

Interview Log

Interviewee: Nellie Flowers **Tape #:** OR 120.1

Interviewer: Kelly Feltault and Melissa McLoud **# of Tapes:** 1 of 2

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Nellie Flowers is the mother of Rhonda Aaron who Kelly Feltault documented for the Delmarva Project. Nellie is also related to Tom Flowers, current county Commissioner for Dorchester county.

BEGIN SIDE A

KF: Go ahead and say your name.

NF: Nellie Flowers.

KF: All right. And um, I usually start off with the real easy questions Nellie, like where were you born and what date, and all that kind of stuff, um, and then we'll just start talking about crab picking.

NF: Ok.

KF: Um, so where were you born?

NF: Uh Golden Hill.

KF: In Golden Hill?

NF: Um-hmmm.

KF: Ok. Were you born at home or...?

NF: Yeah.

elligible]?

NF: No, we had a doctor that usually come around and uh, delivered us.

KF: Ok. Ok, so there was no need to go into Cambridge then to the hospital?

NF: No. Um, usually it wasn't um, wasn't anything, you know, the doctors usually came at the house.

KF: Right.

NF: There was a lot of times then that they didn't have no money.

KF: Right, right. Well let me ask you what year you were born in.

NF: Uh, twenty-eight.

KF: Ok. All right, and um, were your parents from this area too?

NF: Um-hmmm. Were from Golden Hill.

KF: Ok. And um, what did your parents do for a living?

NF: Uh, he, my father was a farmer.

KF: Ok. Ok.

NF: And, of course my mother and, and us children went and picked tomatoes.

KF: Ok. Ok. So when did you pick tomatoes?

NF: When I was about four or five years old.

KF: Ok. [Laughter]

NF: [Laughter] On up when, we used to go in there and just take a water bucket. [phone rings]

KF: Right, picking tomatoes. So, was that something that a lot of women did then, was pick tomatoes?

NF: Yeah, most of them.

KF: Um-hmmm.

NF: Yeah, most of the housewives, they always went out and picked tomatoes. We

always had to go in, in the summertime and plant them.

KF: Ok. And was there a canning factory around here? (Some sort of alarm goes off, as if a phone has been left off the hook somewhere]

NF: Uh-huh. Oh we had several canning factories, but we don't have them anymore.

KF: When did those close up?

NF: I guess approximately twenty, twenty years ago or more. Could be about twenty-five to be honest.

KF: Ok. Ok. [Sounds of movement, laughter, sound of alarm dwindles and then disappears] That's a good solution.

NF: That's a good solution. [Laughter]

MM: It works. [Laughter]

KF: [Laughter] So when did you enter crab picking?

NF: Not till I was married.

KF: Ok.

NF: I got married when I was twenty-one. And uh, we uh, we just decided to change jobs.

KF: Um-hmmm. Was there a reason for that or...?

NF: Well just because I was over here where the crab picking was at and all the factories were around Andrews.

KF: Oh, ok, ok. Huh. Well how did you learn how to pick crabs?

NF: Mother-in-law.

KF: Oh, so your husband's mom taught you how to do that.

NF: Um-hmmm.

KF: And did she pick crabs as well?

NF: Yeah, she picked all of her life.

KF: Oh, ok.

NF: Since she was a little teeny girl.

KF: Hmmm. And how did she teach you ... how to pick crabs? Do you remember?

NF: We just went into factory, I told her I wanted to pick. And we went into factory and went ahead and picked.

KF: What was your first day at the factory like?

NF: Nervous.

[Laughter]

NF: [Laughter] Just like today.

KF: [Laughter] There's nothing to be nervous about, we don't bite. It's all right. Can you describe what the factory looked like that first day that you came in there? Do you remember any impressions you had?

NF: Just the people looked at me just to say well are you going to pick crabs? [Laughter]

KF: Really?

NF: Yeah, but in them days we didn't, we just went ahead and somehow, they showed us how to do it and, and you kept going from there.

KF: Um-hmmm.

NF: It's not...

KF: And did they start you off picking claws or did you picking crab?

NF: Well uh, picking claws. We cracked claws at first. And then, we just decided, my sister and I just decided we were going to start picking crabs. Because they would leave us in the factory with all the claws. Of course in them days we had to pick uh, we had to crack all the claws, no matter how small they were.

KF: Right.

NF: So we just decided we weren't going to stay there, no longer than the rest of them, so ... But we used to have to crack claws the whole time.

KF: Um-hmmm. And I've seen some ladies do it, can you tell me how you cracked the claws? Or how they cracked the claws where you worked?

NF: We just cracked claw fingers. And well, one can has got um, we just used the back part of it, in, put that in there, and then the claw fingers we used to, well they're called cocktail hangers, and we just put it in another can.

KF: Um-hmmm. What uh, tool did you use to crack the claws?

NF: Just a, a ordinary knife, a regular crab knife.

KF: Ok. Ok. Who makes the crab knives that you use? Is it Carbo-Hall **[spelling?]**?

NF: Carbo-Hall.

KF: Yeah, ok. Have they always made the knives that people have used?

NF: Mmmm... no, it was another, it was another name to them, but Carbo-Hall hadn't made them at that time.

KF: Ok, ok. Hmmm, ok.

MM: Um, how long did you have to pick claws before they let you start...?

NF: Oh I could have, unh-uh, I could have went right in picking crabs if I wanted to.

MM: If you wanted to. But you didn't.

NF: And I didn't.

MM: Ok.

NF: Because I thought it was easier for me to crack the claws, because I had tried crabs at my mother's house, she used to go out and catch a few crabs and uh, bring them home and steam them and when we did my job was to pick the crabs. And all I had was about ten, twelve, crabs and it would take me all day to pick them.

KF: [Laughter]

NF: [Laughter] Had no idea what I was doing. And what I was doing was very wrong.

KF: What were you doing wrong?

NF: I just, I just weren't cleaning them up right.

KF: Ok.

NF: And uh, and of course and I just, well I didn't even cut the knucks **[spelling?]** off of them, I just um, would just pull the claws off and try to pick them that way.

MM: How did you, who taught you how to do it the right way, did your mother-in-law teach you?

NF: Mother-in-law. Um-hmmm.

MM: Did she sit beside you and put a...?

NF: No, unh-uh.

MM: How did she teach you?

NF: Well she just uh, she just told me how to do it and every once in a while she'd come over and she'd say, now cut it this way you'll get a little bit faster.

KF: Hmmm. So just showed you little tricks.

NF: Um-hmmm, um-hmmm. Then you kind of watch the other people.

MM: How many other people were in the room, do you remember?
We used to have thirty some pickers in there.

MM: So you watched the women that were sitting beside you?

NF: Um-hmmm, um-hmmm. But then it got so that we didn't have very many pickers. Of course the older ones were gone. And we didn't have very many pickers so uh, then's when they brought the Mexicans in.

MM: When did that start to happen?

NF: I guess about five, six years ago.

MM: Ok, ok, so you had a full picking house until a couple of years ago really?

NF: No urn, no we only had uh, wound up with about ten, twelve pickers, is all we used to have after the older ones died off And then we had urn, we only had just a few pickers. So it's the reason why they had to either bring the Mexicans in or we, we just couldn't pick them. And at that time there was a lot of crabs around there.

KF: Right, right.

NF: But most of now what we pick is you know, is crabs away from here. North Carolina and Delaware.

KF: Hmmm. From Delaware?

NF: Um-hmmm. There's also, well the other day Jay, not, not my boss, but the one down the road farther, urn, he had them from Louisiana.

KF: Um-hmmm.

MM: Is this Jay Newcombe **[spelling?]** at A.E. Phillips?

NF: Um-hmmm.

MM: So they're bring them from Louisiana now?

