe how people have fun now versus how they did when you were a kid or even when your kids were kids, you know?

H.L.: Big change. Like I say, when I - when I was getting to be an active young person now, like the middle of the Depression. I was bom in '18. Depression started in '28. And it didn't start clearing up until about '34 or 5. So I was in high school right then. I went through high school without a nickel in my pocket. And you can imagine what you had to play with then. It's *nothing*. We went and played in the river in the summertime, played in the woods in the wintertime. But and played with little rowboats and stuff like that. Nowadays, they play with dope. The biggest attraction kids got nowadays is all these different drugs and all that they experiment with. And it's bad. I mean I'm not saying all of them do that, because there's any number of wonderful young people nowadays that I admire because they are not involved in this stuff And it makes you feel good to see them, 16, 17, 18-year old person that does not smoke, and doesn't do drugs and all. And they just good solid people. And you feel good about young people again. But the world is so different. It's so much attraction for it. And I just don't think it's good. I mean I may be old fashioned, but I just don't think all this freedom of speech, and freedom of spirit and all is good for people coming up in their formatting years, because

that's all they see. Television, and records, and everything has got so much bad stuff for them. All this hip hop and rap and all this stuff, it's just such foul profane language and all. And the dances and all that they do now, it's just so much different from when I was coming up.

C.B.: Did you have dances and stuff when you got out of high school?

H.L.: Oh, sure. When I was in high school and all, it was little different community halls in the area, like Norfolk, community halls I lived in, and Clarence Park (phonetic), was another area. But they had - usually they were found over your fire stations, the community hall. And they would have a disc jockey up there playing records. And nobody would have a date. The people, maybe two or three of them had dates. The rest of them, the girls would come, the boys would come, and they'd all meet there. There wasn't nowhere to date because 16, 17, 18-year old boys didn't have an automobile. You rode a bicycle, or you walked, or you bummed a ride. Maybe one person had use of his father's car, and six or eight people would pile in it and go. So it was just a big gang got together and had fun. And maybe they all piled in a car and drove to a drive-in afterwards and get a hot dog and a chocolate milk or something. You could get a hot dog for 10 cents, chocolate milk for a nickel. (Laughter.) But that was a lot of money to us 'cause couldn't - all the money you had was go to work on Saturday, cut somebody's grass in the summer or shovel snow off a sidewalk in the winter. You might make \$1.

C.B.: How did you end up going into boat building, opening that business from - you said you built a bunch of little boats. Like what, did your dad help you set up the shop or

H.L.: No, no. The closest thing I had to a shop when I was coming up was a little old single-car garage with no floor, just dirt floor. But I'd go to school, I'd carry my boards on, get on the streetcar with a few boards on my shoulder and carry them to school and run through the planer. I thought I'd died and gone to heaven when I moved over here. I was just a junior in high school. Morrison High School over in - new side, it was only a six-room building. Didn't have a total of 200 people, graduating class would be about 28, something like that. I come over here with a 1200 student school, first school in the State of Virginia to have talking movie pictures in it, and fully-equipped machine shop, filly-equipped woodshop, fully-equipped sheet metal shop. Man, I wanted to go to school every day. I never played hooky a day in my life.

C.B.: And so you would bring your boards so you could cut them?

H.L.: Oh, yeah, I'd take wood to school. I'd get some of my buddies to help me get on - I said you get on, two of you all get on a streetcar first, I'd have the boards, and stick your hand out the window, I'd put the boards on them and ride, just carry them to school. I'd jump off, go over and get the boards, I'd carry them to the wood shop. And then during my wood class, I'd run them through the planer and saw them up, do what I want, make the finish stuff, and then sand through it, go back home in the evening. Sometimes, if it was a long piece, we'd walk, 'cause I only lived - it was pretty good walk, about three miles, two and a half miles, but that wasn't nothing far as getting something done for my boat. So that's how I got started in boats was when I was going to school. And when I got a job, first job I ever worked, Virginia Chemical Company. But that was just a means to an end, just give me something to have income till I could gradually buy tools, knowing all the time that my main idea was to go in business. I went in business when I

was, let's see, in '45. I official went in business in 1945, which was, what, 28, 38 - I was 27 years old. That's pretty good jump for a 27-year old boy that hasn't been around the world a lot. Close to home.

C.B.: And what was your first shop like when you went into business?

