

Interview Log

Interviewee: Evelyn Robinson

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Interviewer: Kelly Feltault

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Interviewer (K.F.) very difficult to hear on this tape. Interviewee (E.R.) loud and clear.

BEGIN SIDE A

E.R.: --Shots and can only take a limited supply per day, and then we have to send to Virginia. And that way, we use our fresh shells to go back on the bottoms, so we're really the two-fold bad situation.

K.F.: Well if I could have you state your name.

E.R.: I'm Evelyn E. Robinson.

K.F.: Okay. And I usually start interviews with real basic questions and then proceed. Where were you born?

E.R.: I was born in Bishop's Head.

K.F.: In Bishop's?

E.R.: Yes. That's just a small community to Tar Bay, Fox Creek in that area.

K.F.: Okay. And were your parents from that area too?

E.R.: Yes. Both of my parents were from that area.

K.F.: What did your parents do?

E.R.: My father did the soft crab shedding operation. It was owned by Charles arks and his family. They're still in crab picking too, even today. And this factor was unique because that's where the steamboats came. It had a freight office attached. So it was quite an active center for freight and passengers gong to Baltimore. And my father did, as I say, the soft crab operation. And this was back where you pack soft crabs in large wooden boxes with seaweed and ice and the white paper. And at that time, ou probably put them on the steamboat, sent them into Baltimore. And then, of course, when the steamboats stopped service then we went to trucks. And then m mother picked crabs there, yes. And Mr. Charlie Parks, the owner, his wife taught my mother to pick crabs. They were from Hooper's Island, and this is were the good crab picking, knowledge of good crab picking comes from, really.

K.F.: It does?

E.R.: I think so.

K.F.: So the Parks were from Hooper's Island?

E.R.: Yeah, the Parks were from Hooper's Island and Mr. Charlie came over here and started a crab house over here, and his son also was in business with them. And my mother worked there, and maybe about 15 or 20 white ladies, and then they had about 40, 50 black ladies. I mean it was a huge operation.

K.F.: At Parks?

E.R.: Yeah.

K.F.: At Parks?

E.R.: At Charles Parks, yes, was the operation.

K.F.: Okay. So they had about, what, -90-ould say?

E.R.: It could run -- usually they I think about 60. They counted on 60 pickers. Like I say, you know, crab picking, they stay home days and it's kind of a free operation. But I would say at times, there would be 12, 15, probably 20 white ladies, and then there would be young, at times children could work in crab houses, and you had children cracking claws and they did the crack claws operations. And then the black ladies, and we all worked together.

K.F.: But now were you all in the same room?

E.R.: All in the same room.

K.F.: Okay. Were there segregated bathrooms?

E.R.: I don't remember. I just remember we went to the bathroom, we just went to the bathroom.

daughter.)

J.R.: At that time, this is not the nicest thing to say, but we have our own theory of that today. Your bathroom went overboard. You didn't have, you know, and so I can't remember. At one time, my mother and father lived there. They had an apartment right there. And then when I came along, I my mother thought it was a little bit too dangerous to raise a child, cause we were way out in the water. This had a long at that time, that factory was built way out in the water. I would think because of the steamboat it had to be out in the channel see. And we had a long wooden wharf, and you rode to that. And I think my mother decided that was not the safest place to raise a child. So --

K.F.: Oh, you pys -- were you living out on that?

E.R.: Yes, we lived + my mother and father lived there at one time.

K.F.: Did they have apartments for or the workers?

E.R.: Yes, Uh ative .

K.F.: Oh, I've never heard that.

E.R.: Yes they lived there. And then as I say, then my mother - I guess my mother ana father thought this is not the safest place for our baby. nd my mother says I had to be three, but I can remember from at least our, because my father taught me to count peelers. And I learned to count to 100, to count peelers from the Grabbers bringing them in. But that whole factory was destroyed in the flood of 1933. It all was taken away.. And luckily, there was onl Mr. Parks and a man there that day. And he got m a boat and took him ri t to his house. It was frightening. Trucks, cars and everything, it all was lost. And the strange thing -- and I'm not going on your path--years later, my daughter and her husband were tonging there. And I told them, I said there should be a lot of spats there because there's a lot of thin ~s for 'em to catch on, oysters to catch on. So they were tonging there, and they tonged up a cream pitcher from my mother's dishes.

K.F.: Oh, you're kidding.

E.R.: No, I'm not.

K.F.: Do you still have it?

E.R.: My daughter she had it and it burned in her house. She had a house fire. And she was devastated because that was part of her house -- and my daughter says here's this -- so she took it to my mother and my mother says that s mine, that was my dishes.

(Laughter.)

E.R.: But anyway, it was a nice -- the operation at that time, you had big huge wooden steam boxes that you steamed crabs in. And my father's brother did the steaming of crabs. It was almost like a family operation, Mr. Parks and his son, and my father and his brother worked there. And then like my mother and I and then my cousin, they worked there. And it was like family, and it just seemed like such a lovely time. And we were not poor because that was -- we were not poor because there was money in the operation, and m father always had money. And it's not like, you know, some people think well at that time, that was the money maker m the county, like the tomato houses. Those ladies, we all **made fantastic money for that time. And my father had a car a Model-T Ford. And a lot of times, my mother would take him to shed up soft crabs which had to be done, you know, on like a four hour, sometimes two-hour basis. And then she would come back and then we would go back and go to work there.**

And at that time, I'm trying to think because you have a lot of people that service, that bring the crabs to the ladies now. And I'm trying to remember

about that. I can't remember about the men. It seems like to me my mother entered her trash the had this great big thing, and it went overboard. Her trash went overboard. We think that's where e had all this seafood suppl~y. And it seemed like to me that she went back. We had tomato baskets. This is what we picked in, tomato baskets. You turned over one basket, put a tomato basket on top of that. And that's how you picked. And my mother would -- she would go back, and someone would shovel her crabs. And she would take `em -- I never thought to really ask her about that. But I can remember sitting and picking ~c~rabs, my mother showing me how to pick crabs. And, of course the children, as I say, crack claws. I didn't want to crack claws. I wanted to pick crabs. That was the adult operation, I wanted to pick crabs.

daughter)

F.: You wanted to be an adult.

E.R.: I wanted to be an adult. And at one time, they gave you, it seemed like to me, that may have been the oyster operation, they gave you these little metal tabs, that was probably the oyster operation. And some of the black ladies at the end of the season would have big flour sacks of these, they had saved all their tags and they would bring them to be aid. You went by these little metal tokens 'ike. And they would bring these four sacks. They had saved 'em. I can remember a flour sack was like this. They had saved them and they would bring `em. And, of course, at that time, you only picked two kinds o crab meat in a metal can, that was regular and lump. Now you have all these whatever the customer wants for the day, this is how you pick it. And, see, it's a little -- I have a blind spot I guess. Some of the people say to me, don't any of you young people know how to pick crabs any more. I don't see any of that jumbo lump. And I thought well, that's one thing, you don't have too many pickers that do pick jumbo lump, I'll grant you that. But it's how that order comes in that day.

Some days, we Vick it all together, lump and regular all together in one can. And then other days, it's possible to pick in three cans. We can pick jumbo lump, backfin and regular. That would be three cans. And of course, now we don't pick in tin cans anymore, we pick in plastic. At hat time we picked -- and at one time, the lump can, to make sure you get that lump, was a taller can. They did not want it pressed down. They want to make sure you had pound but they didn't want it pressed down. And that was in a metal, we picked in metal cans. And they had huge ice boxes and ice houses they called them that the walls were insulated with sawdust. And they got these big cakes of ice, like 100 pound cake of ice. And they had this grinder that you'd cut it and then you'd put it in and ground up the ice to put in these big barrels that you -

K.F.: What do you mean, like --

E.R.: Big wooden barrels that you pack this crab meat m, and you put this cover over it with a wooden rim around it, and you shipped it, that's how you shi ~ ped it.

K.F.: Okay.

E.R.: And like the -- in the barrel, here would be your regular barrels of regular, or maybe if that person -- you may mix it up if he wanted 25 pounds, but you put it m these barrels and that's how -- then you put a tag on it with his name and his address. And, of course, as I say, at one time it was done by steamboat. Then eventually we went to these huge trucks, Victor Lyn Line and Marshall's Express and whatnot.

K.F.: Okay. Let me ask you more about your parents working there, and what age did you start?

E.R.: As I told you, I was about four years old when I was there. And, of course, they let me pick. And everybody thought -- they were very clean people. The floor was wooden. It was no cement floor. And we think today that 7s one of the problems with women working in the crab houses, that's what's wrong with their back.