NF: He had, well I don't know how many they brought in but they just brought some to, he steamed them for his uh, some of his people. And of course he gave Rhonda **[spelling?]** and Larry some. And Rhonda said they were delicious.

KF: [Laughter]

NF: You don't really want them when you're working on them.

KF: No?

NF: Unh-uh.

KF: So you're not a big fan of crabs because you have to pick them?

NF: Um, I can eat them or I can leave them alone. If it's nothing but crabs, if I go **[unintelligible phrase]** I can eat two or three. But if not, I don't. It don't bother me but if there's anything else there to eat. [Laughter]

KF: [Laughter] Ok. Well let me have you describe what the picking table was like. Uh, when you, and what company was it that you started working with?

NF: W. T. **[not positive I've heard these initials right]** Ruark.

KF: Oh, ok. Do you still work there?

NF: Um-hmmm.

KF: Ok.

NF: Been a long time ago.

KF: How many years?

NF: Oh.... about fifty.

KF: About fifty years.

NF: Uh-huh.

KF: Can you describe what the picking table was right when you started and who sat next to you?

NF: Well the first, that they were, they were like wooden tables but they have to have a

stainless steel top.

KF: Right,

NF: So uh, later on in the years we got uh, metal tables.

KF: Uh-huh, ok.

NF: But um, it's just, just a table that you, one sits across in front of you. Just, you know like we're sitting now.

KF: Right, ok.

NF: Big enough to put a pile of crabs in the center, and you pick from one side and they pick from the other.

KF: Now do you work as a team, the two of you, trying to pick that pile of crabs?

NF: Oh well, we pick until they're all gone.

KF: Does it help if there's someone across from you who might be kind of fast, does that keep you going or...?

NF: Nnnn...no. Because I'm never as fast as the one sitting across from me. [Laughter]

KF: [Laughter]

NF: Of course I have a Mexican lady sits across in front of me now.

KF: Oh ok, so does everybody sit in the same place as usual?

NF: Um-hmmm, each day we go in, we have our own places. So, every year we go back and we'll sit down in that same place that's our, that our **[unintelligible word]**.

Have you been sitting in the same place for fifty years?

NF: No. No I changed.

KF: When did you change and why? [Laughter]

NF: [Laughter] Well I changed one time, it just, just because it was um, more convenient, for me to get in and out of my seat. And um, it wasn't anybody sitting in front of me then. But um, last year my sister convinced me to sit back with her. She says my husband cleans up some crabs, of course he cleans up crabs for her and when uh, and she say because and that way, if I get too many crabs in front of me I can just scoot them over to you. So she just pushes them all over to me. Every once in a while you'll see this hand go, when she got them in front of her she'll go.... slide them over to me.

[Laughter]

NF: [Laughter] That makes it good. Because it makes me a little bit faster too.

KF: Um-hmmm, ok. And has your sister been picking there for fifty years too?

NF: Uh, no, she's uh, let's see, she was in Alabama first.

KF: Oh ok.

NF: Because her husband was in the service. And then when she came back, I guess, I guess she been going, working there, different places, about forty years.

KF: Ok, ok. What's it like working with your sister?

NF: Fun. It's not bad. We just talk to each other.

KF: Is that usually what happens on the table, is everybody's just talking?

NF: Um-hmmm. In fact, all over the factory you just hear these noises and sometimes you can pick up on what they're saying and sometimes you don't. Because there's so many of us talking at one time.

KF: Well if I was to walk in your picking house what would it sound like, what would I hear?

NF: Well you'd probably hear crab shells.

KF: Banging against each other?

NF: Um-hmmm. You'd probably hear that and uh, you'd hear us talking at first and then we, as it goes on we're quiet. We don't say a word then, if anybody walks in. [Laughter]

[Laughter]

NF: That's with all of us...

KF: Why is that?

NF: I don't know, we just quiet down, I guess we respect the other person as they walk in.

KF: So if it's anybody that walks in? Or just a stranger?

NF: Just strangers.

KF: Ok.

NF: If the inspector walks in, we calm down, we don't say anything. [Laughter]

KF: [Laughter] Ok. Well since you brought that up, what's it like when the inspector walks in?

NF: Well, I don't get too nervous, because I feel that I'm in the right of everything that I'm doing. But uh, it's not bad.

KF: What was it like when you first started? When the inspector would walk in?

NF: Well we didn't have very many inspectors then.

KF: Oh, ok.

NF: They came in becau... a couple times a year, and that was it. But they're in there every week now.

KF: Really!

NF: Um-hmmm, we have them almost every week.

KF: Every week, wow.

NF: It's more or less, well sometimes that they test their meat. They have their meat tested and they come in and get samples for bacteria.

KF: Right, right. What happens if they find something?

NF: Uh, they'll just let them know and, we have to do a little bit better. But most of the time I don't think they find that much wrong.

KF: Ok.

NF: Of course I guess it depends on the crabs you have too.

KF: Right.

NF: But uh, it's not bad.

KF: Ok, ok.

NF: I don't mind the inspectors now walking around, checking us all out. Because we have to have our hairnets on, we know that before we go in there. And we also know we have to get up and wash our hands. We have to go up and weigh our own meat. Wash our trays and um, and sterilize them.

KF: What do you all sterilize them in?

NF: Uh, HTH.

KF: Hmmm, I don't know what that is.

NF: It's AT... HCH, or sometimes, it could be bleach. But most of the time it's HTH.

KF: And you dip it in there, you dip your tray into the bussel [?], uh bath of it?

NF: Um-hmmm. We have two stainless steel tubs and we wash our trays with a brush in one side and dip it in the other side. And pick our cans up. Of course we sterilize our hands as we're dipping them.

KF: Right.

NF: And then we also have buckets of water at each sink. And we, if we go to, if we go out to the bathroom, then when we come back we wash our hands. And uh, dip our hands in the HTH water,

KF: Ok, ok. Huh. So that must be a, a pretty, it's sounds like it adds a lot of steps to

NF: It has. It is, it really is. And you don't touch your seat after you, when you get ready to sit down. You have to make sure your seat is ready and, and sometimes you scooch your seat in with you, with your feet, you know with your arm and feet, you scooch your seat in.

KF: Right, right.

NF: Because you're not allowed to touch the chairs.

KF: Huh, ok. Sounds like being a doctor when you scrub, you can't touch...

NF: Right. Right.

KF: [Laughter]

NF: [Laughter] Somebody told me I should really have been a doctor, I said well I know

KF: [Laughter]

NF: [Laughter] Of course it's um, some I've seen some people wear gloves to pick in. But I can't do it.

KF: Why not?

NF: It, it gets in my way. But I have seen a lot of them wear them.

KF: Is that because um, the sterilizer might irritate their skin?

NF: No, uh sometimes they get uh, they break out from the crabs,
KF: Oh, ok. What is it about the crabs?

NF: It's just something in the crabs and some of their hands break out. At times. Now I've seen one place, True Vinson's **[not sure I've got this name right]**, and I walked in there because we were going to get crab meat from him for the, he was donating this crab meat for the school. And um, when I went in there, they every one had blue gloves on. That's what they learned to pick in, of course they were all ... he didn't have no local crab ... no pickers in there at that time. They were all from, I think they're ... Cambodians, or they were at that time. But then he has, I think he has Mexicans now.

KF: Ok. And you haven't heard of anyone wearing gloves? It's a new one.

NF: Yeah, some people do. Now me, when I get ready in the morning, I get up two o'clock.

KF: Um-hmmm.

NF: And, get sometimes, get my cup of coffee, sometimes I wait till I get to factory, get me a cup of coffee and drink it and, before we start picking. But, I wrap this finger here and my two thumbs into tape. Then they have finger cots [?] that I put right over top of them because if I don't I get a callus there.

KF: Ok. And what motion is it that gives you the callus?