H.L.: . Huh?

C.B.: What was your first, what was that first business like? You had your one-bay garage?

H.L.: Oh, no. I bought an old board and five lots, five city lots with old board on them, \$500 for the property and the building. You can imagine what that building was. It was a derelict. But I rolled out some toilet paper and covered the roof of it there and got it so it wouldn't leak, and started old tin sides with a wood roof, and tarpaper. I worked like a Trojan in there supporting that roof and - had a lot of poles holding the roof up, and I laced it up with heavy boards and all and sawed all those. I had work *in* there. And built a boat in there *on* the dirt floor and stuff I had a band saw, and a joiner. I had a planer, but I hadn't hooked that up yet. I got enough money, I built a board about a 16 foot square of cement right in the middle, put my machinery on. And every time I'd build a boat if I'd get a little extra money, I'd form up a place and pour a strip of concrete. I finally had concrete floor in there. I'm telling you. It was work, and hard work, but I was young, and I could handle it.

C.B.: Were you married then? Did you have children too you were trying support?

H.L.: Yeah. When I got - when I went in business, I was married, had two children, third one was on the way. And I was brave. I went right in that business with nothing. I had--- it was, I had a 1942 model car that I had all during the war. That was about war out.

C.B.: And so you built this boat, and who bought it? Do you remember?

H.L.: I was trying - it was a *young* boy in town, his father was a judge. Oast (phonetic). Townsend Oast. I built a snipe boat for him. I think I probably got \$300 for it. At the time, when I came out the Navy, I was only making \$1.14 an hour, times 40 hour week, what would that be? Probably \$45. Time you take the deductions out, I'd get about \$38. So if I could pull \$50 out of that place there for a week, I felt like I could do all right. But I took less than that to start with. Things were tight. And that's how I learned to work long hours. I'd go to work at 7, I was the original 7/Eleven. I'd go to work at 7 in the morning, I worked till 11 at night. Not one day a week, but five days a week, and I'd knock off at 6:00 on Saturday. That was some - and Sunday mornings a lot of times I'd go, after Sunday school, my father would whip me if I didn't, even though I was married, he'd get on me if I didn't go to Sunday school or church. I'd best at least go to Sunday school, if I didn't stay for preaching, I had to go to church on Sunday, some part of church. But I'd go down there on Sundays, maybe put in two or three hours sometimes. I tried to not to actually do any monetary work on Saturdays - on Sundays. I'm not a deeply religious person, but I was raised in church, and I have a lot of respect for it, and I try to lead a good life, and try to treat people fairly. I don't get up and preach, but I know there's somebody up there, and I respect it.

C.B.: Did you ever have a helper in your shop? I mean were you -

H.L.: Yeah. At one time, I had as many as three or four people working. But I had two or three apprentice boys that came along. Next thing you know, by the time they work

with me for a couple years, they knew enough about boat building, they applied to work Navy Yard, the boat shop, go right in there as a mechanic. I'm a pretty good teacher (laughter).

C.B.: Yeah, absolutely. So what do you think about your nickname, Rocketman?

H.L.: I don't know. I - that's kind of accident. Gwen or - what's her name, Wendy? I think it's her name. I'll find it somewheres. Where in the world is it?

C.B.: I don't know. It's a - I heard it in a magazine. There's a cover or a story, calls you Rocketman.

H.L.: Yeah. Well anyhow, this -

(END SIDE A.)

(BEGIN SIDE B.)

H.L.: -- just called to see how you were doing an all, and we talked for a few minutes. She was a nice lady. Just as nice as she could be. And she did a real, I thought so much of that thing. It was so factual. Most every reporter that ever interviewed me tries to embellish things and make it look real good, and nine times, it ends up being something that's not factual, and I don't like it at all. So I even called her up after I saw that. Somebody saw that and framed it and brought it to me. But she'd call me, and we were talking, and she said anything I ought to know? I said no, not that I know of. I said wait a minute. I said I've got a big old red rocket I built in 1956, a big unlimited is in here, and I'm going to re-do it. And that's where that came, she wrote that on the Bay Magazine.

C.B.: Right.

H.L.: And she wrote that on across it. She's not writing for Sebring's (phonetic) anymore. I don't know if she's freelancing or working with the Bay Magazine. But anyway, she wrote that article up with this information over the phone. She didn't, she didn't come down - she didn't come down.

