

Interview Log

Interviewee: Jim Dodson **Tape #:** OH139

Interviewer: Kelly Feltault **# of Tapes:** 1

Date: November 11, 1999 **# of Sides:** 2

Location: Byrd's Seafood
Crisfield, Maryland

Topic: Crab Picking Project

Corresponding Photography Log #: yes, see Byrd's series

Comments: Great tape quality! Phonetic Spellings: John Caitlin, Joyce Fitchet, Arlene Worton.

BEGIN SIDE A

J.D.: -- picking, or if he's, and this is mostly in the wintertime when they do this, you know, because a lot of `em go up there to pick a few crabs.

K.F.: Okay. Yeah, okay. He didn't tell me that yesterday. He had about three people in there yesterday.

J.D.: Yeah, but during the wintertime if he gets more people, then he like gets some of my pickers, he gets some of the ones there `cause see we'll stop picking. I'm on my last, you know, getting ready to quit now picking.

K.F.: Right, okay.

SPEAKER: Morning.

J.D.: This is my dad. He's -- daddy, this is -- what's your name, first name?

K.F.: Hi. Kelly.

J.D.: Kelly, yeah, from --

SPEAKER: Kelly? Nice knowing you.

K.F.: Good to meet you.

J.D.: She's from the Maritime Museum in St. Michaels.

SPEAKER: Oh.

J.D.: Yeah.

K.F.: Yeah. We're doing a history of the crab picking industry. So we're talking to folks who are still in it.

(Laughter.)

J.D.: Which is a --

K.F.: There's a few who aren't.

J.D.: Yeah. Which is a fading industry, fading fast.

K.F.: Right, right.

J.D.: Most certainly is.

SPEAKER: I would say from year to year, it might get better next year.

J.D.: Yeah. It's not going to get any better, I can tell you that, way things look.

K.F.: Well when did you all get into this business?

J.D.: Well Byrd's was an old company here from, I guess, in the 50's.

Clifford Byrd is the one that started the pasteurization of the crab meat. He couldn't find -- he didn't even want to get into the crab picking industry. He just wanted to have this process that he figured out how to do to preserve crab meat. You know, when there was an abundance of it, he could can it, and then it could be used. And it's the same process that is used in the industry today. He had a patent on it until 1976. And in 1976, the patent went off, and then the whole industry went and did the pasteurization. He did

all the pasteurization of the crab meat in Crisfield for all the packing houses here years ago.

K.F.: So they would ship their meat down here, and --

J.D.: And he would pasteurize it, and they would send it back. And they worked with Continental Can, and there's the article that I gave you in reference to Continental Can.

K.F.: Right.

J.D.: But in 1970 something, I don't know what date it was on there --

K.F.: This is '88.

J.D.: Yeah. But I think they took some crab meat, they took 50 pounds of crab meat, and they opened the crab meat up, two cans every year for 25 years. And at the end of 25 years, they found the crab meat to be good, free of bacteria. But the cans were a little rusty and things like that. But it was, the crab meat was fine inside of it from the process that, you know, Byrds did.

K.F.: Right. So he never really had pickers here then, he was just canning meat.

J.D.: No, he had pickers also.

K.F.: Oh, he did have pickers.

J.D.: Uh-huh (Affirmative). He had a picking house here. He had pickers, but he canned all the meat, the excess meat that they couldn't sell that people wanted him to do. And then he taught 'em and things like that, how to do it their self.

K.F.: Oh, okay. So how did you come into this?

J.D.: Well when he passed away, it was left to the family. And then the family came in, and the family thought they had to have Mercedes and airplanes and things like that, so they went -- they filed for bankruptcy, and then the bank sold it off. And we bought it in 1994. 1994, we bought it at an auction sale. And we came in here and started operating it. Which was -- and we came here with the man who worked for Clifford Byrd, John Caitlin. He worked here for 20 some years with Mr. Byrd and learned. So actually, John Caitlin was the one running this house.

K.F.: Oh, okay.

J.D.: And so he taught me how to do the processing, and taught me the buying and the selling of the crab meat industry.

K.F.: What had you done before you got into this?

J.D.: Restaurant. I had the Captain's Galley Restaurant in Crisfield.

K.F.: Right.

J.D.: And the reason we bought it, there's another -- I had a restaurant in Ocean City, Captain's Galley Two, and so we bought that in reference to having a supply of crab meat is the reason that we bought this crab house. But the basket trade has really affected the industry a lot today, you know. It's just too much demand on the live crab market. And it just -- and then, of course, your pickers they're getting older all the time. And there's no young ones coming into the -- so then you have to go out and seek foreign labor to help you out to get through, you know, abundance of time, which you have a short window that you have to get this crab meat picked, so you have to go out and get some extra help.

K.F.: Now I noticed you did have a couple of -- are they Mexican?

J.D.: Yeah. I had eight, and five of `em left, and there's three that I had left in here when you were here yesterday.

K.F.: Now are they H2B workers, or --

J.D.: Yeah.

K.F.: Okay.

SPEAKER: I got to go to town. Well it's nice to have met you.

K.F.: Nice to have met you too.

SPEAKER: Your girl's down there waiting for you.

J.D.: Who?

SPEAKER: Is it Joyce?

J.D.: Is she waiting for me, or is she waiting for Beverly?

SPEAKER: Oh, Beverly's supposed to come in.

J.D.: Yeah, Uh-huh (Affirmative).

SPEAKER: Oh, I didn't know that.

J.D.: Yeah.

SPEAKER: Okay.

K.F.: And how long have you had H2B workers?

J.D.: Two years.

K.F.: That's interesting. `Cause when I interviewed I.T. Todd, he said there weren't any Mexican pickers in Crisfield at all.

