

BEGIN SIDE A - TAPE OH127.2

K.F.: Who makes your knife then?

E.R.: Pardon?

K.F.: Who makes your knife?

E.R.: Murphy, Murphy. Everybody wants a Murphy crab knife.

K.F.: Really?

E.R.: Yes.

K.F.: Why is that?

E.R.: Well really, you get it and you redesign it for to suit yourself. 'Cause no one really they how to make a crab knife. I'd like to show em sometime. They make the blade too wide and too thick. When we get those crab knives, we have to cut 'em down and get 'em to bend. Now if you see what my daughter picks with, it's unbelievable what she picks with. But my crab knife is a -- crab knife but it has to be redesigned. And Carvell Hall knives, really and truly this is off the record, I don't think you have to -- once you use Carvell Hall. they have all those carvings in the handle.

K.F.: Yes.

E.R.: And they don't want really to use that. And I can't -- I've always used a Murphy, and I can't use that.

K.F.: Okay.

E.R.: But we started with an old Barlow knife. And then we had the crab, the claw crackers had these long, nice -- just a long piece of metal almost that they cracked claws with. They were heavy and they cracked claws. And, of course, at that time, you cracked claws on a stone or a brick. Now you have to have a metal piece to crack the claws on.

K.F.: What are some of the jokes and (inaudible).

E.R.: Oh, my. We've got one of those pranksters. You may find yourself tied to the chair.

K.F.: You're kidding.

E.R.: You may find yourself thinking I'd swear I had four pound of crab meat when I left my place, and I only have three now. She might remove your pound of crab meat. I mean they get -- they really had a good time playing jokes on each other. And one of the jokes my daughter played on a man that picks crabs, she took -- Steve is always playing jokes on us. So she took a crab and put a rubber band, a red rubber band. And he doesn't -- he won't admit it, but he doesn't see that well. She put a rubber band around that shell, and he pried and he pried to try to get that back shell off. Finally, we got -- after so much, we had to laugh. He said somebody's done something to this. So we showed him, whoever picking was around there. But they are notorious for playing jokes, some of the things that they do to each other. And I can't even think of them off -- but we do have one, as I tell Diane, because my daughter was away for quite a while. So the way she plays yokes is the way the old ladies used to do to each other.

They would do all kinds of things to each other. But mostly they would tie your apron. And they would fuss around your back and pretend that they were rubbing your back. And when you get up, they had tied you to your chair with your apron. That was one of the things. ~ And then as I say, they would take a can of crab meat, and you would think well I swear I had it, but it's gone. And they would, then before you got ready to weigh p, they'd return it to you after you sit there and debated, I don't know, I swear I did another pound of crab meat. But like I say, our people down here used to have a lot of fun. The old ladies, no matter how old they were, used to dress up on Halloween.

K.F.: Oh, really?

E.R.: Yes. And now, you know, you only have the little children. They have a limit on the age that they can dress up, although some of 'em don't abide by it down here. But no matter how old they were, they dressed up for Halloween.

K.F.: Oh, great.

E.R.: Yes, they did. And they made a lot of preparation for Christmas. Working in these factories and making all the preparations they did for Christmas. Making all these cakes. They would make up -- the cakes, hand baked cakes from scratch. And a lot of 'em make their own homemade root beer. And of course, back then too we used a lot of those crab pickings to put on the gardens that we raised.

K.F.: Uh-huh (Affirmative). On the (inaudible).

E.R.: Yeah, went right back to the land.

K.F.: What are some of the -- what did a crab picking house sound like when you started?

E.R.: Happy. Of course the one I work to now is happy too. But they were, then it would -- it kinda died down, but all you would hear would be the crab shell dropping in the basket, you know. And it was like as the day wore on, we probably got wound down. I guess they got tired out. And but it was, as I say, it was -- it was such a happy place. And mostly as I remember, like I say, the black people with their singing. And they were such happy people. They were happy, they were happy. It seemed like it was just a happy time.

And now we have black people who have so much more than those poor ladies. Have so much more, and they're so aggressive, and so unhappy. And those-- a lot of those ladies would go and wash for people, and do -- help the house clean. And some of 'em would cook, you know. Go to people's houses and be cooks. I know some of the dance clubs, they would have them for cooks. And but it didn't -- I guess because I never knew what it was all about. For instance, I remember I had an uncle who was -- this is past the Model-T Ford days, but anyway, he came, he had the clubhouse up at Laurel Race Track, and he came down and he had a black chauffeur.

Well, of course, you know, he wanted to try to impress the people he grew up with. He had this big car and he's sitting in the back with a chauffeur. So he came to visit, and of course my grandmother cooked a meal. We always did. And when it came time to eat she set the table in the dining room, which we did when we had company. And my uncle said to my grandmother, what about the chauffeur? He's black, a place in the kitchen. And my grandfather spoke up and said no. He's good enough to drive you around, he's good enough to eat with you. So that the black man -- and I've heard my aunt say that when she first went to Baltimore and rode the street car, she said I'll never forget, Evelyn. I got on one day and there's all these people standing up. But there was a seat next to this black lady. And I just sat down. She said, cause we had never -- our black people, we didn't do things like that. She said I noticed people kept nudging one another and whisper. And she later on when I got home, and she said I happened to tell the people that she was living with. And they told her you don't do that. You don't sit next to the black people. They said wasn't she sitting in the back? She said yes. Well that's another black person should be sitting in the back next to her, not you. You should've stood up. And she said I didn't realize that things were like that.

