

get this. But that's not true, see. And when they come down and they'll find out they can't get the meat out of the crab as quick as they thought they could because it looks, well they would look at her, they look at these young ladies, it looks easy, see. And that's why anybody pick crab long, if they're any good at it at all, they say they're a professional, I always say that, but it's an art to doing all this, see. That's why they can talk and not have to look at what they're doing, because they know their hands are working together.

G.S.: Well when I came, I almost didn't make it because I couldn't average. And grandma started giving me meat until I got my speed up. Because they called me and told me I had another week, and if I didn't average in that other week, I wouldn't have a job.

K.F.: How did you overcome that, Georgia? I mean how did you --

D. S.: She motivate herself.

END TAPE ONE

BEGIN TAPE 124.2

(Laughter)

D. S.: She was -- yeah, she was very fast. Faster than me. Because see --

G.S.: Trying to keep up with her.

D.S.: Huh?

G. S.: Trying to keep up with her.

D. S.: Who?

G. S.: You.

D. S.: No, sir.

G. S.: She was fast.

D.S.: See, see, you hear my cousin talking. That's the kind of talk I was talking about. When people say that -- that's why I always said, like I tell this young lady or anybody else, when I race, I race against the clock.

N.J.: Yeah.

D.S.: I never know what people got on the board not unless they tell me.

N.J.: Yes.

D. S.: You understand? When someone say that -- like if I get 90 pounds of meat, and I haven't done that in about three years now, so that's how bad it is. Well I can't get 90 pounds of meat anyway in the course of one time during the whole summer. I at least try to make at least once a year, but I haven't done it in about five years. But I never know what people have because unless they tell me, I ask a person how many you have. I say I'm almost up there myself. Well I probably have twice as many as they've got already. But that, I'm just kidding with them.

G. S.: Yeah.

D.S.: But I waste --I work just the time, you see, like when I told you about this six-hour period at 103 pounds, so you average, I was really cracking about 17 or 18 pounds an hour. The highest I ever done was 21 pounds in one hour. And I was in my prime then. That was in '58, and I -- the young lady she was speaking about got 101 pound, but she started at 5:00. I start at 8:00. So if you counted up, and I always take a break, I never sit there and crack for a whole solid hour without taking a break.

R.B.: I can't do that,

J.J.: What, take a break?

R.B.: Huh-uh (negative).

J.J.: I can.

D. S.: I have to take a break every 15, 20 minutes, smoke, walk around, get yourself together. And so I was average something like, when I say 20 pounds an hour, actually no more than 50 minutes, maybe 55 minutes, see.

K.F.: Okay.

D.S.: That's why I don't race people, nothing but the time, the time. I say I know I can't beat the time. That's why I say if I can get so many pounds in a certain amount of hours, then I can go home. And that's what I did.

G. S.: Once I got my speed up, I don't. I don't race people. But I was trying to get my speed up so I could have a job.

(Laughter)

D.S.: You got to do that.

G. S.: See you got one week, if you don't average in one week, you're gone. Then I said don't worry about it, I'll give it to you.

D.S.: And you have to do these things. You have to do like what she's doing 'cause see, I've done that now. That's what I'm talking about now. See I've done the same thing. My brother was -- my uncle was, when I was nothing but a kid, was beating me. I said well I'm going to have to -- and I didn't like it too well, you see. And I said every week, I was getting better, and better, and better. Then when I got in my teens, and my brother was very fast, I would beat him.

K.F.: Okay.

D.S.: And see then after I beat him, then all the rest of them that was good. And then everybody else. But see, they say that I cannot race nobody because I like to sit by myself and I sit to the wall. I don't see nothing but the wall. Only time I can tell if they got anything when they come with the meat. But when you're trying to race somebody, you don't have no control over what you're doing then.

N. J.: No.

D. S.: You see? That's why I say you have to, your coordination goes off because if someone weigh up before I do, and I'm trying to catch 'em, then I'm going to end up slowing down because, see, you're trying too hard. See that's the only thing about picking a crab and cracking a claw. If you don't have, your coordination not right, and you're not motivated right, you've got to be motivated when you come in here. Because if you're sad yourself when you come in here, and you're already upset and angry, you know you ain't going to do nothing.

N. J.: Do nothing.

D.S.: You might as well stay home --because everybody else will just go around you. See you got to be wanting to do that. See I have got upset, and I've told the boss man one time, I said -- he said why ain't you got no claws? I said nothing I can do for him today. I am not in the mood because I'll be sitting down here and be thinking, and I'll be getting up and looking, and thinking, and saying to myself, if I can go home, I can come back the next day, then I'm all right. But then I say to myself, that's \$100 I missed today. Then I'm mad all over, see.

(Laughter)

D. S.: But that's, I can't say -- and the kids coming today, they will not come down here because nobody wants -- see you can't tell people a lot of things to do, you know, right

way to do something and whatever. That's why when they ask me to help the girls when they come in to crack claws in the summer time, I say I could let her watch me, and if I see I'm getting the meat, I can show her. But after that, if they got a way they're going to do something, hey, ain't nothing I can do about that.

G. S.: I don't think no two people pick alike.

K.F.: Really?

J.J.: Even when you been trained by someone.

G.S.: Yeah. Because when Grandma trained me, I went the fastest way I could get.

Now I got to hurry up and get this meat out these crabs as fast as I can without the bones and I went my own way to do it. Nobody picks alike.

K.F.: Well how does your way differ from the way that your grandmother showed you how to do it?

G. S.: Well she trims both legs off. She cleans the crabs, she cuts the fat out the middle, the dead man fingers, I don't.

K.F.: You don't? Okay.

G. S.: I don't. And other than that, it's the same. It's just that I try the quickest way I can get into it. And cleaning it out slows me up. So I don't do it.

N.J.: You see that's the way I do, I cut the fat.

G.S.: See I don't. I just trim the legs --

N.J.: That's the way I do mine -- that's the way I do mine.

G. S.: And I cut the top off, I pull the fat and the dead man fingers off, and I throw it away, then I can get the lump out.

K.F.: Okay.

N.J.: Mine is clean before I start.

G.S.: No, I don't.

K.F.: Okay.

G.S.: Takes too much time.

J.J.: Well long as I knew I was over there with Eva, long as I knew I could pass her, I thought I was doing all right because she's been here for years and years, and when I came

R.B.: Slow.

J.J.: Yeah, she was slow. I said well long as I -- and I could get up with Reedy. Long as I kept up with them two, I was good. But one day, Corinne, I don't know how she did it, she talked me into picking 40 pounds. I picked `em --

R.B.: Okay, she was a fast picker.

J.J.: I picked `em.

N.J.: Yeah, she could pick crabs.

J.J.: But when I went home, I got no further than the porch. And I was on the chair steep. Mama had to cook supper for my kids, she had to put `em to bed. When I woke up, they were in bed, had been in bed. I was still on the porch sleep. And you remember when Grandmom -- when they was going down -- like that. I said oh, no, no, no.

R.B.: Marzella also was a fast crab picker.

J.J.: Yeah.

R.B.: Very fast in those days, very fast.

J.J.: And they went down -- at night, I tried it --

R.B.: Marzella, Grace.

G.S.: Yeah, `cause when --

J.J.: When we got off--

G. S.: My Grandmom used to get up and come to work.

J.J.: Sure did.

D. S.: Yup, and --

G.S.: Work all day, go home, fix something to eat, and come back and work all night. I couldn't do it. I'm not telling a story. I couldn't do it. I couldn't do it.

J.J.: We were sitting there. And I was sitting like this, and I was going like this. She says baby, what's a matter? I said Grandmom, my back hurt. Oh, my Lord, child, you ain't got no back.

(Laughter)

J.J.: I told her, look, I'm not made the same thing you made out of. So my back is hurting. When we got off, I went home, fell across my bed, crab clothes and all. Grandma went home, fixed something to eat, cleaned up her house, took her bath and went shopping. I was still sleep cross my bed.

R.B.: Yes, made of good stuff. Good stuff.

J.J.: I don't know. I said I ain't going no more. That's it. That was the ballgame for me.

G.S.: Used to go home and cook food and bread.

J.J.: Yeah, rolls and all that kind of stuff.

G.S.: Come down here at 6:00 in the morning, work all day, go home and cook other people's food and bring it back and work, what was it, 'til 10:00 at night?

J.J.: Uh-huh (Affirmative).

G. S.: And work 'til 10:00 at night --

J.J.: Make homemade rolls and bring `em back down.

G.S.: And then get right back up 4, 5:00 next morning, cook breakfast, come on back down here. I just -- I'm not made out of that.

D. S.: Did you come down here?

G. S.: No indeedy.

(Laughter).

J.J.: I tried a couple of times. I said nope.

G. S.: I like working, but I just couldn't do it.

D. S.: I didn't think too much of it myself. I said, no, sir. When I leave here, that's it. It was, what, 4:30, 5:00 then.

G.S.: Uh-huh (Affirmative). I was dragging then. Lord knows I can't do it.

J.J.: I tried it for a couple of nights.

G.S.: I never try it.

J.J.: And that was it for me.

G.S.: Because a lot of `em that did it, when they came in the next morning, they were tired. They only worked a half a day and left, where I was still here. I was still here all the day.

D. S.: Then they come back that night.

G.S.: Uh-huh (Affirmative). So they were still losing.

D. S.: All they lost was time, wasn't it?

G.S.: Uh-huh (Affirmative).
D. S.: And sleep.
G.S.: Time and glad they were home, stop have big crabs during the day. Work some more at night.
K.F.: Well let me ask you all, how many men did work in the crab house? I know usually it's women. But how many men did work in the crab house?
R.B.: Now? You talking about now?
G.S.: It's two men picking crabs now.
K.F.: Now and --
D.S.: Oh, before that?
K.F.: Before that.
D.S.: Oh, matter of fact, you didn't have no crab picker when I started, not a man, nothing but one fellow, or a fellow, that's the way he started off. Quite a few. I don't know exactly what the number would be.
R.B.: It was quite a few, yeah.
D.S.: See you're talking about the time that it was well over 100 people working in this place.
K.F.: Right.
D.S.: And them days --
R.B.: Yeah, some was carrying crabs.
J.J.: It was the Sampsons.
R.B.: Some was steaming crabs, working in the packing rooms, so you really --
J.J.: Johnson.
D.S.: The Johnsons, yes.
R.B.: Yeah.
J.J.: It was quite a few.
K.F.: And I guess there's still men doing those jobs, steaming and packing.
D. S.: Oh, yeah.
J.J.: Uh-huh (Affirmative).
K.F.: Now what happens if you all catch a picker who's picking over the crab?
(Laughter)
R.B.: Like if they're picking with you like you're in front of `em?
K.F.: They're at your table.
R.B.: You have to talk to `em and ask `em, you know, you just have to explain to `em and tell that you don't pick crabs like that.
N.J.: Smack their hands.
R.B.: But you have to explain to `em and tell them, you know, that's not the way you pick crabs. You have to pick them as you come to them.
N.J.: Yes, I do smack their hands. Told them don't do it no more.
D.S.: That's what you do?
N.J.: Yes. I ain't telling no -- I'm not going to tell no --
J.J.: Me either, because --
G.S.: If anybody sits in front of me, I lay down the law. We pick together --
R.B.: Together, yeah.

G. S.: We pick 'til all the crabs are off the table. We do not pick over crabs. And I've never had a problem with it.

N.J.: -- big one or small one -- I smack some fingers.

(Laughter)

G. S.: Glad I don't work down there with you.

N.J.: Don't -- pick `em as it comes.

J.J.: Well my mom and I pick together, so that's no problem.

D.S.: Yeah, `cause you pick some --

(Laughter)

G.S.: And pile `em upon the side. I see `em piled up on the side.

J.J.: When I get --

N.J.: I see some great big hands going in the middle and come up with it, I know she's been there.