K.F.: The floor.

E.R.: The cement floor. And Dr. McWilliams told me it's almost like you're falling down with your knee on that cement every time you moved, because he knew the movement of a crab house. But it was a wooden floor and, you know, it seemed like everything was very clean. And the black ladies would bring all this nice food. Oh, they would fix chicken, they would have great big containers of green lima bean soup cooked and they would all share it. And they still do where I work today. They bring all this food every day and they share it. And the umqu~e thing about me is raised my own family at a crab house. I took four children to the crab house.

K.F.: Oh, you did?

E.R.: Yes.

K.F.: Okay.

E.R.: Right down here on -- well they own it now, but at one time it was W.C. Dean, and I worked for him, and he permitted me we had about 13 children there at one time. And they all just played, and I had a playpen, I took mine as a baby.

(Laughter)

Well when my husband came home out of the service, we lost our home. And we -- there was no such thing as a baby-sitter.

K.F.: Right.

E.R.: Baby-sitter? Everybody was working. Who was going to keep babies? And so we all took them to the factory with us, and we shared, you know, one would look for the children, another one go down and look. But this is a continuous thing. Just as I grew up in a crab house, so did my children.

K.F.: Right.

E.R.: And they learned the trade too. My son cracked claws and my daughter picked crabs. And then I have a granddaughter, she picked crabs, she's out in Ohio now. And then I have a ,great granddaughter, and she's going to pick crabs. We're teaching her. Because we tell them, when you retire someday, it's going to be -- you might decide you want to go back picking crabs. But getting back to the operation that we had early on, all I can say, it was just such a happy time. And those ladies, black ladies, would sing. I can't remember many white ladies sing~ng, but I can remember those black ladies singing. They would start like a little gentle hum, and they would build up until they would be singing words. And to me, they were like Aunt Sarah, Aunt Ninny, and I was always Miss Evelyn to them,. and here comes our baby you know, and they would hug. Well they were just my mother too. And as I say, I was the only child that was allowed to go free down there. The rest of em worked. The rest of the -- it was mostly boys that cracked claws.

K.F.: Oh, okay.

E.R.: It was mostly boys that cracked claws. And but I would go in to -- could go in the office, and I could talk -- they had a telephone, of all things, a telephone. One of those great big box kind, you know?

K.F.: Right.

E.R.: And but it was -- they brought crabs in then so you do not have this basket thin the ladies ~ picked all the crabs. There was no such thing as picking out~ig crabs. Now see, we call the crabs. That is also an additional order. These crabs, this crab and this crab. You have females that go in the basket. And at that time -- we made probably a better quality crab meat. You picked all the crabs. And at one time, I don't know why they did this, but they had a bucket of saltwater. And they had -- the cans all had holes in em, in the bottom of the can for holes. And they would water this crab meat, and I guess -- maybe -- I don't know what they did that for. And they had holes in the bottom of the can. But they don't do that anymore. Of course, we use plastic cans. But they were metal.

K.F.: Right. Some of the metal ones, they'd drill holes in the bottom?

E.R.: Yes.

K.F.: To run water through?

E.R.: Yep, they would run water through that. For what reason, we have never figured it out. We've talked it over and we -- none of us working in crab houses have figured out why they do that. Unless they thought to keep the moisture in it, put a little bit more moisture in it you know, it wouldn't dry out on the way from here to Baltimore. It could have been. But then there has been a time that we picked just one can, and big pans of regular, and they went through all the regular to make sure there were no bones. And then they put it in the cans. I have worked like that too. And you went out and you -- they weighed the pan, the meat, and that's the way you did it. But after the Parks, we did it in cans, two cans, and that was the order of today. We just called it lump and regular, lump and regular. And now today, we have straight up, back regular --

(Laughter.)

E.R.: I mean they have come up with their own ways of grading crab meat. And there -- It was crabs upon crabs caught. And you steamed em in the big wooden boxes. And you went to work early because we did not -- they were spread out to cool, and you shoveled them off the floor. And you did not have coolers. They were just spread out that night after -- as they steamed them, they dumped the steam boxes and spread them out ~probably about a foot thick. And when you'd go over in the morning, you'd look to see how many crabs you had to pick that day. And you had to pick all that you had that day. You did not have a cooler to put them in. 'T' hat was only in later years that I saw crabs put in a cooler.

V.: And how long would you pick crabs for one day?

E.R.: Well as I say, it was probably no problem getting crabs picked because you had so many pickers. And you went to work early in the morning. Now over at Hooper's island, they always went to work much earlier than we did. But we would go, my~mom, of course she wouldn't go down 'til like 7:00, but some of those ladies would go at four. And there's even them that they go at 2:00 in the morning. I remember an inspector coming around here. And he said that the farther south you got, you found people going to work earlier. I guess it was because of the heat, they wanted to -- the crabs picked because, as I said, at that time, you picked them -just as they were steamed. And then in later years, as I got older and my children and I were -- there was a different system in Fiddville.

K.F.: And what was that?

E.R.: You went to work in the morning, and then you came home, and then you went back in the afternoon. They preferred to get most of the crabs picked up. They steamed them as they came in, they steamed those crabs and you picked them hot. And we loved it at that time. You know, they weighed

good, they were wet, but they were kind of bad for your hands. Now the whole idea has changed. We prefer the cold crabs.

K.F.: Okay. Well explain to me what the difference would be. I mean what's bad for your hands when they're hot?

E.R.: Because it had hot mice that runs. And many, many women are very -- have a bad reaction to crabs. Crabs -- there are -- and then there are some people that reaps have an allergic reaction inside the crabs. But the will break your hand out. And, of course, you can't work if you have places on your hands. But hot crabs will do that. And it's like I say, back when we worked at the steamboat wharf, we never did have that with your hands because the crabs had been dumped and they were cool. And so we know it comes from the hot crabs and the hot juice. It was almost like we scalded our hands we were so eager to get them and pick them, and because they weighed good. We thought they were just -- hot crabs was the way we wanted to go. Now we found out we prefer the ones that are cool, and they're put in a cooler and they firm up.

K.F.: Okay.

E.R.: Even a bad crab, when it firms up, it's not that bad. But so as I say, there was plenty crabs then. The men brought 'em in barrels. The did not pull 'em out. There was no big crabs, medium crabs, fat crabs picked out, she crabs. The picker picked eve g that was caught. And most of 'em used, at that time there was no crab t, there was just trot lining. And they used tripe as bait.

Laughter.)

R.: Tripe as bait, and as I say, the brought 'em in in the big barrels and they came right out and they dumped 'em in the steam box, this great big thing that you filled up with wood and coal, and you build up your temperature and then live steam went through the boxes and steamed 'em. They were huge boxes, wooden boxes.

K.F.: And did the steam escape out of this box?

E.R.: Yes. You had like three little holes in the front. And you had this long wire and you must keep those holes free so that water can run out. And they would -- because I guess that steam, the water in it would force those holes to clog up in there. It was this great big thing that you went and you cleaned out those holes. And as I say, at that time, you stood right by and watched those steam boxes. Because my father's brother and my uncle did it. And he steamed the crabs. And then they had another operation which you're not allowed today. You saved your back shells, the good back shells you saved and you put em in this great big trough. And he sit there and cleaned the fat out and broke that mouthpiece out. And you shin shipped -- they put 'em overboard in great big wire crates to wash. And then they shipped those. People used them to do crab imperial and like that. But now you're not allowed to do that. You have to have the glass ones or ceramic ones.

K.F.: Right.

E.R.: You're not allowed to use the crab shell. So that makes us have a lot more crab chum to dispose of. It really does. And as I say, they had the soft crabs, and I would help my father go rake seaweed, as he called it Sea-O's that washed up on the bank. And you would keep those and dry them out. And that's what you packed your soft crabs in. And, of course, being they were so far out in the channel, it was rough out there. Here were these floats of crabs. So the had built a wooden -- around the float operation so that the weather wouldn't upset the floats. And it was unique. And my father would get in a little skiff and I would go with him. We would dip out soft crabs and bring in. Had this little dip net that you dipped out the soft crabs and brought

them in. And we would grade those, you did grade those. They had jumbo and standard and like that. And you packed `em, of course, with the mouth up in the seaweed in little layers. They were pretty all packed up with that mouth up. And m father made sure everything was erfect. And then you put the layer of white paper, layer of seaweed and a layer of ice, and then you continued on.

K.F.: Okay.

E.R.: And now today, my grandson has a soft crab operation right in his back yard. I mean everybody's got a crab house in his back yard now. Used to be they had to be on the water.