NF: The knife handle. When you're picking, it's the knife handle that gives you the callus. Some can go with it and some can't, and I can't, I can't stand them, they kill me. But then I put the finger cots on and change them about four or five times a day. In fact I change them almost every time I go up and weigh.

KIT: So then you put the new finger cots on?

NF: Fresh one on, uh-huh.

KF: Have you been doing that since the beginning, or when did you start using those?

NF: Um, we started using those when the Mexicans come, that's about five or six years ago.

KF: And before that, did you, how, when did you start putting the tape around your fingers?

NF: Well I used to put the tape on but then I used to always buy gloves and cut the finger out and put over them.

KF: And you've done that for fifty years?

NF: I've done it a long time.

KF: Long time.

NF: Yep, long time. But when you get a cut from picking crabs, it's sore. Because sometimes at night when you got, when I would get a cut I'd have, a lot of time in summertime, I'd just go ahead and put Vaseline or something on my hands and stick them inside, well a lot of them use gloves but I just used a pair of old, you know, white socks. And just stick my hands in them so they wouldn't get sore.

KF: At night.

NF: Because over night they do get sore.

KF: It's a chemical in the crab that when it gets in the cut irritates your skin? Or is it just having that many cuts on your hand?

NF: Just having the cuts. And they really do hurt. It's like a paper cut.

KF: Um-hmmm. Can't see it all the time but you know it's there.

NF: But you know it's there.

KF: Is that the worst injury that you had?

NF: Yeah. I think, I think most of us seem to nick it just a tiny bit. Well of course and when you cut your finger you have to get up and go and wash them and make sure there's no blood on them.

KF: Then do you have to put a special bandage on that cut or....?

NF: Um, no most of times it'll stop bleeding. And then you're ok. It's like when you cut yourself and when it stops bleeding that's it. But then, it hurts worse when you re-cut that place. Because sometimes you can hit the same place twice. Now I've done that before.

KF: Do you have any special home remedies you use on that besides the Vaseline, to kind of take the sting out?

NF: No. Just, well when I come home I make sure I get another piece of tape after I take the tape you know off of my hands I wash my hands real good then I'll tape it because it, or a bandaid, because that way it'll um, like close the cut. As long as that bandaid's on it, it don't hurt. You take that bandaid off, it does hurt.

KF: What are some of the other injuries that crab pickers get?

NF: None as I know of

KF: That's the worst of it, the cuts and stuff.

NF: Um-hmmm. That's the worst of it.

KF: Ok, well let me back up a bit and you were talking about the chairs and you have to push them in with your elbows and I'm wondering does everybody have a special chair they have to sit in? Or want to sit in?

NF: Um-hmmm.

KF: And what's your chair like?

NF: It's a wooden chair, and we were supposed to be getting metal but they tell us now that they don't have to go with the metal. That we can still use the wooden chair. But uh, it's just made a little bit different from, they're mostly all made alike. But I like my chair a little bit straighter, the back of it. Some of them can use a chair that leans back farther and they have a pillow in it. But I just like a little bit straighter backed chair.

KF: Now do some people cut the legs off to make them shorter to fit the table or um...?

NF: No, they're, well some of them's a little bit higher than the other ones and you pick your chair what you want it.

KF: So they come like that?

NF: Um-hmmm. They make them, they make some shorter, some taller. I like the taller chair.

KF: Ok, and can you describe what your work space looks like when you're about to start picking crabs where all your tools are and cups and stuff like that?

NF: Well, just have our, I usually have my cups on the left-hand side. I have a tray. Just set the tray, some of the people stand, but I sit down, I always sit down. And just, within my lap, or I got a little place underneath the table it'll hold it, we got a little clip that goes under the table, a stainless steel clip, and we, of course not everybody has it because urn, my sister's son made them. And some of us when we're sitting down that way we don't have to hold our tray. We just sit the two cans on our tray and just go ahead and start picking.

KF: And can you describe to me how you pick a crab? Like what's the first thing you do?

NF: The first thing we do is to pull the claws off. So, the biter claw. Then we pull the back shell, then I cut the mouthpiece out, and come around to one side of the crab, then turn it and cut the other side.

KF: So cut the legs off?

NF: Um-hmmm. Then we go ahead and cut just the top off, I pick the top. Of course some of them just picks, little pieces, little once in a while, I mean they, if they're small and they just, they just get rid of the top of it. I could never do that. But I have seen them do it. And then just go right ahead in and pick the **[unintelligible word, sounds as if she's said "longbath"]**, and pick the rest of it. Start all over again.

KF: Ok. Now um, I've had some people describe uh, there's a certain way to pick the lump to make it look pretty.

NF: Um-hmmm.

KF: And can you describe that to me, how you do that?

NF: Well a lot of them goes in from the fin, where the fin is, and come over. And uh, but most of the time I cut around the back of the shell in between the two centers, I cut around the back of it and then lift it out.

KF: Oh, so then it comes out whole.

NF: Now some of them can make prettier lump than I can.

KF: And why is that?

NF: I don't know. I think they were more or less taught that way. And of course my mother-in-law could pick beautiful lump which I couldn't lift it out as pretty as she could. Because she always had the lump and the next section to it. And it all depends on your crab too, if they're steamed real good you can get that lump out real easy, and it's according on the fatness of it too. I like a half-fat crab, I don't like a real fat one and I don't like a poor one.

KF: So like a medium one?

NF: So like a medium crab that I like.

KF: Ok, and do any of the pickers sort of pick over the crabs looking for the best ones?

NF: [Laughter] Yes. [Laughter]

KF: [Laughter] Now what happens when you catch someone picking over the crabs?

NF: Oh, I went through that last year. The lady in front of me she was just reaching over picking up all these big crabs and I thought to myself no you're not going to do that to me. And I started picking too. Never did it before in my life. And I started that one day and I figured I'll try to break her but it didn't break her. She was still doing it.

KF: So how did you fix this?

NF: [Laughter] I didn't, I just let her go. No, I've seen a lot of them pick over crabs.

And to me I cannot do it, it just it's something there. I did that one day, and it weren't worth it to me. The only thing I don't like is for them to pick over them and then push the crabs back and pull the top. And I seen a lot ... that's how they get all the big crabs, or the good crabs. They just pick out what they got here, and then they'll, some of them will push them back and pull from the top over. And then some of them they'll start picking and they'll pull to the side and they'll leave all these small ones over here and reach and get more and then just as they go around, they circle right around that table. [Laughter]

KF: [Laughter]

NF: But I just, I just can't do it, it's not something I started out with.

KF: Was this a new lady that was sitting across from you that did this to you.

NF: Um-hmmm. Well, she had been here every year for about five years.

KF: And just one day it didn't....

NF: She had always done it, but see last year I picked in front of her for the first time. Which I was picking in front, I was picking at one end of a table that nobody was set to, but I could have still stayed there but then again I got most of all, like the trash that came out of the bottom. I'd get a lot of that and then when my sister she says well why don't you move back here with us, and ... and when my husband cleans up crabs he can, I'll just shove you some.

KF: Um-hmmm. And what does it mean "cleans up crabs"?

NF: Well he takes everything off ready to cut the top off.

KF: Before they get put on the table.

NF: Now he sets it like with you and she sets in the middle and I set on this....

KF: They have an assembly, you've got a little....

NF: Yeah.

KF: Working together as a team. Does anybody else do that?

NF: Unh-uh. Just the three of us.

KF: Oh, ok. And has he always done that?

NF: Unh-uh. I think he started about four years ago. He retired from Marine Police. And he just had wanted something else to do. He was crabbin', but he didn't like that and his son took off and went and got hisself another job. So that left him with nobody. So anyhow, she um, he says well I'm going in there and clean up crabs for you. Not that she

wanted him to do it, but he did. And uh, that's the way it's been for the last urn four years.

KF: Does he get paid for that?