J.D.: Yeah. No, I had `em at Handy's. I got `em last year. And then Handy's used `em during the soft crab season, and then I used them at the -- when it came abundance of crabs. And, in fact, I got the paperwork right here. I got to call them today in reference to international labor and getting `em lined up for next year.

K.F.: Now do you always have the same girls come in? Is that a lot easier?

J.D.: The last two years I have, yes. So this year, I've had 10 come up, you know, and then, of course, like one left, so you end up with nine. So this year, I'm going to get 12, add two more to it.

K.F.: Now who's showing `em how to pick?

J.D.: Some of the black ladies here that were here. And really, some of `em got very good at it, you know, before they left. You know. I mean they stand right there. You know, most of `em don't even sit, they stand. They don't even sit down, they stand up and pick the crab. And they don't talk to each other, you know. They don't go out and get coffees, they don't go out and smoke cigarettes, you know. Nothing for any of `em to get up, leave their table, and go on down the street, get a sandwich and turn around and come back and sit back down and pick. I mean, you know, but they stay right there. And they're here at, you know, quarter to six instead of 6:00. They're ready to go to work. The other ones come in at 7:30, 8:00. This is why you have to go and find other work -- I mean other workers to, you know, the labor force is terrible in this industry, you know. Because nobody wants to do it. And, like I say, a good crab picker can make a decent wage, a decent wage. We have one girl here, she can pick 50 pound a day. A day.

K.F.: And who is that?

J.D.: Joyce Fitchet. She was --

K.F.: Joyce, right.

J.D.: Yeah. Uh-huh (Affirmative). And Hazel Cropper is another one. You know, either one of them two, if they sit down and they have good crabs to work on, they can pick 50 pound a day, make \$100 a day picking crabs. And that's an eight-hour day. That's not -- you know, so. But they just don't want to do it. And now we got to contend with, I guess, they just come up with passing the bill for minimum wage again. So there's another dollar that's got to come back into the work. You know, some of these women, you know, so now you're going to have to raise the price up instead of \$2 a pound, it's going to have to be 2.30 or something like that to get `em up to minimum wage. So this is going to affect back into the --

K.F.: Right, price of your product.

J.D.: Price of your product. Then you got the foreign crab meat that you're trying not to, you know, that you're fighting against it today for their cheap meat that they're bringing in. Their labor cost didn't go up \$1 an hour. It might've went up 10 cents a day, but it didn't go up \$1 an hour. It's really getting to be a tough industry to do anything with. And I guess really what keeps Byrd's going today is just the fact of the way the crab meat's picked, and what we do, and some of the good old faithful customers that we have

that want the crab meat product that we do here. So if you started a new crab product, you know, picking plant from scratch today, it would be hard for somebody to compete with the foreign market. It really would.

K.F.: How much do you think the foreign market, how much of this market do you think the foreign market has?

J.D.: It's really up there today. It's well over half. I know it's --

K.F.: Really?

J.D.: Oh, way over half. Yeah. Most certainly is.

(OFF THE RECORD BRIEFLY - TELEPHONE.)

K.F.: When you were saying that Mr. Caitlin really sort of taught you this business.

J.D.: Yeah, right.

K.F.: Well one of the things we're asking people is how did you learn the business? How did Mr. Caitlin teach you this business?

J.D.: Teach me how to buy crabs, quality crabs. Make sure that you bought your crabs in barrels instead of bushels, because if you buy `em in bushels, there's so many that can shortchange you with your bushels. So buy by weight, you know, then you know you're getting what you pay for. You know. And then you want to try to keep quality crabs. You don't want real old junky crabs, you know. You want a good quality crab. And that will have a better product, you know, to show at the end. And then he taught me how to pasteurize the crab meat under the technique that was taught by him. And, in fact, even today we do our crab meat a little bit different than the industry does.

K.F.: Really?

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

K.F.: Can you share that with me?

J.D.: No. No. That's just a little thing that was to keep Byrd's a little bit above somebody else's product is the reason that we do it, you know. I mean our product can last, just like you say, forever pretty well is the thoughts of, you know, the health department and what other, you know, Virginia Marine Science people, they looked at it also. But it's just a little technique that, you know, it's really not much, but it's something there that makes the difference.

K.F.: Industry secrets.

J.D.: Yes.

(Laughter.)

K.F.: What did he teach you about working with the pickers themselves?

J.D.: Just the pickers are, sort of like everybody in here is, related. It's all part of a family like you would have a family of say Jacksons here. Well you

would have, you know, the Jackson family. And then if the daughters got married with another name but they're still part of the same family like downstairs today picking in the Jackson family, we probably got about seven pickers because each family went to a certain crab house. And then their siblings followed in their steps to the time, you know. And the mothers would bring the kids in, you know, while they picked because they didn't have any babysitters or anything, and they let the kids come in and sit in the corner somewhere and crack claws.

K.F.: Right.

J.D.: So and this is how the kids learned, eventually, after they would crack claws in the summer, they would let `em start picking a few crabs. And this is how they got the status what they are. But today, you know, there's babysitters, and then the rules has changed so much with the health department of allowing people in. The labor laws, the whole nine yards. Which, you know, you have kids out here today that do want to work, all right. So they're not going to get the minimum wage by coming in here cracking claws, but at least it keeps them off the street. They're here with part of their family. And a lot of times when they come in, the kids take and crack the claws and they put their crab meat on their, let their mothers weigh the crab meat and it goes onto their mother's thing. So it's helping the household is really what it does.

K.F.: Right.

J.D.: But if you get caught doing that today, you know, then here you are, the labor laws and everything else, they're going to come down and want to fine you and everything else. So you just have to stop it, you know. The mother said can my daughter come in, you know, she's off of school today, or I have nobody to watch her, can she come in and crack some claws. And it's hard to tell `em no. But if you do let `em in, you know, then you have to watch out the door, make sure that nobody's coming or anything else, you know. But if the mother doesn't have a babysitter, then of course, then she can't work. So it's a catch-22.

