

Interview Log

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Interviewee: Lou Brown of A.E. Phillips Tape # : per i

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Begin Side A

KF: So if I could have you say your name for me Lou.

LB: Lousetta **Isp?**] M. Brown.

KF: All righty. And where were you born?

LB: Tidesville [?j, Dorchester County.

KF: Ok, in TWesville. ^{*r04&v 1)*} May I ask what year?

LB: Um, nine, wait a minute, it's June the ninth, that's six, nine, twenty-three.

KF: Ok. And uh, what did your parents do?

LB: Well my mother for a a while worked uh, you know, in the crab house, then she quit to raise the children and Daddy, he worked with a man in a gunning club.

KF: Oh, which gunning club?

LB: I don't remember that.

KF: Did they take care of the gun club and take people out hunting and stuff like that.

LB: Yeah, he did, yes.

KF: Ok, so your mom quit the crab house to raise the kids?

LB: Yeah, was seven of us.

KF: Oh my goodness. She didn't take you all into the crab house?

LB: Well I went when I was real little too, three or four years old, and just set there and tried to crack a pound, which was two cents and a half a pound then [chuckles]. But we had to go because you know we didn't have nobody else to stay with.

KF: Ok, and is that how you learned how to pick crabs, from your mom?

LB: Yeah, and crack claws.

KF: And how did she teach you?

LB: Well she would, first she would pull the back shells off and then clean the fins off of them and give them to us to pick or she'd save us the best claws and let us crack them. So that worked out all right.

KF: And where were you sitting?

LB: In a chair by her. Which was against the law but you know they didn't.... They had to bring them or leave them home by themselves though.

KF: Um-hmmm, how many other kids were in the picking house? When you were little?

LB: Well you know anybody had a child was in there. Because they even, even after I got married, I come over here and they would bring their kids down the factory and put them in a big box, you know, put them in the corner and let them sleep with a blanket over them till they woke up. You had to do it.

KF: Yeah, yeah. So was your husband from Fishing Creek then?

LB: My husband was from Washington.

KF: D.C. or state?

LB: Um-hmmm, D.C.

KF: D.C. ok. Ok, well how did you uh, meet

LB: Well my first husband, my son's father, I got one child, my son's father, he was from around here. He crabbed, and he was also a carpenter.

KF: Oh ok, ok. I was trying to figure out how you got over here to Fishing Creek from Tidesville **[Toddsville?]**.

LB: Well he was, my first husband, he was from Fishing Creek, but he run over there

because it's not that far, see.

KF: Right, right, ok. And uh, how long have you been picking crabs?

LB: I'd say over seventy years. Or cracking claws with it. We didn't pick that many crabs because ain't, you know they were afraid we'd get bones or something in it, so she let, mostly let us crack claws and they'd give us the good ones.

KF: Oh, ok. And at, well, I guess at what age did your mom decide that you were probably good enough to start picking actual crabs?

LB: Oh I'd say about six.

KF: And was that because you were good at cracking claws or ... you just?

LB: No, well six years old you know you ain't going to be too good at nothing. [Chuckles] But we tried, we did all we could do.

KF: What are some of your memories of the, the crab house when you were little?

LB: Um, I don't remember too much of it but I know we used to have to walk about three-quarters of a mile to work. And then, I'd go down there and stay till about seven-thirty, and then I'd have to walk home and get dressed and walk to the school for another mile, you know just to get my schooling in.

KF: And which crab house was this?

LB: I think it was called uh, Johnson's. That's been a long time ago.

KF: Yep, doesn't sound like they're still around.

LB: Oh I know it. And if it wasn't for the Mexicans, they wouldn't be around.

KF: Right, right, ok. And have you picked crabs all your life or have you had other jobs?

LB: Well I went to Washington and stayed about ten years and worked for People's Drug Store. And then I decided to come back.

KF: And uh, what were the other jobs that were available to women around here, if you didn't pick crabs ...?

LB: Not much of nothing. See now the young ones don't do that no more, they don't want nothing to do with it.

KF: Yeah, well and they can get up to Cambridge too.

LB: Oh yeah, um-hmmm. But you take a girl sixteen, or fifteen, sixteen years old, she can make a lot of money if the claws are good, you know if you want to crack claws or if she wants to pick, it's good money. But, they don't want nothing to do with it, no.

KF: And why do you like it so much.

LB: Well I like the money it brings in for one thing and I like to be with the girls down there working with them. I guess I could exist if I had to but, I'm a bingo fiend.
[Chuckles] And lot of times that you come home with nothing.

KF: Right, right. Well you said you like um, working with the girls, uh, what's it like in the picking house when everybody's in there working?

LB: It's really nice, because everybody gets along with each other you know and even the Mexicans, we don't know everything they say, but they know what we say and they know how to answer, or one or two of them will anyhow. And they're wonderful people to work with. Course there's only about three or four of us left. [Laughter] That's why you can't start now. I told them all three of us wouldn't make a good one. [Chuckles] That way they fly, oh them Mexicans can pick a crab. Ummm!

KF: Really. Now who taught them how to pick a crab?