NF: No. He just helps her out. And he helps me too. But we laugh and carry on and have a good time there.

KF: Now are you related to anyone else in the crabhouse?

NF: Well in the summertime my sister and I, I've got two sister-in-laws that work there, in the summertime Joyce works there, my other sister-in-law that lives next door. But then I have a sister-in-law, she's around Wingate, that she comes over and picks. But it's just a, just my sister and two sister-in-laws, they're the onliest ones related to me.

KF: And other people who are picking, are they related too? I mean are their families in the picking house?

NF: Um-hmmm, we have um, like mother-in-law with some of them. Of course some of them don't have anybody in there. And we have one of them that has a mother-in-law. And of course we have, the Mexican girls, we have a lot of them are sisters. And we have, we have a mother and daughter comes from Mexico.

KF: So is it mostly women Mexicans who are coming here.

NF: Urn, we've had uh, we had one man that was picking from Mexico, that was husband and wife. But, they decided to go back last year. And of course now as far as I know, they won't be back this year. And of course they were two of the fastest pickers we had.

KF: Oh really. Now had did they learn how to pick. Did they do that ...?

NF: Just watched us. And they're, they're faster than most of us.

KF: Hmmm. How long does it usually take them to catch on and get fast.

NF: Maybe about a month. They catch on real quick. Of course we've had some that didn't catch on as quick, but we've never had to send one back for it. They've caught on, you know, how to do it.

KF: Now what happens, what would happen say if you had never caught on to crab picking? Would they have kept you in or would they have said....?

NF: I would have still stayed there.

KF: Uh-huh. So it's not how fast, it's....

NF: It's how, well, it's not the fastness of it, it's how you pick the crab. Now we've got some that've been there ever since they started they're still picking bone. And they have to

get on them almost every day. And what it is is they try to pick a lot of crab meat, try to race somebody else. And when they start racing the bones go in.

KF: Ok, ok. So there are little competitions between pickers.

NF: Um-hmmm. I don't have anybody to race.

KF: [Laughter]

NF: [Laughter] Because I'm slow anyhow. But I never tried to race nobody up there.

KF: Now do the pickers all live in this area from Hooper's Island and Wingate?

NF: Well the onliest one lives around to Wingate, of course she comes, she lives with her son at Golden Hill in the summer time. But they, everybody else lives around here.

KF: Ok, and it's all women picking except of course for your in-law.

NF: Yeah, the rest of us are women.

KF: And how many pickers are white and how many pickers are black?

NF: Well we have um, we have about ten of us pickers, but the rest of them are Mexicans.

KF: Oh, ok, so there's no African-American pickers?

NF: Unh-uh. No, we used to have some, but they decided, they were coming from Cambridge and they just decided that they didn't want to pick no more.

KF: Hmmm.

NF: Some of them got different jobs around.

KF: Right, right.

NF: But, all what we got in there is Mexicans. Of course we get along with them too.

KF: What's it like, I'm assuming that they don't speak too much English.

NF: Not a whole lot. Once in a while you can pick up on what they're saying. Like I knew, I know a few words in, you know, in Mexican, and when they say them, then I know what they're saying. But it's not a whole lot that I can pick up. They can pick up more of ours than what we can of theirs.

KF: Ok, ok.

NF: Like crabs, we call them "crabs" and they call them "haydas" **[uncertain what word was actually said here]**.

KF: Oh, hmmm, haydas [?]. I don't think I ... knew the Spanish word for crabs.

NF: And like manana is tomorrow. So we pick up on a few things that they say.

KF: Ok.

NF: And if we can't understand what they're saying, they'll imprint it on the table and a lot of their words are spelt like ours. They have a different, like an "a" is a different design. But we understand what that "a" is.

KF: Um-hmmm. That is what I was going to ask you is how are people communicating in the crab picking world. [Laughter]

NF: [Laughter] Once they're ...I knew every one of their names and I could every morning we could do exercises, we would just say, well one girls says exercise you know she'd holler out and we would just put our hands up and I knew every one of those girls' names. And then we got new ones in and I couldn't remember them. They used to get me to holler out all the names you know.

KF: Um-hmmm.

NF: So they could do the exercise too.

KIT: Ok, and what are these exercises?

NF: Just for fun. Just to stretch yourself, helps your back. Well we used to do it every morning but that was just for fun.

KF: Before you started?

NF: No, about eight o'clock.

KF: So after you'd been at it for a while?

NF: Right. It just helps relax your back, it pulls your muscles.

KF: Ok, um, let me ask you how does a crab picker retire?

NF: They don't. [Laughter] If they get too old and decide that they don't work anymore, you do it by the way you, if you, by your age, if you feel like that you can't do it then, they always quit. Now we have one lady that was there and she slept a lot when she was picking but she, she didn't give it up. And she um, we quit that fall and I believe it was January she died. But you really don't, you don't give it up. Like they, they asked me when I was going to retire, I said I'm not planning on it. They said well how about if you won the lottery? And I said what difference does it make, I still don't want to give it up. I'd only give it up if I had to. It doesn't make no difference to me how much money I had,

I still like it.

KF: What is it that you like about it?

NF: I just to be in with other people. And I feel like, if you give that up then what have you got to live for?

KF: Um-hmmm.

NF: You're gonna go down, I've seen too much of it. I've seen people go right down hill when they quit work. And I don't want to do that. Because I just celebrated my seventy-first birthday. [Laughter]

KF: [Laughter]

NF: And I'm not ready to retire yet.

KF: Well what's the best thing about picking crabs?

NF: Well you really, the best thing I see about picking crabs than any other job you got a boss, yeah, but he's not on you all the time, he don't, just stand and say you've got to do or you've got to do that. We just do our thing. And if we make a mistake, he'll tell us. It used to be that if people got bone in their claw, in their crabs, he would say um, you all got to do better. But we got a good boss. But now then they would take them, take the bones back to the pickers. Which I think is very good. Because you don't get blamed for somebody else picking the bone. Because, one day they were going through the meat to find out who, you know had the bone, and they, and um, this colored boy was, was uh, went through mine and I had a phone call and I come back and I said Jackie, now you've give everybody else their bones back, where is mine? He picked up off of my tray two little teeny pieces of bone. And I said is that all I got back? He says that's all I found.

KF: Hmmm.

NF: So, and I weren't picking it special either.

KF: Ok.

MM: So the special has less bone in it?

NF: Well, I mean, if you, if you're going to.... Like I mean uh, I don't, I don't pick, I pick meat all way along same way.

KF: Right, right, ok.

NF: And some of them has, has to pick it a little bit slower to get a better grade of meat.

KF: Ok.

NF: But I just do it one pace, all the time.

KF: Ok. Well can you tell me what the names of the rooms of the crab house are and where they're located? We haven't been in Ruark's [?] yet.

NF: Well we have a, we come in through, well we got several doors we can come in to the packing room, that's where they weigh their meat and pack it. Then there, we have a picking room. That's where we pick at, in one room, and the packing room is in the other.
KF: Ok, and who works in the packing room?

NF: Um, we have several. Usually uh, it's um, Jackie. It's a black boy that uh, that weighs the meat. And sometimes if it's too much for him to weigh then somebody else of the workers will come in and put lids on, put them on ice.

KF: So he's the only one back there packing and weighing?

NF: Well he does it, and we have another boy that works there too. One or the other does one job and one does the other. They just take turns, you know, whichever one is there watching ... gets to weigh the meat and then, the other one packs. Then the boss's wife comes out and she helps. And she works in the *office*.

KF: Is the office separate from the packing room?

NF: Yeah, the office is right off of the first, well, you've got to come in the packing room and go to the office. But you come in through the doors in the packing room and you go in through, to the *office*, he's got two big rooms back there. And then uh, that's where she works.

KF: Do you ever go to the office? Do pickers ever go to the office for any reason or do you just mostly stay in the picking room.