K.F.: Yeah. It really is. That's one of the topics we've been asking people is about when the labor laws changed and what happened.

J.D.: Yeah. And so now you can not have the younger people coming in doing this because of the fact that this is why you don't get any experienced crab pickers anymore because they can't come in with their mothers to do it. So that's, so now you have to go out and get the foreign labor to bring `em in instead of, you know, here's some kids here, they wouldn't make it, but I mean that's a lot of money to them, you know, to do something.

K.F.: What are some of the other family groups that you have here, what other families?

J.D.: Well you have the Croppers. We had Maddocks. We had -- let's see, Cropper, Maddocks, Miles.

K.F.: M-O-L-L?

J.D.: M-I-L-E-S, Miles. Campbells, Byrds, and all these are, you know, the blacks, you know, they're not whites. Very few whites, you know, would pick crabs in this area. I don't know about -- I think Cambridge had a lot of white people.

K.F.: All of Dorchester County has a lot of whites.

J.D.: Yeah.

K.F.: The picking houses are very mixed.

J.D.: Yeah. But here, see, we have very few whites that do pick crabs.

K.F.: Why do you think that is?

J.D.: I don't know. I really don't. I have --

K.F.: `Cause they'll work the soft crabs, won't they?

J.D.: Yeah. They'll do the soft crabs, but they won't -- and, of course, then the blacks, they do work in the soft crabs. But not many, and very few males. I got, since I've been here, I've had two male pickers. I got one today, but I have had two, you know. Only just one. So there's very few of them around.

K.F.: Yeah.

J.D.: And they were, you know -- I mean they could pick crab meat. But they didn't want to do it either. Mostly, you know, you have your help working into the crab house, you know, is pretty well black. You know, you don't have any white ones working the floors and putting crabs up and things like that. But the cooking of the crabs is all done by the, you know, the blacks --

K.F.: The guys.

J.D.: Yeah, right. The guys. It's a guy thing.

K.F.: It's a guy thing.

J.D.: It's a guy thing.

K.F.: Okay. Well what is some of the equipment that you have here? Is it still original to the --

J.D.: The original equipment down here. We have equipment here that the old Continental Can was dated 1906. And they're still, they're still in working condition. Very few parts left for `em. If you need parts for `em, they have to be custom made, and go to the machine shop and make `em. And there's three of those here. And one of `em is 19 -- the earliest one is 1906, and the latest one, I think, is 1913.

K.F.: Wow. And that's the three that are right there in front --

J.D.: They're right in front. That's them. They've been here for the whole time, Just pieced together or something breaks on, there's another part put on `em, but they are the original ones that were here. So it still works fine. I mean they seal just as well as any new machine. In fact, they claim that they're better than the new machines. I haven't seen a new machine --

K.F.: I'm sure they are.

J.D.: -- so I have no comparison, you know, so I don't know. But the machines today, that type of machine's worth about \$50,000 new. So if you have to go buy a new one, but even used and refurbished like that is probably about 20,000 for a machine, each machine. And like here, we just need a big cooler here. We don't -- actually it's a freezer that got damaged in this past storm we had. But we put a freezer in with two compressors on it, but we set it at a temperature of 34 degrees to keep your crab meat at 34 degrees. But we only ran one compressor, but we had the other one hooked up in case something happened to that one. We'd convert right over and keep the temperature while the other one was fixed. And we had a freezer instead of a cooler because it would hold the temperature a lot better.

K.F.: Better.

J.D.: Yeah.

K.F.: Okay. Now is this building original to the --to Byrd's?

J.D.: Yeah. This building right here was built in 19 -- in the 30's is when this was, and it was an oyster house. Originally a oyster house.

K.F.: Did he do oysters?

J.D.: Yes. This is originally an oyster house. All in the back was -- they just brought the oysters in here, and dumped `em in there, they shucked `em here and went out the front door. It was called Eastern Shore Seafood. In fact, out front there's an old piece of concrete out there where somebody had the name in it. Part of the name, you can read the name, but it was called Eastern Shore, Eastern Shore Seafood, I think, or something. Eastern Shore something. But then when Mr. Byrd bought it back into the late 40's when he bought this building, that's when it was called Byrd's.

K.F.: Okay. Yeah, it really seems like the crab industry got started in the 40's here.

J.D.: Yeah, right. Yeah. `Cause it's 50 years Byrd's has been processing, I mean pasteurizing crab meat. So that's exactly when it came, somewhere about 1949.

K.F.: Okay. And what about all the brick buildings on the side here --

J.D.: All the old brick buildings here were part of the tomato industry. There used to be a railway that come down here right in front of the building. There was a railroad thing that came down. And all that was the Handy Corporation. See, Handy's wasn't always in soft crabs. See Handy's, that was -- John T. Handy was into the tomato packing business at times. So these were all tomato packing buildings down here along the sides.

K.F.: Okay. So even some of these brick buildings here were all tomatoes?

J.D.: Yeah, all tomatoes. It was all tomatoes.

K.F.: Oh, okay.

J.D.: And they would load the ships, and the railway cars full of, used to be down to the city dock right in front of the restaurant there.

K.F.: Right.

J.D.: Yeah, that was the old dock there that they had. And they used to load tomatoes, and oysters and crabs and crab meat onto the boats to take them like to Virginia or Baltimore. And then the railway cars would come here and take the stuff like to Philadelphia, and New York, and but it was a railroad track right out in front of the thing here. In fact, they just tore `em up not too long ago, all the railroad ties.

K.F.: Oh, really?

J.D.: Yeah, this past year.

K.F.: Oh, gosh. Okay.

J.D.: Yeah, when they put this new road in, they just stuck a new road in here.