LB: They taught theirself. When they, when they first started coming, he would have a girl come in, maybe one day and show them. And you'd think well they ain't never going to learn this job. And they can beat any Americans down there. Any of them. Good girls.

KF: Well what did uh, when you were younger, what did the crab house sound like when you were in there?

LB: Gol...I can't remember that. Can't remember.

KF: Singing or talking...

LB: Well they might sing a little bit or something like that because I think, you know, sometimes they do that to all the factories, and then when somebody has a birthday, they sing it in Spanish and the Americans sings it in English. So they do that you know every time they'll let us know when one of them's got a birthday. So, that's pretty good.

KF: So did you pick crabs um, until you moved to D.C.?

LB: Yeah, um-hmmm. You shuck oysters too in the winter time.

KF: Oh did you do that too?

LB: Yes I did.

KF: Wow, ok. And did most of the women who picked the crabs also shuck oysters?

LB: Yeah, a, quite a few of them. But that, you know that was a long time back because, about thirty-nine or something like that. But I think they shucked over here too later. But a lot of them did, yeah, yeah they shucked too.

KF: What's the difference between shucking and picking? I mean I know, you know oyster's a different shell and all that kind of stuff but, the way that you have to work your knife, what's the difference?

LB: Well it's a different kind of knife, an oyster knife's got a big round handle and a sharp blade about like that in it. Then the crab knife is metal, and then it's got a little blade about like that on it. And, where you have to cut the fins with the crab knife, but with the oyster knife you've got to stab it in between there and try to get it out.

KF: Ok, ok. Is any of the motion the same, I mean as far as ...?

LB: Well it's similar, it's around the same, but you've got to, you know, use your hand different. Like picking crabs, you'd be cutting them with this one then you know and then take the meat out and lay it in your hand. And then when you shuck and oyster, you got to go like that and get in there and then cut it and pull it open and then cut it off.

KF: Well why don't you tell me how you pick a crab.

LB: Well I pull the back shell off, then I cut its mouth out, and I go out and cut them fins off, turn it over and cut the fins off on the other side. And then I cut the top off and pick that. Then I pick the bottom.

KF: Ok, now Jay told me the other day when I was, yesterday when I was down there talking to him, he said he's seen you pull the top off a crab and get the lump out.

LB: Most of the time I do, unless the crab's not cooked right or something other or little. You cut it, well it would be that side would be cut, so you cut this side and you, I just take the knife and cut that bone that's in there and then I take it somehow and get underneath of it and every bit of it comes out together.

KF: Wow, I've never seen anybody do that.

LB: It's not many people does it. My friend when I was real young showed me how to do that and I never ever forgot it. But that's a big piece of lump when it comes out like that. Most of the time I can do it, you know every time....

KF: Well tell me about your friends that you've had in the crab house.

LB: That's the onlyiest one I've worked to since I've ... no I did work for Charles Henry Parks, for the factory down the road there a little bit. I worked for him when I was

young. I guess when I first come over here in about in forty-two.

KF: Well what kind of friends have you had in the crab house?

LB: Real good. Real good.

KF: Do you all go out and do stuff together or did you ... ?

LB: Yeah, we used to go out, we'd take a, in the winter when we wasn't working, one girl would take her car and the four of us would go off in it, one day a week, then the next week the other one would drive and we'd go somewhere else. But, haven't done nothing this winter. [Laughter]

KF: [Laughter] Ok, you must have been working when the crab houses were really full and busy and

LB: Oh yes!

KF: What was that time like?

LB: Well, I would say now we got more pickers then we've ever had in our life.

KF: Really?

LB: When them Mexicans are here, yes, you've seen the factory, how big it is. We have every seat full in it.

KF: Huh, ok, ok. So, are things busier now than they were say in the fifties or sixties?

LB: I don't know, I don't know what to say about that, because the fact that we were full then because like I say because kids would come in and things like that so ... But I'll bet he's getting more meat than he ever got. So if you go by that or not. Because them girls are fast.

KF: Well tell me about some of the traditions of being a crab picker. I know everybody has to have their own special chair and

LB: Oh yeah, we have to have our own chair. And now they've started putting numbers on our tubs that we use. And, you know to see that, then if they're not clean they know who it belongs to. And we have our own knives, we, you know, much like we like them. And they give us aprons and a hat or a hairnet, either one we want to wear. And we like our boss. We always have him a birthday party or something, we did until last year and then the health department got so, you know they wanted everything just so-so and we were afraid they would come in when we, you know had everything out.

KF: Right. Ok. Well that reminds me, what was it like when the inspectors came through

when you were young? And you were underage?

LB: We had to go hide.

KF: Where'd you hide?

LB: [Chuckles] In a box or the toilet or something, till they, we found out they were starting to examine the toilets too so... what could you do? You had to go away and hide. Life really changes.

KF: When did they start urn, being real strict about that?

LB: About...,

KF: About having kids in a packing house?

LB: Oh that's been going on I imagine about ten or fifteen years. And now they don't even want in there if it's under fourteen years old, they don't even want them, you know come in there and speak or nothing. Un-uh. They used to let you have a soda to the counter you know or the table that....

KF: Right.