So this is what I miss when we all worked together, and we were never -- I never, ever thought I was poor. Like I said, my grandparents brought up that we were, we thought, you know, we were never poor. But I guess we were all poor together. Although I'm sure that the black people were poorer than we were. But yet they worked where we worked and I'm sure they made good money. Just like I said, they brought flour sacks for their little things down, trade em in for the money. But it was just a good time. And as far as, our communities looked nice. And the children, we had a lot of children. In the evenings, you could hear the children, they would go to different houses and play and mothers would be out calling them to come home. And always singing that hymn at supper time, you could hear 'em -- come on home, it's supper time, daddy come on now. And it was -- but now it's not. It's not. And somehow or other, this is like -- I go back to the crab house days. That was my happy days. And it seems like when I left and went to work at Air Pack, that was when our lifestyle started changing. And then when I came back, it seemed like it all had changed. It was almost like Rip Van Winkle, that you come back and it all, everything changed.

And our churches used to be filled. No work was done on Sunday. And now you see people cutting their grass and everything. It was kind of strange. That would never happen. And I guess I associated all the good life with the crab house.

K.F.: Well what does a crab house sound like now?

E.R.: Well it's noisier.

K.F.: Okay.

E.R.: It's noisier because you do have most of the operation is in the crab house. See it used to be the crab house was open. And now it's all in these walls. You had --

K.F.: There were no walls?

E.R.: Well the picking room was closed in. But the operation where they landed the crabs and they steamed the crabs, that was all open.

K.F.: All.

E.R.: Then they screened it in. The health department said screen it in. And they screened it in. But now they have a closed in room for the steamed crabs. And then they rolled the crabs in in the crates now where they had been in the cooler. And it's all shoveled out in there. The man shovels it and put your crabs up on these stainless steel tables. And it's more -- it seems like a busier time and a noisier time. And, of course, some of the things never change. Like I said, the ladies still talk wedding, funerals. And not too many sing any more. But some of the things have never changed. Of course, now we have to have -- used to those ladies wore starched white aprons. A lot of the embroidery on them, and you embroidered them all winter.

K.F.: Oh, really?

E.R.: Yes. And your starched dress, your starched apron. Hose, silk hose. They even wore wrist watches to work. And some of them, I've heard my mother say, that your previous church summer dresses, you took them for the crab house the next year. But now here we are in jogging suits, or I used to keep it to white pants and a colored top.. Most of them are Meredith Meredith that I work for the cap and shirt to match like at Christmas, we accumulate quite a bit. But there's no starched aprons. They have to be plastic. And most of us have white tennis shoes. And go barefoot -- bare leg in the tennis shoes, no silk hose. Those ladies used to wear cotton hose probably, or maybe they were silk hose that had runs in them they couldn't wear any more. But they really -- their dresses, you could snap 'em. Those

dressess were starched so stiff. And even those that made muslin slips, they, a lot of them would starch their slips and those aprons. And they spruikled them and ironed them with these small irons on a cook stove. But now that's all changed.

K.F.: So everybody would embroider their aprons?

E.R.: Oh, they would have all this lavish embroidery. And I can remember my aunt would even embroider her name on her apron and do all those kind of things. And you must have them starched white. The would be white. Most of them were made out of muslin. And they would^ymake you an apron. And then they would stamp it with these transfers and embroider it. Yes. They were something. And like I say, a lot of them came with their wrist watch on their arm. And I used to laugh and tell them, some of those white ladies, they would always hug me and all. And they never smelled like crabs. They smelled like perfume. But now see, we're all crabby.

Laughter.)

R.: With these sweatsuits, and pants, and the knit tops and all. And of course, we have to wear something on our head. I wear a cap 'cause I'm a hat person anyway, but my daughter wears a hair net. But now it's a plastic apron and just wash it oil, and hang it up and leave it there. Those ladies would wash those aprons out. Put em out on the grass because you've of to remember, they were only going to be washed next Monday probably. But they would rinse them out, that crab out of them and put 'em out on the grass. And then they'd be collected up and washed on Monday. And they would starch 'em. They boiled, they boiled their starch, cooked starch.

K.F.: Oh, my.

E.R.: Yes, I'm telling you. I don't know how it's all done, but it would get done.

K.F.: Okay. I haven't heard anybody talk about that.

E.R.: That's what they -- they wore the house dresses. And like I say, some of them used those dresses that maybe had been worn and were very worn from going to church, and they would ppt those in the crab house. But now it's the Jogging suits or pants or something and tennis shoes. And, of course, like I say, they wait on you. And there was a time when back when, you took your meat up whenever you wanted. You decided p m going to take my meat up. An I can remember, I think they had made wooden for to take your meat up on. Of course, now that wouldn't be permitted. Now we have to take up every five pounds.

But Mr. Tyler has a better idea. The health department is very ignorant about that. Because it can take somebody a long time to get five pounds. Where me I can get it -- he weighs you up, the first weigh up is an hour and a half, and then it s on every hour. And that way, the meat gets there in the ice and cooler very quickly. But back then you just sat there until -- I've seen em take up, I think about 20 pounds of meat. It was, you know, it was taking up all this meat stacking it. And you would turn around and look, look how many pounds she's got. But you can't do that any more. You sat there and just picked along, picked along. And, of course, now our factories are air conditioned. Back then, they were not. They raised the windows. But it seemed like they were -- Iguess being on the water like we were, that they were never warm inside. But now, our factories are air conditioned. We still have to take up on the hour to get it as cold as possible as quick as possible. And, of course, they truck their own. Each crab house trucks his own now. There's no more big trucking outfits that come down here. What happened, they would bring ice, and the freight barrels and things like that and pick up

the crab meat. Now each take this basket crabs, soft crabs and crab meat
dail

K.F.: And --

ER.: See and when we started, we had what we picked in was a long table, but each one had a partition. It was called a trough.

K.F.: Oh.