K.F.: Okay (inaudible).

J.D.: Yeah.

(Laughter.)

J.D.: But that's what this was originally, a oyster house, and then it was converted over in `49 for picking. But at one time, they had, Byrd's had over 100 pickers in here, 100 crab pickers.

K.F.: In the room that's downstairs?

J.D.: In the room that's downstairs. See they had all the -- well it's set up now that they can hold 60. But back there years ago they had tables even along the side. See you had long sides.

K.F.: Okay.

J.D.: And they used to sell -- one of their biggest customers was the old A&P Company. I still have some of the old stamps from the A&P Company.

K.F.: Oh, you do?

J.D.: Yeah.

K.F.: Oh, okay.

J.D.: But they used to sell to the A&P, old Atlantic and Pacific Tea Company.

K.F.: Okay. What do you think is the hardest part of this business?

J.D.: The labor.

K.F.: The labor.

J.D.: Uh-huh (Affirmative). Getting -- because of the way that you buy crabs, a lot of times you can get crabs, but you don't know how many pickers you got coming.

K.F.: Right.

J.D.: Some days, you know, you might have 50 pickers. The next day, you might have 25 pickers. You don't have that consistency every day that you know that there's going to be 50 pickers down there. So that you know that you can go out and buy these crabs to have them picked. So each day that you -- how many did I pick today, you know, that's how you have to work this game. That's how many you have to try to buy. And sometimes you have a chance to buy it, well I can't use `em today. The next day you call and they go well, I sold `em. So then here you are, you know, you don't have enough for the next day. And that's a short day for `em to work.

K.F.: Well with the Mexican pickers now --

J.D.: Well at least you know that they're here every day.

K.F.: Right.

J.D.: And that you know that when you come in the morning, unless one of `em's sick, but I mean they're sick sick not to be here, that they're going to be there, you know that you got two tables covered in there that's going to be picking. Now you don't know about the table next to `em, or the one across there from `em, but you know them tables is going to be covered.

K.F.: Right. Well what are some of the challenges working with the Mexican pickers?

J.D.: Just the language. I mean I don't know the language. But usually there's enough that we can talk to `em I mean as far as showing `em things. And then, of course, we have the housing available right up the road here for `em. So --

K.F.: The cinder --

J.D.: This little housing complex.

K.F.: Cinder block.

J.D.: Right.

K.F.: Is that government, was that built by the government?

J.D.: No, no. We own that.

K.F.: Oh, you own those.

J.D.: Yeah. That's one of the things that you have to get these people up, that you have to house `em, you know, house `em.

K.F.: Has Byrd's always owned that housing?

J.D.: No. No, I bought that two years ago when we found out we have, the industry has to go to this here foreign labor. I mean there's no way of getting around it. It has to go there. If not, all of `em's going out. In 19, I have an old book at home, in fact if I go home, maybe I might get it for you and let you look at it, but there was 44 crab picking houses on the Eastern Shore.

There was -- I forget how many it was, but anyway, it's in this little book. But today, there's only three left. Three crab picking houses left. That's it.

K.F.: Here in Crisfield?

J.D.: In Crisfield. And at one time, there had to be 30 crab picking houses here in Crisfield.

K.F.: Right. So it's you guys, Metompinkin, and is it J.C. Tawes?

J.D.: J.C.W. Tawes.

K.F.: And Maryland Crab meat closed this summer.

J.D.: They closed. They're gone. In fact, they've gotten rid of their stuff. They're getting their stuff out of there now. They have leased their building out.

K.F.: They have?

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

K.F.: Okay. I should run over there because we wanted to talk to Tim about maybe the family would donate some of the equipment to the museum.

J.D.: Yeah. Yeah, they're getting rid of it.

K.F.: Well what do you enjoy about this business?

J.D.: Well that might be a hard one to answer. The people, I do like the people. I mean they are nice. I mean you deal with all types of people here. But the girls that I have here are, 99 percent of them are religious people. Sometimes they'll, you know, when they get in here and they have some good crabs and things to work on, they get to singing right out in the middle of the day, which was an old tradition, you know, with the crab house singing, which, like I told you before, they do sing here every morning 9:00. I don't care who's in there, but 9:00, everybody stops, and they sing the Lord's prayer here every morning 9:00. And that's probably really what I enjoy in the morning to hear them, and see `em. And then you do have, you know, a lot of fun with `em, joking and things. But really, I guess, is to see quality crab meat coming out, you know, and people appreciate that. That's probably really what I do enjoy.

But as far as it's getting just to be more of a hard drive all the time to keep you going with competing against, you know, different things in the industry today such as, you know, price is the biggest thing. And it's hard for us a lot of times to get our money back out of what we pick, you know, against some of the other, you know, and like I say, it comes back to the foreign crab meat again, that you can't compete against it. Years ago, you know iff you pasteurized your crab meat around December and January until next March, your crab meat was automatically going to be worth at least 2 or \$3 more a can than it is today. Today, if you can it, you're most likely going to get the same price for it as you did at the time that you could've sold it today instead of tomorrow.

K.F.: Okay.

J.D.: See it's not that -- and yet a lot of fellows go and have a line of credit, you know, where the crabs come good, they borrow against the line of credit, and so they're paying interest on it, so really at the end they're going to lose money on their pasteurized crab meat, you know, if they don't have a special place to sell it. But a lot of restaurants today do want pasteurized crab meat, you know, they do, because there's no spoilage with it.

K.F.: Right. And it will store longer.

J.D.: Yeah.

K.F.: So are restaurants your biggest customer then?

J.D.: That's all. I don't sell to the open market. All mine are just like five star restaurants, you know, that's who I deal with.