LB: Well you work hard, you know you want something to drink. They don't let you do that no more or nothing.

KF: Well what other changes have you seen in, over the years of picking crabs?

LB: The money part, that's about all.... [Laughter]

KF: The money part.... [Laughter]

LB: From two and a half to two, I mean two and a half cents to two dollars, that's a big one! [Laughter] But, I mean it's nice, I like to do it. I know I'm too old to be doing it but, I like to be with the girls and we all get along like I said and, it's just nice. I like it.

KF: Do you think of it more as uh, a time to go and talk with people rather than working or ... ?

LB: No I, I'd rather work if I can, I don't work that much like the rest of them does. Like the Mexicans, they'll come in at five o'clock in the morning, which I try to get there at five. But by about eleven I'm ready to come home. And they'll stay till two or three if he wants them to, if they've got crabs. But, I ain't going to try to do that much. [Laughter]

KF: [Laughter] Ok. Urn, what do you remember about some of the strikes that happened?

LB: I wouldn't out here on that time. I was in Washington then. I've heard them talk about it you know but...

KF: What do people usually say about them?

LB: Well I don't know, they're talking about you know how it happened and everybody walked out on them and things like that but I wasn't here at that time.

KF: Were you here for the thirty-three storm?

LB: No, I was still in Washington then. No the thirty-three

KF: The thirty-three, yeah the thirty-three tide.

LB: Oh that was over at, when I was living at, just a child then I was only ten years old, and it come up all in the house and to about the seventh step going up the stairs. We all were upstairs, couldn't get down. And I can remember all of our furniture and all being so muddled the next morning you know when it's all gone down. I remember that.

KF: What did you all have to do?

LB: Well we had to stay upstairs till it went down, then we had to scrub that all up and get that mud and stuff out of there. Because it was just like, you know mud, everything. But we made it.

KF: Well when you were working at the crab house and uh, your first husband was crabbing and working, what did you use your money for that you earned at the crab house.

LB: Well it wasn't that much. I mean like, you know like I said, mother may have given me about nickle for what I made or ten cents, something like that. Because she had to work to help pay the bills too. You ain't get very much, of course a nickle would have bought a lot then.

KF: And how about when you got older, when you were uh, working and married?

LB: Well we come over and we had to get a house to live in, we had to pay rent. You know it still takes money to do everything with. So

KF: So your money went to paying bills and ...?

LB: Yeah. Keep that straight so we wouldn't go in the hole. Because in the winter, sometimes it was bad and you couldn't get out for you know a month or two. And it's all frozed up and all. And we did make crab pots too.

KF: Oh you did?

LB: Um-hmmm. That's hard work too.

KF: Well I've never seen anybody make one, how do you make a crab pot?

LB: Well if you'd come a little earlier I would have took you down to the field here, right across from Jay's? That big white house? He makes crab pots every day. Art Phillips. And if you did, get to Jay's all you got to do is just look right down there, it's a big white house. With black shutters on it. And he'll show you, you talking about somebody can make a pot, they'll go so fast you won't be able to see him. He, they make about fifty a day. But he'd love for you stand there and watch him make them.

KF: Now how much did you all sell your crab pots for?

LB: Oh gol, I don't remember. I'd say maybe eight or nine dollars. Each. And I guess now they're probably forty or fifty dollars apiece. I don't know, because I don't have anybody crabbing or anything.

KF: Ok. What's uh, what's one of your favorite memories of working in the crab house? Anything stand out for you?

LB: No, not really. I like it best when we have goo, big crabs and be able to pick them, that makes a difference.

KF: Now how often do you get big crabs to pick these days?

LB: Well sometimes maybe once a week, sometimes a certain time in the season maybe it'll be about three weeks in a row we'll have all big ones. And that's fun.

KF: Why, why is that fun?

LB: Because they're so big you know, when you, when you clean up a crab, get the meat in the can, you can see your can come right up. But you pick them little ones like that you know, what have you got? Two or three little pieces of meat not as big as your finger. [Chuckles] So that makes a difference too.

KF: Oh, is there a time of the year when the crabs are easier to pick?

LB: Oh yeah, about in June and July and August. Well September ain't too bad, but they're starting to get you know under the water and getting hard then, like them sooks and all ...ohhh! Them fall sooks they call them, and they are really tough.

KF: Is it hard to pull the backs off or cut the ... ?

LB: Yes. It's hard to pull that off and it's harder to cut them. But they got a lot of meat in them, lots of meat.

KF: Now one thing we've been asking people is about um, injuries that might happen at work. Have you ever seen anybody get any injury or cut or anything like that? You got one.

LB: I had a pair of tennis shoes on, and they'd just scrubbed the floor, and I think it was a little bit of soap on it, it could have been, or it could have just been the water, because you know how tennis shoes will slide. And I slid across the floor. And they had a metal piece that by now they've took it down, and it cut my hand all through here. I had to have stitches all in that. And it, and then two or three days later I realized I couldn't raise my arm, and I tore the whole rotary cup out of my arm. And I had to have it operated on, and but I've got it working all right now. But it's, well they've put good floors in now. It used to be them slippery floors and you know what that is, like ice you walking on. And he, they could have never stayed in business if they hadn't fixed that floor because them girls would have killed themselves as fast as they go. [Laughter]

KF: [Laughter]

LB: But then it was nothing but, like I said that clear cement, and then they soaked it down, and then tennis shoes just slipped from under me and I went down. So, but now they've got them, did you notice the floors in there?