E.R.: Yeah. This is my crab trough. And it was mine. And it was

partitioned off from the next door, the next neighbor.

VF.: Does it look like the way the oyster shuckers had it set up? You know, the all have their own little slots.

E.g.: Yeah. Well this is the way it was with crabs. We called it our crab trough. And now, of course, we're all on a stainless steel table is what it's fixed in. They usually keep it for about six people on a table.

K.F.: Okay. And who sits around you right now?

E.R.: My daughter works right in front of me.

K.F.: Okay

E.R.: Yeah. And then a friend of mine. Mr. Tyler has a very big factory. And we kind of spread out. And next to me on my left, now my (laughter's in front of me, used to be a real young colored, black girl. And I think she's not going to be back. And then a friend of mine that I've known for years worked right across. And then of course, to my back is Mr. Tyler's daughter-in-law. She picks crabs too. And a friend of hers works in front of her. And then another friend works. I mean you know, usually it's friends. You pick who you want to work with. Usually try to get in front of somebody that you're the best friends. I mean we're all friendly.

K.F.: Right.

E.R.: Or maybe somebody that lives next door to you.

K.F.: And why is that?

E.R.: I don't know. It just happens that way. When I went to J.C., he just said to my daughter, he said I know you want to work in front of your mother. So she did. And then when this friend of ours, she had worked there previously, and she came back. They kind of almost let you pick your place. And he'll tell you who works where. And when she came back, she wanted to work close to us, and she did. It's almost like -- it's always been that way, that you kind of work with your friends, and you wanted a place next to -- I want to work next to her.

K.F.: Are you picking against people, or (inaudible).

E.R.: Oh think we do. Now at one time, at one time, I was faster then. But now I'm slowing down, I know that where I have carpal tunnel in both hands, I have a tear in each rotor cuff. 1V~ doctor over in Easton said I would like to know what kind of work you do. Because as the man said the other night, only athletes usually have those tears. But anyway, I am slowing down, but I kid her. And I'll say how many did you beat me today? And then sometimes she'll say I beat mom today. I said but remember, I beat you more years than you've ever beat me.

Laughter.)

E.R.: Its usually a little compatriot spirit there amongst everybody.

K.F.: Okay.

E.R.: I always you know, I don't sense it as much with the younger ones as I did with the older people. I mean we -- I could remember seeing em going like this to see how many -- and then speeding up a little bit, you know.

K.F.: Okay. And what about picking over crabs?

E.R.: Well I have a theory about that. I've always thought if you can get to that crab quicker than me, you're welcome to it. And I kid my daughter

sometimes. I tell her that I'm picking over her crabs. And she'll say to some of the other ladies mom's picking over the crabs today, girls. Mom s -- I'm not really but we kid each other. But we had a -- the reason why I say that, we had a lady who moved here from the city. And she worked in front of a friend of ours. And this friend would get so mad. She'd say she's picking over the crabs again today. I said let her. If you let her get the crabs, you should,, I said because I would have it first. I aid because I would've had it first. I' said you're a faster picker than she is, so you should be able to get the best of the crabs. And there are people who will do that, who will pick over the crabs.

You've got to pick it eventually, and I don't think that's fair. That's not in the -- fai ness. But there are people who will pick over crabs. It's like oysters. There would be people who would pick over oysters. And at the end of the day, you had all thus -- they would throw it back. But as I say, I pick -- I think sometimes we compete with each other. You know, I kid her that I'm picking over the crabs. And it's just a feeling that sets you all working together. And she, up until a couple years ago, she d been working on the water with her husband, but she doesn't work on the water anymore. Because I think it gets to a time when you realize that working on the water is hard work.

K.F.: Yes.

E.R.: And she stays home, as she says, enjoys -- she picks crabs in the summer. And she enjoys as she says, she enjoys grandchildren in the winter. But that's, a lot of the ladies through here now, see they go on unemployment in the wintertime.

K.F.: Well what used to happen in the wintertime -- now they're drawing unemployment. What would happen before that?

E.R.: We shucked oysters.

K.F.: So have you shucked oysters?

E.R.: Oh, yes. Oh, yes. All those houses that now are just crab houses, at one time they were oyster houses. You had to be. And it's so strange to see `em idle in te wintertime now. Of course, now they buy oysters and send them to Virginia, but they don't shuck. And supposedly they say its a red ink operation for them to shuck oysters. I don't know. but we laugh, ladies that used to -- my daughter's never, ever shucked oysters. But youknow, most of us would rather shuck oysters than pick crabs. We loved it.

K.F.: Really? Why?

ER.: I don't know why. Because it was hard, nasty, dirty, wet, cold work. It really was. But we did. And it was something you took pride in. I mean being a good oyster shucker is quite an art to it. And we laugh now. How did we do our housecleaning and get ready for Christmas and everything? We shuck oysters. Because now we could hardly get ready.

aughter.)

R.: It's just one of those things, but this is what happens. But yes we all shucked -- that was another thing they changed while I was away. The oyster houses stopped shucking oysters. And that was strange to me. I never thought that would ever happen. As long as we had oysters. But they found it more profitable or just as, you know, to buy them here and send them to Virg in' lS And just shut the house down for the year. And of course, that made the ladies now, you had a choice. Because those ladies were not going to be without some money for a whole winter. And it was, you know, go and find a job elsewhere. And now it's almost like I'm going to be openin& up in the spring, they draw unemployment. Which is, a lady said to me you re all

on Welfare in a way. I said well, it's according to how you look at it. But I always would pick crabs in the summer and tong in the winter. Of course, you don't draw unemployment when you have a tonging license, and I always had a license. But that was just a choice they had to make. And it was sad, I think. But I'm not -- I don't know what happened to us. I don't believe some of those ladies that used to shuck oysters were very old ladies. I don't believe any of us could do it now. Because as I say, that is a job and a half, shucking oysters is.