K.F.: And all over the country or just --

J.D.: Yeah, yeah. We sell to like Palm Beach Country Club, things like that, you know. So -- but I mean that's the niches that you have here. I mean they want the quality product. That's why a lot of times I go out and I buy jimmy crabs to pick jimmy crabs because of the fact that, and they do, they pay more for the crab meat, but they want a quality product. They don't want sooks, you know what I'm saying.

K.F.: Yeah.

J.D.: The female crab. They want, you know, a quality product. So that's why you go out and pay a little bit more for your crabs, but I sell the crab meat for a little bit more money. So some people say how you get that kind of money for it? Well you open my can up and take a look at mine versus somebody else's can, you'll see the difference. And so there you are. And so it's rewarding that way when you got dedicated customers come back each year tell you how, you know, don't forget me and that type of thing, I want the crab meat again.

K.F.: Well it seems like it's also good customer service for your guys if you're really paying attention to what your customers want.

J.D.: Right. Yeah. It has to be. If it's not, then you lose your customers 'cause there's so much of it out here on -- everybody's after your customers today due to the fact -- years ago, it wasn't because you didn't have the foreign crab meat competition today. But now it is. It's become, the thing -- I just don't think a lot of times we're on a level playing ground with everybody else, especially with the foreign crab meat, due to the fact of, you know, their labor cost, their product. You know, they don't have to go out and spend \$25 a bushel for crabs to pick, you know. They don't have to pay the \$2 a pound that we have to pay to have it picked. They don't have to pay unemployment insurance. They don't have to pay workman's comp. And then, you know, and of course then they add some chemicals to their crab meat to liven it up, you know, to make it look whiter and all, which we don't. You know, it's taken from the table, it's canned, it's all natural. And yet, you have people being misled by some of these foreign dealers is really what it is. I mean working on their name, that's all their doing. And people just figure, you know, well here's a big company like that, you know, they should have quality stuff, you know, that's all they do. And then they put that thing on there Maryland style, you know, so everybody thinks that it's Maryland crab.

K.F.: Right.

J.D.: And they're buying it, and it is strictly something that's come from Indonesia, it's come from the Philippines, it's come from Pakistan, you know, all that type of stuff I mean, the crabs sort of look the same, but they're not the same. Anybody can say what they want, it's not the same. Texture's not the same, the whole nine yards. It's close, but it's not the same.

K.F.: Right. Now wasn't there an effort to try and get them to -- like you could only label it Maryland crab meat if it's blue crab and --

J.D.: Well they're trying to now. The industry's trying to get together, the blue crab industry is trying to get together now to state on the can, you know, this is North American Blue Crab. Now they have -- they named their crab blue crab. You know, I don't know how they did it, I guess -- but anyway, they named it a blue crab, you know. It has a Latin name, which I don't know. In fact, I don't even know our Latin name, to be perfectly honest with you. But they call it a blue crab, and that's how they get away with it. And so now we're trying in the industry to get everybody for like all the United States who picks any of the blue crab, even from Texas, Louisiana, Florida, Georgia, South Carolina, North Carolina, Virginia and Maryland. I don't believe there's any picking house in Delaware, I don't believe.

K.F.: No.

J.D.: No, not to my knowledge. But anyway --

K.F.: There aren't many crabbers left in Delaware too.

J.D.: Yeah. So anyway, what we're trying to do is get that put on a label, you know, that this is United States Blue Crab, or something like that, or you'd get some sort of logo that people know that, you know, this is a product of the United States. This is an American product. This doesn't come from a foreign processor somewhere. So we don't know what's going to happen. It takes a lot of money to get this stuff started, and the industry just doesn't have it, you know, because of the fact that it's been so hard on us. We have really lost a lot of market.

K.F.: How much market have you lost?

J.D.: Well the market has lost about 75 percent, believe it or not, I mean really. And that's factual, that's not, you know, coming off. It's --

K.F.: How much does that translate into dollars?

J.D.: I don't know. It's a lot, a lot, a lot. I mean a tremendous amount of dollars. I mean there's the National Blue Crab Industry that has all the facts. I did have some paperwork over here on it. But what I did with it, I don't know. But anyway, there's some stuff that's around for it, you know, 'cause I belong to the industry. We have meetings. I don't know what I did with it, but anyway, they have some facts out in reference to it about how much product we've lost, how much is imported every year, a lot more is imported. And you could call them up there, Jack Brooks at Clayton's.

K.F.: Oh, all right, Jack has it? Okay.

J.D.: Yeah. Get up with him and he can give you all this information in reference to that.

K.F.: Okay, all right. Well where do you see the industry going?

J.D.: Downhill. I'm being perfectly honest with you. Because of the fact that the basket trade is there. There's only certain times a year that they need a dumping place, that your trucks need a dumping place to dump the crabs. And that's, you know, usually in the fall. Maybe a few times in the summertime when the crabs are weak and they can't send them to the market because by the time they got them to the market, they would die. But that's the only time, you know, unless the picking industry itself, if you want to go out, and you have to pay the premium dollar. And then you have to stay here and pay that premium dollar and not make any money during the summer months due to the fact that's when the crabs are the highest, the crabs are the poorest, but then you have to wait 'til your September, and October and part

of your November comes so you get about a 10-week period to try to make enough money to keep the operation going all year long.

K.F.: And that's tough?

J.D.: That's tough.

K.F.: That's really hard.

J.D.: Right.

K.F.: Yeah.

J.D.: That's why most of, a lot of the places like Metompkin Bay, that's why he goes and he does oysters. He picks, and now he's in the oyster season. And in the spring instead of picking, he's in the soft crab business. So per se, a crab picking house is strictly, like this one is, just for crab picking. You better have some strong customers who want your stuff to make it so you can pay your mortgage and pay your insurance and all all over the rest of the year. And that's what we try to do here. And then, of course, you have to make some profit. But the profit is way down now. I mean there's no sort of like, you're here working all year long in a break-even situation.