J.J.: Well that's the way -- pointed that out to me one day. Said he left his fingerprint and he had left his whole hand where he grabbed the crab and just dragged it, and he left his fingerprint.

G. S.: I don't like that. I pull -- when I pick, I pull a pile to the side. I don't care how big or how little they is, I pick all of `em until they're gone.

R.B.: That's right.

G.S.: Then I pull another pile to the side. I hate people that pick the big crabs, and at the end of the day, they got all these little tiny crabs up there.

R.B.: Yeah, `cause you find some that will do it. They don't do it with me because there's nobody in front of me. But I was picking with somebody. But you find `em will do that.

D. S.: A whole lot of `em do that.

R.B.: Yeah.

J.J.: Uh-huh (Affirmative).

G.S.: Seem like at the end of the day, they are so hard to get off

R.B.: It is.

D. S.: But I always thought that when you have to do stuff like that, you're slowing yourself down anyway. Because when you got to reach --

R.B.: And pick the big ones.

D. S.: -- and here's something in front of you, then you're reaching, you're taking more time.

R.B.: Uh-huh (Affirmative).

J.J.: Uh-huh (Affirmative).

D. S.: Taking more time. Then sooner or later, your arms got to get tired of reaching that high.

R.B.: And you still got the small crabs to pick.

D.S.: Uh-huh (Affirmative).

K.F.: At the end of the day.

R.B.: Yeah, you still got `em.

D.S.: Not at the end of the day, before the end of the day --

R.B.: Before the end of the day. Depends on what time it is, yeah, that they --

D. S.: But that's what happen when they do it that way, though.

G.S.: Uh-huh (Affirmative).
D. S.: They pick over crabs. If you don't watch, it's going to be some day at the end of the day.
G.S.: Uh-huh (Affirmative).
J.J.: Well I'd rather have --
G.S.: I don't like it.
R.B.: I don't like that either.
G.S.: No. I'll pull `em to the side. Whatever's there -- I don't care -- that's what I *pick*. I don't care if it's a big one on top -- stay there until I get to it.
R.B.: I pick `em as they come. Yeah. The way they put `em, I just pick my crabs as I come to `em. I don't do no picking like that. And that way, I can get `em off quicker, you know, I can get `em off quicker, yeah.
D.S.: That's one thing, we was brought up that way.
R.B.: Yeah, I don't *pick* over.
D. S.: We was brought up that way. You don't pick over piles.
K.F.: So it was the way that you all were taught.
R.B.: Yeah.
G. S.: Uh-huh (Affirmative).
K.F.: And that's a courtesy.
N.J.: That's the best way to pick `em.
D. S.: Not so much as --
G. S.: Yeah, whoever's picking in front of you, you know.
D.S.: `Cause years ago when you --
J.J.: I know when he gets ready -- I knew what he was getting ready to say.
(Laughter)
R.B.: When we came along and you did that, you might as well get ready to fight.
D.S.: There was a lot of fights.
R.B.: `Cause they would do it. Yeah, those ladies would do it.
D.S.: They'd fight in a minute get a hold of them crabs.
R.B.: Uh-huh (Affirmative).
D.S.: Yes, in deed. That really was something going *on*.
N.J.: We'd do it now if you didn't have to get fired.
G.S.: Had to get what?
N.J.: Get fired.
G.S.: What's that for?
N.J.: I said we'd do it now if you don't get fired.
D. S.: She said yeah -- the boss is more --
R.B.: Things are different. Things are different now. It's not like it was years ago.
J.J.: -- used to come out in those days where he'd pick out the big ones.
D.S.: They was fighting back in them days.
RR: I don't even think they sent `em home then, did they?
D. S.: No.
R.B.: They'd come in, talk to `em, and they'd go back to work and that was it.
D.S.: They didn't come in -- too many women.
R.B.: *And* they let `em go on back to work.

D.S.: Back there them days, them women would fight.

(Laughter)

J.J.: They know not to mess with them women. They leave the women alone.

D. S.: They had them knives.

K.F.: Well let me ask you all about your knives then. Where do you get them, and do you all have to alter them so that they work for you?

G.S.: Yeah.

J.J.: Yeah.

G. S.: Right here.

R.B.: Yeah, right here.

G.S.: Most the time, have to cut --

R.B.: You have to get `em sharpened down so that you can, you know, pick with `em, yeah. You might have to get `em sharpened several times a year, right? When they get through with mine, mine's just a little small blade, You wouldn't even think you could pick crabs with a blade from there.

G. S.: You only have to hit it once to get in between what I hit the most. If it's too wide, you're going to --

R.B.: Yeah, you have to get `em --

G.S.: Small enough to get in between, you'll be pulling meat out without breaking bones.

K.F.: So they're really not made originally the way you all --

J.J.: No.

R.B.: Huh-uh (negative).

K.F.: And how do you cut `em down? Who does that, or where do you get it?

J.J.: We usually get one of the guys going through cut `em down for us.

R.B.: I guess I buy one every two years. When you get through sharpening mine, I don't have any.

J.J.: Well I've got so many. How many do I have, Donald?

R.B.: Huh?

J.J.: I asked Donald how many do I have?

D.S.: You have quite a few.

(Laughter)

G.S.: I guess she does have quite a few.

J.J.: But I got one which is an antique.

R.B.: Antique.

J.J.: I got one that's an antique.

R.B.: Yeah, I wish I had brought mine down here and showed it to her.

J.J.: I stopped picking with it now, though. I stopped picking with it. I don't pick with it any more.

D. S.: Yes, sir. That is an antique. You could get some money for that thing.

K.F.: Why is it an antique, Joyce?

J.J.: I mean because it was used years back.

D.S.: It's a very old knife.

J.J.: Yeah.

D. S.: Very old knife.

J.J.: It's an old knife.
D.S.: Very old. I haven't seen one like that --
R.B.: I think you have one. You have my mother's knife that was used.
J.J.: I've got -- what is it, the brass? Is it the brass on it?
R.B.: She has my mother's knife that I was using when I started eight years ago. That was my mother's knife.
K.F.: Oh, okay.
R.B.: And she has it. Yeah. That's an old knife.
K.F.: Yeah, I'd like to see these knives and maybe take a photo of `em.
R.B.: She has one. `Cause I started sharpening hers and that blade, remember that narrow blade, I couldn't do nothing with it.
J.J.: I never thought to bring the knife. `Cause I keep mine pointed.
R.B.: Yeah, my sister has my mother's knife.
D.S.: But his knives that he's got is the ones that most of `em are using here.
J.J.: Yeah.
K.F.: Are they made by a --
D.S.: You can get a basic idea what they're all about.
J.J.: I've got a couple that's Murphy. Yeah. Somebody Murphy. Murphy Company, something. But that old one that I had, that was really, that belonged to Grace.
D.S.: At that time -- it's old.
N.J.: Sure is.
J.J.: Told me to stop using it, `cause I was picking with it.
N.J.: You was?
J.J.: Yeah, I just stopped picking with it during the summer.
D.S.: If it's got any writing on it, they'll give you some money for it.
J.J.: Oh, I don't think there's no writing on it.
D.S.: Ain't no writing on it?
J.J.: That's gone.
D.S.: Oh, Lord. You can hang it up then.
J.J.: Yeah, I think that's gone.
D.S.: Because it's real old. I do know that much. They had some down here when I started that was too big for my hands. You know, grab the hammer, it hanging way out there from all that weight.
J.J.: Oh, yeah.
D.S.: Real old. They said that was the knife that they used to crack the claw. Now that will give you an idea, you'll have to have a real heavy knife like that to crack a claw of those very large crabs. And you got to put some pressure on it. `Cause it's not gonna do too much if you don't have enough weight. So that's how large the crabs were, and they had some knives to fit the bill if you could do anything with them. I know, that's why I say them knives got to be about 75, 80 years old.
R.B.: Yeah, I know mine was probably that old, the one I had.
D.S.: But the knives that they use today, the women used to pick crabs.
N.J.: I think it don't --
J.J.: Huh-uh (negative).

G. S.: It seems like the crabs is just -- I don't know. It messes `em up. Before you know it, at the end of the season, you start out with a blade like that, before the end of the season, it's down like that.

R.B.: It's down where you got to go buy a new knife.

G.S.: The crabs is wearing the knives down.

D.S.: That's that sharpener that you get --

G.S.: I only sharpen mine about once a year.

J.J.: The ones that had that --

R.B.: I know, I got mine sharpened about --

D.S.: But most of them girls that come in here, they get their knife sharpened every day.

R.B.: Every day, yeah.

J.J.: Oh.

G.S.: I get mine sharpened three times, maybe three times. Depends on --

D.S.: It don't do no better. I don't know why they --

N.J.: Well that's me, `cause I get mine sharpened and it does no good.

R.B.: So when you sharpen them every day, they sharpen away.

D.S.: I seen some claw crackers sharpen knives. I don't sharpen my knife.

J.J.: Look just like toothpicks. Points are real small. `Cause that one of Gracie's, hers is just like a toothpick almost. Yeah. And the hammer is rounded instead of flat.

N.J.: Oh, okay.

K.F.: And what do you all wear to come to work?

G.S.: Anything.

(Laughter)

R.B.: Anything you don't want wearing to work.

D. S.: Work like this, this is where she comes from.

R.B.: Depends on the weather. Dungarees, shirt, sweatpants.

N.J.: You know I ain't wearing my good clothes --

G.S.: Anything you don't want to wear anywhere else.

R.B.: Anything you don't want to go dressed up into any place else. I don't care how much you wash those clothes, that scent will stay there, cannot get it out. So I have a certain set of clothes I wear to work.

D. S.: That's for sure.

R.B.: On the side from the set that I wear out. Can't mix `em.

J.J.: Better not.

R.B.: I have a bag with my work clothes in, and a bag with my regular clothes in.

J.J.: You could just throw it over there and say it's work clothes. That's all you can do.

K.F.: Okay. And what's the first thing you all do when you get home?

G. S.: Take a bath.

R.B.: Take a bath. When I walk in the house, I take a bath. Then I find something to eat.

J.J.: Yeah.

N.J.: Eat to sleep.

R.B.: No, I can't go to sleep.

J.J.: Well I do.

N.J.: I do too.

J.J.: Can't you tell?

G.S.: I'm not going to be nosy --

R.B.: I only eat one meal a day, and that's dinner time. So I might drink a soda or get some water while I'm here. Other than that, I don't eat. That's when I lose my weight.

K.F.: Okay.

R.B.: I eat one meal a day.

J.J.: Well that's when I gain.

R.B.: And sometime I walk. I take a walk from Park Lane down to the long walk and walk back. Yeah. I make it a habit of walking.

G. S.: Well I'm just greedy. I'm going to be honest, I'm just greedy. If I was up late, I don't have time to eat breakfast, I might get a pack of crackers from here. Other than that, I do not like getting up from the table. I go way up and I come back. If I stop and take a break for too long, that's it. My whole day is messed up. I don't like doing it. Go away, come back and work.

J.J.: Well see I'm the opposite.

G.S.: Well see she don't want to work.

J.J.: I weigh up, and I wash my stuff and bring it back to the table, then I take a break. Well I used to take a cigarette break, but I don't smoke no more.

G. S.: It just show you everybody's different. I just can't break like that. If I break like that, I --

R.B.: Me neither. I can't break and come back and get back into it. I have to just keep into it, you know. I have to just keep working -- away, come back, keep working. But I can't break like that, 'cause I'm like you. I wouldn't want to come back -- it's too hard picking up your speed. Once you come back, it slows you down.

J.J.: That's true. But I have to get up.

R.B.: Well you don't have no problem 'cause you're going to get yours. You got yours and gone home.

N.J.: He's going to crack his anyway.

G.S.: -- go in that door, I got mine, I'm leaving. All that smart stuff like that.

R.B.: But Donald doesn't take that many breaks. You don't take that many breaks.