K.F.: Now what's the difference in the way you have to move your body to pick a crab and the way you have to move your body to shuck an oyster?

E.R.: Well shucking oysters now, they have told me that down at Calvert s, that he did fix some chairs that some of the elderly ladies could sit down. But you can't sit down and shuck oysters. You have to stand. And really and truly, it's almost -- almost have the same movement as picking crabs because you have to shuck that oyster and then flip it in the bucket and drop your shells. So it's almost the same movement. Except you must, to me you must stand up. I don't understand how, although they say that he did fix chairs that ladies did shuck oysters. But I could not, I have to stand. Which years ago many of the ladies stood all day and picked crabs. This lady next door lived next door to me, she died when she was 85, and she was still picking crabs and standing all day because the older ladies stood up all day and picked crabs. But then I think there was -- we went through -- we had a chair, but we would sit awhile and stand awhile.

Then Calvert came up and he looked the situation over, and he fixed your chair that it just suited you and your place you work too. And we started sitting all day. It used to be we stood up, and sat down occasionally. And then as I say at first, they all stood up. My mother can not sit down and pick crabs. She stood. She got used to standing up the older people did. But I guess we got to be lazy or something, and weaker, wiser ma be. But an yw ay. Have I given you any information that you can use?

K.F.: You have glven me plenty of information. And I'm thinking what I. probably should do is come back and talk with you some more at some point.

R.: Well help yourself.

K.F.: But, you know, I'd love to come back and talk with you some more about this. The museum is tryin to put together a history on the crabs (inaudible). An oral history of (inaudible).

E.R.: As say, Charles Parks that I work *for*, his family is still in the business.

K.F.: Now which crab house is that?

E.R.: Well they're over at Hooper's Island now. As I say Mr. Charlie was from Hooper's Island came over here, and he always still lived at Hooper's Island. And he has Virgil Ruark, and they still have a Charles Parks Crab House over there. And the younger ones run it. In fact it was ironic. My grandson worked *for*, when he started out as a boy working on a crab pot boat, worked for Mr. Charlie's granddaughter's husband. And we used to tell them, you know, laugh about it. But and it's just like, as I say m family, my mother's still living, and she started picking crabs, and now alf ofUS are still. And this lady that lived next door, her two daughters started out cracking claws little. And they're still working in a crab house. Now they've never, ever done anything else. They never, ever left. When the bad times came, they -- one did not have any children, the other one only had one child. And they gust stayed. But you know quite a few of the older eople who went in back in that era are still there. And like I said, a friend of mine that works on

our table, her mother was a crab picker. She grew up in the crab house. Her mother sent her to State Teachers College in Salisbury. And she laughs now. She says just think, I could've been a school teacher.

(Laughter.)

E.R.: And she's picking crabs. She's still icking crabs. Now her daughter is a school teacher. And her younger daughter works in preschool. I don't think she's a teacher. I think she's an aid or something. But it seems like the people that started in that generation moved down to the next generation, next generation. And as my granddaughter said when she lived in Texas that when she would go in the grocery store and ask them about crab meat, they would look at her like lady, who are you, because she could ask questions that probably no one that came to **buy the crab meat ever asked because they didn't know what to ask about. She would ask them when** it was picked and where this thing and that thing. She said and I think sometimes they got ght angry with me. But it's something. And as I say, we're going to teach the little great granddaughter. She's learnn. And I kid her. I say in about another year, we're going to ask Mr. J.C. can you pick crabs, and you can buy your own school clothes. I said that's what all little girls do, they buy their own school clothes.

(Laughter.)

R.: I can remember when I was probably in elementary school, I cracked claws that summer, and I bought myself a icycle. I thought I was uptown. I think I paid -- gave my grandmother \$2 and a half a month or something. And she had bought the bicycle for me, and I had to pay her back. But we all--

K.F.: Once you of older, what did you use your income for?

E.R.: Anything wanted. I love hats, I love clothes. And quite frankly as I say, junk. I'm a hunker. That's what my husband always calls me, a junker. And well it almost comes back -- here I think it's almost a partnership between iusband and wife. What has to be paid, you pay. You all -- it may be something that started with the old traditions obsharing and everything, but that was -- and whatever was leftover, something he wanted, he bought, and whatever I bought. And that's the way it was. And it's funny, because we've got a health situation, I'm sure you're aware of now, on the Eastern Shore. And about this \$75, we've been debating it. And one of the people who did not know. And she said -- I said to her, you know, these people do not have \$75. It's hard to comprehend for a congressman or a senator to comprehend, but these people do not have \$75. So she said well you people on the Eastern Shore are paid under the table. I said he, wait a minute right now stop n t there. I got something to tell you. The ady that retired from Air Packs, s e doesn't et as much old age pension as I do as a crab picker. I et, I can tell you -- at e time, I was ettin \$25 more a month than she was.

lus a little retirement they got at Air ack, ey send back for their health. Which someone said to me can you believe the little retirement they get? I say I can believe it. But that, what has happened everybody wants to say the Eastern Shore, but I picked up a study, and it said like 53 percent of this whole country is living on less than 5,000 a year. So evidently, we were not all that ill-paid. You know. It's all over the country. It's not saying the Eastern Shore is poverty, it's all over the country. People back then, they were good wages. But when they compute it for to pay us in retirement, it doesn't come out to the income level now. I mean back then if someone had said to my husband hey, when you retire, you're go in to get X number of dollars, if they had told him that you're oing to get \$500 a month, he would've said God, oh, we can live, you ow.

K.F.: Right.