K.F.: Right. Yeah. Does he have the float tanks you can put the water through?

E.R.: Yes, yes, everything. He's got an operation except he's in short supply of crabs to go in it. Big operation, and the first year it was really ter . The peelers are kind of -- with these new operations they got, those guys realize they've got those great big -- I tell 'em yolook like up in Massachusetts with these great big booms and all. Used to be a man pulled the crab scrape. I mean that was hard work, but he saved your crabs. You pulled this little -- this crab scrape, and you caught the peelers and soft crabs. But now they've got these gigantic operations that they re doing. And, you know, the young ones have said oh, you old fuddy-duddies, you didn't improve the operation. Now they've improved themselves out of business.

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

E.R.: Mother nature only takes so much technology. Well they're taking it faster than mother nature can put it back. I mean scientists don't want you to say that, but that's what's ha penmg. And a lot of the young ones, I don't think they're as protective of their industry as the old people were. The old people had more of a thing about God's operation. Today everybody's approaching it from a scientific operation.

K.F.: Can you explain to me what God's operation is?

E.R.: Well it's like my grandfather had a friend. And they were very good friends. But I could depend on every Sunday night they would argue, especially about oysters that you should be able to -- well crabs too. That you should be -- there shouldbe no size. Just take it, you know. I m I'm not talking about little bitty thins like that. But a normal crab, they should be able to take and there shouldn't be laws because God put them on the bottom, and that should not be. It should be what that man would buy which down in Louisiana it's almost like that. I don't know if it's changed, but it was at one time. And my_ grandfather would argue with him. No no, no, that's not the way it is. You know, there's another part of the bible that says ou must obey the law. But this man thought, he said God put it on the yottom, and we're supposed to take it, an man's not supposed to tell us how to take it `cause God put it there. But by the same token, they were very protective of that because they were a lot of -- they were very religious. Let's face it. The Methodists in these small communities were very religious people. But he had -- they had this feeling about what was on the bottom about God put it there and they always had this thing about we would have seven years when we would be -- have overabundance, and then we would have the seven years of famine. They would go by that. My grandfather would quote it many A times.

K.F.: And do you think -- did you see that happening --

E.R.: I have seen it happen. But now I think we're beyond our seven years. I have seen it happen in the past where we knew -- we would say it will come back because the men had to go to Potomac and that's when I left and went

to Air Packs. But it came back bigger and better than ever. But it seems like now that we're catching more than what nature can really replenish. And I think it's a lot of our technology and things that -- we've gone more to mechanical instead of the man. Used to be it was almost what man could do. That was it. Now they've come up with mechanical operations that are really doing -- I don't think we can put it back as fast as it's been caught. Of course, you do have -- and you have pollution. That's quite a factor too. 'Cause like I was telling -- when I moved here 58 years ago, you would not believe this community. And I think our community has been hit worse than any of the surrounding ones.

Everybody here had a garden. Now you look -- now you think, a garden? This whole -- where we live, where I'm living now was a whole farm, a big house, and this was all farm land. They grew -- this was tomato fields. And now you look at it now, no one has a garden. You go to the supennarket. And see, when you turned over your land and you fertilized it, you put straw on it, mulched it, we call it mulch now, but they had a word for it, and it built it up. Now no one turns over your land. Instead we're going down, down, down. As we go down, we're -- my house was hooded eight times in two weeks. And as you flood, we put in these septic systems. And that's sweeping it right back out in this bay. And I, m not sure if either septic system is without fault of sending at least a little something. Some are worse than others. Just like I've told `em, our septic systems are -- many of the old ones are failing. And we don't want that to get in our deep wells. But we don't want this filth going out in the bay either. Because f think some of the chemicals and things we use now, even to wash our clothes used to be we washed our clothes with lye soap and had no bleach -- no chorine, you boiled `em.

K.F.: Right.

E.R.: And so you didn't have that going out in the bay, and you didn't have all this tide. From `33, that was the big tide. I don't rememer a tide covering our land any more until like C;onnie and Diane, when my children were almost grown. And now every time we look out, we're scared because we see tide. And most of the time, it's enough tide to flood our houses. And that's not helping the bay. When it goes back out, it takes everything with it, all the filth and junk from the land. But we're hearing horror stones this year about crabs. Some of the crabbers are not that upset yet because they are seeing crabs when they've been tonging. But -- ui getting back to the old crab houses, we had chairs that we sat, and we worked on Saturdays too.

K.F.: You did?

E.R.: Oh, yes. All day. And then we thought we really had a blessing, we went down to half a day on Saturday. When I went back the second time, we were working a half a day on Saturday. And now, unless it's really urgent, it may be one time a year, Saturday, and that would be all.

K.F.: Well let me ask, let me back up and ask you when did you quit workin at the crab house?

E.R.:~ I quit working at the crab house -- let's see, I was about 30 years s old, must ve been in the 50's when the water business -- see I was working in the crab house and tonging with my husband. And then there were no oysters. He went to Potomac. And women did not go to Potomac.

K.F.: Okay.

E.R.: And we had families. We were, of course, too --that was another thing we did not go. So here was this company in Cambridge. Cambridge was booming, we had this industrial park. And a lady at Air Packs, she was

from down here, she was a personnel manager. And we kind of thought hey, we've got a chance, I believe, of getting a job. Because here we had just worked in crab houses and had our own almost a lifestyle, you know. And all of a sudden, you know here it is, here's children they need college educations. They need all the newest things and we vee got to do something. So here's women out working. And most of us at that tune, our children were grown, my children were grown my youngest child was like 10 years old, and my daughter was old enough that she would be here when die of on the bus and when they came home from school. And they were -- I ~ one was m elementary school. So I went to Air Packs. I worked there 17 1/2 ~ears.

K.F.: Okay. And what does Air Packs do?

E.R.: It makes electronic parts. Like they started out making a new thing in the electronic field. It converted (indiscernible), made choppers and then we went on to transformers. And, of course, now today it makes circuit breakers and all the sophisticated things in the electronic field. I have a son that is a sales engineer there. But we went to work there, and it wasn't too much of a change. Because when you went to Air Packs at that time, it was like a big family too. In fact the first time I went there, I worked for 14 1/2 years. Then I went back for the other, and there was a difference. But we went there, and it seemed like that was when a lot of the crab pickers left the crab houses.

K.F.: For good?

E.R.: Yes. Some of the younger ones, the got out and got a taste of here was insurance, retirement benefits, so they d of started going out and getting jobs elsewhere and it seemed like to me that was the start of women leaving down here and working in Cambridge. Now in the past, when there was hard times, just briefly, I remember some of the ladies going to work at Phillips factory. But it wasn't a permanent thing. It was just like a couple of months 'til the crabs come. In the spring of the year mostly they would, between qysters and crabs commg, they would work to Phillips for a few months. But never a~perm anent thing. When it came, they would come back to the crab houses. But it seemed like that time, that's when we -- and mat seemed like to me that was the start of the young people leaving and from then on not too many your people worked in crab houses.

K.F.: And that was m the SO s?

E.R.: Around 50's, in the 50's, yes.

K.F.: Okay. And what made you come back to the crab house?

E.R.: Well as I say, it started booming again, and I had been riding these roads for all these years and my husband worked too. And then it was booming again he decided he was going back on the water because he had been pamtmg, he was a paint contractor and he painted sailing yachts. And he was going back on the water. So I thought you know, I've been riding these roads for 17 1/2 years. I'm going back home. And m children were grown, and so I went back on the water with him, and I stared back picking crabs in the crab house. And m daughter did too. Because by that tune, she had two children, and they needed day care, and she thought well, you know, I can make good here. And I can go~~tonging with my husband too like mom does. And I can be here, put the children on the bus, and they could re~ate their own hours. And it worked out fine. And as she says, it s an We andmother's job today. ff daughter.)

E.R.: But and so, of course, like I say when we went back the second time, crab houses had, even from the time of my raising my children in the crab

houses, there had been quite a few changes like I say. There are not many young people. It's mostly elderly. And, of course, now where I work now, there does have black people and white people back again. Because before in that time frame of when I was little, and then when I worked as an adult, there were no black people in the crab houses.

K.F.: So when you were little, you had a lot of --

E.R.: Black people there. Uh-huh (Affirmative).

K.F.: And then --

E.R.: Then we went to an all white crab house.

K.F.: Why did that happen?