D. S.: No.

R.B.: I know you don't.

D. S.: I mean it's according to how many times I weigh up.

R.B.: Yeah.

D.S.: If I weigh up 10 times, I don't take 10 breaks. Because every time I weigh up, I'm going to take a break. But now we -- I think we weigh up six times a day, so on the sixth time, that's the time to go home, so I take five breaks if I work until they get off. But most time, I'm gone before that.

R.B.: But you don't stay on break that long.

D.S.: No, no.

J.J.: You have to stress that point.

R.B.: Yeah, I really have to stress that point.

G. S.: Sometimes y'all be gone so long --

R.B.: Yeah, you stay that long, you know.

J.J.: Oh, come on now. During the winter, you right in there.
(Laughter)

J.J.: But I'm all year.

G. S.: But I can't do it. It just bothers me.

D. S.: Yeah. If I take `em too long --

G.S.: Away from the table too long, I get some attitude because I got to hurry up back.

J.J.: And then when I eat lunch, you know I'm sleepy when I come back.

G. S.: That's another reason why I don't do it.

R.B.: Yeah, because when you eat, it makes you sleepy.

J.J.: And I'm sleepy when I come back. I've even nodded off.

R.B.: See? I can't do it.

G.S.: Then you get back in that little room. Lord forgive me, and they back there gossiping and talking about everybody, and you get back there get listening, and don't want to leave, so if I don't go back there, I ain't got to worry about it.

J.J.: I know, `cause I would walk out and that gossip --

G.S.: I'm going to listen --

J.J.: I put my word in, `cause you know I talk. You know that.

D.S.: I'm going to have to go out and take myself a smoke `cause we been sitting here two hours now. I'll be back.

G.S.: And you be ready to go to sleep.

D.S.: I ain't going to sleep. Ain't going to sleep.
(Laughter)

J.J.: See that's what I'm talking about.

R.B.: That's his break.

K.F.: Now often do you all have to get up to weigh up?

G. S.: Every hour and a half

J.J.: Every hour and a half

K.F.: Every hour and a half?

J.J.: Uh-huh (Affirmative).

K.F.: And is there -- how's the room set up. I haven't seen the picking room here. How is the room set up? I mean where's the weigh-in scale?

J.J.: The scales are over on the side, the tables are running this way. That's it.

R.B.: Yeah. Where you dip your pan, wash your hands and dip your pans, right coming out the packing room, they're sitting up. Well when you walk in, you can see `em up against the wall, the sink where you stick your pans. Sink for washing hands, one for dipping your pan at night, washing it.

J.J.: Then they have one by the bathroom.

R.B.: One by the bathroom, when you went to the bathroom, come out.

K.F.: And where's the steaming room in relation to the picking room?

J.J.: They steam over there.

K.F.: Over here?

R.B.: Uh-huh (Affirmative).

K.F.: The other building. Okay.

R.B.: Yeah.

K.F.: And what would you tell someone from, say, Indiana who may not know anything about crab picking, what would you tell them about this job?

G. S.: It takes somebody with a little competition to even want to pick crabs.

J.J.: Yeah, now.

G. S.: It's something not everybody can do.

K.F.: Well what type of person do you think is best?

G. S.: I don't know.

J.J.: Somebody like working with their hands.

R.B.: Yeah.

G.S.: Somebody that can get into a piece rate, that's like working by piece rate. That's why I came from a sewing factory here, 'cause that was piece rate.

R.B.: And maybe would be interested in knowing how to get in those crabs and picking 'em, you know, somebody that can.

J.J.: Uh-huh (Affirmative).

G. S.: Somebody that can look at the long range. I mean you go today you're not going to make no money, but --

R.B.: Short range, long range picking crabs.

G. S.: -- the long range will get into making good money.

K.F.: Okay.

N.J.: Well that long range thing --

J.J.: It didn't work for me.

R.B.: It works for everybody else.

J.J.: I know.

R.B.: You're one in a million, Georgia.

J.J.: I know. I can work when I want to, but it's not all -- I just don't have no speed.

N.J.: Don't have no speed.

J.J.: No speed. It is something I can --

R.B.: Because a lot of people, they likes to eat crabs; but some of 'em don't want to pick 'em -- not going to make a living.

J.J.: Yeah. And I don't like 'em.

G.S.: But see that's the problem. I love crabs.

R.B.: You know, they likes to eat 'em, but as far as sitting down making a living, they don't want to really get into that skill.

G. S.: I would eat crabs 24/7.

J.J.: I don't.

G. S.: But the point of it is, when I'm here, it's all about a dollar. Not about --

J.J.: Crab salad and crab cakes, that's all.

G. S.: I love 'em.

J.J.: Otherwise, I don't fool with 'em.

K.F.: I was going to ask you guys about how often do you eat crabs since you work with 'em every day.

R.B.: Crab cakes.

G.S.: I love crabs.

R.B.: Most the time, I buy my meat when I'm, during the summer when I'm working, I might buy about six or seven pounds, and then I don't use that until during the winter

months. And holidays, like Thanksgiving, Christmas, if I have a pound left for Easter, like I just used my last pound last week, that's when I make my crab cakes.

K.F.: Okay. And do you freeze it all?

R.B.: No, I just put mine right in the freezer. Of course, my niece, she does different.

G. S.: I make mine in crab cakes and then freeze them.

R.B.: But I put mine in the freezer and just take `em out and let `em thaw out and then make my crab cakes that way.

K.F.: What's your secret for thawing out crab meat?

R.B.: Well what I do, I take it out a day before I'm ready to use it and set it inside my refrigerator and let it thaw out that way because my house stays fairly warm. And I don't want the crabmeat to spoil setting out trying to get it to thaw out. And when I'm ready for it, it's all thawed out.

R.B.: Well, see, that's why I make my crab cakes then freeze them. `Cause to me when you thaw it out, it's a lot of water in it. And if you make the crab cakes and freeze it, take `em out, it's just like fresh crab cakes. It's not -- the taste is not watered down.

K.F.: Okay. What other favorite recipes do you all have for crab?

G. S.: Talk to the cook.

(Laughter)

N.J.: There your cook.

K.F.: The cook, okay.

D. S.: No, I don't have --

J.J.: Every now and then I have the stuffed shrimp. That's holiday, believe me, that's the only time we get it.

R.B.: Stuffed shrimp, yeah. You stuff `em with crabmeat.

J.J.: Yeah, like Christmas. Uh-huh (Affirmative). That's about the only time they get it.

R.B.: And your crab balls.

J.J.: Uh-huh (Affirmative). Special occasions, something like that.

D. S.: I don't deal with too much of that seafood, no more than fish, certain type of fish, that's it. And crab cakes. That's all I like.

K.F.: Well how are you known as the cook?

D.S.: Oh, well, not far as seafood is concerned, but any other dish.

K.F.: Okay.

D.S.: I'm a better cook than this girl.

N.J.: Better cook than me?

(Laughter)

N.J.: He got that right.

D.S.: But I don't put my hands in dough. I don't -- I can't make no bread. I don't want to do it. I never did learn.

J.J.: Well you have to do like me. I don't put my hands --

D. S.: You got the machine now?

J.J.: With dumplings -- no. But I take a spoon for to make my bread, for my biscuits, I take a spoon.

R.B.: You use a big spoon.

J.J.: Uh-huh (Affirmative).

R.B.: Yeah.

D.S.: But see, that's another thing too. When we learn how to do this seafood work, most of us learned how to cook almost at the same time.

K.F.: Really?

D.S.: I been -- oh, I started cooking for the family, I imagine, when my godmother got sick, and she taught me everything I really know. And I wasn't nine years old, and I've been cooking ever since. My wife hasn't really cooked a meal for me, we've been married 37 years, I would say not three weeks since we've been married, not three whole weeks. I do all the cooking.

J.J.: I bet she enjoyed that.

R.B.: I know I would enjoy that.

(Laughter)

K.F.: Do you do the dishes?

D.S.: Oh, yes. See one thing about being in the kitchen, I don't like no dirty pots or pans around me. If the kitchen is messed up, then I know I did not mess it up. It's cleaned up before I go in there. And then once I go in there, you don't be running in and out.

J.J.: You don't like nobody in there? I don't either.

D.S.: See when you get busy --

J.J.: Yeah. They come right in. Especially if they're talking, I'm ready to sit down, they drive me behind.

D.S.: And then go to the pot and see what it is. I don't care for that too much.

R.B.: I really didn't do that much cooking until I was around 18. I just didn't want to cook. Just didn't have time.

J.J.: Oh, I like cooking.

R.B.: Well I had time, but I didn't want to do it. But after I reached 18, I had to. My mother did most of the cooking.

J.J.: I like cooking.

D.S.: Yeah.

R.B.: But I never forgot what she taught me about how to cook, and how to fix this and that. So when I reached the age 18, 19, then I had to go ahead and cook food, but I knew how to do it.

D.S.: She brought a piece of beef one time, talking about your mother --

R.B.: My mother?

D.S.: Uh-huh (Affirmative).

R.B.: Okay.

D.S.: And I told her, I said -- she said the time I fix that beef -- I said well maybe you're using too much heat. I said some people like to do things too quick. Now you get a piece of beef that's cheaper beef, the lower the heat is when you cook that thing for hours and hours at a time, the more tender it's going to be.

J.J.: That's right, that's right.

D.S.: So don't put it in there because you got a recipe that says --

R.B.: Turn it up high.

D.S.: -- 350, put it on 350. See you got to look at it this way. Any time you use somebody else's recipe, they tried it out more than one time. Try your own recipe out,

see what happens. I cooked for my wife and mother one time, lobster dish. Of course, I don't like lobster myself. Spend all that money, clean that mess. But see, that's trying out different things. Then I said well I taste it, I said it's not too sporty. So then I changed two of the ingredients, see, suit my taste. See that's in cooking. So if you prepare yourself a crabcake, the basic recipe, that's all you need is the basic, all this extra stuff is for them people that goes to them restaurants spend all that money, then they'll come out and talk about how good it is, you know, spend all that money, don't like it. But they can say they like it because they spent \$100 for it, you see. And the basic recipe is, what, you don't need nothing but two or three ingredients.

G.S.: That's it.

D. S.: All you need is something to combine the thing. Because if you use too much ingredients, then when you gonna taste the crabmeat.

R.B.: You can't taste it.

D.S.: That's what it's all about, tasting the crabmeat.

R.B.: Yeah.

K.F.: So what do you all put in your crabcakes?

R.B.: Sephus?

D. S.: I tell -- what 'did I tell y'all I do? I goes to the supermarket, I get crabmeat mixed, already mixed up in a little package. Dump that in there, little mayonnaise, pure mayonnaise, not this -- original mayonnaise I use, whatever it calls for, that's it. Put them in balls, fry it down. Smile the whole time I'm eating.

(Laughter)

N.J.: You put green peppers in yours?

D.S.: Enjoy every bit of it. You hear what I'm saying? That's what I do.

R.B.: I put an egg in mine, little bit of flour into it, salt and pepper --

J.J.: I use a little bit of bread crumbs.

D. S.: Little dry mustard.

R.B.: -- and cut an onion real fine, and just mix it together.

J.J.: I don't want no chunk in mine, no chunk of onions.

R.B.: Yeah, but I cut mine real fine. And then I mix it up and fry `em in small cakes like that.

K.F.: Little crabcakes?

R.B.: Yeah.

J.J.: That's what mamma likes.

R.B.: Yeah, I used to make big ones, but I fry `em in little ones now -- I stopped making `em for --

J. J.: That's what --

R.B.: They eat more if I fry `em, and then I have enough to go around.

G.S.: I don't want balls, when I want a sandwich, I want a sandwich.

R.B.: Not the crab balls. It look like --

G.S.: That's what I'm saying, I want a sandwich.

(Laughter)

J.J.: And bless her heart, Rita, had her plate piled up. When she got to the crab balls, she had nowhere to put `em, so she just took a handful and throw `em in her mouth.