E.R.: But now, that is no money for these people to try to live on. And as I tell them, I'm not sure if we planned too well for our future because every waterman thought that he would always be able to be a waterman. He would just some day lay down the tongs and he would die that day. And that what he got as an old age pension would just be like -- we used to laugh and say our Pepsi money. But it's like my husband, when he was 15 years, he could not work. He was a very, very seriously ill diabetic with a heart problem which had been in his family, it was in the genes. And he did not work. But most watermen think they're going to work 'til the last day. They're not ing to have to give up.

K.F.: Right.

E.R.: And when the doctor said to my husband about his eating habits. Let me tell you, the work he did he had to eat. I said and then when you retire and you don't have a lot of things to think about, oh then the eating it's hard to break that habit of the really deep eating. And when the doctor said to my husband about his eating habits. Let me tell you, the work he did, he had to eat. I said and then when you retire and you don't have a lot of things to think about, oh, then the eating it's hard to break that habit of the really deep eating.

K.F.: Right.

E.R.: And probably all the wrong things. The things you need for energy when you retire are all the wrong things.

K.F.: Right.

E.R.: And so when they say about the Eastern Shore and like I told them, I'm not making a point of poverty for us. I'm just making you understand and be realistic about the whole country. Don't sit back very complacent and think everybody is doing well. Unfortunately, they're not. And the people who have worked on steady income and were promised a lot of, like I tell them for instance, a couple of years when Air-Pack would not give us a raise, and they say well we're putting it in health insurance for you. And I said but then all the sudden that health insurance that was supposed to be the benefit for those couple of years, it disappeared. So you didn't really get anything. And so this life of being a waterman if we just could get it back to where it was, I'm not sure if it will ever be. Like I say, technology may take it over. I don't know. But it was a good way of life, and people made money. And I read, I think that the oyster harvest was higher this year than it had been for some time. But it was a good life, and probably better back when we had the old wooden crab house with all the old wooden accessories. And now the stainless steel and all the new things, and we don't have that many pickers.

K.F.: Now do you recall any of the strikes that happened around here?

E.R.: Watermen strike about '68 --

K.F.: What about the pickers' strike?

E.R.: I can't remember when they've ever been on strike.

K.F.: Okay.

E.R.: If you get mad, you just stayed home that day and cooled your anger and go back the next day.

(Laughter.)

R.: I mean that's the way it is. I can't remember, you know. And if you get ticked with someone at that crab house, you moved to another one. And, of course, I think I've worked in mostly all of them around here not from being -- but when I was little, as I say, I worked for Charles Pas. And then we -- when he -- crab house left washed away, the '33 flood, then I worked for Palys over Windgates as a child, 'cause we were allowed to. And I

worked to the Crosians (phonetic). They were big in seafood, and they were foster parents to my grandmother. And we would go down there, they would permit us. And then when I came back after I worked -- when I came over to Toddville, I worked for W.C. Dean (phonetic). And then I worked for Calvert and left for a time. As I say I worked at Air Packs then I came back. Tried the mini crab houses. Then ended up right back where I started. Usually do. Most crab pickers usually do. If they have any frustrations, they may leave for a day and come back the next day. And I can't remember -- I can remember watermen ever so often, they show their muscle and have a strike.

K.F.: Okay. And what would happen then? Did it slow you all down at all?

They usually go back and work for less than what they were getting when they went o stoke. That's a famous saying. We'll say like for instance, oh they called for all the watermen to be at Cambridge, South Dorchester. Were not going to crab for so and so. Last year they did it. Well you rode by there on Sunday morning, they were all leaning across hoods of their pickup. And I said to my daughter I said I don't know what they were getting, but I said they'll go back and they'll work for less. Every time they go on strike, when they go back, they get less. But it's hard for people who are not in say a union as such. Because you've got to remember, they're individuals.

I can remember one time we went on an oyster strike. And we heard that the watermen over Hooper's Island were out. It was supposed to be the whole shore. And it was one of the last of the big strikes. So we went over there, and we started laughing at them. Hey youguys, you got to work. We'll bring you a loaf of bread and all this, you know how you say things. And so it was some anger. And then we came home, and they started calling us. They said we got to work. You people over there have got money, we don't have any. We got to work. So it's individuals, you know, trying to strike, it doesn't work because you always have people who need money. And it's hard if you need money to say I'll stay ashore and not go to work. It's just

I say when people break the law, I told DNR, mine were brought up to respect the law and to abide by the law, but it is hard. But you go out there and you need money for a house payment or a car payment, and it's overboard not to bring some illegal ashore and try to get away with it.

It's hard. Or if you know your children don't have money for food. And some of these young ones do not know how -- when we saved our money in the fall. Because as we say we always anticipated that long bad winter. And the young ones don't. They spend what they make every week. And you can't do that out in the water business. You've got to put, as I tell them -- you got to put some nuts in the nest or you're going to be urting this winter. Some nuts must be in the nest. And it's -- of course, maybe they don't -- there was a time we made money like nobody. We made money. We tonged in Oxford. When you tong in Oxford, you work every day.

K.F.: Why is that

E.R.: Because there's places over there that you can get in out of the wind. The wind's a certain direction, you can go elsewhere. Oxford is a waterman's dream.

K.F.: Okay.

E.R.: As far as tonging. And I used to pray, please Lord let it be bad today. I do want a day off And we would work hard. I mean a\$ week. And you

made good money. The market was there, they paid a good price you could catch your limit and you worked every day. And it was a good lil'e.

K.F.: And who did you sell your oysters to?

E.R.: Well there was over on the dock, we went over on the Bellvue side, Shawn Burk (phonetic) was buying. He had trucks come in. He was the person who had trucks came in, and he bought for different trucks as they came in. He was the person that took care of everything.