NF: No, we stay in the picking room but we, sometime we go in there and sit down and talk to her. It all depends. Or um, I mean we're never called to the *office* unless we got a phone call or something like.

KF: And that's where you got to get your phone calls is in the office?

NF: Um-hm, in the office. Of course they have a phone on the outside of the, in the, in the steaming area, they have a phone there, now that's where I mostly go to get my phone calls.

KF: Tell me about the steaming area, it's next door to the picking room?

NF: Uh-huh. It's right off of the picking room. And it's like a steam box in there. And uh, of course a lot of times now they steam what [?] time we're there. Where they never used to steam crabs when we were all there.

KF: Really?

MM: But they do now. How ... when did....

END SIDE A

BEGIN SIDE B

NF: Of course if we're going to eat any crabs, a lot of them would go out and take off, you know, hot ones and eat them. But me, I very seldom taste a crab. And if I'm going to eat any of it, I do not like the lump.

KF: No?

NF: Unh-uh, backfin I do not like.

KF: Hmmm.

NF: I just like the little piece that's got the fat on it. That's the only section that I really like.

KF: Why is that?

NF: I don't know, it's just got a better taste to me. And I've seen a lot of them eat the backfin, but not me.

KF: And what about the taste between a Jimmy and a Sook?

NF: The Sook is sweeter. All the way through. I don't, and I don't like a big crab.

KF: The taste is better on the medium crabs too.

NF: Um-hmmm.

KF: And easier to pick.

NF: Um-hmmm. I don't like, I don't like to pick a big crab. When we get the big crabs in, I'd rather not pick them. If I had my choice, I'd rather have the five-inch crab. But like I said, it's all due to the fatness of it.

MM: What time of the year do you see a change in crabs?

NF: Um, when we first start picking they're small. Of course they're away from here too. They're small. And then we got them, the fattest crabs that we have, the best crabs that we have is like last of August. Starts the last of August, the rest of them are not as good. And when we first start, I mean, I'll say May, they're good. And July, they're not as good.

KF: Hmmm. Ok.

NF: That's when we have our slack, slackest time is in July. Because in August they start fattening up again.

KF: When do you all start picking crabs from Maryland?

NF: Well I think last year we didn't pick any from Maryland till about September.

KF: Wow.

NF: And we picked a very few. Everything else was brought in.

KF: That's uh, that's really sad. [Laughter]

NF: [Chuckle] Yes because I, I mean, the crabs around here are easier to cut.

KF: Are they?

NF: Um-hmmm. When you get a crab from around here you can tell it. In fact the meat comes out better. It's just something about the waters I guess, that they just pick easier.

KF: Hmmm. Is there any difference between like the Delaware or North Carolina crabs?

NF: Well the Delaware crabs are not as bad as the North Carolina. North Carolina crabs are very hard to cut. The Delaware crabs are not as bad. They're similar to ours but they, they're still a tiny bit harder to cut than ours is.

KF: When you say hard to cut, the shell is hard to get through with a knife, is that...?

NF: Um-hmmm.

KF: Ok, so it's thicker, thicker or harder shell.

NF: It's a harder shell. It's harder on them. Of course, I think that's what bothers my fingers so bad, you know that one finger.

KF: How about the Louisiana crabs?

NF: We don't pick too many of the Louisiana crabs. They pick most at uh, down to Jay's, A.E. Phillips picks a lot of the uh, oh will pick crabs from there. But we don't get too many of them.

KF: And they're all still blue crabs though from North Carolina?

NF: Um-hmmm. Yeah.

KF: Huh. That's interesting.

NF: They're not as big as our crabs. From North Carolina. Now we got one place that he gets them from, Wye River, and they're huge. You know big crabs.

KF: I've heard Wye River crabs are just huge. [Laughter]

NF: [Laughter] I think he calls it a, a lake or something. But he can, he brings them in, they're only allowed I think to catch so many of them. And he brings them, he brings a basket of them in and he'll bring one of them crabs in and show us.

KF: Now do you guys pick those or does he steam those and send them out?

NF: He just has them for techway [?], no I don't think he even steams them.

KF: Oh, so they're just live?

NF: He sells them to, maybe to one customer or something that he has.

MM: Well let me ask you when you started to pick crabs how much did you get paid?

NF: I think about ten cents a pound. It wasn't a whole lot. We're up to two dollars now. Of course some places pay more than that. And somebody told me that in other places they're supposed to start off this year with two-forty. I think it all depends on what the, you know, um, some of them will say they're going to pay us certain price, of course we have the home pickers see. And they're the ones that usually get the, I think anything we'd **[or "they'd"?]** want to do. It sounds like to me.

KF: The home pickers?

NF: Uh-huh. Of course they only have three or four pickers. And if you, like if they pick good meat, then they deserve more. But we, ours is two dollars a pound.

MM: When you were making ten cents a pound, do you remember how much of your, it was you and your family's budget every year, was it about a third of the money that you all were earning, was it half, was it a quarter? Do you remember how much, how important that income was to your marriage when you first started?

NF: Well I never made over twenty-five hours a week.

MM: Ok.

NF: Now then, I can average up to most of the time about um, two-seventy-five, three hundred.

MM: So twenty-five dollars **[Note the discrepancy here: Ms. Flowers has said twenty-five hours a week, but interviewer refers to what she's said as if she's said twenty-five dollars a week...which Ms. Flowers seems to agree below with her "Um-hmmm."** From the context, transcriber was expecting her to say "dollars" but on

the tape it sounds as if she's said "hours"] a week in the nineteen... early fifties?

NF: Um-hmmm.

MM: That's when it was.

NF: Um-hmmm.

MM: Was that money essential to your paying your rent, buying food, or was it money that....?

NF: Well I mostly, my husband, of course he didn't work, he worked um, he crabbed, but um, when I was drawing my unemployment, I never drew over twelve, fifteen dollars a week.

KF: Hmmm.

NF: And see we draw unemployment in the winter time.

KF: Right.

NF: And uh, always, I could get a grocery bill for ten dollars. Of course we had to go to Cambridge to get our, to sign in too. Every week.

MM: Is this, when you were beginning too? Or does this start in the sixties and seventies. At the very beginning....

NF: At the very beginning we, we could still draw unemployment in the winter because we weren't uh, we didn't do any other type of work.

MM: Just picking the crabs?

NF: Um-hmmm.

KF: Ok.

NF: But mostly it went you know, like for groceries or, now we owned our own home. Because when we built that we had enough to, to really pay for the home, which was only twenty-four by twenty-four. We only just had this kitchen, and that room, and the living room.

MM: This is the house?

NF: Um-hmmm.

MM: And you've added to it over the years?

NF: Uh-huh.

MM: Ok.

NF: We added the utility room on and then we didn't have a bathroom when we first moved in. But then we built two bedrooms, we had two children. And we built two bedrooms on and the bathroom.

MM: Ok, so it sounds like that ten cents an hours was really important. Because it was grocery money as well as paying for essential...

NF: Um-hmmm. Yeah. And of course without the, of course he didn't make a whole lot either, not in them days.

MM: Right.

NF: But we were happy. [Laughter]

MM: [Laughter] And those years you worked in the summer time picking crabs, and the rest of the year you um, raised your kids?

NF: Raised my kids, yeah.

MM: Did you do any other kind of work the rest of the year to bring in more money?

NF: No, because usually there weren't anything else you could do.

MM: So by that time the tomato picking had no longer, like your mom picked tomatoes, but you didn't ... once you became a married woman.

NF: Once I became married I didn't pick them any more.

MM: Because they were gone?

NF: Oh, no, because I was, at that age I was in the, skinning tomatoes, and I didn't pick them. But we used, we used to go in to the fields and husk corn though. We did that, when I was single and young I did that in the winter time with my mother. We'd go out in this field and they'd cut this here corn and bring it up and we'd, oh it'd be so bitter cold. And they would stack this corn up around us and we would husk the corn, and as we did it we just put the rest of the stalks over just in a pile so it would be up around us.