R.B.: They must've been real small.

J.J.: Little crab cakes. Put `em in her mouth and kept on going.
R.B.: I'm like you, Don, I like to taste that meat. If you put too much in it --
J.J.: Yeah.
D. S.: That's what you're doing, you know, disguising the flavors of that meat.
R.B.: Yeah, and you won't be able to taste the meat into it.
J.J.: But I love crab salad.
K.F.: Now what's the best part of the crab to eat? Which part has the best flavor for you all?
N.J.: The regular.
K.F.: Claws, regular, backfin --
G.S.: Claws are good.
J.J.: I love the claws.
R.B.: I like the regular meat. I don't eat too many claw cakes.
J.J.: I love the claw.
R.B.: The meat sweet?
G.S.: Yeah.
R.B.: That's what I hear somebody else say. But I like the regular crabmeat.
J.J.: When they come through, of course, he don't get all of `em `cause if there's a big one he'll be cracking.
N.J.: Telling it now, ain't you?
J.J.: He will. Sephus, you hear me? I hear you over there. Must've been a big one.
R.B.: But then like if you're going to buy like a bushel of crab like we did one time, you have a chance to pick that regular and the jumbo, so you got two mixes of meat.
K.F.: So you all prefer the lump mixed in with the regular?
R.B.: Yeah. `Cause my niece and I, we bought a bushel. Was about a year ago, right?
G. S.: Uh-huh (Affirmative).
R.B.: Yeah. Of the jumbos. They was nice.
D.S.: I'll tell you one thing, that lump, you know, that's --
R.B.: But you had a mixture of two different kinds of meat plus the claw.
D. S.: -- make a salad. If you go for crab salad some places --
R.B.: Yeah.
J.J.: When my son-in-law come home, I have to make him crab salad. He loves it.
G.S.: But I just don't like buying bushels `cause I cannot crack a claw.
R.B.: Well that's only, you got to crack those claws --
G. S.: I cannot crack `em.
D.S.: That's what a lot of people do.
J.J.: I crack mine.
R.B.: Sometimes I get maybe a pound and a half of claw meat, maybe two pounds, I crack the claws, I don't want to throw them away.
G. S.: It goes right -- they eat what they eat, and the rest of `em go in the trash. I can't crack `em.
D.S.: That's what I do, throw the claws away.
J.J.: You throw `em away too?
D.S.: I don't crack no claws when I leave here.
(Laughter)

J.J.: I crack my claws when I get `em like that.

D.S.: They don't bring no claws there for me to crack `em.

G.S.: I let `em eat all they can eat, the rest of `em go in the trash.

D. S.: That's the only place I crack claws, on the job. Yes, sir.

K.F.: Are there any special stories that you guys have that you tell to each other about working here, or any special memories you want to share?

R.B.: The only memory I have --

J.J.: Gonna tell us something.

R.B.: No. I think it was a storm. What storm was that, a tornado or a hurricane, remember? And the water came up into the crab house. And I think we started work around, what, six, seven, and around 8:00, they had to bring something in, we had to get up on what, a box, what was it? A big box or something they brought in. Remember we had to get up on there?

D.S.: How long that been?

R.B.: Ain't been that long, couple years ago.

D. S.: Couple years ago y'all were down here during the storm?

R.B.: Yeah. The flood came up, the tide came up.

G.S.: It was in here, we couldn't get out that door.

R.B.: It was on a Friday. We couldn't even come into the office to even pick up our checks.

J.J.: I must've been home.

R.B.: And so what we had to do, we got up on this -- well it was something big they brought in. We got up on -- yes, and we went to the packing room and left our meat there. The ones who work in the packing room had to weigh our meat.

D. S.: That's when our little boards was floating around in there.

R.B.: Yeah. And we couldn't even -- and I was so scared `cause my car was up there on the hill, and I was so afraid, I didn't know if I was going to be able to get to my car or not. But the water had came up into the crab so high.

K.F.: Was it up to your knees or something?

R.B.: Oh, it was way up. It was way up, yeah.

G.S.: If you sit by this door, and this door is low --

R.B.: Yeah, it was like 8:00 in the morning.

G. S.: -- it comes up by the door close to the drain.

R.B.: Yeah.

D.S.: But you know the time -- that wasn't too bad of a storm, I imagine.

R.B.: Well that's the worst I been to.

D. S.: The worst I've been in, on the other side when the tide came up and they had row boats out here to keep us from carrying up on the hill. That's been a long time ago.

R.B.: Yeah.

D. S.: I say now you know, this is something.

J.J.: I missed that one.

D. S.: People don't want to leave. I was here, well I couldn't go nowhere, but if the tide comes -- tide starts coming in and I listen to the weather report all the time, and I know when it's supposed to be high tide, I know how long once it gets deep what time it goes

back down, I'm going on out of there. I ain't going to stay and get washed out. My father wouldn't --

R.B.: But you know there's still people that wasn't leaving on the table. They was still sitting there picking crabs.

D. S.: -- put her into the boat, row on up the hill there. I said now you know it was bad.

R.B.: Yes, it was.

D.S.: It was bad. But do all that to make that dollar, honest dollar they say.

G.S.: That's what it is, an honest dollar. That's a hard dollar.

D. S.: Yes, in deed.

J.J.: Well snake sent me home one day.

D.S.: Next to you?

J.J.: You remember when --

RR: Where were the snakes at?

J.J.: In the packing -- I mean in the picking room, came through the door.

N.J.: Came through the door?

R.B.: Well that's good memories, isn't it?

J.J.: I'm definitely scared of snakes. Of course, I didn't need much excuse to leave to go home, but that was a darn good excuse because I just got up and went home. And that was right by the bathroom too. And every time after I came back, every time I go in the bathroom, I had to look around all like this 'cause if I saw it, I was gone. So the snake took me home.

(Laughter)

J.J.: Big black one. They was looking for it, they couldn't find it. Went back outside, up on the roof, they were looking for it on the roof, but it come around and came inside.

D. S.: I guess the best time, really, us kids --used to blowout, pickup all the crabs, then I couldn't cook no more crabs, they'd make me go home.

R.B.: Yeah, that's when we was real young when we first started down here. The -- used to blow up. Steaming.

D. S.: Just the top off, blow off, blow all the way across on the other side there. Had a mill there, mill right there where that restaurant's at.

R.B.: Yeah.

K.F.: Okay. Was it the -- what mill was that?

D. S.: It's the shell mill.

R.B.: The shell mill.

K.F.: The shell mill. Okay, okay. So the water would blow up and send crabs everywhere?

D.S.: No, not --I don't know where the crabs went to, but I'm just --

R.B.: You had to run. Yeah, we would have to run and get out of the crab house. All this steam would come out. Oh, you wasn't here during that time.

G. S.: Huh-uh (negative).

R.B.: Oh, that was frightening. 'Cause ever so often, it would blow up.

D.S.: Too much pressure.

R.B.: Blow off the top and come off, yeah. Steam be everywhere.

J.J.: I missed that too now.

R.B.: Everybody would just run.

J.J.: Oh, my goodness.

D.S.: Go on home.

R.B.: Didn't we go home?

D.S.: But it takes the long -- they had a lot of old tops anyway, right? Put another lid on that bad boy and they'd be cooking three or 4:00 in the morning, they'd be cooking them crabs. Red, and your father, and --

SPEAKER: Greenberry.

D. S.: Greenberry.

R.B.: Greenberry, yeah, that's right.

D.S.: I'm trying to think of Greenberry, that's who it was.

J.J.: Have to come home while they were cooking more crabs, and they would want me to --

D. S.: And then Greenberry got up one time.

SPEAKER: I didn't know that happened all the time. I remember --

R.B.: Oh, yeah.

SPEAKER: -- when I was real young.

R.B.: Yes, it did.

D.S.: It happened before you even came into the world.

R.B.: Yeah, that was before, yeah.

(Laughter)

R.B.: Sure was.

D. S.: I was nothing but a kid myself

R.B.: I can remember that.

D. S.: I was like 10 years old. Man, I used to love that, though. Any time we could get away from here, I used to love it.

R.B.: Yeah.

D.S.: Comedown here, wait to get into the place, you know. Sleeping out therein boxes. I swear, they get you up, walk down here, it's dark, and jump at your own shadow walk in the middle of the street. And see it was kind of rough. It really was kind of rough during them days. See you'd have to walk from -- through this section here, and at that time, you got to watch who was out there. You walk in the middle of the street, and then if a car come, you better get up on the sidewalk because you have people try to run over top of you. That was a little rough.

R.B.: Yeah.

D. S.: And then every time I used to walk by the tree --

(END SIDE A OF TAPE 124-2.)

(BEGIN SIDE B OF TAPE 124-2.)

D. S.: -- you know, you can outrun somebody or not. But it was, it was kind of -- especially when you had a little time off, 10:30, 11:00, we have all them crabs sometimes, just -- pick up, go home, wait for the whistle to blow, and I say I hope it don't blow. Around 2:00, you didn't hear nothing, say no it ain't going to blow. Then the whistle blows.

R.B.: Blows. You could hear it too, yeah.

D.S.: Toot, toot --

J.J.: -- mama --

R.B.: Yeah, you could hear it, that's right --

D. S.: -- back down here, then you wait. Now see, like we start now, if we're going to start at 6:00, we start at 6:00. Back then if they say they're going to start at 6:00 and somebody come in at 4:00, and your place -- start picking. And so you know we had a group of people that greeted my mother --

R.B.: My mother --

(Laughter)

D. S.: That family's always going to be on time.

J.J.: Miss Mabel.

D. S.: Yeah, going to be here on time, before time. Come on, you know how they are, they're going to start early. Get down here, then you'll be fussing. I don't hear nothing moving up there. Time to go to school.

J.J.: If you didn't go to bed early, didn't get no sleep, you had to come anyway.

R.B.: Yeah, had to.

J.J.: Groan. Didn't come home until daybreak, tell you what mama did. Mama said don't bother getting in that bed. Take a bath, change clothes, get your work clothes on 'cause you're getting ready to go. And I sat here and nodded all day long. The guy I was with, that I was going with, he was here too. And his mother made him come down, so we were both trying to find some way to take a nap.

(Laughter)

R.B.: Yeah, you had to come to work.

J.J.: 'Cause we had to come. I said oh, Lord, I'll never do that again.

D. S.: You know when I used to --I used to tell people, I said when I started cracking claws down here, I wasn't quite seven at that time, seven on my birthday in August.

J.J.: Good, Lord. You did start early.

D.S.: And I said we used to come down here. We were so small that the boxes that the cans came in, I think they might be a little longer than what these boxes are. But you could get into them boxes and stretch out and you ain't going to hit nothing. That's how small we were. I said now you just think, ain't that something? But then I thought about it, I said now how about -- I was glad I was here and still in them fields picking them beans or something.

J.J.: I know.

D.S.: Picking -- have the sun beating down on me, you know.

J.J.: They said I was in the bean field and got two baskets --

R.B.: No, you didn't.

J.J.: And that little -- boy had the -- one basket. And mama said how much you make? And what little change I made, I had spent that at the store on the way back home. But mama told me no, that's it, that's your first day, that's your last day, you don't go no more. Oh, gosh,

D.S.: You had a lot of fun down here though.

J.J.: Yes, in deed. Yeah, you did.

R.B.: Yes.

D.S.: You had a lot of fun. And everybody, when they wasn't upsetting each other -- looks out for each other. But any time you're going to be around a bunch of people,

someone is not going to be -- you're always going to have disagreements somewhere. That's always sort of -- but when it comes to the push -- together.

R.B.: Yeah.

D. S.: That made the difference. That's why it was, regardless, it was one big family.

J.J.: Yeah.

R.B.: One big family, that's right.