KF: No I didn't, un-uh.

LB: They're more like a, like something like tar, but it's got little, like little bumps in it all over it. So you know, so you won't fall. Now I think just about every factory's got it now. But it's a really big difference.

KF: And what do you do when you hurt yourself, because I know nobody has insurance?

LB: Oh yeah, *they* have it, see that was Workmen's Comp. Oh yeah they paid it.

KF: And do you all joke Jay a lot? Do you kid him a lot?

LB: Oh yeah, he's a nice boss. We get mad with him sometimes but we, or we pretend we are. Yeah he is a nice boss. We don't have any trouble with him. He'll just, if I come home early, he'll just pick up the phone, [imitating a man's voice] "Wha'the hell matter with you today! That you gone home!" He thinks I ought to stay there like them young girls. But I don't pay no attention to him.

KF: Well what was it like the first summer the Mexican girls were here?

LB: Well the first summer I think they were a little rough because you know none of them hadn't come over here, and they, I guess they felt like they had freedom and everything and, they just wanted, I don't know what it was, but after that they started coming and we never had no problem or nothing out of them. And a lot of our girls I guess has been here five or six years, same ones. But that first crowd, I guess that was the first crowd that

ever hit, you know, the United States, and man, they said they were really rough. [Chuckles] But I mean they were all right down the factory, we didn't have no trouble with them. But, you know, people say, "I seen them last night" and "I seen them last night" and ... so, I don't know. But they're really good girls.

KF: Well what do you think it takes to make a good crab picker?

LB: I guess just knowing how to clean them up you know and get the meat out. That's just about the main thing, and then experience, you got to, you can't come in there in a day and do it, and that's what I can't understand about the Mexicans. They can come in one day and if you'd set there and watch them, they're pulling the crab all apart and pulling the meat out of it with his, with their fingers and everything. And the next week they're weighing more than the other girls are weighing. In a week's time they can do it. And the, and you stand there then and watch them, they know exactly what they're doing and everything. They're just smart people, and they're willing to work. But they do, they pick pretty meat and they get it every bit out because Pete goes around and checks the trash every now and then, **see** if there's any parts of crab left in it you know.

KF: Oh, ok. What happens if he finds some?

LB: He brings it back to you and shows you. [Chuckles]

KF: And what happens if somebody starts um, picking through the crabs.

LB: Well see they bring a, a big tub full in and put in your bin. For you to pick. Now the onlyiest way somebody would pick over them, like if me and you were working side by side, and if you wanted to pick the pick ones you know and kind of throw the little ones back, then say, they call that "picking over them". I don't like to pick with nobody like that. I like for them to pick their own, leave mine alone. But that's the onlyiest way they bring them in, two tubs at a time, you know one in each hand, so they just, everybody's picking, they put a tub right in front of them. So you know there's no picking over.

KF: Have you ever worked anywhere that that happened?

LB: Well we used to have a man down here, that's before Jay ever took over or anything, and he was chasing a couple of women, he was awful looking but he chased a couple of women. And they'd say, "He know where to put that shovel." [Laughter] You know you can, can maybe take four or five this way and then move it, and see four or five over there and pick them up, and they'd say, "He knows what he's doing." But I, I don't think it happens down there now. You might get one tub don't look as good as the next tub but far as picking the out that's going to happen any time. Like if you were a crabber and you went one place and I was a crabber and we both land the same time, well your good ones would be with my bad ones, if, you know if that's the way it worked, so.

KF: Right. Now can you tell a difference between picking like uh, the North Carolina crabs and the....?

LB: They're different from ours. They're not bad but, sometimes, you know we get good crabs from down there, but nothing's like our crabs.

KF: Well what's so special about the Maryland crabs?

LB: I don't know. They's just like the Chesapeake Bay oysters, you always hear people say that knows anything about oysters, "If it come from the Chesapeake Bay, it's wonderful." But I mean those crabs are good, don't get me wrong, like Delaware and all, but you can tell the difference in them. Because it, in the main time of the season, if they're cooked right, which way ours has always been cooked right, the meat will fall right out of them and, it's really a pleasure to work then.

KF: Well do you ever have days when you just can't pick anything?

LB: Yes. [Chuckles] Yes I have, little I days I haven't gone in. Now I think everybody has that though on any kind of job, you know, sometimes you just feel like, "Well I don't want to go today." You see if we work all summer, then we get to sign for unemployment in the winter, so that helps us in the winter. It's nice, when you can go to work when you want, come home when you want. But see the Mexicans don't do that. They come to work when we do, and when Jay says you pick till one or one-thirty or two o'clock, they never say anything about going home,

KF: And why do you think it is that um, only women pick crabs?

LB: They got two or three men does do it.

KF: Here at, at Phillip's?