K.F.: Okay.

E.R.: And like he would --United Shellfish and people like that. But then others would come in from Virginia, and then they would have what they would call a big tractor trailer come in for soup. And then you could go ^{ton} on the not-so-desirable oysters. Because they would buy them, they wanted cheap bulk. They wanted tractor and trailer load fast. So Taut went where it was not so -- and the other buyers wanted a better oyster. But when that tractor trailer came, you were home free. Because he'd want to get filled up and get back home. They called them soup oysters. I don't know whether they it was a good market. We had market, I mean oysters, plenty, and it was -- we would go up to Cambridge and tong. Of course, fishing day didn't have too much then. Fishing day is wicked. And so is Cho~ ptank to work in. We'd go up to Choptank and work in the fall. Then about Thanksgiving, wed go over to Oxford. And then eventually,, we started going over there, the whole season. And you did not miss any time. It's beautiful over there working, those homes on the shores and everything. It's just -- I guess they're my best memories of tonging is over in Oxford, over in Oxford.

daughter.

lik.R.: Tre Avon. Oh and then we would get on some days -- one day we prayed it would be bad. It was Christmas. And it was bad. So we said we've worked -- we're not going to work the bad weather today. So we went shopping over in St. Michaels, all the antique shops. And oh, it was fun to come back on the ferry. It was just like a holiday. And the people over there were nice, and it was a lot of watermen . And it's fun when there s a lot of watermen. Very de ,ressing when you're all spread out. When you can work e a long winter, friends and neighbors and your children and all around, it's fun. But like I say now, it's -- some are on Little Cho tank some are Oxford, some are -- you know, it's all broken up. And I just don t Mink its that much enjoyment. You know, but these things happen. You're doing fantastic things over there at --

K.F.: The museum?

E.R.: Yeah.

EK.F.: Well they're tryin . We've got a whole new thing they 're trying to do. specially now that se ood industry -- a lot different (inaudible). Tell people what happened once it hits the docks. So they-- I think last year they were, you know pretty much -- exhibit (inaudible) to make sure people understand (inaudible).

E.R.: One time, we had a canning house for fish in Cambridge, the Phillips did.

K.F.: Right.

E.R.: And they canned herrin g, which I'm not sure how much market it is. I see it on the grocery shelves,]but I never, ever buy canned fish.

K.F.: I don't think it's (inaudible).

E.R.: I remember -- well now you have fresh fish all year round.

K.F.: Right.

E.R.: And used to be you didn't. The old people salted down fish for the winter, or else you bought it canned. And I can remember my mother buying

canned fish, and salt and pepper and flour and fried it. I never had that. But I can remember her having that for a meal. But now it's like these people, my grandson, I think he started last year -- I don't think he's tonged until he's -- he's been fishing. And I mean catching fish. And see it used to be you had fish locally like you have people in the spring of the year as we called it, put out -- but then when crabbing started, they took those up. It was only that little in between, maybe six weeks or something like that or maybe some of them would put them out and not tong after Christmas. I mean now my -- he's been, I mean fishing big time. And several more young people like him.

K.F.: Is he netting or -

E.R.: Drift I think they drift nets.

END SIDE A

BEGIN SIDE B (Tape OH127.2)

E.R.: I guess they didn't have the boats to do that type of fishing that they do now and go out in the bay and all. They just more or less did it locally. And you had to wait 'til that fish came in your waters. And of course, that would be at certain times. And now, out in the bay, they're, I guess, always there.

K.F.: Right.

E.R.: Because you're whole boat scene has taken a drastic change, from the little boat with the little -- as we used to call it a Palmer motor, and then you went up to the automobile motor, and now you've got the big diesel motor, which they can go anywhere. So that's changed the whole scene of the seafood industry. Your power and your boat has changed a lot. Like I say, my andmother used to take and mend the sails from the boats on her sewing mace.

K.F.: Oh, okay.

E.R.: Yes. I mean, some of those were patched and patched and patched.

Laughter.)

R.: But, you know no -- now it's a different thing. And, of course, the sail dredge boats and all are limited. So I guess everything has its day.

K.F.: Now did the dredge boats come through this area?

E.R.: Oh, yes. We had -- well dredge boats were over on that side. We didn't have dredge boats on this side. Dredge boats always had to work out in the bay. And for some reason or other, the fishing day was never dredge boat territory. The men probably know more about that than I do. But we had fleets, and one of the biggest dredge boat builders was right over at Windgate, Ronzy Parks. Built the Rosie Parks and --

K.F.: Oh, right. Rosie Parks that's up at the museum.

E.R.: Yeah, and the Katie. I mean she was the biggest dredge boat. And then of course, later on as kind of the market for dredge boats went out, he built the smaller skipjack for pleasure people, you know. And, of course, that did him in. That's when someone killed him after that. He was a master at building dredge boats. And he taught a lot of young men through here the art of boat building. And it was something. And he, I think at one time he thought, seems like to me he had three buildings at one time. It was -- people would come to watch and build these three dredge boats because they were beautiful.

K.F.: I ask because the other project the museum's working on is, you know, they have the Rosie Parks now. They're trying to re-work her and get her ready for people that would be able to, you know, look at her. And one of the things they're trying to do is talk with people who cooked on the dredge boats. And the people when they come to visit and look at the Rosie Parks can understand, how did a crew live on this boat -- how does a cook make all these meals all day long, and feed, you know --

E.R.: A dredge boat had a cook. Now I don't think he was left much time to come up, as we call it, topside to do much other than he kept cooking all day long, because everybody was always asking for something hot because it was cold work cold, wet work.

K.F.: Right.