D. S.: Family, you know, that's what it was. We looked out, or everyone looked out for each other and their children. That was the greatest thing about it. Not like today. They don't look out for each other no more.

R.B.: No, not like those days.

D. S.: Too selfish today, yeah. During that time, you could hear all the people say and you know it if you're brought up during that time, when they say I'm going to tell your mother, you better believe she's going to be told. Now you can watch t.v. and listen to the radio or whatever you're listening at, looking at, so much (Inaudible) I was coming up. Like my mother told me, she said I said just think, you have me down here in the mornings, slapped upside the head, crab fat all upside my face, she say yeah, look at you now, I taught you how to work, didn't I? I say yeah, you done that all right. I said I don't care where I go, if my hands haven't -- if they don't cripple my hands up, I can always come back and I know I got a job.

R.B.: That's right.

J.J.: Uh-huh (Affirmative). That's true.

D. S.: I can do something and make something out of it.

K.F.: Now within the crab picking room, was it mostly African Americans who were picking crabs, or was it mixed?

J.J.: It was mixed.

R.B.: Back during that time? It was mixed.

J.J.: It was mixed.

D.S.: They were segregated back during that time.

K.F.: The rooms were?

D.S.: When I was coming up, they had a little room --

N.J.: A claw machine room.

D.S.: Yeah.

J.J.: Who?

N.J.: Claw machine there.

D. S.: Yeah, and that's where -- want us in the biggest area 'cause it's more of us.

R.B.: More of us, yeah.

D. S.: About maybe 20, 25 white pickers in another room.

J.J.: Oh, I don't remember that.

D. S.: Yeah. Everything during that period was, you could read books all over the country it was the same.

R.B.: Yeah. But we all got along, we never had no problems.

D. S.: No, no problems.

R.B.: Yeah, we all got along.

K.F.: Were the rooms joined in any way, or were they totally in different areas?

D.S.: Oh, it was --no, it was joined together. They just had an imaginary partition, imaginary that you could -- you know which way not to go.

K.F.: Okay.

N.J.: Then you could sit anywhere.

D.S.: Well that changed a long time ago, yeah, But I tell you, I thought about that a long time ago, although it was segregated at that different time, as far as working conditions and this and that, I worked down here the majority there were not the minority. We were the majority as far as working in the plant.

K.F.: Okay.

D. S.: That's the only time we ever got over during that time.

K.F.: Okay, Can you give me an example?

D. S.: I mean, you know, see if we -- okay, as far as carrying the crabs out, of course been doing that for years. But if the crab carrier will carry out the best crabs in that area, and the black crab pickers would see something like that, then all they have to do is raise their voice about it and it would not be done no more. You understand what I mean now?

K.F.: Yes.

D.S.: Because at the given time, they say well they give the white the best. It just happens. And if anything, they got what they could get because the women during that period, there wouldn't been no crab house here, they was tough women.

R.B.: Yeah, they always stuck together. Yeah, they always stick together. During that time, they used to stick together.

D.S.: And -- bodily harm, as they say.

(Laughter)

R.B.: Yeah, they would all stick together. It wasn't like now.

D. S.: Yes, indeed. If I went down, you know in the 80's, I was down in Hoopersville cracking some claws. And I don't know what area they're from, because they had the same old sign that they had a thousand years ago in the sense -- they didn't have the name up there white and coloreds -- you know, bathroom, but you know which one to go into. So when the guy said to me, the boss man said, because he -- I was cracking quite a few pounds for him. He said you know, we're just like one big happy family down here. I said is that right? I said my family house, we all use the same bathroom. He didn't say no more about that from that point on. When you talked to him, you talk about work. Don't tell me about no happy family. I knew it was no happy family.

(Laughter)

D. S.: See I was making him money, and I don't care what they do. I'll go by his rules because I was leaving from this area because it wasn't doing too good at the given time. I had been following -- just like migrating workers, have to go where the money was being made.

R.B.: Yes.

D.S.: If it wasn't for that, I wouldn't travel no 30, 40 miles when I can walk a short distance to here, you see. Yes, indeed. I told him, I said everybody knows all one big happy family. Just play by the rules.

K.F.: And that was in the 80's?

D. S.: That was in the 80's, '82 to be exact.

R.B.: In which they should've been over it by that time.

D. S.: Oh, my gosh. They have been over it.

R.B.: It's not over with now, but it's not like it was. We have come a long ways. But it shouldn't even been up there during that time, not in the 80's.

D.S.: They didn't have no signs up, but --

R.B.: But you knew which one to go into.

D. S.: Yeah, 'cause your uncle went into the same. You know better, you know -- what you doing in there.

R.B.: My uncle?

D.S.: Yeah.

R.B.: Okay.

D. S.: Harmon.

R.B.: My uncle Harmon.

D. S.: Come out and say well I had to put the toilet paper in there so -- I was just cracking, I kept on doing it. I said --

R.B.: Down Hoopers Island.

D.S.: Hoopersville.

R.B.: Hoopersville.

DS.: Yeah, Hoopersville. Yes, sir. Down in '82.

K.F.: And you went down there because the crabs up here weren't --

D. S.: Well they was kind of slow. And I was all about making some good money at that time.

K.F.: What did you all do when things got really slow?

D. S.: I probably go around to Bill, see what he's got to throw out.

(Much laughter)

D,S.: Got that slow I have to go around to him.

R.B.: When it gets slow, we just --

J.J.: Yeah --

(Group Discussion & Laughter)

D.S.: After awhile, won't matter too much, after another year. I know I have something coming in. I'll be that old.

J.J.: Uh-oh.

N.J.: You not there yet.

D. S.: I'm right there, baby.

J.J.: Oh. How we gonna get there?

(Laughter)

J.J.: You think we gonna get there?

N.J.: Yeah. I'm gonna get a pension one day. You see me rolling down here on a wheelchair, rolling on through picking.

(Laughter)

J.J.: Talking about moving that age up.

N.J.: I know it.

K.F.: Now what about the unions? I know there was one in Crisfield.

J.J.: Oh, they wouldn't let none of that.

N.J.: No, indeed. Not no union.

D.S.: They tried.

J.J.: They tried, but they wouldn't let it in. They tried it two or three times, didn't they?

D.S.: I remember that one time they was coming down here and --

J.J.: I think it was a couple times they tried it.

D. S.: They was turning over people's cars and shit.

R.B.: Yeah, they were.

K.F.: Really?

R.B.: Few years ago, wasn't it?

D. S.: Yes, sir.

R.B.: I remember that --

D. S.: Yes, sir.

R.B.: They wouldn't let nobody come in and work. I remember that, yeah.

J.J.: They tried a couple of times.

K.F.: What happened?

R.B.: They wanted a union.

D. S.: Yup, tried the union. That was --

R.B.: Tried to get the union in.

D. S.: That was in the 40's. Late 40's.

R.B.: Sure was.

K.F.: And what do you all remember about that time?

D.S.: I don't know too much about that. I know that it was a little trouble. I know -- because most of the time, any time they had unions during that period, or even now, really, you got to watch out 'cause you're going to have trouble, violent trouble I'm talking about. I'm just not talking about somebody saying don't go there.

R.B.: They'll stop you.

D. S.: See that door -- them cars and stuff

R.B.: Breaking windows, yeah.

D. S.: When I was down here, it was called Beecher's Crab House, I believe it was. I don't know when they changed it to J.M. Clayton. I don't know when that was.

J.J.: Beecher's Company.

D. S.: He was a nice -- he was a nice fellow, yeah. He was a very nice fellow.

J.J.: Who is that, Paul?

D.S.: No, old man Beecher.

J.J.: Oh, don't know that one.

D, S.: And they tried to get the union in. I don't know where they -- I think that was that union that was getting all the -- everything, wasn't it, -- or something like that? I believe. I'm not sure. They tried to unionize everything. I think that was when they tried to get the one out there in the packing company. Tried to come around, and they read to a lot of people, they read to `em. They was happy. So it didn't happen. After the violence, then it doesn't happen. Start going breaking out windows, car windows and stuff Then you know I didn't want to come down here. They had -- that's what I'm talking about coming in early before the light come up. You have to walk through that, come through -- half way through there, you don't know what's going to --

R.B.: My mother used to tell me about, yeah. That's the way they would come --

D. S.: Yes, sir. Right. And that's where they would stop us too.

R.B.: The canning factory over in that area,
J.J.: Back there over there?
R.B.: There was a canning factory over there, yeah. Skin tomatoes too. I learned how to skin tomatoes.
J.J.: Mom and I go over there too.
R.B.: Oh, yes. Yes, I learned how to skin tomatoes. When things got slow here, I would go over there and work in the canning factory skin tomatoes.
D.S.: Summertime, yeah.
R.B.: Summertime, yeah.
D.S.: And then around late August, early August, things picked up.
R.B.: Yeah, I'd come on back.
G.S.: I didn't know that.
R.B.: Uh-huh (Affirmative).
J.J.: I remember when it was there.
G.S.: I don't know how to do nothing but pick crabs. I'm way behind. That's nothing.
(Laughter)
J.J.: Tomatoes wasn't for me either, unless I was working on the line with cans.
R.B.: I used to love to skin tomatoes.
G.S.: I never been in tomatoes.
K.F.: Now how as it similar to picking crabs, skinning tomatoes?
R.B.: You have to have a knife, you go into the top of it, and the tomatoes would be hot, and that skin would come right off, you have a bucket you put `em in. They pay you so much a bucket.
K.F.: Okay. So it was the same skill. You had a knife in your hands and --
R.B.: Yeah, yeah.
D. S.: She's good with a knife. Was that the switchblade?
(Laughter)
R.B.: That boy likes to cut up.
K.F.: Well you all must remember when, if you don't mind Bill, when Bill and Jack and Joe were young and were brought in here?
R.B.: Yes, in deed.
D.S.: They're still young.
R.B.: They still young.
J.J.: Office used to be upstairs. I didn't know him.
G.S.: Who, the --
J.J.: She don't want to answer.
(Laughter)
R.B.: When they was brought in, I was in Delaware.
N.J.: They probably had him in the office.
D. S.: Wasn't nobody there but Joe.
(Laughter)
N.J.: And --
D. S.: Is she still there?
(Laughter)
D.S.: But see --I think Jack came down here more than the rest of `em, I believe.

R.B.: Yeah, 'cause Jack looks just like -- what's that picture in there, the picture with my father. The one over there -- the one

G. S.: He do look like that man.

R.B.: Yeah.

J. J.: Yeah.

SPEAKER: Ellison.

R.B.: Yeah. Okay. Take a good look at that picture there. See it right here?

D. S.: Yeah, I see it. That forehead up there.

J.J.: Look just like him.

D. S.: That forehead, yeah.

N.J.: Sure do.

D. S.: Yeah.

J. J.: I want to know who these two are.

R.B.: I don't know.

SPEAKER: Now which one is your father?

R.B.: This one here.

SPEAKER: Oh, okay. I knew James.

R.B.: My brother was very young.

SPEAKER: You can tell.

R.B.: Yeah, you can tell they're very young. My father worked here until he passed away. Yeah.

D. S.: -- quite a few of 'em, yeah.

R.B.: I'm surprised you didn't recognize him. If you look at him, didn't he look just like him?

J.J.: I saw the nose.

R.B.: Uh-huh (Affirmative).

J.J.: I said yeah, I know that's the nose.

R.B.: When I first saw that, I told you, I said that's my dad. I've been trying -- my mom, I couldn't find a picture in my mother's house of him. And I've been trying all this time. I said well I give up, you know. 'Cause I was nine years old. That's how I remember him when he passed away. And when she showed me that today, I said that's my daddy. She was older than I was, and she don't remember.

G. S.: She told me she was little, little.

R.B.: She was older than I was, and she don't remember. She's two years older than I am, but she don't remember.

D. S.: That was in --

R.B.: She don't remember. She was two years older.

N.J.: -- had this, just got in the house.