C.B.: She missed a great opportunity to see you in person.

H.L.: Well she came down to for this one here and all, she

C.B.: Barely slowing down. Where would we ever be able to see one of your legendary boats? It makes me just - are they in museums, are they - do you know where there's any around? Do you know anybody that wants to give one to the Maritime Museum?

H.L.: I don't know of anybody that wants to donate one. They're so much in demand.

C.B.: I know.

H.L.: Everybody's trying to get one of my boats. Tom D'eath, I don't know whether he *has, how* many he has now. At one time, he had seven of them.

C.B.: D'E-A-T-H, I see that -

H.L.: He's down in Florida.

C.B.: In Florida.

H.L.: I don't know whether I have his address here or not. I don't even know where to look now.

C.B.: Would we be able to get to him through ADBA or something?

H.L.: Oh, yeah.

C.B.: Yeah?

H.L.: Yeah. He heads up the vintage and antique boat division of ADBA.

C.B.: Okay, great.

H.L.: So you'll be able to get his - through that. In fact, I'll dig around and find it. I'm running a little short on time.

C.B.: That's all right. Yeah, we don't want to hold you up. But I'm curious to know if you have photographs, or any memorabilia that you might be interested in letting us - not, obviously, today, but make copies of or help us with the exhibit?

H.L.: I think I might be able to help you out on that because I've got some that just came back from California. They were supposed to - if I could find them real quick, I think they're around here.

C.B.: If you can't, we can call and pester them.

H.L.: I sent a whole bunch of stuff some outfit working for, I think it was for Speed Vision or one of those - they were putting together a program, and they were going to do a - I've had two or three of them, and they was going to do another session on me, and they wanted to know if I had any photographs and all. I said yeah, as long as I get them back.

C.B.: Right. We're going to give them back too. Speed Vision -

H.L.: I was about, I was about ready to call out there and find out where my stuff was when they came back in the mail. There's -- no, that's his old address out in - Michigan.

C.B.: You've gotten warm. Do you ever go watch Larry race anymore?

H.L.: Yeah. I was over in Hampton -

C.B.: You can never find it when you're looking for it.

H.L.: I sure can't. Where in the devil was that? I know they're not on top there.

C.B.: Take your time.

H.L.: Pictures.

K.F.: You're quite a celebrity.

H.L.: There's that boat that was in there, the old Red Rocket right there. Took that picture after he got home and sent it to me. That's just - that's a **heavy** -

C.B.: Oh, yeah. See how the different -

H.L.: See, he brought it down, all this was missing when he came, this, the cockpit and this part, the dash, and that part. And you wouldn't believe what it cost to make that right there, because I had to re-develop that, and then I had to make a model of it, a wooden model And then I had to make a fiberglass mold off of it, then make a part in the mold -- truckload parts and all because of the process you had to go through to do that.

C.B.: This is sort of like all your P.R. packs.

H.L.: This is, this is the list of the boats. You want to see how many boats I've built? I loaned this to a gal that's writing up a - I don't know how long it's going to take her to write it up and all, but she wanted, she borrowed those. She works with the newspaper, but she's - that's a printout, a computer printout -

C.B.: **Yeah. I wonder** if we'd be able to make a copy of this.

K.F.: Do you have a Xerox machine there?

H.L.: Huh?

K.F.: Is that a Xerox machine there?

H.L.: **Yeah**, it is. It's an old one, but it works.

C.B.: Can we just make a copy of it?

H.L.: That's why **I'm making** all those copies.

C.B.: Are all these pages -

H.L.: Yeah. They're all -

C.B.: Oh, this is only the 60's, Kelly. This is not -

H.L.: (Laughter). One of them's a list of the boats that have - then that would be all the boats that had U.S. One, another one have, all the world records and -

C.B.: **Would** you let me borrow it and send it back to you?

H.L.: Sure.

C.B.: I'm good at it, I'll send it back. And we'll take it home and make copies at the museum and just stick them in an envelope and send them back to you next week.

H.L.: Sure.

C.B.: That way, we don't have to stand -

H.L.: You'd be welcome to use that, but that's making one copy at a time. That's

C.B.: That's not a very good envelope.
(Laughter.)

H.L.: Wait a minute.