LB: No, not at Phillip's. But the factory up the road a little bit, um, Ruark's, well he just got one cleans up crabs, but Harry's got one, Harry Phillips, that's on down, before you turn, when you're coming down the road, instead of turning to go to Salty's, right on straight down, he has a factory, and he has a man that picks crabs in there. Oh ok. Oh and Billy Ruark's got a Mexican man that picks crabs, they say he can beat every one of the Americans up there.

KF: Which house does Billy Ruark own?

LB: Be the next one up the road, on your right hand side when you leave here and go up, it's on your right hand side. About a mile.

KF: Ok. But there aren't a whole lot of men that pick crabs.

LB: No.

KF: Why do you think that is?

LB: I don't know, Well they like the water so that's where they're at most of the time. We got one girl down there, her husband comes in and cleans them up for her when he's not on the water.

KF: What are some of the um, jokes that you all tell?

LB: Well I can't think of a joke but most of the while we'll say one. But, I mean even that last year wouldn't be much, because I said there was only three of us Americans left. And the rest of them was all Mexicans and you don't like to say things they don't understand because, you know they might think you're talking about them or something. So we, if we say anything, we all, I mean all the Mexicans and all know what we're saying and talking about. Because it's got to be hard, I, I wouldn't want to go to Mexico and live. No.

KF: Do you all do stuff with the Mexican pickers after work or anything?

LB: No, not really, if I'm, like if I'm going up and buy some fruit or something up the road, if I see one of them on the street, I'll stop and get them, take her there, when they're through up there, they'll come home with me. And things like that. But, no, and Jay takes them to town once a week, let them shop. And, I think they just, you know, that's all they do, just go to store and get something or something like that. Or after going home from work and I get, some of them lives up the road later when they come, so if I'm going in town or anything and I see them I stop and pick them up and take them home. But, I mean, no we don't go around with them.

KF: Now have you had any of the Mexican food that they cook?

LB: Yes a couple of times but, I told them, I'd like to have some enchiladas made, and then they made some kind of rice one time, they put it in these corn husks and fixed it like rice pudding and that was delicious. But, they cook a lot of grease in their stuff. [Laughter] Golly! They used to bring a, that's before you know they stopped eating, they would come downstairs and bring this plate of beans or something, and after they'd eat it that grease would be that thick in the bottom of that thing. But I love Mexican food. Oh yes!

KF: Did you love it before they came?

LB: Oh yes. Um-hmmm. Oh yes.

KF: You like the spicy food.

LB: I do.

KF: Well what about cooking crabs. How do you uh, what kind of recipes do you uh, cook with crabs?

LB: Well I haven't cooked one for so many years I wouldn't even know. That's right.

Well most of the time, before we start, Jay'll have us come down you know and eat all the crabs we want the day before. And, I mean, he don't care if you, well now they won't even let you eat a piece of meat to the table or nothing, but he wouldn't say nothing if, you know, you picked a little bit and went in and had it for your breakfast, he wouldn't say nothing about that. So. But they're good. You like crabs?

KF: I love crabs.

LB: Oh, good.

KF: It's been very um, hard sometimes doing this uh, talking about crabs all the time

LB: Uh-huh, I know!

KF: After you're done you just want to eat one! [Laughter]

LB: Mmmm. That's what I told them, I said I don't want to go to work, but I could really stand something to eat! [Laughter]

KF: [Laughter] Well how does a crab picker retire?

LB: They don't. Till they're getting so old they can't do it no more or die. That's about what they do.

KF: Is that what you'll do?

LB: I guess, if I'm playing bingo I will. I told them I said the day I give up bingo, you'll know I've left the factory.

KF: And what is it about bingo that you like so much.

LB: Oh I don't know, but I love it. [Chuckles] I guess it's like anything else, wherever you get, you know, make your mind up to, that's, that's what you like. And I do, I love bingo.

KF: Do you play up at Cambridge or... ?

LB: We go to Church Creek on Tuesday nights, Easton on Friday nights, and Trappe on Saturday night. Well that's a long way to go play bingo! But, we used to go six and seven nights a week.

KF: Oh you're kidding me.

LB: Oh no I'm not! They got, it just got too much. It'll take you about thirty-five, thirty-eight dollars a night to play. But Easton, not too long ago, about two months ago, they have a little card you put your own numbers in, seven of your own numbers, it's called "U-

Pick", like if you pick seven, you pick from one to seventy-five, and put seven in a box, and that pot over to Easton went twenty-seven thousand dollars. And one lady got it after it went that high.

KF: Wow.

LB: She was lucky, I'll say. Mmmm.

KF: Who do you play bingo with?

LB: I have a friend up the road goes, and up the road further another friend goes and then I pick up one in Cambridge, and she goes with us.

KF: And are they all crab pickers?

LB: Just one of them. Just one, the other one, the one in town, no, she don't work. And the other one up the road, she don't work either, so, it's just me and Francis that goes. I mean that has to work. Because she's worked every day this week. For Billy Ruark.

KF: Oh she has.

LB: Yes! They go to work about three in the morning.

KF: Yeah, I talked with somebody and they said they went to work at three o'clock in the morning.