R.B.: I guess it's the whippings I got, maybe that's the reason I used to remember him so. He used to give me all my whippings. And I guess that's the reason why I remember him so. But when he said don't go away from the house, I would go. And when I'd come back, I'd get a whipping.

D. S.: Tornado came through and went through --

R.B.: Yeah.

K.F.: Tornado?

R.B.: Yes.
K.F.: Really?
D.S.: 1945. Yes.
R.B.: Yes.
D. S.: Good damage.
R.B.: Yeah, ripped down --
N. J.: Yeah --
J.J.: -- a year old.
K.F.: Really?
R.B.: Yes, we was into it.
N.J.: Just got in the house.
K.F.: I hadn't heard about that storm. I knew about the different hurricanes that came through.
R.B.: Oh, it was a tornado came through here, yes.
D. S.: You're talking about -- but this was '45. You're talking about --
J.J.: Somewhere around there.
D. S.: In between.
R.B.: In between, yeah. But we was all so lucky. Didn't nobody get hurt but my oldest sister, she had her leg broke.
D. S.: Yeah.
R.B.: But other than that --
J.J.: Who, Mabel?
R.B.: Yeah. Nobody else get hurt. It just smashed the house --
D.S.: Turn over the house?
R.B.: Yeah.
D. S.: You're right.
R.B.: Yeah.
D. S.: Turned over the house.
R.B.: Ours just smashed in. We was underneath all of the --
D.S.: The grading.
R.B.: Yeah, the grading. We was underneath all of that, but we was lucky that we got, when we come out of it without a scar.
K.F.: And did you then have to rebuild that house?
R.B.: Yeah. No, my mother bought -- I believe it was a church next to that, and they remodeled that church into her house.
K.F.: Okay.
R.B.: That house she has now was a church.
D.S.: Yeah, I remember that.
R.B.: I think that was only thing stood but the top went.
D. S.: That's why that's still --
R.B.: Yes.
D. S.: -- so high.
R.B.: Yes, that was a church.
D. S.: Looks like -- about 12 feet.
R.B.: Yes.

J.J.: Lot of memory in that house.
R.B.: Uh-huh (Affirmative).
K.F.: Is there anything you all want to add to this. I don't want to keep you here all day. I'm sure you all could talk more, but I don't want to keep you here all day.
R.B.: I don't have anything else to add to it.
N.J.: No. Do you, Sephus?
D.S.: No. Just a good experience, that's all.
K.F.: Okay.
R.B.: Yeah, very good experience.
D. S.: Teach a little discipline, because you really got to have discipline if you're going to do this type of work. If you don't have no discipline, you can forget it because -- otherwise, I think -
J. J.: `Cause you ain't got no discipline.
(Laughter)
K.F.: Well let me ask you all one last thing. What does a crab mean to you?
J.J.: What does a crab mean to me?
D. S.: Just that one by itself don't mean nothing to me. But if you have quite a few of `em, means work. That's what it means to me.
J.J.: Yeah.
D.S.: Work. And I hope they're large when they come in.
J. J.: Yeah.
R.B.: Yeah, that's about the only thing. Crabs bring in money.
D.S.: But I tell you, I do worry about what's happened to the bay.
R.B.: Without the crabs, you can't make no money.
D. S.: Yeah. You ain't got the crabmeat, you're not working.
R.B.: It's very important to have the crabs. Yeah.
D.S.: But I worry about the environment now more so than I did years ago. Especially when it starts hitting home.
G. S.: Yeah, that makes a difference.
D. S.: Always makes a difference. And I thought one time, I say one thing about that crab -- get through a whole lot, don't have to worry about him. I was wrong. Have to worry about him now. Because I looked at -- really I looked at this place, I said now when I get that age, feel like I don't want to have to get up and go to work, I said they might let me come back here. But if the crab is not here, then I'd have to stay home.
J.J.: Right.
D.S.: So I hope they find some kind of remedy to what's happening in the bay, and that way if we get plenty out of the bay, then we'll have plenty of work. `Cause when they have to start coming across highways and different states, then you really don't know what you're getting over here.
K.F.: Is it easier to pick the crabs that you all get out of the bay than the ones that come from North Carolina or Louisiana? Can you tell a difference?
D. S.: I think you can.
R.B.: Yeah.
D. S.: At different time of the year, just before the fall of the year when they start getting, the crab itself go under, you can get in the crab much easier because it's not that heavy, as

far as the shell is not that thick, I mean. You can crack it with accuracy, and you can pull the back off them crabs, and the bone itself is not hard to crack.

G.S.: And the meat is different.

D. S.: Yeah.

G.S.: Maryland crabs are sweeter.

D.S.: Well, yes. We've got the best. I've been way out there in California. They talk about that Maryland crab. Always talk about. Yes, sir. Can't you send me some?

R.B.: Maryland crabs.

D. S.: I said no, I can't bring you none. But crabmeat is work for a lot of people. The reason why people do leave from this point and go somewhere else because the work is not steady. And if you're not really good at this craft, then you're not going to make it. So you need a lot of work, and for a person that's not good at it, then they'll work every day. But you take the ones that's good at it, full day will do them as well, see. That's all I have to say, honey.

K.F.: Okay.

(Laughter)

J.J.: You've said it.

N.1: I know it.

J.J.: That's all I have to say, honey. You said it all for everybody.

K.F.: Well that's plenty.

J. J.: Yes, in deed.

KR: Well I'm going to ask you all if I can borrow these photos and have copies made at the museum and then return them to you.

R.B.: Okay.

K.F.: Is that all right?

N.J.: Okay.

K.F.: Let me figure out whose photos are whose.

R.B.: You can take it out the frame.

J.J.: Oh, she said you can take it out the frame.

K.F.: Oh, you want it out of the frame?

R.B.: Well you can take the frame and all. She's going to return it anyway.

K.F.: Okay. Let me write down who belongs to what here. Who's is this one, does this belong to you?

R.B.: Yeah.

K.F.: Okay.

R.B.: Trying to figure what year, 'cause they never put the date on the back of that.

J.J.: Huh-uh (negative).

K.F.: And this is Fronnie.

R.B.: Uh-huh (Affirmative).

J.J.: Is that the one in the hallway?

D.S.: This --

R.B.: The year should be on because --

J.J.: No, it's not.

K.F.: Look on the back.

G.S.: Because I remember when they took -- but I don't remember that one.

SPEAKER: I was looking at it -- older, I mean -- the picture was taken before that, before the paper.

K.F.: Well is there a metal --

SPEAKER: Yeah, they're the giant.

J.J.: Oh, yeah.

SPEAKER: `Cause that's what I was looking at. They're pasteurized cans.

D. S.: Okay.

SPEAKER: That's why I asked to see those pictures because I thought maybe they were, but no, that's -- they're pasteurized cans.

D.S.: Long as they're pasteurized -- when I started, it was nothing but cans. We had white cans for the crab meat, and it was like -- I don't know what you call it, it wasn't brown cans, it was just -- for the claw meat.

SPEAKER: I think, you know, it's probably late 80's.

J.J.: Like a brassy color, that brassy color?

D.S.: Yeah.

K.F.: Is this yours?

J.J.: Yeah, and that's a old one.

K.F.: Okay, now let's start here. This is your --

J.J.: Yeah.

K.F.: And what is his name?

R.B.: Joshua Jones.

K.F.: Joshua Jones. And we know who this is?

R.B.: I don't know who that is.

D. S.: No.

K.F.: Unknown.

R.B.: Dad.

J.J.: That's dad, that's her brother and my father.

R.B.: James Jones.

K.F.: Okay. Okay. And then who's next?

SPEAKER: That's Ellison Clayton.

K.F.: Ellison Clayton.

G.S.: I think it's a picture of --

K.F.: And do we know who this guy is?

R.B.: I don't know who that is.

SPEAKER: I may be able to find out. We have that picture somewhere.

K.F.: Someplace?

SPEAKER: Yeah.

K.F.: Okay. And we can't really tell who that is. We'll skip him. And whose is this?

J.J.: That's my mother's mother, May Anderson.

D. S.: And who's that sleep?

J.J.: Pearl.

(Laughter)

J.J.: And her granddaughter, Pearl Anderson.

K.F.: Okay.

SPEAKER: Left to right, it's Pearl.

J.J.: Uh-huh (Affirmative).
K.F.: And May is your --
J.J.: Grandmother.
K.F.: Grandmother.
J.J.: Maternal.
K.F.: Okay. And this is Fronnie about what time?
R.B.: I would say she was maybe in her late 20's, something like that, when that picture was taken. I don't know what year it was. I just happened to find that picture. She told me it was me. I said no, it's not me.
(Laughter)
R.B.: Tell you to look at the Model T Ford and the bus, and I said no, that's not me. That is her. Because I remember she used to wear a scarf around her hair. And she had one ring and a watch she always wore. And I said no, mom, that's you. So I went and had some pictures made, a little one.
K.F.: Okay.
J.J.: So we're --
R.B.: Oh, yeah.
J.J.: Grandmom and granddad.
K.F.: And then whose newspaper article is this?
R.B.: Oh, that's my mother's. That's the article they did on her.
SPEAKER: We have a copy of that I gave you.
R.B.: They have a copy.
K.F.: Yeah, I got a copy of that one.
R.B.: Okay.
K.F.: So I'll let you take that one back. Okay. Now all right, let's see.
J.J.: This is daddy.
K.F.: Before you all leave -- oh, okay. We have -- we're going to put the tapes into the archive at the museum so that people will be able to hear this history of crab picking and people's experiences. And to do that, we have a form for you all to fill out that also has your mailing address on it that I'll need definitely to mail you back these photos, but also to mail you all a thank you letter too. And everybody could fill one of these out. And we're also going to send folks copies of the tapes if you want one.
R.B.: Okay.
N.J.: Okay.
R.B.: That would be nice.
K.F.: And I'm hoping that when you all do start picking, that I'll be able to come and take some photos if that's all right.
R.B.: Got another one, Joyce?
J.J.: Leave one.
SPEAKER: Dad and I signed one yesterday too.
K.F.: Yeah.
R.B.: We need two more.
K.F.: Here's a pen.
R.B.: Two more.
K.F.: There should be some in that folder.

SPEAKER: You need a clipboard to write on?

K.F.: And in the fall after we've finished interviewing everybody, we're going to put together a little book for the people that participated, so we'll be sending you a copy of that as well and letting you know when the exhibit's going to open. We're actually hoping that what we can do is as we put the exhibit together, we'd like to come back and make sure we got the exhibit right. So we'll be asking you all for your opinion, you know.

R.B.: Oh.

J.J.: -- crab house?

K.F.: Yeah, if you want to check that too.

(END OF TAPE 124-2 - END OF INTERVIEW)

you. So in that way, they've learned to let the person who is responsible for that particular part of the company to go ahead and make the decision of it. And they're the ones, if you make a mistake, they're the ones who are responsible.

K.F.: Okay.

B.B.: It's not that bad. We have an understanding, we know who --we know what the business is all about, and we all have the same objective in mind.

C.B.: But they all have it in mind to make some money, and provide their families with a good family life, buy them a good home. And Bill was a great sailor -- he and Joe did a lot of sailing, competitive sailing.

K.F.: Oh, okay.

C.B.: Penguins I think you start out in. And they taught their children how to sail. Joe's got a boy named Andy, the oldest one, he's a crackerjack sailor too.

K.F.: Okay.

C.B.: That was the recreation that the boys here -- Bill was sailing, and Joe was sailing, and Jack didn't get into sailing much, did he?

B.B.: He crewed a little bit.

C.B.: He crewed, yeah.

B.B.: Later on, he did. Not as a youngster. Motor boat.

C.B.: And then my mother got -- she had a double-decker trailer, we'd haul these Penguins around, and my mother would -- they were too old, too young to drive, so my mother would take 'em around, pull this trailer around all over the country. Went up to Canada one time and competed in sailing. They were good.