MM: Did you give that money to your family or did you...?

NF: Um-hmmm.

MM: Yeah.

NF: Yeah, Mom and Daddy we just, we just did it for them.

MM: What did you do when you were picking and you had little babies?

NF: Um, part of the time um, my mother-in-law would some mornings, she would stay home and keep them early in the morning and then when I, then I came home. And then lot of times they went with my husband on the water.

KF: Hmmm. Ok.

NF: They went out on the water with him and then I could, was able then to pick the whole time.

MM: Did you ever take them to the picking house?

NF: Yeah, sometimes.

MM: Was that ok?

NF: Well, that weren't. But um, they mainly stayed out on the wharf And uh, you know on that one little section there that you could watch them. No they weren't supposed to be there, I'll put it that way. [Laughter]

KF: [Laughter]

NF: And that was years and years before I came over here. Because you had to be um, you had to be sixteen before you could really go in picking. And you know that is a very wrong thing because most of the children now, if they. They want to work. They're going to work at the age, ten, eleven and twelve, because they would like money too. I know, I know with mine, my son when he was, he went out on the water with my, with his father, but then when he got to age twelve he wanted to earn money too. So he bought a boat. With the money that, that Marcus would give him to help out. He would go ahead and, and he saved it and bought hisself a boat. And went crabbing for himself.

KF: At age ... twelve?

NF: Um-hmmm.

MM: Did you have two sons or a son and a...?

NF: A son and a daughter.

MM: And did your daughter want to do the same thing when she was twelve?

NF: Um, no she come and cracked claws, picked along with me. **[Unintelligible sentence here, sounds as if she says "I have three of my own, they'd hollerin' [hirin'?] 'Inspector!' or two.]** They went out... [Laughter]

KF: [Laughter] Do the others [?] bring their kids in?

NF: Uh, some of them. Of course some of them they were older people and their children were grown up. But I, I think at the age, I think that's the reason why a lot of children get in trouble. Is because they linger around with, just walk around with other children. If they have a job to do, I think it helps. I'll be honest, I didn't have any problem with neither one of my children, and thank God for that. And of course and both my grandchildren they work, because Dusty's always been out on the boat with Mark Jr. Since he was ... four years old I guess. He's always been out there working with him. And uh, Larry's took Justin.

KF: So they go trapping a lot together too.

NF: Um-hmmm. Yeah. Now my other grandson, I have two grandchildren, grandsons, and he usually traps. In fact he's caught two otters this year.

KF: Wow. That's pretty good.

NF: Uh-huh. He's tickled to death over them.

KF: I'll bet. [Laughter]

NF: [Laughter] But he, he goes out trapping too. And then they're both in the outdoor show.

KF: Oh right, Rhonda said they were going to compete against each other this year.

NF: Um-hmmm. And you know what, you know what Dusty told me, he says um, Well, he says, I wish, Justin and I have got to compete against each other. He says you know I don't mind if Justin won. Theresa says why, Dusty. He says well just because I took top prize for a couple years, but I don't think Justin's ever took top prize. And I'd like for him to win. It don't make no difference to him, I mean he, he comes in second, it's fine with him. Now he tries, don't get me wrong. He tries very hard. [Laughter]

KF: [Laughter]

NF: It's just like with duck calling and goose calling. If he comes in, if he takes top prize fine, if he don't, then it's still fine with him. And of course I think Justin's been the same way.

KF: Sound like good kids.

NF: But like I say, and I think, I think a lot of these kids get in trouble because they have nothing to do. I really do. Of course mine, mine worked all the time.

KF: So why didn't Rhonda decide to continue picking crabs? Was she cracking claws?

NF: Um, she could crack claws.

KF: But she didn't want to go on and pick crabs?

NF: No, after she graduated from high school she was ready to go out. In fact um, she worked at a restaurant at Golden Hill for a while. But then, when she graduated, the year she graduated, she went ahead at uh, and got a job, and she's been there ever since. She decided she didn't want to pick crabs. And which I don't blame her.

KF: No?

NF: Unh-uh, just don't blame her. The hours is what, well we get up at two o'clock in the morning. And we go over there about five minutes to three. And by the time we get everybody set up, because we always put their trays on the table and put their cans in it, and then she goes up the road and gets the other girls. And we have that all set up and so they come in and all they got to do is set right down and pick.

KF: Ok, so you go over early and you set up?

NF: Uh-huh. Everyone of us goes over at five minutes to three, and then she goes on up the road and gets the Mexican girls.

KF: The owner's wife does?

NF: Um-hmmm.

KF: And where do they live?

NF: They live up here ... they live on Fishing Creek. They live up the road there, you know where Island Pride is?

KF: Where is it from Old Salty's? Is it, is it....?

NF: You go on up road as you're going over the bridge.

KF: Ok.

NF: And it's Nanticoke sets out right there and then it's a old big house sets there. It's two right alongside one another they live there. They live in both of them.

KF: And she has a van that she goes and picks them up in every morning?

NF: Um-hmmm.

KF: And they get there at three-thirty?

NF: About three-thirty.

KF: Do you get paid extra for doing that?

NF: Unh-uh. We don't punch in till they do. And we don't pick up a crab. We don't start ahead of them. We all start together.

KIT: How does the day start? I mean you've just told me about the process of setting up, now when they get there how does ...?

NF: When they get there they come right in and put their aprons on, rinse their hands, and they're ready to go right on to work. They don't have to, they don't wait at all. When they come in, they come in and stand by their place. Because the biggest part of them stands up. They don't sit down.

KF: Hmmm.

NF: And this is for eight hours. But they like standing up.

KIT: They can work faster they think?

NF: They have, we have a very few, no they're just, they're used to standing I guess. And we have a very few that sits down. Now to me I can, I can stand up and pick but I'd rather sit down. Of course if my back starts hurting me I've got to stand then. [Laughter]

KF: [Laughter]

NF: And that can do it too.

KF: Well has there ever been a point when you decided to stop picking crabs or had to stop or ... you know, the plant closed down or ... anything like that?

NF: No, but one year I couldn't pick too much because I had arthritis. Or they called it arthritis, I don't know.

KF: Your hands?

NF: Well no it was all over. And I really believe at that time they didn't tell you it was Lyme's Disease.

KF: Uh-huh.

NF: And I just ached all over. I could not do nothing. But uh, that one year, that was it. I just, I'd get up and go to work and I could not, I could not even bear to cut crab. I have arthritis in these two thumbs.

KF: Um-hmmm.

NF: But I really think Lyme's is what it was and then back in them... then, I don't think

they really thought too much about it. But then my main places now is the two thumbs with arthritis. But it don't stop me from doing my work. And like in the winter time I sew.

KF: Oh, ok.

NF: I'm really always busy.

MM: What is it, a memory, you worked in the picking house for fifty years, do you have a story of a day, a story of a person, or a memory that stays with you?

NF: Not really.

MM: Not really?

NF: Unh-un.

MM: When you say that you love the company, at the picking house, tell us a little bit more about that.

NF: Well, it's just that they're, my boss is just so nice to us. He's, he's never been hard on us. And we're, and actually we're more or less our own boss, because a lot of days, I mean he don't come in and say do this better or he don't stand over you or anything, he'll walk around through the factory sometimes and uh, and he'll stand and talk to you for a few minutes and then he's gone on out. Of course we call him now "Walking Turner".

KF: Why is that?

NF: [Laughter] He's W. T.

KF: [Laughter]

NF: He'll walk in through one door, around to the factory, go in another door. And then he'll come around to another door and walk in through the factory and goes in another door. He'll walk around, this is how he keeps going, walking around, he'll go to the office, he'll turn around, he'll come back in through the packing room, or the picking room, and he'll walk out another door. And we just call him "Walking Turner".