E.R.: And some ^{Tears} years ago, I met a black man. And we got talking. When he found out where from, he said he had worked -- I don't know whether he said on the Lady Kate or the Rosie, but one of those dredge boats. And he knew Ronsie and all that whole family. But dredging -- see we had a dredger who was our next door neighbor. Well what he would do, and I had an uncle that would go with him from the time he was a real young man, he would leave home in the fall and go up to Baltimore. They would dredge up there. And, see there was no transportation. They would come home at Christmas. Ana they would dredge, as they call it, dredged up the bay. They dredged up the bay. But they-- in my husband's time, the tongers here in Toddville had gone up to Baltimore and tonged. Had to stay up there. There was nothing there. And they stayed up there 'til like Christmas and came home. But dredge boat was well I always kid them and say if I had really thou ~t about it, I say I would've bought myself a dredge boat, and I wo d ve had five nice looking yo~ung men. And they would've been my dredge crew in the wintertime. Then in the summertime; we would've had cruises, and I would've fed 'em and I said these old ladies would've been delighted at these oung men, all suntanned I shorts and all. I said that's what I would've done, I'd have had myself a dredge boat.
(Laughter.)

R.: But anyway -

K.F.: Sounds like a good idea.

E.R.: Yeah. And but we were laughing . But dredge boats, they were something else, they were something e when you see all those together they were awesome with their sails, you know. And, of course I was in high school when we had that tragedy in the Choptank River, and a lot of our friends neighbors lost their lives.

K.F.: f don t think I've heard of that.

E.R.: Yeah. They all capsized. It was, I believe, March. They came out real quick like. And I remember, he's now Captain Spark over at -- has his own seafood business. But anyway, we're were both in the same class. And this oh, bad time came. The school went all dark. And he as I said, he was always so nice. But that day, he really acted up. And his rather was drowned in that, the dredge boats capsized. And a man up -- Mr. Bill Bradford, he drowned. And another friend of ours, he was on the dredge boat when it capsized. And someone in another boat threw him a rope and told him, said boy, grab that rope or to hell you go. And he grabbed that rope.

And he's always said that he would've drowned anyway. But for years, he had practiced in swimming of swimming with boots on m practice, taking them off, and he was able to kick his boots off. Because your boots will fill with water and pull you down or drown you, the boots themself will drown you. And you can't kick them off. It takes an expert to know how to get his boots off when they start filling up with water. And he survived. In fact, he lives up there now, George Wheatley. He survived that. That was, I think it was five dredge boats capsized. I know of three people that drowned. This lady next door her brother was one of them that drowned. And I was telling my daughter, I' said you know, we really have lost people in drowning accidents. Because had a neighbor over Bishop's Head. She lost her

husband, her brother, her uncle, and two sons. Not at the same time, but different times. I said that family -- the younger one said no. No water for me. It was too many, too many.

So it can be an awesome thing. I've seen some -- as I told people, they always said to me were you scared on the water? No, my husband was never scared. Had I seen him become upset, I probably would've been upset. But he was always pretty calm. And he was always pretty good with the weather. And he's say Eelyn, get things ready. We've got to leave because you see that cloud up there. And we could always mostly run ahead of the storm. A couple times we -- it ran a little bit too fast for us. But he was pretty good. He was not reckless. As he said, he never learned to swim. And when he went in service he was on the amphibious forces the Army. First time they ever had an amphibious force. And they picked all the men from the Eastern Shore to be their first amphibious force. And when they got there and they found out he could not swim, and then they found out quite a few could not swim, they tried to teach them, and they never did learn to swim. I don't know what it was, but he never ever learned to swim. And he was always -- he's day don't be foolish when you're on the water. There's no place to be foolish. He'd get upset with some of the young men. He'd say they're playing with their lives. And maybe we were a little bit too careful, but we managed to make a living and still -- and the same with ice. It's nothing to be paying around with, ice and a boat. But we worked out there sometimes where we've had to watch the ice and run all day long from the ice, especially over in Oxford when they had that freeze over there. But it's something. Oh, me.

K.F.: Now what I'd like to do is go back and listen to this, and I'll probably have some more questions for you.

ER.: Okay.

K.F.: If it would be all right if I come back.

E.R.: Okay.

K.F.: The museum, like I said, is trying to put something together for the (inaudible). What we're going to do in the fall is put together a little booklet for the people who've participated. And -- probably -- they're going to build the building first. But they can -- so it may be, you know (inaudible).

E.R.: This spring when we get picking crabs, I'm sure Jay Steven -- he is very good about things like that. He likes to promote.

K.F.: Okay. And Jay he's at Meredith & Meredith or at Parks?

E.R.: He's at Meredith & Meredith -- well both of those houses belong to him now.

K.F.: Oh, okay.

E.R.: His brother got out of it, and J.C. has it. And then J.C.'s son runs one house, and J.C. runs the other. And it's more or less you know, of coming together and J.C.'s son graduated from college and all, so he should bring a lot of, you know, things to the industry.

K.F.: Right.

E.R.: And of course, with J.C., with all of his working knowledge, and putting it all together.

K.F.: Right.

E.R.: And like I say, there's two crab houses down there, and they're not that far apart. And J.C., he's very modern and very much of advertising the industry. And he belongs to the institute, and tries to keep, you know, seafood going, and seafood clean and everything that he can think of to do. Really is.

K.F.: Where are some of the other crab pickers --

E.R.: Right there, or the other crab houses. Any crab house usually, if you let 'em know, you know, like could we come. They have no problem with it. They're more than cooperative.

K.F.: Right. Now if I want to talk to other crab pickers like I did with you today, who -- is there somebody else I can call or --

E.R.: Before I came I'd call J.C. And then I'd ask him, you know, well J.C., could I talk wits some other pickers. And most of the pickers we have, a lady that cracks claws, and she's been on t.v. before, and Mold her she came out well. And she said well it's a little hard to crack and talk too. But anyway, J.C. usually is very cooperative about things like that.