And that's the last, last year, that's what happened. The year before that was the same type of thing. One year we did have a good year. And each year you look and say well maybe I'll have a better year. And that's the reason you stay into it. And this year looks like you'll do a little something, but it's not going to be, you know, a big year. Even though there were some crabs at the end, but there's such a short period to get these crabs picked, and you can't get `em picked because you don't have the help to do it.

K.F.: Okay. Well now how much does it cost you to bring the Mexican girls up?

J.D.: It's somewhere around \$150 a person.

K.F.: A person.

J.D.: Yeah. And then when they get here, you have to have the housing ready for them. And at which time, then I think you're allowed to charge `em \$5 a day, I think, you know, for housing, which I don't charge `em that. And, in fact, even up there I put a telephone in for `em and all just to try to give `em -- I mean I got it so they can use a calling card to call out. I don't have it so they can just dial to Mexico or anything like that `cause here you're paying the bills, you know. But that's, you know, and of course they have t.v., you know. I don't know. I guess they watch VCR's or something, I don't know. Some of `em can speak a little bit of English, enough to get by.

K.F.: Well we've been interviewing the Mexican girls in Dorchester County too who've been picking as well. And it's -- they all have pretty much the same story. All their money goes home --

J.D.: Right.

K.F.: --to their parents. Some of them have a couple of kids that their parents are taking care of and all --

J.D.: Right, until they get back. Yeah, each one of `em, you know, you can see it because they have their receipts come back here, you know. This is their address where they get their mail, and when their mail comes in you see this Mexican stuff and just give it to `em, but you know that's what it is, Express Mail type of thing. They send their money home. And they're appreciative of the work, you know. They're not like some of the girls, how many you got today? You tell `em, say I got 20 rings to pick today. Oh, my God, you got that many. You know. Well they don't say it. Why don't you have 25 rings is what they want to know.

(Laughter.)

K.F.: Now what's a ring?

J.D.: A ring holds like 10 bushel, you know, into a ring, you know, what we call a ring.

K.F.: And would that be the square boxes they have --

J.D.: Well they have squares. Some people have squares, but we use a round ring that we cook down in the cooking room.

K.F.: Oh, it's the steam room.

J.D.: It's the steam room.

K.F.: Okay. What do you think the crab industry has meant to people here in Dorchester County?

J.D.: Oh, this was their livelihood. This was big. This was the number one thing here in Crisfield many years ago. But now it doesn't mean as much to `em. Maybe to some of the older ones. I mean we got `em downstairs, you know, in their 70's working here still, you know. But they're just dedicated. And it's more of a social life when they come to work. It's not more working. But they **want to know what happened last night, you know.** They want to know what happened at church or when somebody dies. And that's another thing. When somebody dies here, instead of you losing like I say one, you know, for a death, then you're losing that whole family. So then you're losing six or eight, you know, because they all have to go to the funeral. You know. And, of course, they never get buried on Saturdays. They all get buried during the week.

(Laughter.)

K.F.: I'm wondering if there are, or you still might have records from when the Byrd family owned --

J.D.: No, when I took this over here, they took everything out of the building 'cause they didn't want to give anybody anything. They were just against the bank when the bank foreclosed on 'em and everything else. And when the bank said they were going to sell it off, they come in and just totally housecleaned everything here. The only thing I did find up in the rafters, and John Caitlin showed it to me, or I showed it to him, and it was the first pasteurized crab meat can that was ever used in the industry. And I have that in a little box, you know, down to the restaurant. And I got that. It's a little - the can that's on that picture there, but you can't make it out very well.

K.F.: This short one that looks like a tin can?

J.D.: Yeah. That's the first can that was ever used for pasteurization of crab meat. And I don't know if Continental would ever -- I asked them if they had any, and they said no. Whether if they would ever have one to give you all.

K.F.: Do you have a phone number for Continental Can?

J.D.: Uh-huh (Affirmative). Continental Can did a lot of cans. Steel and Tin did another whole bunch of cans for the crab meat industry. Used to be called -- here it is, Crown, Cork and Seal. You can talk to Mr. Howard Bozman. Here's an 800 number, 266-0226. Or Dave Guy. Either one of them. Tell him who you are and what you're doing. Maybe they can come up with some cans, you know, which would really be --

K.F.: Yeah. Or even talking to some of the older salesmen who might've dealt with the companies.

J.D.: Yeah, but some of 'em did save some of the cans. I don't know, you know, who did what. I don't know. There is probably some old cans around somewhere. I know they're collectors.

K.F.: Right.

J.D.: A lot of oyster collectors. I think even up there somewhere in Cambridge, there was a boy that had a lot of crab meat cans, older ones. I can't think who he is.

K.F.: Yeah. There was one student at Salisbury State whose family ran one of the crab houses in lower Dorchester, and he did a paper on the crab cans. Went around to all the crab houses and took pictures of 'em, so he had a pretty good, you know, photo collection. He had some of the cans, but he didn't have all of them.

J.D.: Yeah, 'cause most of 'em, like I say, we just throw it away or rusted out, just like the oyster industry is too.

K.F.: Well I guess since we're trying to understand the history of this business, where it's been, and I think we understand where it's headed. Everybody has said the same thing.

J.D.: We know where it's going. We know where it's going. And I guess we know where it's been. I mean it's been, years ago, it was a very profitable organization. And at times, they -- here in Crisfield, you know, you had companies that wanted to come to Crisfield. And, of course, the old crab packers ruled the small communities here, you know. And so if an industry wanted to come here, they would keep `em out.

(OFF RECORD BRIEFLY - TELEPHONE.)

(END SIDE A.)

(BEGIN SIDE B.)

K.F.: -- when it was, you know, the biggest industry here.