KF: [Laughter]

NF: [Laughter] He never stops walking. If he stands and talks to you one minute you're lucky. But he's, he's just nice, and his wife is just as nice to us.

KF: And they have been your boss for ... the last twenty years?

NF: Oh longer than that because he has, his father had it before him, I guess they've been there for close to thirty years.

KF: And did you work for his dad?

NF: Um-hmmm.

KF: Ok. Did you like his dad too?

NF: Um-hmmm. Yeah.

KF: How about the other women, are you friends with the other women outside of work?
The women that you work with, um, do you like them?

NF: Um-hmmm. Yeah we get along fine. Every once in a while, I'll call some of them and talk to them from here. And uh, I mean I, we all get along.

KF: Well you said that um, that your boss's father had worked there, prior to him, and do you remember him bringing your current boss in when he was a little kid? I mean did they bring in?

NF: You mean my other boss?

KF: Yeah, the, I don't know if he was the first owner, but I guess Walking Turner's dad?
[Laughter]

NF: [Laughter]

KF: Did he bring him in when he was a little kid to the picking house?

NF: Urn, not a whole lot. No, when he graduated I think, he like drove the truck or something for him.

KF: Ok, ok.

NF: Of course um, he's in his sixties now too, I don't know he's sixty-seven or sixty-eight.
So, he used to bring him, I mean sometimes he would drive the truck. But then when um, when his father died, he took over. Because he was the only child.

KF: Ok.

NF: So to keep the business going, he had to take over. But he's been there ever since his father died, and like I say he's not hard on us. I mean, we're more or less our own boss.

KF: Now how does he let you know the crabs are in and it's time to come pick?

NF: Well if we're not going to pick the next day, they'll call us. But most of the time we have crabs, now sometimes she'll call us and say if the crabs are late coming in and we've picked up everything we've had that day, and if they're late coming in, like they're going to

steam about uh, eleven-thirty, twelve o'clock, or ... and we go to work at three, she'll tell us. And sometimes it's later than that when the truck comes in. And she'll call us and say we're going to work, start work at five.

KF: In the afternoon?

NF: Unh-uh, in the morning.

KF: In the morning. Ok.

NF: But most times it's uh, three o'clock. Or we go over at three.

KF: Ok, so somebody works, the steam people, the people who steam the crabs, they work from eleven at night until midnight or one?

NF: Well they work until they've steamed the crabs up. And have them cool enough for us to pick when we come in.

KF: That sounds like they probably work at night.

NF: But the ones that steams them, they're there earlier than we are, sometimes it's most of the night.

KF: And do they go home like in the morning?

NF: No, they um, they work until we finish.

KF: Who are they?

NF: We have um, two uh, colored boys, that does that. And then we have um, we have two of the Mexican boys working with them too. But it used to be just the two colored boys.

KF: And they not only steam the crabs, they bring you the crabs and put them on the table.

NF: Um-hmmm.

KF: So you have uh, is it possible to get to know them well enough that they would bring you a special pile of crabs?

NF: Nnno...well, yes. [Chuckle]

KF: [Laughter] Does that happen?

NF: Nnnnnnot to me, but they get, they know their girls.

KF: And they bring them....?

NF: And they bring them the first ones come out of that tray would come to one special. Bin right alongside of me where I used to pick would put right in that one bin. They got the first tub out of there because all the good ones come off the top.

KF: Uh-huh.

NF: And they got the best ones, and then they bring a lot of the Mexican girls rest and they're not, not as good. If, if they're good crabs you get one tub, if they're bad crabs, you get two.

KF: Hmmm. Ok.

NF: But they do, yes they know, a lot of them.

KF: What do these tubs look like, how big are they?

NF: They're like the, I don't know if you'd call them the twenty gallon, they're galvanized. They're about that tall.

KF: And they come straight out of the steamer that way?

NF: No, they get, what they steam them in is a trays.

KF: And then they empty the crabs out of the trays into the tubs?

NF: Well they pull the tray out and then they got a end that comes off and they shovel them from the end of this big tray, I guess the tray's about this wide. It'll hold twenty-some bushels. But anywheres from some twenty to twenty-five. And they shovel them from the end of it. Of course then, the good crabs, if there's anything good it's on top, they'll fall down unless to the, get for some of them. But when it comes, it comes to the rest of us.... I have had a few good crabs but ... that one girls gets them every time.

KF: [Laughter]

NF: [Chuckle]

KF: Is she related to any of the guys or...?

NF: [Hesitation, then...] Just good friends.

KF: [Laughter]

NF: I don't think she's related to them but, just good friends.

KF: And do any of you all ever say anything to get that to stop? Or not?

NF: Well I had said something one day, and they, some of them looked at me as if, You're

crazy, they're not doing that. So then they'd, they picked **[unintelligible phrase]**, they picked up where the first tray was, first tub was going every day. And the first tub out of there, all of them trays went to her. And of course when they, if it was good crabs, you know big crabs, that they would just, wouldn't divide them as well. They'd bring another bad tray in and that'd be the first tub I'd get. And, of course the rest of them too. Of the girls. They got their preference.

KF: How about with the guy who weighs the crabs, when you get up and you carry your cans to the weigher, do you, you take it to him?

NF: Um-hmmm.

KF: Are there ever any cases where there's um, you think, or any of the crab pickers think the weighing is um, being done favorably?

NF: All of it's weighed the same.

KIT: It's all weighed the same.

NF: Um-hmmm.

KF: Do you see it when it's weighed and you can tell?

NF: Um-hmmm.

KF: Ok.

NF: Yeah, because the scales are set in here and we put our tray on this side and we, and you're supposed to stand right there and wait until he gets finished weighing. Now a lot of them don't do it, a lot of them will take it up and leave it, come back to the bin and start picking again. And then another one'll come up, set it down, they'll go back, and then some of them, I've seen some of them set them on the end of the table too. Of a table. And then they can, they get mixed up.

KIT: How do they keep track of who's who? Do you guys have a little number or um...?

NF: No, well we should. But I, I stand there, me and my sister stands right there and waits till he weighs it. Unless he's not in the packing room. And then we'll put it there and come back.

KF: In a few minutes to make sure that he's done it?

NF: Um-hmmm. But we'll come back to the table and clean up what time, until he comes in. Because sometimes he's not in there, at the time we go up and weigh. But I, I still like to stand there and wait for my **[sounds as if she says "nate", but I'm guessing she's said "weight"]**. I don't, I don't just like to come back and set down.

KF: How does the total get kept? Does he tell you, do you keep track of it yourself?

NF: Well we always weigh six pounds at a time.

KF: Ok, and he keeps track of it for you during the day?

NF: He puts it up on a board.

KF: On the blackboard?

NF: On a board, it's like a, like a paper. And our number is on it.

KF: So every time you carry a six pound can up there he does, he does, he writes down your number?

NF: Uh-huh, he'll write it down. He does it beside there.

KF: What's your number then?

NF: Thirty-six.

KF: Has it been that number for, the whole time you've been there?

NF: Always. Yeah, it's always been thirty-six.

KF: Now can customers come in and say I want number thirty-six's lump meat? No? Your numbers don't go on the cans.

NF: Unh-uh.

KF: No, ok.

NF: No, don't go on the cans. Sometimes it should.

KF: [Laughter]

NF: [Laughter] Now I'll, we've got one factory does that, numbers all of his cans. Whatever his, the numbers for his pickers, has a certain number, and they, and their number is on the can. But sometimes I think we should.

KF: Who's that, to follow up on that one, is there um, do you have a crab picker that was the worst crab picker you ever saw in fifty years and... [laughter].

NF: [Laughter]

KF:...who stayed at it?