K.F.: Okay. One thing I was going to ask you about, I guess I was reading some newspaper articles about a strike that happened in South Dorchester in the 50's. And I was wondering how that affected your business here. Did you all see more business because of that?

C.B.: No. We had a little organization. Dorchester Seafood Proper. And we were very close-knit people. We knew each other by the first names. A lot of our families grew up together, and we stuck together. And if lower Dorchester had a problem, we'd do what we could to help 'em.

K.F.: Okay.

C.B.: And I'm not going to say just how, but we did what we could lawfully to help 'em get through their problem.

K.F.: Okay.

C.B.: I think that's why the union never bothered us much because they knew we had -- we worked together real closely, and I don't think we ever took advantage of any of our help.

K.F.: I was just curious because I thought maybe the watermen would come up herewith their crabs rather than --

C.B.: Well I think the -- I don't know if we're talking about the same thing, but they imported Mexicans down there too because the people -- the Americans down there realized that they had to have year-round work, so they came to Cambridge and work in the shirt factories, or sewing factories, rest rooms, and they had to get Mexicans to work too, because to do this crab picking and oyster shucking.

K.F.: Okay. I was just asking about the -- I think it was '54, 1954 strike that happened in South Dorchester -- that the watermen would come here with their crabs.

B.B.: I didn't know anything about that. It was a watermen's strike?

K.F.: Yes --

C.B.: I don't remember what you're saying either, but I do know that they had some trouble when they got Mexicans, that some of the watermen got out to the Mexican girls, and it caused problems in the family.

B.B.: Well this was like back in 50's, Dad, right when I was born. It's way before Mexicans. She's talking about a strike down in South Dorchester.

C.B.: Oh, oh. I don't remember that.

K.F.: Somebody had given me a stack of newspaper articles. I had read them and thought well I wonder if Cambridge saw more business at that time. Nobody was working down that way.

C.B.: That doesn't register a thought in my mind. I can't remember that. Though I do know that we had a seafood packer, Dorchester Seafood Packer, and we worked very well together. If they were short of crabs and we had too many, we would sell them crabs, and they'd do the same for us.

K.F.: When did that organization start?

C.B.: Well I was one to first start it, Calvert Tully and I.

K.F.: Okay. And was it to get better representation of the industry?

C.B.: Well it was -- we'd have a meeting of minds. And we talked these things out. If somebody was having a problem, we'd try to help them solve it. And when we all left there, we always -- the meeting, all us were all friends and go have a beer together and a highball afterwards. If they had a problem in South Dorchester, they would talk to us. If we had a problem, they would come talk to us. And this way, they weren't robbing each other for workers, and weren't trying to steal crabbers from each other or oystermen from each other. They gave us an opportunity to keep on going day after day instead of having a strike of 10 days or two months or something like that. And with the short season, crabs, one week, even one day means an awful lot in the final production for the year.

K.F.: Okay. And now do you have the same crabbers who usually sell to you?

C.B.: Uh-huh (Affirmative). It generally works out that way. Because they -- I guess it's because when they get producing crabs, at first a company can only handle so many crabs. And when he starts off the season, *he has* let's say 50 crabbers. And he takes -- those crabbers depend on him in taking their crabs because you can't carry crabs for a week and wait for somebody to come get `em or they won't be much good. So this is one reason why we got this machine -- because if we have so many crabs when these crabbers -- and our crab pickers couldn't handle them, then we start the machine. And these machines, there wasn't any -- it was all laborers you pick up off the street. All *they* did was stand there and pick shells out of crab meat, or take crab from here and put it there. That's about all they have to do. They didn't have to go through all the motions of picking a crab like breaking the legs off and cutting the knuckles off, pulling the back off They had all those different motions to go through.

K.F.: Okay. And who were some of the crabbers that bring you the crabs? Who could you count on would always bring you --

C.B.: Well all of `em that work for you depended on you to **take their complete catch. And in the fall when the sooks become real plentiful, that's when a lot of us had problems in handling** their whole catch. And with the short season, one day -- if you let a crabber off one day, he's hurt for the whole season. And this is why we went to the trouble of developing this machinery where we get an unskilled laborer to run these. And it still gives -- *and* another thing, the reason why we could keep good crab pickers, because they knew when before crabs came on, we run the poor crabs through the machine and give them the full crabs. As you know, you pick a crab, if it's a

poor crab, you're not going to get much meat. And you go through the same operation to get meat out of a full crab, a fat crab. So we would give the good crabs to the hand pickers, and the crabs that were a little hard to make time on we put -- put `em on the machine over there.

K.F.: Okay. Now how did you all grade your crab meat when you first started?

C.B.: Well the market had a lot *to* do with *that*. *I* mean some people who can afford to pay 20 or 25 or \$30 a pound for crab meat, then *they* will get the lump, backfin lump. Your -- now this meat over here, there's no backfin comes off these machines. So a lot of that meat goes to these companies who make crab cakes. Andy, I think, used to make `em. I don't know if he does now or not. Then there's several others. Oh, Campbell's Soup and we sell a lot of crab meat to Campbell's Soup. Oyster shuckers -- shucked oysters to Campbell's Soup. And most of your backfin goes to gourmet restaurants. You *know what I* mean by backfin crab meat?

K.F.: Yes.

C.B.: And that comes from the backfin of a crab, meat from a crab.

K.F.: Okay.

C.B.: Okay.

K.F.: So was Campbell's Soup a big customer for you?

C.B.: Huh?

K.F.: Was Campbell's Soup a big customer for you?

C.B.: In oysters especially. When we were shucking oysters, we'd haul, oh, two or 3,000 gallons of crab -- or oyster to Campbell's Soup up in Camden, New Jersey. They make canned Campbell's Soup, oyster soup. And we used to wonder what they did with all of the oysters because you open a can of Campbell, you see about three oysters in it. And there we were carrying `em gallons and gallons of solid-meat oyster, no juice. So they went a long ways from a can we gave `em to what *they* put in the final pack.

K.F.: Well is there anything else about the business you can think of?

C.B.: I was just sitting here thinking probably something we didn't --newsworthy or people would like to read about that you and I haven't gone through, but I can't think of anything.

K.F.: How about this day-to-day working here, if somebody wanted to know what it was like to come here to work every day?

C.B.: Well like I said, we had to find a way, after we stopped shucking oysters here, we had to find a way of working every day. And we -- unemployment helped us lay the crab pickers off when we didn't have any crabs. And sometimes what we'd do is take a truck and go to Carolina where their crab season is longer, and that's where we got crabs to pick. We'd haul `em up here and pick `em, steam `em and pick `em. And we didn't -- I don't think we ever made a lot of money, but we kept our work force together.

K.F.: And that was really important to you?

C.B.: Oh, my land, yes. You can say -- crab picking is an art. You have to be an artist to pick a crab. Pick it to get the most -- get all the meat out without a lot of shells. And you don't learn it just one day. It's experience. And it's hard too. When you take and cut those knuckles off, you can't have a knife that's too sharp, you cut your fingers off, keep your fingers all scratched up all the time. So you have to have a *fairly dull knife* to -- I mean to cut those -- and it's an art. With cutting those knuckles off, you put your knife on top, and you work -- twist your wrist. It kind of pulls the knuckles out rather than cutting them off. Now you can go start a crab-picking operation.

K.F.: Well I'm trying to figure out how to give visitors at the museum the experience of, you know, what it would be like to work at a crab picking plant. So I'm trying to figure out how to do that.

C.B.: Well the thing that -- it's -- when you go home, you're smelly. That's the only thing that I know of that is against crab picking. It's not a high -- it doesn't have a high pay scale that some of your other companies have. All food processors are low-pay scale.

K.F.: Right.

C.B.: Read about Perdue farmers? That's an example of it. I've been following it very closely because I know just what the growers are going through. And that's why chicken has always been real cheap because the Perdues, Tysons have kept the price to the growers low, Perdues own the chickens, they own the houses, the farmer, I guess, owned -- maybe Perdue had a mortgage on his farm, whatever, where the chicken houses were. And the farmer just tied right down just as close to the Perdues and the processors, I guess you call them processors, that they just had to do it or go out of business, lose their farm. I've been following it very closely because I can understand piecework, and the farmers depend on, just like the watermen depend on us, the farmers depend on Tysons. But it's gotten so in the crab business we don't have the control we used to have years ago, Because like I say, years ago, hardly anybody went to the store and bought a dozen steamed crabs, took `em home and fixed `em. They went in the store and bought a pound of crab meat and took it home and made cakes or salad or what.

K.F.: When did it become popular to get the whole crab?

C.B.: You'd always -- Bill, do you know? Were they selling basket crabs when you came here?

B.B.: Oh, yeah.

C.B.: I'm sure they were.

B.B.: I mean it's been popular a while, but it has become more popular, I think, recently in that people of any economic status can find a crab that suits their budget. You know, now people will stand in line for these crabs that years ago people wouldn't touch, the females or the poor male crabs. I mean they'll stand in line and pay a lot of money for them because that's all that they can afford. You know, and to have crabs, sit down and eat by the piece, to drink beer with, have a party with, you know, nice big fat males, number ones, I think -- oh, since I've been here and I would say for the last 30 years have always been pretty desirable to sit down and -- but I think Jack said as recently as he's been here, and he came here in the early 70's, that we bought crabs straight, and we didn't buy four different grades. They just all went into the one basket or barrel. We called out what we needed here, which was the minimal amount, and then the rest went to the pickers. So years ago, the pickers probably had a better chance of doing a little better because they had better crabs to work on. They had the nice fat male crabs that they could work with. And we do pick those in the fall when the demand's way off and the supply's good.

C.B.: And people, people will pay more per pound of crab meat and buy a pound -- a dozen steamed crabs and pick `em themselves if they went and bought a pound of crab meat, they get a lot more ounces for their dollar. But they love to get in and mix it up, and get it all on their hands, and get about half shot off beer,

K.F.: Right.

C.B.: It's just something they like to get mixed up in, but they don't want to work in. Recreation. And something I don't think I told you. The male crab, per pound live weight, will produce more meat than the female crab. And you can understand that. You know how the apron looks like on a female sook?

K.F.: Right.

C.B.: It's a lot of weight lost to the chum pile.

K.F.: Okay.

C.B.: And that's one reason why the males demand more --and the males are easier to cut. The knuckles are easier to cut off than the female crab.

K.F.: Now speaking of chum, what did you do with your chum?

C.B.: Huh?

K.F.: What did you do with your chum?

C.B.: Years ago, we produced what they call crab meal. And we had a plant right out of here where that boiler room is. And we dehydrated the crab pickings and ground it up into fine meal. And this was furnished to the poultry, mostly poultry industry for protein and also calcium for the egg, developing of a good hard egg in a hen.

K.F.: So you guys had your own --

C.B.: Huh?

K.F.: You had your own plant here then --

C.B.: We dehydrated. The crab chum was all -- nothing was left here except crab meal and crab meat. But the crab, the chicken growers and producers learned how to get their protein and their crab meal, they didn't use crab meal anymore. They used meat meal and fish meal. And because crab meal had too much kiten in it. Kiten is a shell, the shell part of the crab meat.

K.F.: Okay. Now did other companies bring their chum to you?

C.B.: At one time, we took the chum from Elliott's Island and our plant down to Toddville. But now it's hauled out to landfills. It's not economically feasible to process crab meat anymore. I don't think there's anybody -- anybody dry their own crab meal, crab pickings?

B.B.: No, no.

C.B.: It was a great big company down Hoopersville took all that crab pickings from those crab packers down there. What was Ted Ranky's --

B.B.: Eastern Shore --

C.B.: Eastern Shore -- no, no. I forget what it was. Crab meal dehydrating plant.

B.B.: Forgot the name of the guy that bought Goose Creek.

K.F.: Okay.

C.B.: I forgot his name too.