J.D.: Oh, years ago when the industry was here, you know, this was all told to me, and I guess it is part of the history that anybody could tell you is years ago when they had all these crab picking houses here, you know, well they had all the labor force. So if a corporation like Delmarva Power, they tell me years ago wanted to come here and set a plant up somewhere and they didn't want `em because of the fact they thought that Delmarva Power was going to take the labor force away. Same way when they came here with the Rubberset Corporation, which is still here today. They had a big time trying to get the Rubberset Corporation here because they thought, you know, they were going to take the labor force away.

K.F.: Right.

SPEAKER: Excuse me.

(Off the record briefly.)

K.F.: What about like Mrs. Paul's, I know, had a huge plant here too.

J.D.: Yeah. They had a time getting that here. They did get it here. But, you know, they had a fight, you know, along with everything. But in the early days, they wouldn't let anything in here, you know, due to the fact that they needed everything for the tomato packing industry, and they needed it for the crab picking industry and the oyster shucking.

K.F.: Okay.

J.D.: See the people next door used to be -- that's all that was, they used to have nothing but shells here, oyster. They used to have, that was a lime plant where they made oyster shells out of, you know, and that was a lime plant right there. And so that was nothing but masses of oyster shells and that's all that Crisfield is made up of is oyster shells from the post office on down here.

All this is just from oyster shells all underneath. You dig down, oyster shells, that's all it is.

K.F.: Okay. I remember reading that in one of the history of Crisfield books.

J.D.: Yeah.

K.F.: And what about the sign over the front door down here? I think it's great.

(Laughter.)

J.D.: What do you mean? What about it?

K.F.: Well when did that go up?

J.D.: I put it up in 19 -- well, I guess, when was the 50th anniversary? I put it up a few years, what, '96 was it?

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

J.D.: Yeah. Two years ago, I put it up. So it's just for the girls so they want to come and they could see it. It was just some sort of, I thought, for appreciation of what they -- and we do have people come in, you know, who read the sign one day, and if they're staying here, like the elder house group, things like that, well they like, you know, they'll come back and get here in the morning so they can come hear `em sing.

K.F.: Oh, okay.

J.D.: Yeah, because it's just part of the whole history that's gone away. We had CNN down here was doing a thing on the crab meat industry this summer, I don't know exactly what time, and they photographed and they did the photograph and taping of it, all that stuff.

K.F.: Okay. Yeah, I got the names of the folks who did it yesterday, and I'm going to give `em a call and see if they want to maybe loan some of their footage.

J.D.: Yeah, they were nice fellows who did it, really nice guys.

K.F.: Okay, great. Well if we were going to interview, I know I've interviewed Miss Cropper and Miss Fitch, if we were going to interview any of the other pickers that you know, who should it be?

J.D.: Oh, any of `em really, to be perfectly honest with you. Some of `em may be a little bit bashful than the other ones. But any of `em. Like Miss Gurdy May, you know, she's one of the old Jackson clan.

K.F.: Okay.

J.D.: And you have a Barbara James, you know, she's an older crab picker. She had her daughter that used to sit beside her. In fact, her daughter just took a job at Wal-mart, you know, so -- but anyway, she sat beside her just until this past year ever since I've had her for the last five years. And so that was just another good example, mother and daughter type of thing where she

was brought up here in the crab house. The fellow who come up here, he's been in this crab house since he's been 12 years old.

K.F.: That's what he told me yesterday. He'd be a good person to talk to.

J.D.: Yeah. So he's a Jackson.

K.F.: Oh, he is?

J.D.: He's part of the clan that was born. I mean they were brought up here in the crab house. I mean this is the only thing that he knows is the crab. So if he had to go out and look for a job, you know, I mean he has no skills. But I mean to come here and run a crab house, you know, he knows how to run the crab house. You know. So I mean he can do it all pretty well as much as I can do it except he doesn't do the cooking of the crab meat or the selling of it, but I mean he can go back and cook the crabs, he puts the crabs -- helps weigh up the crab and get the orders out. But I mean he's been here since a toddler. You know, coming in here. And believe it or not, he used to -- they tell me he used to sit there and crack some claws at one time, you know.

K.F.: Okay. Yeah, I keep hearing stories of how the boys learned how to pick, and crack, and do it all too, and then as teenagers, they went off and got another job.

J.D.: Yeah, right. `Cause their mothers had no babysitters. I mean these kids had to come down here with `em so the mother could work, you know. A lot of `em, you know, their father, didn't know where the fathers were, or the fathers didn't want to work or whatever, so the mother kept the family together.

K.F.: Right.

(OFF RECORD BRIEFLY - TELEPHONE.)

K.F.: Okay. Well who else do we need to talk to here in Crisfield? We've talked to I.P. and his son and Tim Howard.

J.D.: You can go down there and see Alan Tyler down at J.C.W. Tawes.

K.F.: Talked to him.

J.D.: You know, Tawes is an old crab picking thing there, you know. And he might have some old memorabilia type things for you.

K.F.: Yeah.

J.D.: And, of course, you know Timmy and Chas Howard. That would be the only ones that I could really tell you right today `cause all the rest of `em are out of business. And, of course, Maryland Crab meat, they just went out so

K.F.: Right. What about Dryden's? Did they ever pick?

J.D.: There was a Dryden that picked crabs, but not Marlene. No. I don't -- unless it was part of her family, but I've only known to do soft crabs.

K.F.: Right.

J.D.: Even the restaurant where I was at, they had -- there was three picking houses there in that little location.

K.F.: Where the Captain's Galley is?

J.D.: Uh-huh (Affirmative). There was three picking houses right there.

K.F.: Okay.

J.D.: Don't ask me to name `em because I don't know. I know one of `em was Bradshaw. Another one was Sterling, which was the old Milber.