E.R.: I don't know. I think what happened was most of our people lived at Liners Road. And a lot of 'em moved away or died, the older people did. And the young people did not want to pick crabs. And you went through a period of when they didn't, we were all white crab houses. And now, as I say when I went back, black people had returned, some young ones, some men even pick crabs, young men. And, you know they like to do it. I was, see as I say, when ~ you go back, you almost think, hey, what's happened since I've been gone? gone? Here's this new picture. Plus, as I say, there are mini crab houses in the back yard. I worked in two of those.

K.F.: What are they?

E.R.: That's my name for them mini crab houses. They start out as a family crab house. They set up the little family crab house. Like maybe they had crabbers in your family, and they pick crabs. And I thought hey why should I work for the other man? I'll put up my own little crab house. University of Maryland cooperated with them, helped them set them up, just like in their back yard. And they have, some of them have as many as eight pickers. Mostly it's like four or five. But now, some of them have expanded and got Mexican pickers.

K.F.: Okay. Somebody was telling us about, they called them little home picking.

E.R.: Yes. I call them the mini crab house, the home pick. And I worked in those, two of those, for a few years. Mostly what I did, I worked to a crab house and would go up and help them in the afternoon. And then I would like, if the crab house I was working in didn't have a lot of work that day, would leave that for those ladies. And I would go up there with, you know the person that owned the crab house was aware of it. And then for a couple years I worked in a -- one of the mini crab houses, cause it was a young man, I knew his family and all, and he -- of course they're always trying to get my daughter and I to come work for 'em. And you come to work and they paid a little bit more per pound, that's how they attract you. And, of course, they probably don't have the overhead, and they sell direct, so they're, you know, doing quite well.

But I understand that now some of them are having to go out of business, because as the family dies out, and they're getting Mexican labor. And when we get Mexican labor -- once you get 'em here, you got to pay 'em. And with the scarcity of crabs, they're most like a liability. Now where I work, we don't have any Mexican workers. But we do have -- right in the community we have Mr. Irving Cannon (phonetic) has Mexican people. And they live -- they're very friendly. They come to church, go to our church and --

K.F.: Oh, okay. The one that's right here?

E.R.: No, over here at Windgate. They go to Windgate Church. And over at Hooper's Island, I understand they go to their church over there. And they're

quite friendly. They go, you know, but they have to furnish them a lot of benefits, 'cause you have to take them to Cambridge to get their groceries, to do their shopping, to a doctor. And then, of course, you have to supply certain health benefits to them too -- getting those people here. And thus is off the record, of course. It's sad 'cause we have so many young people unemployed. And I've tried to attract them to picking crabs. And I said they may smell but once you take a bath, nobody knows you're a crab picker. (laughter.)

R.: You make good money, and you're -- if you want to take a day off to take your child to the doctor, or if you want to take a day off to go to Ocean City, you can. You know, this is -- of course, my son has a problem with that. He says, you know, you're not supposed to be a walk-in, walk-out operation anymore. You're supposed to do just like regular factories do. But unfortunately, that hasn't happened yet. But now we have some of the elderly black people. And they are just something else. And, of course as I say, we have quite a few young. I'm not sure how, with this scarcity, if we're going to be able to keep them because they may decide to get jobs elsewhere. But seafood operation is a wonderful way of life, if you could just keep everything comfortable. You're free, and it's something about it working out in the air in the daytime. And even, I've worked out there when it's been freezing, but it was still -- I didn't -- it was something I loved. I loved working on the water. I loved picking crabs, really, I did.

I guess maybe as I tell -- a lot of people say why do you want to do that? And I say well I guess that was because that was my happy time. That was when life wasn't complicated. My children -- when growing up my children, it was -- we were -- and then on Saturday when we knew we were going to Cambridge and go to the movies and they were going to get their allowance to go shop at the dime store. All that has disappeared. And it seems like life has gotten complicated and just not the nice life. But I guess my memories of crab picking is why still like to be in the business. And at 73 years old, as I tell 'em, make enough money to support my shopping habit.

(laughter.)

F.: And what are some of your favorite memories about crab picking?

E.R.: I guess favorite memories is it was just a lot of good feeling of love there with the black ladies. I mean what child would not relish having all these people making over you? And no one ever -- I can't remember harsh words. It was just such a feeling of a warm, soft atmosphere. And the owner of the factory was such a wonderful man. My father, and all the people who worked for him. And then as I say, as I had my own family, that this gave me a way of life too with my children. 'Cause I don't know what we would have done. I had four children. We had a fire and I needed to work. And the children could work and then of course they took -- they no longer permit children in the crab houses.

Now I will say this. When children worked in the crab house, there was an understanding between the employer and the parents that these children did not get down and run around and come back.

K.F.: Right.

E.R.: The child sat there. And it was up to the parent to keep 'em there. And when my granddaughter, when she wanted to work, to make money -- of course she's like me. ~ she loves to shop. And what says a crab picker can't have designer clothes?

(Laughter)

E.R.: And so we said, you know, well you're short of crab pickers, could Candy come and pick crabs? She's a good crab picker. She wasn't quite old enough. But yet, she could've passed. No one ever questioned that. And he said yes, because I know your famil know she's going to be a good crab picker, and I know she will not, as I say, do these things of leaving meat and things like that 'cause it cannot be done. So she came, and she loved it. And she loves it today. She's a left-hand crab picker. Now that's a little difficult to show someone left handed.

K.F.: Really?

E.R.: I went to Calvert, took me to Louisiana and to Texas to teach -- they had two factories down there, to teach and pick crabs. And it's a little difficult, right handed, t~ng to teach a left handed person how to pick crabs. And somebody said well take a mirror. And I said no, I just told em watch what I do and then adapt it to your left hand. So this is what we -- and Candy, my granddaughter, she picks crabs just like we do, I mean her lump and everything is just as good as right hand, but most crab pickers are right handed.

K.F.: Right.

E.R.: It's a little difficult teaching a left-handed person.

K.F.: Well tell me how you pick a crab.

E.R.: Well you, basicall your crabs are in front of you, and you pick up the crab. And as I say, your thumb is a very important part in the operation. A thumb, to me, is useless other than picking crabs. But you bear down, I hold my crab, of course, in my left hand, my crab would be in my left hand and I bear down and I pull the back shell off. I do not take my back shell ofrwith my knife, I pull it off with my ~ hand. Then as I tell them, when I taught them how to pick crab, you hold thus crab as if you're going to dump it, and in the interest of efficiency you take and make one -- to get all that fat and all that stuff out to the mouth, and cut that mouth all at one operation, 'cause you don't want to have to go back. Then you put your finger your forefinger, across, as we call it the top of the crab. Because that and your thumb rest in the middle of the back of the crab. Because if you have a poor crab and you don't do this, it'll fall to pieces on it. That supports it if you have a crab that's not as fat as maybe you'd like. Then you pull down your dead man's fingers. That's got to be one operation too, and you cut your fins off.

Now God made that crab a little bit round, so you must go around. If you box it off across that top, you've lost part of your meat and your big lump. Because I've seen some that they didn't leave much of that top on there. The more you can leave, the closer you come down on your fins te better off you are, and then you turn it and you do the other side too. AncWthen that's when you go right in that top, and your knife will fall right in that top. There's a little place in there that your knife will fall right in to cut that top off. I pick my top first. I do pick my tops. Some of the people today do not want to ick their tops, but I pick my top. There's meat in there.

aughter.

R.: An then I go in and get my lump out. You go in between each little partition. And then I do not turn my crab. I still keep it like that. And take that piece of lump out of that crab like that. Then I turn it around and go into

et out of the St next bigge onto that lump oflwn gives y the
really jumbo lump.

K.F.: Oh, okay.

E.R.: Of course you had to take the claws off too. When you pick up the crab, you break the claws off. But the bigger piece of jumbo lump clumps if you do not turn that crab around if you go and pick you get that piece of meat out of that -- goes right into your piece of jumbo. I see some people, they take the apron off and they pry the back shell off with their knife. I don't do that I pull it off. Press down with your thumb with the crab -- press down and pull up as I tell them, press down and pull up. And that way -- I found out that's the better way to -- if a crab will be poor or anything, it'll hold together if you cradle it in your hand and do that operation.

K.F.: Okay.

E.R.: And it's meant to be picked. Oh, it's meant to be picked. God designed that crab to be picked.

K.F.: Well you were telling me a story that you have about that.