NF: Well I think the worst crab picker was the lady that I was telling you that died. Because she would sit there and pick crabs and you'd never know, most of the time she would be picking the bone would go in there and she'd stop, and then she'd catch herself and throw all that there in the garbage can and she'd go, in the pan, she'd throw that out, but most of that, lot of that went in the can. She was just not a, it was a picker that she just, picked it all to pieces. Of course we have another one in there that does the same thing, well she doesn't sleep, but she picks bone. And I, I couldn't eat it, I'll tell you.
[Laughter]

KF: [Laughter] Now are there families of good pickers and families of not-so-good pickers?

NF: Yeah. Most of the time it'll be just one out of a family that will, that doesn't pick crab meat as, quite as good as the next one. They just didn't, they don't take their time or something, I don't know. And then I think it all depends on how you pick your crab because if you're going to set there and like cut the top off and you're going to pick that, you're just going to pick it, and cut it and pick meat out of it. And I've seen them set there and they'll cut the top and then they'll go ... **[sounds of movement]** ... like that you know, real fast. Well you're going to cut the bone. So, now me, I like a duller knife than a sharper one, because I cut bone with a sharp one. Now with me **[sounds of movement]**, I have two or three special knives that I pick with. And it all depends on my tray. When I start, it all depends, I like this knife.

KF: Do you take all three of these to work every day?

NF: I take about seven.

KF: Seven, every day.

NF: I ... they're in my bucket. But most of the time, I just take two, two knives and it all depends on what kind of crab I'm going to pick. Sometimes I can pick with this one but the most of the time I pick with that one there.

KF: And this is probably the duller knife.

NF: Um-hmmm.

KF: Still sharp to me but that's ok. [Laughter]

NF: No, it's not sharp. See? It's not sharp at all. Now this one's sharper than that. This one right there. But it all depends on the crab, type of crab it is.

KF: Ok, and that's why you take seven with you every day because you don't know....

NF: No, now a lot of them all picks with the same one every day.

KF: They do.

NF: But I can't do it.

KF: Do you change knives during the day?

NF: Um-hmmm.

KF: Ok. Well tell me which of these knives you use for what crab.

NF: Well I use this for um mainly the bigger ones and, if they're, it just seems like that, well even in a smaller crab that come, that knife will go down in there right. It just sometimes in a bigger crab and then you have to cut sharper. And if it's, if it's not real fat, if it's in between crab, I can use that one.

KF: Did you shape this one yourself or did somebody do that?

NF: It was already shaped. But um, they come through shaped like this now. They used not to. Well I've got about fifteen, at least fifteen knives. But I don't use them all. I mean if I, I like to grind them down the way I feel with them. But this is like um, this is a knife like they use in chicken house, when they're cutting up chicken, and like Purdue and those places. But that just happened to be a thinner blade they had them on, they had thicker blades but another girl and I got the thin ones. And I, I love this one.

KF: Where do you all get your knives?

NF: Um, at the factory. Or we can go in ourselves and...

KF: So like this chicken one, did you get that at the factory?

NF: Uh, no they, they got this one here over at Delaware for me. We were just experimenting on knives, of how to pick. You know what we liked to pick with.

KF: In the factory you were experimenting?

NF: Um-hmmm. We were just doing it on our own. But sometimes, I mean I just pick with one knife if my hand gets tired then I...

KF: I wanted to ask you about, is one of the reasons that, is, does this feel better in your hand than the other ones?

NF: Um-hmmm. Yeah it feels better at times. Then again if I hurt, if my arms start hurting me or my hand, then I can just pick this one up. I go with any of them. Just something that will suit my hands.

KF: When people get up to weigh their meat, is there any superstition about tripping or falling or anything like that?

NF: No. I've seen some of them slip and fall. But they're more or less get their foot hung in like a tub that setting there to put claws in, or if they're washing up you can slip real easy. Now me, I, **[sound of someone knocking on wood]**, I haven't done it yet. But...

KF: [Laughter]

NF: [Laughter] That goes with age too. I could do it real easy.

KIT: Um, do you have a special set of clothes that you wear to pick in?

NF: No. Just, whatever, well whatever I wear at the factory I mainly just have that for ... for the factory. And I've got where I'm going to wear like a couple pair of dungarees, and if any other kind of clothes. I mean that's what I wear every day. At the factory, I don't put nothing on that's brand new. Because once I wear it in there, I don't wear it out anywheres else. When I come home from the factory, that's the first thing comes off And, in the bathroom. Clothes go in the washer, and them clothes that day are washed.

KF: Ok, so you wash them that very day?

NF: Um-hmmm. Because if you leave them, they really have a smell. And I try not to leave no clothes. If I do, I'd have to leave them outside.

KF: Ok. [Laughter]

NF: But I, I have three or four suits of clothes that I wear, different times. But anything that I want to wear anywheres else, don't go on. [Chuckle]

KF: [Laughter]

NF: But that is the first thing I do when I come home. Change my clothes and take my shower. And then if I have time I lay down in the floor, on my back, feet on the sofa, or a chair. And uh, and rest my back. For fifteen, twenty minutes, and then I'm good for the rest of the day. Of course some of them don't have to do that, but I do.

KF: Is this right before lunch that you come home, what time do you get home?

NF: Well, we don't get home till right around one o'clock. I would say around one. Whenever our eight hours is up. It all depends on what time we go to work. Whenever our eight hours is up, then we can, we come home. And a lot of times I go out in the car if I, if the back, or neck is bothering me, I go out in the car for about five minutes and like put my head like this, because I have a place back here that bothers me. And I can put my head like that for about five minutes and come in and I'm fine. And I never lay down here that I don't set my timer, to make sure that I'm up in fifteen to twenty minutes. Because if I sleep over that, or rest over that, I'm like a zombie. [Laughter]

KF: [Laughter] Ok.

NF: I have no sense of where I'm at you know, it's just something that you, that bothers you. I've seen, heard a lot of them say that they've been sitting, well she says I went home today and I slept for three hours. Boy it felt good. And I tell myself, sleep for three hours! I wouldn't even be able to move when I got up if I slept for three hours! I'd just want to stay there. Like I say, of for fifteen or twenty minutes I could lay right there, and then I'm not, I'm not alert. So, it makes a difference. I guess it's a difference in people. But like a lot of them, they just lay down. Now if I was going to lay down in bed or something like that, I would be, I could stay there.

KF: For the rest of the day.

NF: Um-hmmm. But as long as I prop my feet up on the sofa and lay down on the floor, I'm, I've just got a certain time, I couldn't wake up without the alarm. It's like in the mornings when I get up, the minute that alarm goes off I'm up just like that, and a lot of times, don't have to have that clock. I get used to it, and get up at that same time. And most of the time now it's anywhere from six-thirty to seven o'clock in the mornings and I wake right up. And if I'm not, if I don't do that, Rhonda's calling me. [Laughter]

KF: [Laughter] Well when you have to get up at two o'clock in the morning, go over to work, what's the rest of the island doing?

NF: Lot of them's travelling. Lot of them, the cars travel up and down the road. Because they're getting ready to go to work too. They're getting ready to go out in the Bay.

KF: So pretty much everybody's up.

NF: Um-hmmm.

MM: Is your husband up at the same time?

NF: Uh, no, no he didn't get out, of course he's been dead now for ten years, because I'm here... myself.

MM: Did he get up the same time you did?

NF: No, most of the time he got up in an hour. Later than I did. Maybe two hours. It all depended on what time it got light. Because in the, when he was in like uh, September when he would go out crabbing it would be just getting a little bit darker you know, in the mornings. So you had to travel whenever the light is, to go out there.

KF: And what was it like while you were picking crabs and working and then having to come home and do the housework and make dinner and all that stuff?

NF: It's always rough. Of course I don't cook quite as much now because it's just me. Now some days I cook a...

END TAPE