LB: And then you call her at twelve o'clock, she'll say I didn't stay long today. I said I go five and I'm home before twelve! But she goes three and sometimes one o'clock when she gets home. So, I don't know.

KF: Well tell me about some of the um, some of the smells of the crab house.

LB: We really haven't had any since we built this new factory, it used to be the tide come in the old factory, if it's a good high tide, it come in the factory, and they'd have to tie a tub to the chair to keep from it floating away for our claws, and we couldn't get up and go nowhere we had to set there with our feet propped up on the board you know that goes across it? But, but it hasn't been in.... You had it come in there about half way one day, that's the onlyiest time I've knowed it being in this new factory. And that was a bad storm.

KF: Can't do much but pick crabs if you've got, you know, water underneath them.

LB: I know we couldn't get up and weigh the meat or nothing because we couldn't, you know, get up! [Laughter] But it soon went down so, they were all right. But he's got a nice factory down there now, it's really nice. Plenty of room, even with about thirty pickers, there's still plenty of room, everybody's not crowded up and all.

KF: Have you worked places where it was all crowded up and there were lots of people?

LB: No but, like I was saying, they say up at Billy's, now I don't know if you've ever been in there now but he's got a awful small factory and he's got thirty-something pickers in there. So you know, well I don't know, because we got a big factory, and I think when they're all there we may have thirty-one or thirty-two. So I don't know where he's putting them all in that little place.

KF: And why do you prefer to work at Phillip's?

LB: Well I've been there since about nineteen, probably nineteen forty-five. Only when I said I quit and went to Washington, and worked up there maybe eight, nine, ten years, something like that, and then I come back and I've been here ever since.

KF: So you must remember when they opened their first restaurant.

LB: I can't say I do. But I imagine it was the one was in Ocean City. Because he lived right down here you know up on the corner here. So this is where he was from and all. He's got some men now I doubt if he knows himself what he's got. [Chuckles]

KF: Let me go back to um, to injuries. Are there any other uh, illnesses or injuries that crab pickers get?

LB: Well they get crab poisoning sometimes in their hand, you know their hands, right through their fingers, will break out real red, then it'll get real sore. But I don't even think they have too much of that no more, I know there's one girl had it last year, and she had to have cream and all put on it, you know, so that she got through work so it would heal up. But I know it used to be bad but, like I said, maybe it's something they use in the water when you wash your hands every time you know you get up and weigh and everything. So that could stop it too. But, other than that, I don't know no injuries.

KF: What do you think other people should know about *crab* picking? People that don't know anything about it.

LB: [Chuckles] You ever go to where they have a crab feast and watch some of the actions they do? [Chuckles] You just feel like you want to get up and go over there and clean them up for them and you know pick them for them and say now eat this, but then I got thinking, I think they like to do that.

KF: Smash it with their little hammers?

LB: Uh-huh, and pick that out by theirselves and all, I think they like it, because if they didn't, they would ask somebody you....

End Side A

Begin Side B

LB: Well then sometimes they just pull the back shell off, and, I don't know how they get the deadman fingers off, but they cut them in half, first thing they do is break them in half And see that's harder to pick, you, if you had to break every one and cut it then, you couldn't do it. But that's smashing and... But I guess they enjoy them better like that, if they don't know no better, well I think it, if you'd tell them, it's not that hard to learn. But can you pick a crab?

KF: Well I did have somebody show me how to do it on Tuesday. I'm not real fast.

LB: Well you don't think to be, do you?

KF: No, not really, but I did get all the meat out.

LB: Oh good! Would you like to do it for a living?

KF: I don't know, I'd like to see what it's like.

LB: Well you should come one, down one day in the summer time and just come down and hang around the factory and just go, go around and watch some of them girls pick. It would really be fun to do it.

KF: I was going to do that, I, I told Jay and Pete that I'd come by and see uh ...

LB: I mean you can just walk around and talk to them all, all you got to do is say hello and if they don't talk, they won't take the time to talk. But um, you know, we'll all be in there and you can watch how its done. Might appreciate it a little bit better. You'd say oh I don't think I want to do this for a living! [Laughter]

KF: [Laughter] So not everybody's cut out to be a crab picker?

LB: Well I guess if they wanted to be, they could. But, we've got one lady she's awful slow, she'll work all day and she'll probably get fifteen, eighteen pound. She's slow as she was from the city. So. But the rest of them's pretty good.

KF: Now how many pounds do you pick a day usually?

LB: Whew. Maybe twenty or twenty-five now, then I quit. [Laughter] But, one or two days, if the crabs are real big you know, and I feel all right, I'll stay till about twelve-thirty or one. He'll come in, "Yeah I know why you're here today. Crabs are big." [Laughter] But, I don't know. [Sound of phone ringing.] Let me answer this. Excuse me.

KF: Sure.

[Sound of tape being turned off and then back on.]

LB: See that'd be the best way you would have to learn something, then you'd see what goes on, and see how they pick it and all and you'd really enjoy it.

KF: Yeah, I'd like to come and take pictures.

LB: They don't care. They don't care. I say then you do that and you watch what goes on, and see how nice everybody gets along, that's better than anybody telling you. You see for yourself.