E.R.: Yes, tell them --

K.F.: Would you tell me that --

E.R.: I always tell them, I always say to them now I want to show you, I will show you that God designed this crab to be picked. And you've got to face it. God's the greatest architect and builder we have. And then I show them how it was meant to be brought up by this top, it was meant to be dumped, and then I show them how this top, your knife will fall right in. I said that was designed so my knife would go in there and cut that top off. And then I show them how now you go in this lump, and then into each slot. And if you go in those slots, do not -- I've seen them, they scrape across. That's where you get your bones. That's where your bones come. You may get more meat, but that's where you get more bones also. And it's true today that many of the -- and sometimes they say where did they learn to pick crabs? Who taught them to pick crabs? Maybe they just worked in a crab house and just started doing it their own. But --

END SIDE A (127.1)

BEGIN SIDE B (127.1)

E.R.: -- almost took my hand and showed me when I was little. This is how you do it. And it was so funny, the first of my picking crabs, of course you don't become a crab picker with your first crab. And we had these little cracker boxes, and my mother would let me have some crabs, and I would practice I would pick it for my cat to bring home to my cat. And my cat got all my first crab meat. But because my mother wouldn't let that be sold to put in a can. But my, as I say, Mr. Charlie Parks' wife, who was from Hooper's Island taught my mother, and my mother taught me. And we, if you would wait us, because we've had some people come and watch, and they have said that you two are artists. We pick the crab the same way every time. Now some people, they could not teach you because they don't pick it the same way. They don't realize that, but they don't pick it the same way every time. And we had -- and my sister does too. I have a sister, she doesn't work in the crab house too much, because she always worked elsewhere. But she worked for a short time, and she retired, and she picks crabs exactly like we do because this is the way we were taught, my mom taught me, and we passed it on down.

And quite frankly, we've been told that we're not the fastest, but we're the best, and we do have quantity also. And usually they take our crab meat for someone who comes to the best -- if our sales want them to have the best. When you ship in bulk probably, that's where you lose some of our concern for quality. But they always take our meat and give to the people, that's why I figured that we -- we have been told about our lump and everything --

outstanding. And one of the -- two of the factories that we worked to they started asking for the crab meat by name. And they just didn't come in and say I want crab meat, they would speci , I want so and so's crab meat, Robinson's crab meat, or -- Andrew, Tyler -- Andrew was so pleased, Mr. Tyler's son, he was young, and they gave him the other factory to run. And, of course, here was this established factory up the road you know, and he's ust starting. And hew as so pleased on Monday morning when he came in. tie said guess what, they came and asked for the crab meat by name. They wanted Toddville Seafood crab meat.

And he was so pleased that they had asked for his crab meat by name. And as I said, they had gotten many positive reports back of the quality of the crab meat. And it does --,lust spend your time -- crab meat is too expensive not to get good quality. And I've heard of people that have actually turned it away because it ad so much shell in it. When you get shell, it can be nerve-wracking getting it out, especiall if it's a lot. -Vow I'm not saying -- I will not feel through my crab meat. Some people do. They pick crabs and they feel through it. And to me it's not attractive. I do not. Now every so often, I may take my finger and coo like that to see if there is -- could be a bone that could drop without you knowing ~ t. But I will not go through my crab meat. K.F.. Have ou ever (inaudible).

E.R.: Well lump never has -- rarely. You should never ever find bone in lump crab meat. Of course, its very ex ensive. And when they say about buying lump crab meat to make crab cakes, I think how stupid, how silly oure going to break that up, and you've paid for this lump crab meat. Now for hors d'oeuvre and things or to make a nice looking topping, that's different. But you're going to squish this crab meat up. And I saw John whatever from Chesapeake Foundation, cook down here, he bought lum crab meat. And he was only going to get four crab cakes, I think, out of a pound. And I thou t John, how can ou feed people? I get 13 crab cakes. Well he had them this big. And I said to my husband now you watch and see. He s not going to be able to turn those crabs -- now this is the expert cook now. I'm going to tell him some day. I said he's not goin to be able to turn those crab cakes. They're going to fall to ppieces on hnn. They did. So he showed you what would happen. He said here it is.

You put it in the refrigerator after you make the crab cakes out and you let `em firm u . I thoug1~t, huh-uh, no you don't. You make `em riglit out and fry `em n t away. **But you leave put luinp crab meat in there. And it s big, and its f ling apart on you. Cause you ve really got to sguash your crab meat up and put the whatever you use to hold it together. But he had used -- and I thought~I don t like those crab cakes. Ill get 13 crab cakes out of a pound. They re only small, and I like em small and attractive unless, as I tell people, if you're selling crab cakes, you can not sell `em red, you know, you must make a big crab cake. But if you're having crab cakes for a meal, I don't like big crab cakes. But to buy lump crab meat to make crab cakes, but I guess they do it to keep from getting the shell. And it's sad, it reall is. Because as I say you're go~ing to have a little bit, something that wi l not hurt anybody. But a iot of shell is, to me, defeating the purpose of the crab picker. It really~is. But crab picking is an ideal occupation.**

K.F.: Now I've got -- questions for ou.

E.R.: I've got you all -- you probably won't even know what you --

K.F.: I'm excited now, I've of so many questions. Well while we're talking about food and preparing crab meat -- is there a traditional way in this area crab cakes are made, a Toddville way?

E.R.: I have my own way.

K.F.: Okay.

E.R.: And I can, you know -- I take a pound of crab meat, and I use three slices of bread that I've wet, and squeezed all the water out, but I want it moist. And I put those three slices of -- it should be stale bread makes a better thing, not fresh bread because it all gums together. And then I put a couple teaspoons of French's mustard, not dry mustard. Now I understand, I never knew this until just this year, that not everyone puts onions in their crab meat in this locality. I always put a little, I take a small onion and dice it up real fine. And I want it really, really fine. Then I make up my, of course, salt and pepper -- a little bit of salt because that's enough salt in the crab meat and some pepper and I don't put anything else because I want the taste of the pure crab meat. Like I say when crab meat gets in the city, sometimes it's not always too fresh. Maybe they put -- spice it up to cover up or to enhance it, something~. But I like the taste of my fresh crab meat And then I make them in small cakes, like I said, and I pan fry 'em, I don't deep fry 'em. And I can put it right down.

My husband used to say she can pinpoint, tell you how many crab cakes she's going to get out of that pound of crab meat, thirteen. And that's for to have -- for a meal. Now like I say, if you're sell ng `em or like we've had bazaars, you have to make a bigger crab cake. You get about maybe six to cover the bread. But that is my recipe. And everybody comes -- and that onion now, it's a little bit crunchy, that onion, but it's diced real fine, and I think that adds to it too. And I just -- everybody always tells me that you fry the neatest crab cakes. And that mustard gives `em -- `cause I don't like white crab meat. I think some people put egg in it to give it a little color. I like that mustard. I don't like mayonnaise because that crab meat to me is already clammy enough. And mustard -- I mean mayonnaise makes it a little bit too much of that band clammy. And so I put the mustard in it, give it some color plus it enhances. Because when we steam crabs remember, we put that and vinegar, salt and pepper, most people do. They have this little mixture, salt and pepper and vinegar for the crab meat. So that mustard almost gives it like ~~es~~ is a little vinegar taste in the crab cake as well as giving it a -- it gives it a nice color. And you'll have a nice holiday fiy, real mce. And to homecomings and things we have at church, I usually do quite a few crab cakes. But that's my recipe for crab cakes, and it's just a very simple recipe. It's not a lot of complicated things in it. And people put , at one time, I would love to have known the recipe. We had a little place in Canders (phonetic) called Way Out Inn.

And that man deep fried his crab cakes. And when my children were -- when we were -- well I didn't tell ray children, we didn't have too much mone And we would go to town and go to the movies. We would always go o ere and get a bag of crab cakes. **And he gave you saltine crackers. And we would go like down along the wharf, and we would pretend we -- now here's somebody working crab meat all week. I was giving these children a picnic. I** ess we tried to, you know, we didn't want em to think that we couldn't ord to take `em to a restaurant. And we would have soft drinks. And they were the \_world's best crab cakes. They were deep fried, like a ball. Just that little saltine cracker, and you would get a bag like with 15 of `em. And they

were fantastic. But he died, and he took his recipe with him. But everybody will say you run -- go get those crab cakes. And they were really good.

K.F.: What were some of the other food traditions with crabbing? Did people always eat whole crabs, or --

E.R.: No. My grandparents, my grandfather would have had a fit. The crab feast -- and now we have our own -- I mean you would think, the way you work in crabs and all, you still want a crab feast? We have crab feasts you know, locally. I mean my daughter will call me up, we've got steamed crabs, come on up. And we'll sit on her deck and we'll have a crab feast. My grandfather would have -- I never knew anything like that. I never ever -- stewed crabs, now we had stewed crabs.

K.F.: What's the difference?