K.F.: kay.

E.R.: And you know, he'll do things with t.v., and with reporters to show them if we're up, down, or whatever the financial situation is with the industry.

K.F.: ght.

E.R.: And it's worked out quite well.

K.F.: And all I need is (inaudible).

E.R.: Well right now, it doesn't look too good. In a day or two, I could probably give you a better answer. My grandson is getting ready to put out, they're not going down in Virginia like they used to do because they didn't like the report from Virginia. Which they come up with the idea that the dredgers didn't do too well down there this year. It wasn't cold enough for the crabs to bury. And crabs must go in the bottom for to do anything crab dredging. So they didn't go down to Virginia. But in a couple tew days, they re going to start putting crab pots out as far down as they can. And so I can probably give you a better idea. Now the tingers are optimistic. They've seen crabs active. Really active crabs. And someone said he had a fish net, and the crabs ate it up. I don't don't know how big a story that is. But anyway, they've seen crabs, and they're pretty optimistic. So we'll, I'd say a week we should know what's going to happen. And J.C. usually gets crabs out of Virginia, and they start potting down there. But as I say, not too many of our men are going thus year. But they're going to start putting crab pots out as far down as they can. So I m hoping in a couple weeks that we 11 start. Even if it's only like a day or two a week. Or maybe, you know work three or four hours some mornings. Because after a while, you kind of get cabin fever, you know. You want to get out and talk to the ladies, find out what's ping on.

daughter.)

F.: Now do you hang out with the ladies that you pick crabs with when ou're out of work?

E.R.: Well we go to church together,.but I have a lot of pet projects. I do a lot of volunteer work. I'm on the senior council for the county, and that takes me one board meeting. And I'm on the commission on -- work with the Commission on Aging for having adult day care center. And now last Wednesday I was in Ocean City for a meeting. And in the wintertime, I do a lot of things, go to Annapolis. And we're all real good friends. But the lady here, her and her sister shop ~together. And we always are talkie g, and they do things for me, and I do things for them. But we're not like -- I maw as well say it, we're not like we used to be. But somehow or other, as we tell each other, we don't have time to go sit with people like we use to. And in the wintertime, they are in their car, they're going sho~pping. And I'm in my car and my dau ter and I go shopping. It's almost like, you know, my daughter and I, and ese two ladies, they re two sisters, they go together.

us And then my sister-in-law and her daughter, we each one have our cars. It used to be we had one car, and we all had to bundle, we can go together. And it was I'll meet you so and so. Now we have our car, we can come and go as we please. And in the wintertime, we're involved in the -- I do and of course in the summer time I take time off to go to board meetings and be involved in some volunteer work that lets me do -- I tell them the things I want to do and still make some money too. But we're all community people, we go to church together, do things together. But in the wintertime, most of now have cars and we go and do things. And then we'll -- a lot of them take trips, take bus trips. And it's like I say, now no one thinks twice about hey, want to go shopping today? They go over to Baltimore and go shopping. You know that was unheard of back when. You got that little traditional trip to Cambridge on Saturday. Of course, they had plenty of stores there to shop. Now you got to go to Baltimore really if you want to shop.

But these are some things. And like I say, it's usually family members go together in their car. And we probably stop off in doctor's office or in Walmart and talk longer than what we do here. And we always laugh and say

I haven't seen you in so long, but I knew I'd see you in the doctor's office or something like that. Or we're shopping at Walmart, we'll stand and chat. When we going back picking crabs who did what, and of course, I tell my daughter. I say it's sad today, but at funeral time, everybody comes together, everybody shows up, everybody does things for each other. And I guess, as I say now, it's a case of family members go together and do things, and each one has their own car and you're not dependent on someone for when they're going and when they're going to come. And in the summertime, of course as I say, at the crab house, we're all friends and community people and do things. And have little Christmas party at the crab house. But it's, and a lot of our young people, like I say they have other jobs. And it used to be like this house would be -- when my husband died, a lot of people came and they'd say they were my happiest days. Because I would have like 20, 22 people to eat Sunday dinner.

K.F.: Oh, wow.

E.R.: And it was like the boyfriends came, or the girlfriends came, and the grandchildren and all, and it's all one big family. And you'd think this is great. It's going to stay like this forever and ever. And then one day I heard a little grandson say I wouldn't have been here today but dad made me come. I wanted to go to the races today. And I thought that's not right, you know. I can't expect them to come and do what I want them to do because it makes me happy. They have to do what makes them happy. This is their day. So I told them. I said hey wait a minute now let's all stop this. And we would all be together Memorial Day, Fourth of July, Labor Day Christmas, and it was all -- and so we were saying to yes, but it's no longer like that. Because some of the friends, boyfriends and girlfriends they came, and they said the happiest days were with all of you. And when we used to come eat Sunday dinner. And when we used to come for Christmas. And now everybody's got their own family. It's like I say look I was young. I did what I wanted to make me and my family happy. You do the same thing. Don't feel like you got to get in the van and go down to grandma's on Sunday and sit there and do what she wants to do. This is what I did with my grandmother. I visited her on Sunday afternoon and took my children. But now they've got other interests. And it's not fair if you don't let them do the things they want to do.

K.F.: Right.

ER.: But still, meantime you keep the family connection. But it's not like Sunday dinner at Grandma's anymore. They have cars, and they want to do things, and they're going places. You've got to be fair to them. But anyway, well you did have a nice day to come down here.

K.F.: I did. I love comm down here. It's so beautiful.

(END OF TAPE OH127.

(END OF INTERVIEW)