B.B.: Franklin Murphy.

C.B.: Franklin Murphy, yeah. Crisfield Dehydrating Plant. That's what it was. They dehydrated all the crab pickings from Crisfield and also Dorchester County. But we were large enough that we dehydrated our own while it was -- while it was demand for it. Like I say, there was too much shell in it. The chicken poultry raisers could get their shell cheaper using other things like fish meal and meat meal, scrap, you know, from meat, scrap cuttings from meat. When the butchers have cuttings from butchering the meat, they would use that meat meal too. You're not going to remember all this.

K.F.: Well that's why I'm taping it.

C.B.: You'll have to come back about four or five times.

K.F.: Well yeah, I think so.

C.B.: I'm just kidding.

K.F.: We're hoping we can come back and talk with you some more. You know, take photos and make sure people get a good understanding of the crab industry here.

C.B.: We've always --we've always had people from the west, or even from Washington, Baltimore, Philadelphia, wanting to go through a crab plant. We've always been willing to show `em through, spend 15 minutes with `em, let `em sit down watch people picking the crab meat out. They love to watch it.

K.F.: They do.

C.B.: But then the health department says no, you got all these people coming in, you can't do it anymore. So -- we do it anyway. That's not really -- we feel like we've got a justification doing it. In fact, we have whole classes, busload of kids come in.

K.F.: Oh, really?

C.B.: Yeah. From -- away from here. They call up, of course, and say we have 50 kids we want to bring through. The kids are real interested in it.

K.F.: Yeah, I bet they would be.

C.B.: Uh-huh (Affirmative). But like I say, the health department's got -- these people coming in, smoking a cigarette, or their hands are not clean, and they might want to reach over and touch a can of crab meat. It was some -- having people come in.

K.F.: And they must have lots of questions.

C.B.: Oh, lots. Yes, in deed. And we feel like it -- seeing it is worth a thousand words. Five minutes looking is worth a thousand words trying to explain it.

KY.: Right. Well, Bill, I'm wondering if you can tell me a little bit about the markets you were telling us when we were here the other day. You were telling us about the new markets in New York, for the whole crabs and the cooks.

B.B.: Oh, okay. Yeah, that's changed quite a bit in that it makes crabs more hard for us to have available to pick. As I was saying, a whole crab is much more desirable now than it was 20 or 30 years ago. People never thought of taking a sook home to eat it.

C.B.: Not even male crabs.

B.B.: Or hardly male crabs.

C.B.: They started off with male crabs because they were so big and full.

B.B.: Yeah. But the live sook market has become very popular with the Oriental trade, and the metropolitan areas, Philadelphia -- Philadelphia, New York. And they've even sent `em live to Honolulu, West Coast, Detroit, Chicago, all over the country. And from what I understand, Dad, and I didn't realize this until recently, that the Orientals like to take `em, pull the back shells off and eat the roe --

C.B.: Oh, yeah. That's why --

B.B.: -- before it's cooked.

C.B.: Oh, I didn't know that.

B.B.: I didn't realize it either.

C.B.: Eat it raw?

B.B.: That's -- they say that's the way it is. And I'll tell you how we learned that. There's a guy that we sell some live crabs to every now and then that does this, and that's all his market is. He said how about pasteurizing me some crab roe, you know, the crab eggs.

K.F.: Yeah.

C.B.: The yellow.

B.B.: Yeah. So we said okay. So we did it, and he sent it to his customers, and they didn't like it because it's been cooked. He said well they don't cook it before they eat it? And he says no.

C.B.: Never dream of that because --

B.B.: Well I didn't dream of it either.
C.B.: -- a crab is a scavenger.
B.B.: Yeah, it's full of bacteria.
K.F.: Right.
C.B.: And that's why I can't imagine eating something raw.
B.B.: Their immune systems must be tough.
C.B.: Scavenger.
K.F.: Well I guess it's not really like caviar, you know --
C.B.: No.
B.B.: That doesn't appeal to me either.
K.F.: No, me either. I can't even make cooked fish roe.
B.B.: Yeah. So anyway, that itself has put a great demand on Chesapeake Bay Sooks because they're the fattest, they're the best.
K.F.: Right, right.
B.B.: And, you know --
C.B.: Where do they get -- they take it and eat it raw?
B.B.: That's the way I understood it, Dad. I'm as surprised as you are.
C.B.: My, God. I can't imagine. First thing, you know, I know a crab is a scavenger. Right?
B.B.: Yeah.
C.B.: And when they find somebody drowned, the crab have --
K.F.: Yup.
C.B.: And that tells you right there, you know they've got all this stuff on their claws, in their mouth.
B.B.: Well raw oysters comes out of waters too. I mean, you know, and it's exposed to --
C.B.: Yeah, but oysters filter, oysters filter.
B.B.: Well they do, but they --
C.B.: You know, oysters will filter, you know, clear an oyster stream up --
B.B.: Yeah, but it's still coming out of a bacteria-filled body of water.
K.F.: Right, okay. Well how much does of a basket of those sook sell for when those crabs are selling on the market?
B.B.: Well they can bring a very premium price, and they will start calling here anytime for `em. And, you know, it can be as -- they can bring almost as much money as a nice bushel of number ones for domestic -- or, you know, for a Baltimore market-type thing or Ocean City market. So, you know, they love it. Again, it's become very, very popular. And, you know, it's a nice little market on the sooks. Benefits the watermen greatly.
K.F.: Okay. Now how did you discover this market?
B.B.: Well they discovered us. I mean shortly after I came here, and we are not big into it. There are a lot of other crab buyers that are. But shortly after I came here, you know, we started getting visits from a lot of Orientals wanting to get crabs with roe to Japan, and crabs with roe to here to there, to New York, to this, to that.
C.B.: Really -- must be gourmet.
K.F.: Live, and they're still alive.
B.B.: Yeah, yeah. And we just have never fooled with it much because our primary business is picking crabs, you know, picking crab meat. And we didn't think we'd have the supply to supply them and also, you know, to keep our help in work. But they found other people that would. So

that's where a lot of the Chesapeake Bay crabs are going, female crabs. Now when you asked Dad about crabbers, who are -- does any particular crabber's name come to you as being an outstanding crabber? I was doing something else at the time.

C.B.: Well Wilson Todd.

B.B.: Did you mention names?

C.B.: Emerson Todd. There's a big family of Todds. Emerson, Wilson, William, Cook, they're all brothers. And their mother worked here picking crabs. And a sister, Wilson's sister.

B.B.: Worked here?

C.B.: Yeah, two sisters worked here.

B.B.: I didn't know that either. Now was their father a waterman? Must've been.

C.B.: He was Colonel Todd, yeah, he worked for us. But mostly oyster.

B.B.: And Elliotts worked here a long time.

C.B.: Yes, the Elliott family. We have all the Elliotts at one time sold us seafood.

K.F.: Okay. And those connections are still there? I mean do they still --

B.B.: Yeah, we still have Todds and Elliotts. But again, their -- you know, their kids are not exclusively watermen like they used to be.

K.F.: Right.

B.B.: They're doing other things. And, you know, a couple of them have gone on to do other things. And like crab pickers are retired and gone back on the water. They come back to do this as a second living.

K.F.: Right.

B.B.: One of the Todds is a retired state trooper, you know, and his father was Wilson.

K.F.: Okay.

C.B.: -- crab potter as compared to a trotliner. Years ago, they didn't have crab potters. They were all caught by trotline.

K.F.: Right.

C.B.: And now you'll go by and see somebody's back yard full of crab pots.

K.F.: Yeah, hundreds.

B.B.: Hundreds of `em.

K.F.: Hundreds of `em. Now you were telling me about -- I guess it was a picker who was related to a -- who lives in Wilmington?

B.B.: That's her daughter, and she's coming here tomorrow to talk to you.

K.F.: Okay, okay.

B.B.: Two of Rony's daughters, I think her granddaughter and another granddaughter will be talking to you. One of them may be a great-granddaughter, I'm not sure. But they're all going to be related to Rony.

K.F.: Okay. This is not the first time I've heard of people retiring and then going back into the crab picking business.

B. B.: Yeah.

K.F.: And I'm wondering, I'm going to ask them tomorrow, but what do you think it is that makes women want to come back to the industry when they're retired?

B.B.: Well, you know, these girls have a strong work ethic, I think. And they're family's here, they started off working here, and I think it's something they always enjoyed, but knew that possibly there were some better things out there, and they took advantage of it, or got married

and moved away. And, you know, they're coming back to do something that they enjoy, and be with family.

C.B.: Had a big crab house at one time, Roy Harrison over in St. Michaels.

K.F.: Uh-huh (*Affirmative*). Yeah, we actually did talk with Roy two weeks ago.

C.B.: I mean he's still around. He's not still active, is he?

K.F.: No, he's not in the business. He's retired. Bay 100 Seafood has what used to be Harrison's Crab House.

C.B.: Oh, is that right?

K.F.: We're going to talk with them. I think they're the only crab picking place left in Talbot County.

B.B.: Well Bellevue Seafood.

K.F.: Bellevue Seafood and I think that's --

C.B.: Yeah, Bellevue and Turner, Turner.

K.F.: -- for picking crabs.

B.B.: Well Turner's not doing anything anymore.

C.B.: No, no, no.

B.B.: W.A. Turner.

C.B.: That's a colored family over around Bellevue. They got a lot of kids, and they shuck clams, and shuck oysters, and pick crabs. Grandson of the old man Turner, John Turner had the crab industry, and he would work very closely with us. We bought crab meat from him. He'd pick it back then.

K.F.: Oh, he would.

B.B.: Still does. Bellevue does.

K.F.: Oh, Bellevue still picks for you guys.

B.B.: Yeah.

K.F.: Okay. Do they have their own label, or are they just --

B.B.: They have their own label. Plus they'll pick for us.

K.F.: Okay. Now what do you call that when somebody will pick for you?

B.B.: Co-packer, I guess.

C.B.: You identify them on the can, their number.

B.B.: They have to have their license number on the container, although it's our name on it, our brand name.

C.B.: -- name or something like that.

B.B.: We've been doing that forever. Well go back as far as Toddville, you've been doing that. That plant was a different licensed plant.

C.B.: Yeah. Each plant is identified by number, a health department number.

K.F.: Okay.

C.B.: And though they might put it in J.M. Clayton Company's cup, but we can identify it because of the number on the can.

K.F.: Now do the pickers here have their own numbers?

B.B.: Uh-huh (*Affirmative*).

K.F.: Okay. And does that go on the can?

B.B.: Yeah. They write it on the bottom of the container.

K.F.: Okay. So somebody --

B.B.: Yeah, like when Margie was here, we used to have customers come in and want Margie's.

C.B.: That's the truth. They'd say I want number 27.
B.B.: That's right. That's what happens though.
K.F.: And can you fill those orders?
B.B.: Sometimes. Yeah, sometimes. We do what we can.
C.B.: If they call ahead of time, you can do it.
B.B.: Yeah.
C.B.: It's too late if it's all just mixed in a barrel together, in a box.
K.F.: Okay. I should let you all get back to work.
C.B.: Well I've enjoyed talking to you. I don't have anything else to do.
B.B.: You're welcome.
K.F.: Well thank you.
C.B.: I enjoyed it.
B.B.: If you can think of any other questions for him, or if there's anything that maybe you don't think he interpreted the way that you thought --
K.F.: Yeah, well I'll just listen to the tape.
B.B.: -- I'll try to clarify it and ask him again.
K.F.: Sure, sure.
B.B.: He ~~doesn't~~ do well over the phone. But, you know, she's coming back tomorrow to talk to some of ~~Ronny's~~ kids. And she's going to look through this big bag of old newspaper clippings. I'm going to move this typewriter, and you can sit right there.
K.F.: Okay, great.
B.B.: So she's going to know more about us than we ever knew here.
(End of Interview.)

r1

Freddie