E.R.: Steamed crabs are just as the crab comes off you put it in the cooker, and you put whatever you want. Some people put seawater -- and we just put water and Old Bay and steamed them. Well stewed crabs is another different thing. You want the small crab with fat in it. And you clean those up. Now my mother always taught me, you just take the back shell off and you cleaned out everything, the dead man's fingers. But you cut your fins off to about the first joint. You leave those fins on there about the first joint, and you put those in a pot, and you put potatoes and onions in with those. And then you fry meat grease, a lot of people do, a little piece of salt pork, or some grease. Then you pour that over that. And then you have this nice yellow gravy, and these salt -- potatoes. What used to be great, we had gardens we would pull these spring onions, and have these green onion tops and the little white onions in there. And that onion will cook in that crab and those potatoes. And you kind of -- it's not very nice, but you dig in there with your finger and you scoot out that potato and onion on your finger and eat it. And then you have your little knife, and you take your crab. Now some people pick the meat and mix it up with the potatoes and onions. But stewed crabs, there's nothing like stewed crabs.

Some restaurants should take note and have stewed crabs on their menu because they are delicious. But you can't use a big crab. You must have like the three inch crab, and it must be fat. That fat in there is something else. When you mix it with that --

K.F.: Now are the crabs alive before you put them in there?

E.R.: I want mine alive. Now my mother a neighbor of hers steamed her crabs, as we said killed them, she steamed them and then stewed them. To me, you've lost it. That crab must be raw. You even take the back apron off of it too. You scrub it up real good, take all the dead man's fingers off, all that old mouth and all that junk off. You cut the fins off to about the first joint. Because if you don't, it seems like the crab meat cooks out. You must leave those fins on there to the first joint. And they are delicious. Stewed crabs are. Now they're a little bit of problem to get that live crab --

K.F.: I was just going to ask you that.

E.R.: Well it takes a little bit of know-how, because you must learn how to pick up a crab and how to hold it to get that -- get its claws off first, then you're home free.

U.: Oh, okay.

E.R.: You just hold him and get his claws off and you're okay. When they're stewed alive, that's when they're good.

K.F.: Okay.

E.R.: And, of course, then as I say you have the crab feast where you steam the live crabs. And they do all kinds of weird things with 'em from beer to,

but as I say, we usually just use Old Bay. And then when they're done, they mix up these little concoctions, I don't, of salt and vinegar and use saltines, of course everybody knows this, that's beer too. **MP** tell them, you don't sell crabs to people who drink wine and champagne. Crab feasts are for beer people.

daughter)

R.: Because they were sayin , you know, we have some years we don't have a very good market even tough we have crabs. Because eople are on hand times -- our person with the crab feast in the back yard that we sell to. That's our main market. If he doesn't have money that year, we're in trouble. And they'll say well crabs are not ^{movi} I said that's right. They don't have any money to get it. When you -- **A0** a bushel, no working man can afford a \$90 bushel of crabs. When you drop them to \$30, he can et a couple buddies to come in and buy a bushel. You just can not do tat. And you know, they'll say well crabs are not -- they're not going to move at \$90'a bushel. Some restaurants will buy them for their menu. But the ordinary, our bi~~market is the crab feast in the back yard.

K.F.: When did that become a big --

E.R.: Well that's an interestin story too. All of the sudden, no one told us, something was happening. An the Grabbers were a little bit suspicious. They started -- saw the man -- what happened at first was they shipped steamed big crabs in barrels.

K.F.: Right.

E.R.: Okay. They would get money for these, but it wasn't being passed to the crabber. Then we had a local man who would, had a local factory over at Windgate, and he was the pioneer in this, he was trucking his crabs into Baltimore, and he saw the market there. So he came back, and he said look, start separating the crabs in baskets. I'll tell you what I want, big ones, fat ones, she crabs, whatever, and then that's when the started paying a different price. Well that was over at Wind~ gate. He came over in our side, and these people over here kind of do not like that. And for a while it was a little bit of turmoil. And in order -- I was working down here at home -- Creek at that time. My husband was a crabber, but they said no, over here they said no. We're gomg to buy it like we have been, as is. And so the man said well I'm going to make -- it you sell to him, we're not taking your trash crabs. So we ladies, me too even though I didn t have a crabber, went over and worked with that man, picked the trash so he would buy the big crabs, so he would -- that was the start of it, that was -- I'm trying to think exactly when it started, but the Paly's (phonetic), they had been -- Carlton Paly. And started, as far as I'm concerned,, he was the pioneer in it. And he saw the market in Baltimore, and he passed it along to the watermen, and they started selling them raw. And then all at once, it was a big explosion, and then we had as we call it, basket crabs and trash crabs.

K.F.: Let me just see if I've got this right. So he started a -- business where he was, ~ going to buy from the watermen and then separate the crabs.

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

K.F.: And then what was going to be picked --

E.R.: And he would pay more.

K.F.: Right?

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

K.F.: And he paid more for the number ones.

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

K.F.: He came over here and tried to get the watermen over here --

E.R.: Yeah, he did *offer* the watermen here, and all at once they said no. If you can't sell us all, we're not going to buy ny. So he said well I'll buy `em, but I've got to have somebody come pick the trash `cause his workers could not accommodate all that trash he was buying. So us ladies who had watermen, I didn't have anybody, but I did have like a brother-in-law and friends and all, and they said will you come too, and I went with `em. And we worked over there one year, one season was all that was necessary. And they changed their minds down here.

K.F.: They have --

E.R.: Well everybody didn't leave `cause everybody didn't have a crabber and some of the men -- the women stayed. They had, as I say, I was one of the few that left. I didn't have a crabber, but I went with my sister-in-law, you know, won't you please come and help us. But we -- they still had enough~ pickers to stay open.

K.F.: okay, okay.

E.R.: But the next year, it all changed.

K.F.: It all changed.

E.R.: They let them start separating the crabs. But over at Windgates actually is where it first started. It was a seafood packer over there. He was somebody -- as I say, he'd been a waterman, and he knew what it felt like. You know. And that does make a difference if you've ever been a waterman, versus if you've just been a packer, you just see it from the packers' point of view.

K.F.: Ri t.

E.R.: O course, my son has a whole thing, we're still back in time. He says you still got those telephone orders that those people -- he said, now his theory is that the southern market, with their cheap crabs cheap crab meat, have gotten as far as Maryland, they can come this far. Re said what you guys got to do, of course's a sales engineer with -- out all over the world, you ys have got to start from Maryland and move up to the Canadian border. You can truck it. You ve got refrigerated trucks out. He said the first thing you've got to do is you've got to send someone out there in a suit, attache case, and a little cooler with a crab cake and a pound of crab meat. Because he said up in Massachusetts and places like that, they stuff their shrimp with like we stuff a turkey because we they don't have crab meat. So he said your market's got to be different. You've already lost that market. You've really lost the Maryland market. So you've got to move up and go into the Canadian border. And it's like we were flying out to Texas, and we took a cooler of crab meat. Well they have crabs out in Texas. But seafood and vegetables from the Eastern Shore are the best. And we took a cooler of crab meat. And the stewardess said something about our cooler, and we said we're taking crab meat out. She said oh, it may be hijacked, protect it.

E.R.: **And then when I went to New York,** I said to the cab driver, I said will you us a tour of the city. It was at Christmas time, let us see all the light'sled everything, `cause I had an elderly person with me. He said yes. So we got to talking. He~ yuoted me a price what he would it for. And when he found out I was from M land, he said now if you'd have brought me a bushel of oysters, I wouldn ave charged you anything, you know.
(Laughter)

E.R.: And then we met people from St. Louis and they said oh, what we would give for Maryland crab meat. And we lied people who've never had crabs or crab meat. We've even been to Pennsylvania, and the market up

there is not what it should be. But you have these -- I guess it's hard to go to every little isolated spot and sell 'em crabs.

K.F.: Right.

E.R.: But still, you'd think next to Maryland and New Jersey that no one up and down the seaboard would be without crabs. But you can't beat, you can't beat Maryland crab meat. You cannot. I've been to Texas, I've seen crabs come from Texas. See at one time, they shipped big crabs from Texas all steamed in tea boxes. They had one of the big -- he was big at that time, Bill King, King Seafood. And if he had some he couldn't pick, well he sent 'em through us because Calvert was in business with him. They were fantastic crabs. But the taste was not there. The taste was not there. But my, they were big crabs. A lot of our watermen went down there to work, and they said -- they broke up that industry down there.

daughter)

R.: You know, people had not -- it's like Calvert said he went down there fishing. He said crabs were coming out of the water, nobody was doing it. So that's when he got the idea of putting up a crab house in Texas. And then a lot of people from Cambridge went. Slakum went, and Trip, Vandyke, and all of 'em, you know, tried the operations down there, but I think eventually they all came back home. You just can't beat our vegetables and our seafood.