KF: So when's your busiest month, June? July?

LB: Oh... Probably about July.

KF: And do you all pick uh, any Maryland crabs last year? I know it was a bad season.

LB: Oh yeah. Um-hmmm, yeah.

KF: I talked with someone said they didn't pick any Maryland crabs last year at all.

LB: No we had Maryland crabs.

KF: Well what else should I know about crab picking Lou?

LB: I guess that's about all I know.

KF: [Laughter]

LB: [Laughter] Just get up and go to work and come home.

KF: What do you do when you come home?

LB: Down and take a shower and fall out! [Laughter]

KF: [Laughter]

LB: Oh, I don't care if you only go and pick ten pounds, you just feel all achey and stuff when you get home. I guess it's my age you know, I mean I'm not saying you young ones do it, but it is hard work.

KF: What's the hardest thing about it?

LB: I guess cleaning up, you know cleaning the crab up. Because you are forever moving both arms you know and all and they get stiff too, and your back gets a-hurting. But that's for any job, anything'll do it. So. Then you come down, stay just an hour, and you know just go around from table to table and watch the different ways they clean them up and the

way they pick them. Some of them will cut both tops off and lay it in their pan, and pick the bottom, then they'll go back and pick the tops. See it's all different ways, I say if you'd come down there and watch, you know went from table to table, they'd think you're an inspector. [Laughter]

KF: Well I've had that before. [Laughter]

LB: [Laughter] If they think you're an inspector, they're going to behave themselves, they ain't going to do nothing. But I mean if you're just down there, now Shirley come down, her and Brice [sp?], you know the owner, he would, I mean she would come down at least once a year and spend one day in with us picking. Yes she would, but she didn't last year, I don't know what happened. But every year she always takes one day, and then she brought her granddaughter one day and taught her how to pick it. Of course she only cleaned the fingers off and cut the tops off, so all she had to do was put the meat in there. [Chuckles] But some of them girls, they all pick different. Some of them will clean up about four or five crabs and pick the bottom and put the top in their pan, then after they get, a little pile like that, they'll start picking them. And so, so about everybody picks different.

KF: Who do you think is the best picker at Phillip's right now?

LB: I think it's the Mexican they got there. We had one white girl, she picks, she picks beautiful meat, but she's slow too. She'd only, well she don't come till about seven, and then she gets about fifteen pounds a day and that's all. But it's a couple of them Mexicans, they say they don't have a piece of bone nowhere in their meat. And this one girl, one girl over there, Mimi they call her, and she picks a crab, she cuts the top off, instead of cutting the top, you know getting the meat out, she pulls it every bit with her fingers out. Her little fingers sometimes are all, you know all blood raw where she picked so much. But she picks every top, that's what I was going to say, if you watch, you can see the different way people picks. But she gets every piece of meat out, and them little teenie fingers... [Chuckles] Yeah...

KF: I guess it would help to have little fingers.

LB: Well I don't know, looks like that'd be hard work though all day long picking that meat out of that.... Mmmm! And sometimes them things are tough. But she still does it, she picks every piece out with her fingers. And we cut it you know and just get the meat out then, but she don't. And she's about, yeah she is one of the fastest in there. None of them make their hundred dollars a day.

KF: Is that how much they usually make?

LB: They make over their hundred lot of days, and they have to stay there. And the crabs are good anyhow. Time as Pete gets all the meat weighed, you know it's about time for him to start again. Because they're fast.

f KF: Well how does it work if you, let's say you fill up your tub, and then you take it up to Pete?

LB: We weigh every, every, whenever he weigh, every hour and a half he weighs, so that whatever you've got, you weigh. Every hour and a half he weighs, that gives you a chance to get about, average six pounds, sometimes if the crabs are not too good, you're not going to get six pounds, so you weigh five or whatever. But he generally weighs every hour and a half right on schedule. And he'll start you know with one on the end and just work his way around the tables, and he knows, you know what everybody's weighing, and where they're at then.

KF: Oh, yeah I think I will have to come back down.

LB: You'd really enjoy it, you really we would. We have busloads come in there sometimes.

KF: That's right! Now how do you all like it when people come in by the busloads?

LB: Well we don't really mind it, it used to be they'd come to everybody's table you know, maybe ten here and ten there and ten the other. Well the boys could not get the trash in to, they couldn't empty the claws, we couldn't get back if we were quitting to wash our tubs or nothing, so then they started to make that, getting them all to stand up on the corner you know so they could still watch everything was going on, so that was a lot better. But, it didn't bother me. But they do come, sometime we had three or four in two months. Well they buy meat and then they have souvenirs and all down there now so, they buy some of them.

KF: Now what kind of questions do they ask you, or do they ask you?

LB: They don't ask the pickers, none, or they may say sometime it used to be, like I said last winter he had them just stand up on the, the corner, but they'd say, "How many crabs can you pick?" Or "How many crabs picked for a pound?" Now how you know how many crabs it takes for a pound? They could be that size or they could be that size! But, everybody's nice to them. They always come back. You want to tell your boss you want one day off and you're just going to prowl, and see what you can find out. [Chuckles]

KF: [Laughter] Well it would, this is my job, you know it wouldn't be a day off for me to come down and visit.