C.B.: I just picked them up, and they went shooting out the bottom. That's okay, I'll just put a paperclip on it. Some kind of trick you play on people. Sure, you can borrow them, and then they fall out on the floor.

H.L.: I still got them.
(Laughter.)

H.L.: Let me take this out. I don't know what it is. Wise boats -

C.B.: Put that in here. **Thank** you.

H.L.: Ought to take my stuff and send it on -

C.B.: Here, we'll just make a copy. And then what I'll do when I send these back to you is say I'll send you an envelope, and I'll say did you find those pictures yet, and then you can put them in an envelope and send them back.

H.L.: I've got them. I've got a whole press packet here somewheres. And I do not know - I'm thinking maybe, I'm thinking maybe that I took them home.

C.B.: Took them home.

H.L.: And gave them to my wife so she could put them back in the scrapbook.

C.B.: Good, well that's a good thing. At least she knows where they are.

H.L.: Here's something that was taken during my induction into the Virginia Sports Hall of Fame.

C.B.: Oh, I read that yesterday too. I forgot to mention that. That was an honor, wasn't it?

H.L.: Yeah. My nephew was taking pictures everywhere, and he ran them off on - whatever type camera you call that. There's that old man and his wife.

C.B.: Is that you too? Let's see.

H.L.: Yeah. She got her tongue sticking out. (Laughter.)

C.B.: Oh, yes, she does. She's pretty. What a handsome couple.

H.L.: That's the president of the bank who introduced me.

C.B.: You went to Richmond for this?

H.L.: No, it was right here in Portsmouth.

C.B.: Oh, they did it right here.

H.L.: Virginia **Sports Hall** of Famers in Portsmouth.

C.B.: Well there's a beautiful picture -

H.L.: That's my second-oldest boy there. Got killed a year ago Memorial Day.

C.B.: Oh, I'm sorry.

H.L.: Yeah. Had a pile of pictures.

C.B.: All your *kids look* like you, well the ones we've met.

H.L.: Huh?

C.B.: I said the ones we've seen pictures of look like you.

K.F.: All your kids.

C.B.: Yeah.

H.L.: They do, huh?

CB.: Oh, Larry - I said to Kelly it's amazing how much he resembles you.

H.L.: He does, really. All my boys do. I don't know. I'm just strong genes.

C.B.: Yeah, I guess so. Rocketman strikes again

(Laughter).

K.F.: What's your mailing address, Mr. Lauterbach?

H.L.: Huh?

C.B.: Your address.

H.L.: Is there two of them there?

K.F.: No. We have just one.

H.L.: You can have more, you can have both.

C.B.: Actually, Kelly is going to be leaving the employment of the museum next week, and she wanted to meet you before she finished. I'm going to be staying there, and I'm going to be the one pestering you from here on out.

H.L.: All right.

C.B.: Is that all right?

H.L.: Any time.

C.B.: I don't have my card with me so I could give you, so you really don't know *who* you're talking to, do you?

H.L.: No, I don't.

(Laughter.)

C.B.: I just forgot my cards. But I'm going to stick everything in an envelope and mail it back, and I'll put a card, and I'll say it's me, *who you* met last week.

H.L.: Okay, okay.

C.B.: And I'm going off to San Diego tomorrow.

(OFF RECORD.)

C.B.: Like he plays a head game when he races. He races so hard.

H.L.: He's smart. He races smart.

C.B.: It takes your breath away because you think whoa, he just opened that thing up and you're like - but Wheeler doesn't seem as gutsy. So it almost is like Wheeler needs a bigger motor, because Larry's gutsy.

H.L.: Larry's good, Larry's good. He's good on the clock and all. He's having a little trouble with this new boat. The engine is at the low end, it's not responding like he wants to, and it makes it a little hard on him, especially if you've got too many amateurs out there, they all come up too early. It makes it hard for you to back down. You can't let everybody get in front of you. You'd have nowhere to go. So if they come up too early, you're almost obligated to come up with them. Then that means you got to go quick at

the beginning. And the engine he's got now, when he gets down below 60 miles an hour, it doesn't get warmed up quick. So he's trying, he's working on the man that build the engine, trying to get him to move - calm it down a little bit to a lower end, 'cause he's got plenty of top end. It goes like the devil when it goes. He's good, Larry's good. He's a good driver.

C.B.: I can tell you're ready to go.

Laughter.)

(END OF INTERVIEW.)