K.F.: Now one thing we're asking people that pick crab meat, while you're working all day, at certain points in the industry, you can (inaudible). But not too much is going to (inaudible). How would you manage to work and --

E.R.: Now like I say, when I had a family, I worked here and we worked in the mornin'. We came home, and then we went back in the afternoon. And I usually cooed something for my dinner then and had that mostly all ready. And I'd give the children a bath and put clean clothes on. We would eat lunch. And then see over here was a little bit different from where I was from. On Monday morning, ladies didn't go to work over here 'til Monday afternoon.

K.F.: Oh, really?

E.R.: We did our wash washed in a tub and board. And who could get her clothes on the line the first, you know. I mean you were a smart woman if you had your clothes out before the sun came up. And nobody wanted to be lazy. And then they would blow the whistle, we blew the whistle that we would be working that afternoon, and he would tell us the time. One, we knew he'd be picking us up 1:00. See at one time now, all the ladies had to walk to work. And then all the sudden, we had transportation provided.

K.F.: So they had like a car that came and --

E.R.: A bus. They had a bus or a truck. It came and picked us up. I think about those ladies walking to work in the morning, and walking home when they're tired. I'm telling you, they were tough birds. And they didn't work in the morning over here on Monday morning. And that day we was, trying to get the laundry done. And then like I say, we worked in the morning, we came home and then we had like a couple, three hours. And then we would go back and we'd work 'til like 5:00. And then when we came home, we had our dinner, and then, of course, at first we didn't have any electricity down here. The children would be put in the wash tub for a bath, and go to bed. But it wasn't like that -- that, I think, then it was much easier than when I went to work and had all the electricity and everything, it seemed like to me my work went easier then.

K.T.: Really?

E.R.: In the spring of the year, us ladies would -- us ladies would get together, and we didn't have much money, but we would try to figure out a way to get some paint and some new carpets for our windows and do our house cleaning.. You know, everything ad to be scoured. And in the fall, we did the same thing. And now I think I look at the young people, and they don't care what hangs in their windows. I wonder what do they have to live for? What do they live for? I know women maybe now have got a different role, but still that was a part of being happy, your house. And we laugh now how some of the things we used to do about painting up in the spring and raking our yards and getting flowers in and getting our garden in. Some of these ladies put in these gardens that were -- I mean, you know. Then when you sit down and work all day long now.

Of course we don't have -- we go now, we don't ~~go early~~ ^{somebody} go there at 5:30. And we sit there and we talk about maybe ^{going to have a} wedding ^{year probably when I go to work, my granddaughters get} married, ^{it'll be well who's wearing what and what is it going to look like.} And then of course, you have these sad tffiings like happened to me, and it will be talk of that, and things that are going on between -- it's a nice life that you can sit there and talk. Of course, those ladies now, they will take a break, and then they take their lunch. I don't. I work straight on through. I tell `em I didn't come down here to take breaks. I came down here to work. Now if I've got to take all those breaks, I'll just work my little time and go home and take my break. But they take breaks. It's the law now. At one time, they made a big deal out of that, taking your break, and making your own -- because it's supposed to be so much per hour. And now you get paid overtime.

K.F.: Really?

E.R.: Yes, you get paid overtime, which can be something. And when we work on Saturday, we get paid overtime.

K.F.: Oh, wow.

E.R.: Yes.

K.F.: Okay.

E.R.: See I had a little bit of a problem understanding that. I thought if we make enough mone to cover a 40, 48-hour period, whydo they have to pay us? Because let's lace it, many of us --any good crab picker makes more than minimum wage. That's a poor crab picker only makes minimum wage. And if we can -- but they still have to pay us overtime. And it's unbelievable to us after all those years we worked. We lost a fortune. Really, we did.

Laughter.

E.R.: An we laugh now about we don't mind working on Saturdays, that's overtime.

K.F.: Well now how much did you make when you started, not as a child, but --

E.R.: As a child, it was three cents a pound.

K.F.: Okay.

E.R.: It went as low as three cents a pound. Then it went to five. That was big. Then when it went to 15 cents a pound, my, my my. Then it went to 25, and like that. And then, of course, it was unheard Of that we would ever get a dollar a pound.

K.F.: And now you get?

E.R.: Gee, it can be two to two and a quarter. Of course, now the cost of living has gone up too. When I think of all the money that my mother and them, those ladies could save money on that. And now we can't save any

money. Of course, maybe we have more extravagant habits now. I don't know. But those ladies you know they were very -- they were thrifty. Everything was used. And when they were -- some of the things I was hearing that they did to save, and I think we're so -- even us that try to be saving, we're still very wasteful compared to those ladies.

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

E.R.: Pardon?

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

E.R.: Well we never ever had paper towels. And like we said, a Sears Roebuck catalog in the old outhouse. And I think my husband would say Evelyn, you waste the most paper towels. And I say well I don't realize I'm wasting them, but every time, I got get myself a clean paper towel. Those ladies did not have paper towels. And they had, for instance, their flour bags, they always wanted cotton flour bag. That was their dish cloth. And then there was a time when the feed sacks became their curtains. They even made pillow slips out of those, you know. And the things that they did to really save. And then they would go get unbleached muslin, sew up bed sheets, and they would bleach those sheets, you know, and put 'em on the line, on the grass so the dew would bleach. And then you think they didn't have bleach. They saved up the meat scraps and put with lye, and in the spring of the year, they made the big pot of soap. It was so pretty. Sometimes it was so pretty, I used to say I wish we could eat that 'cause it looks like great big hunks of fudge. And you think they saved all those meat scraps in these jars. And now here's all this trash that we -- there shows you how waste we are. Everything was in jars, and you saved every jar.

In fact, my husband wants every jar saved. I said what will we do with them if we save them? Yes, we need a few. And our closet at home was filled with can -- where my grandmother would can tomatoes, pears from an old gentleman that he gave them to us because us kids did errands for him. He gave us all the pears. And she would preserve and can them and make all kinds of things out of these pears. And then we would take some of the pears, and they would wrap them in paper and put them in a dark closet. And apples. And it caused, it always smelled so good. And the flour. And I think all that, and they really -- they almost had a budget of that stuff that it was going to last a whole winter come hell or high water, you know. And then at night, I never made molasses taffy -- or vine ar -- I don't know how to make vinegar taffy. But my andmother, we had pulling taffy. And like when we had our -- socials for Washington's birthday to make money for the church she would take food coloring and do the vinegar taffy. After you pull it you know, it turns silver-white.

I~F.: Oh, okay.

E.R.: Yes. You take vinegar and water and sugar. Delicious, it is. And you pull it. And that was fun. You pulled it until it turned snow white. And then she would color like red and blue. And she would braid it red, white, and blue taffy for sell for auction for Washington's birthday. And they did **all kinds of neat things. And I thought they were very creative. They quilted. They took their old quilts and kept rec cling them and togging them. And you slept under a -- with the quilts. > grandmother and my mother would pick ducks for -- my uncle was a guide a local club and caretaker. And hundreds of ducks. They had no running water, just a big well in the community. And we would save those feathers, and she would do feather beds and pillows out of those things.**

K.F.: Right.

E.R.: **Now all that stuff gets -- and tin cans, what few cans we had which I always said my grandfather -- we had more canned goods, we lived better than most people because we could afford things from the store.** And he would take the label off and bum it in the stove, and then he threw the cans out to rust and go back in the ground. You didn't have any trash left. You burnt everything up in the stove that was paper. And the metal, you threw it out and let it rust recycle it. So now we've got all these huge dumps that we've got to find a lace for all this trash. And whatever was left of anything, they braided it into rugs. I mean you either wore it or walked on it. (Laughter.)

R.: I mean that was the way it was. And I think back to like when we would be in those big old plumped u~ feather beds, and with all these quilts over us, and these were things that they did that we do not do. And yet we're supposed to be the people that's going to have all this time with all the new-- where did they get all their time from . Of course, they had a wash day. That took all day.

K.F.: Right.

E.R.: On Monday, Monday was wash day. And Saturday was clean day. And then you did cleaning all day Saturday morning, then you went to Cambridge in the afternoon. Of course, usually my dad and my mom went early in a mornin_~~g because we had our own car. But a lot of those people went on the bus. They had bus service down here on Saturday. And of course, we had bus service that took people to Phillips -- to work. Big bus service at that time. It was a private contractor. But, and I mean you went to church. That was a must on Sunday. Everybody went to church. And communities were very quiet on Sunday. Children were not allowed to play they could play but don't yell. It's Sunday . And it was, like I say, this whole community was beautiful. It was green, there were fences to keep the animals out for the gardens. And they white washed those fence, white washed their trees. Everybody had trees, shade trees.