LB: Well that would be a nice day though, then you could write down what you wanted to write down. You know what I mean, by the time you're seeing it yourself. I'll bet you'd enjoy it.

KF: Yeah, yeah, I think I would. I think I'll probably come down. I try to visit a lot of the plants actually this summer and uh, see everybody picking.

LB: Yeah, because everybody's different. One time I went down to Hoopersville, the Vietnamese was working? I never seen nobody clean up crabs like they did in my life. I don't even know how to explain they did it, but they said they got the meat out of them.

KF: Really. Where was this?

LB: Down to urn, I can't Lindy's down the Hoopersville. But they, they're not there no more, he let them go. When the Mexicans come, he let them go. But they were coming from Washington, D.C, ever day to pick. But they, they're knives were just like a razor. And they cut it some way, and then they cut the top off off them, you know like it was falling over or something, and then they got the meat out. But they didn't pick the top. They cut it some way so they didn't pick the top. It was amazing how they did it. I mean even if you went to every factory, I'll bet you every one of the women is just about picking different. Now a friend of mine, when she cleans up the crab, she leaves that first knuckle on there, and she cuts it and leaves that knuck, and then cuts the rest of them off, then she goes on the other side and cuts the four and leaves that knuck on it. I mean, she gets all the meat, but, I guess I turn my crab around when I clean it up, I don't cut, you know the back, the one back this way, and that's why that knuck is in my way, I don't like him, the way she does it, and there's a lot of them does it. So as I say that's another different way. Them Mexicans picks a pretty piece of lump too. They're whole can is just big pieces of lump.

KF: Now you guys have to separate the meat out into lump and regular and special? And claw?

LB: Yeah.

KF: And do you all crack your own claws?

LB: No we don't crack any claws. Now four or five days last year, I just felt like I wanted to crack some claws and they were pretty and I cracked my, I forgot how many pound I cracked then. I think it was about seventy or something like that, because it was, you saved them big fingers. You know what they are, and the crab is real like that, and you crack that claw, man you got a big piece of meat! And it don't take much for a pound of them, so that's where you make your money. But them little claws like that. Mmmm.

KF: So who usually cracks all the claws?

LB: We used to have a girl that cracked over there, but her mother just died and she ain't, I don't think she's coming back. So we don't give them, I mean they sell them. They box them up and ship them. And I think one or two times last summer he needed meat so bad, he got the Mexicans after they got through picking early, for to set there and crack claws, and I think, you know they cracked about ninety pound, all of them that day. But they don't like claw cracking.

KF: No?

LB: No.

KF: Why not?

LB: I don't know, they said they just didn't like it.

KF: Ok. Well I guess that's about it till I come see you in action.

LB: I hope you do! I really hope you do!

KF: I will. I'll probably be back uh, back down this way many times this summer, I want to come and visit.

LB: When are you coming back down here again?

KF: Well I'm coming back to talk to Mr. Ruark, I haven't talked to him yet. When am I talking to him? At the end of this month.

LB: I was going to say, Art might still be making pots, because he'll soon be putting the pots overboard then he quits making.

KF: Really, huh. Well I'll be back down this way next Thursday.

LB: Well that's when you can come down, after you do talk to him, or you don't talk to him, just pull up that white house with the black shutters, and he'll be right there in that garage and you can just toot the horn and let him come there and you can ask him. And he'll, "Sure, come on!" And you'll enjoy that too.

KF: Yeah, is he there in the afternoons too, or just...

LB: Yeah mostly all afternoons.

KF: Ok, ok, I'll have to do that.

LB: Just stop right out there, the shed's right above the house. Where they make them, and nine times out of ten he's setting right there making them. Him and his son both.

KF: Huh, ok. Ok, well that sounds fine. All right.

LB: What's your name?

KF: Kelly.

LB: I thought you said Kelly, I started to say Kelly and then I said no, better not.

KF: That's it. That's it. I'll leave you a card. And I, I realized I usually have a release

form for people to sign um, for the tape, um, and I've realized I've left it. Um, what I do need to do though is get your mailing address. Ok.

LB: Eleven twenty-four, Keyes [sp?] Road.

KF: Fishing Creek.

LB: Two one ... two one three ... oh my God ... two one three two, three, fou, oh my God you know this is awful,

KF: [Laughter]

LB: I don't want to make a mistake and give it to you. [Sounds of movement] Two one six, uh two, uh three Two one six three four.

KF: All right.

LB: Now you finished for tonight?

KF: Yeah, got to drive home now.

LB: Where do you live?

KF: Well um, I live actually on the Western Shore.

LB: No! You got a long ride!

KF: Ah, it's about a hour. It's not too bad. It's not bad at all.

LB: You sound like you're late getting home every night then.

KF: Well sometimes it's not so bad and sometimes dinner's made when I get there so

LB: Oh good! That's worth being late for!

KF: That's right!

LB: Thank you.

KF: And my phone number's on the back if you need to call me about anything.

LB: Ok.

KF: And uh

End of Tape