K.F.: Oh, really?

E.R.: Oh, yes.

K.F.: There aren't that many here.

E.R.: No trees anymore. And my daughter said to me, Mom, you've got to get them together to clean up Toddville. I said I better clean up my own yard first. She said yeah, but you clean it up in the spring. You always have a nice yard. I said I wouldn't dare. I would not dare. She said you've got to get a committee together. And if the ones won't clean up, tell 'em you'll come and clean it up for them. I wouldn't dare. But this community was beautiful. The houses were kept nice. In fact, it was some of the most fantastic housekeepers I've ever seen. I don't know how they kept their houses that clean. Not just clean, but they were immaculate. And their ards were beautiful. And you didn't have a florist to go buy flowers from. You traded back and forth your labor. They gave you some Gladiola bulbs, and maybe you had some lour O'Clocks, and you trade them back and forth. And now we have all these florists and -- but this way is going right back to nature because we're not taking care of it. We're not bemg good stewards of our land. And everybody was really -- in fact, one son still lives here, two do not live here and they don't like to come home anymore because they re upset because they remember better days. Mom, how can you people -- they want me to sell and move. I say, nope, I don't think I am. Not yet. It really was -- well it's no use saying well the good old days, everybody remembers the good old days. But our good old days were, I think, much, much better. It seems like everybody was happier.

My husband had a theory. He said people stopped being good neighbors when we stopped pulling up boats together. Now a truck -- they have cars, they pull the boat up on the car. Used to be, men got together and pulled it up on the back and roped it up so that you could do your boat in the spring and in the fall. And then every so often in the summer you would get a great, there was a big store up here with a porch. Come on, men, we've got to go down and help so and so, he's going to ull his boat up. And my husband said that was the end of being good neighbors when we stopped pulling up boats together. And it seems lie television, everybody goes in his house, and you only see somebody -- that's it. You know, used to be we would go visit at night, the women would go and quilt, and the men would probably sit and argue politics or whatever. And sometimes we had a little battery radio that you could get the news and Amos and Andy, then you turned it off to save your battery. And so now it seems like everybody just stays in their own home, and we just lost something.

Not only in cities too, of course they -- maybe they live next to their neighbor and they never ever knew `em, but my grandmother for a time lived in Baltimore, and she was always -- there was always community, you know. The feeling of community. But the crabs -- maybe the whole way of life has changed. Technology has ruined it all.
(Laughter.)

But now we're up to a good price and overtime, and now we don't have crabs. And, of course, like I say, we bring in -- I don't have any problem with the Mexican people as people, they seem very nice and they're like me, they're trying to make a living. But I do think of all the people we have local who could pick crabs. And here we're having to give all the benefits -- a lot of benefits to Mexican people that our own people do not even enjoy. And everything that takes money out of your pocket, out of the young people's pocket, it s more taxes. That's the only problem I have. My son has worked for a couple companies, my other son, and they've moved to Mexico. And, of course, they always ask him to go along. He says no, you know, years ago I would've gone, but I'm too old now. I nave family, home. And he said to me I hear they're not doingtoo well in Mexico. I said well I'll tell you what's going _to happen. We're going to keep moving, moving, and we're going to shuttle the globe and come nght back home. We'll eventually wind u~ n~ht back where we started from. But it's sad when I think like Air Pack, they re not the big giant they used to be here anyway. They've moved part of their operation, and some of the other companies that have moved their operations.

And I think what are we going to wind up, just being a country of fast food places, of services instead oflo~bs? Because they were -- my son was working for (Indiscernible). They moved to Mexico. And, of course, he didn't have any problem finding a job. And he's been to Air Packs at one time, and came back. Of course, he sees the whole picture of where he travels, and he's involved in business. And, of course, like I say, he's the one that thinks we're not doing right by the crab industry.. And at one time in fiustration, he never -- most of us went through a period of not wanting our children to go on the water. It was a hard life, it was uncertain, and you always want better for your children.

So I, you know I had this dream they would all go to college. Unfortunately, neither one of them went to college. My daughter says to me now, mom, why didn't you really beat me and insist -- she wanted to go to nurse's training. And the first interview, she came back and says I'm not going to do it. Now she says why didn't you make me do it? I said, you know when you get your age, you know, you can not make you. Only why should I waste money on trying to make you do something you did not want to do. But anyway, they've done quite well with, as we say, the education. My two brothers have, with the education they got here at our local high school. One of 'em, we put him out on the water on Saturday morning with his dad, just tonging. And when his father came home he said he's never going to get aboard my boat again. I said why? He said no matter how big a **lick** I threw up there, there was no change - in his expression. Usually, they'll say boy that's a good lick, that'll work. He said no more. So he never, ever went on the water.

So some years later when all this thing of moving and jobs and stress of downsizing and all, he said I wish daddy had taught me to tong. I said you blew that one Saturday morning when you went one time. You did not get the opportunity.

daughter.)

R.: But two of them do -- one of 'em is a waterman, he does the whole scene from the eeling, that's a new business too with us now is eeling and that's about to break up the eels too. And tonging and crabbing. And, of course, as I say, I have a grandson that he chases crabs from Teach Creek to the Inner Harbor.

K.F.: Oh, wow.

E.R.: Now see at one time, if you lived here, you sold to Farm Creek. Now you can tell them I don't have to sell to you. And you move, and you move, and a know, it used to be -- remember it was closed waters to tongers. Each county had its own border. And then they opened it up. And everybody moved if they chose to move, you know. But he's everywhere for a crab, and he's everywhere for any fishes and tongs. Of course, he's got a big (inaudible), and high class boat. When he was 16, he went to the bank and got \$65,000. And when he told his grandfather that I think his hair turned white. He said Jay, when I was 16 years old, \$6~000 was all the money in the world. He said well I want it so it can be paid off while I'm still young. I think he had like a 10 year loan or somethin'. And when his little girl was nine years, her ninth birthday, she announce to everybody, much to our embarrassment, my daddy's boat's paid for today 'cause the papers come in the mail. He paid for it in nine years.

daughter.)

E.R.: So last year before Christmas when he told my husband his motor had gone up, and my husband had been a decent mechanic in the service. And he said Pop~Pop, my motor's gone up in my boat. I'm going to get me a new motor. He said well Jay how much is that doing to set you back. He was thinking it was going to be three or \$4,000 cause he's still living in the depression age. He said \$25,000. Well I think he lost it there that time.

Laughter.)

R.: But I mean, you know, they announce these thousands without blinking an eye. And to these older people, us you know, when pennies were very valuable, and you could buy a dress for 99 cents -- in fact I've heard my mother say that she bought two for 9 cents one time, and she said they were good enough I wore 'em to church. And I think 99 cents. But now they talk thousands. And they have to have all this stuff on the boat. Used to be you

had a sounding pole and a couple buoys and that's it. Now you got all this, shows you where the fish are, where the oysters are. As they say, they can pick up a broom straw on the bottom of the bay, and it cost thousands of dollars. And then just about time you get it all straight, paid for, you got to replace it for something newer that's come along.

KT Right.

E.R.: So just little thing of -- used to be the watermen had a, as they called it, lunch bucket and his boots, and he walked. And probably his boat had been in the family for years. Now it's got to be a fiberglass boat, a brand new pickup and his wife has to have a car. Used to be, I can remember running out and saying oh here comes so and so down the road 'cause they had a car. And now it's -- in the space of my lifetime, I think I've seen more changes than an~ body else. Because my grandfather never learned to run a motor in a boat. boat. He never teamed to drive a car. And it's like I told him, I said I can see why certain things of life are necessary. Because I used to say boy he's an old frogg y.~I'm not going to be like that. I'm going to keep up on everything. Well here's the computer now.

K.F.: Right.

E.R.: I'm illiterate. I mean these little great grandchildren, they have a Gateway computer. And they can tell you all, I mean the re like seven and nine ears old And they must have this computer. And think here I am, an old Eddy duddy. I have not learned computers. But it's almost the same thing when he did not learn. But yet here s Calvert with a crab ickin~ ma e, and I'm still picking with my same old knife that I picked with. No, I tell a lie. We picked with a Barlow knife.

K.F.: A Barlow, not a --

E.R.: A Barlow knife. And it was just, you know --

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