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

J.D.: The old Milber, that was one.

K.F.: Yeah. That one, I think, became Maryland Crab meat, didn't it?

J.D.: Well eventually, uh-huh (Affirmative). They got all the old customers, but there was a Milber, and there was a Maryland. You know. It was two -- with that whole family, but now it's gone. It was -- so it was two crab picking plants and one family.

K.F.: I know. In Dorchester County, I know there are still several -- there's lots of women who still pick in their homes.

J.D.: Oh, yeah.

K.F.: Now is that happening in Crisfield? I know it happens on Smith Island.

J.D.: Right. Not as much in Crisfield as it does on the island. And not as much as on Tangier. There's a lot now on Tangier of the women picking crabs over there. And that was another thing, you know, something like the state went over there and spent all this money over there on Smith Island to give all these women the right to pick crab meat, to be legal, quote legal, but now the only thing they do is go down and get their cups down to the thing, take the crabs home and pick their crabs back at home. So what did they do? They didn't do nothing except, you know, I don't know. The state didn't come and give me 250,000 to come in and build my crab plant up. So that was the biggest joke in Crisfield for the --

K.F.: For along time?

J.D.: Well since they've done it, you know, we still laugh at it, you know. You can still go down to the dock if they come over, and you can get all the crab meat you want. You'll see the regular ones who sells it to the restaurants, and they go down every day. They get the crab meat and take it off. You know. So I don't know. That was just something that I guess they figured they did something, made the governor look good and he got his votes. I think that governor was -- I don't know who that was, Hughes I think at the time, wasn't it? Was it Hughes at that time that did that?

K.F.: Yeah, it was before Glendenning, wasn't it?

J.D.: Yeah. Uh-huh (Affirmative). Well it was Schaeffer, but I think it all started with Hughes at the time, I believe. I'm not sure.

K.F.: Well now what do you guys fall under as far as the Ag. Department? I mean it's not a farm product.

J.D.: No, we're food. We come under food.

K.F.: Food, that's what it is.

J.D.: FDA, yeah. Food and Drug we come under.

K.F.: Okay. `Cause I was thinking today as I was driving over here, you know, a lot of the farmers get federal aid when it's a bad year.

J.D.: Yeah. No, we don't get --

K.F.: But there's nothing for this industry or --

J.D.: No, nothing. Even though we're considered farm, you know, I mean we're really technically, I guess the guys are out harvesting a product, you know, but it's off the water so -- but no, we don't -- there's no federal aid or anything for people like us. Either you make it or you fall on your face, one of the two. So that's just as simple as that.

K.F.: Okay.

J.D.: And, you know, another part of the industry is with the unemployment, you know, everything is seasonal. So we're at the highest rate of everything that comes right down, you know. Your unemployment rate is high. And, you know, like the industry is having a tough time. But yet, unemployment in the state is somewhere around 4 percent, whatever. We're still at the high rate. Where's all this extra money going to the state? I mean we're still paying that high rate. So why shouldn't some of that rate come down if unemployment rate is down? But that all stayed right the same. It hasn't came down to us. That rate is still when they had 15 percent unemployment rate, we still paid the same thing at 15 as we're paying at 4 percent now.

K.F.: What is that rate?

J.D.: Seven, 7.5.

K.F.: And you have to pay that how many months of the year?

J.D.: As long as they're working. Whatever your total payroll is. So my payroll here say, this year, will be maybe 200,000, something like that, you know. And that's, I'm not taking out of their check. That's what I have to pay. So it's, what, around 20,000 something like that. I don't know.

K.F.: Now how many of your pickers do draw unemployment --

J.D.: All of `em.

K.F.: -- January and February?

J.D.: Oh, they can't wait. Right now, they can't wait. I mean they're waiting now, they've got their quarters in, so now they're waiting now so

they can go ahead on unemployment. Each day they come down and how many crabs you got to pick, you know, today? When are we gonna stop? You know. When is the end? `Cause see as long as I'm getting crabs, they can't draw. But soon as they find out that they can draw, then they all go. Like starting this week, well of course they picked three days this week so they couldn't draw because they all had -- they'll have more than enough time in. But say next week they only work one day. Then they'll come and they'll want to draw partial. They'll want to draw partial, so that's more paperwork.

K.F.: Right.

J.D.: So what I do is just try to hold it off, and just cut it off one day and then do what I call a mass layoff slip. I run everybody's thing off, the last day of work was this day, this is what they made, this is when they started the work, take it up and give it to the unemployment office. And that way I don't have to -- even though they send all this stuff to you to do, you don't have to do it because they have it all on file.

K.F.: Okay.

J.D.: But that's called a mass layoff slip. So you just lay everything off except for the fellows, you keep them here to do your cleaning up and your painting and getting ready for the next season.

K.F.: And how long does that usually take?

J.D.: It'll take about four weeks to paint and clean up.

K.F.: So usually by January, you guys are --

J.D.: Yeah, but the end -- before Christmas, you'll be done and be ready for next year. So this year it'll be a little bit longer because I had a flood, you know, Floyd got me, and I lost -- a lot of damage to me here.

K.F.: Oh, what happened?

J.D.: I have just about \$260,000 worth of damage.

K.F.: Oh, my God.

J.D.: Lost crab meat and all.

K.F.: Oh.

J.D.: Yeah, that was about \$68,000 worth. Then the FDA man, of course, the next morning he was downstairs, and all that hit the water, you know, like in my freezer that I had back there used as a cooler, but anyway, it was all on the floor. The first two rows, all that had to be thrown away. Where the water hadn't got on the others, it was still cool, and that was okay. But the ones that was in the water, he said that all had to be taken to the dump.

K.F.: Oh, gosh.

J.D.: And, of course, then I didn't have no content insurance, and they don't want to pay. So and that's what I said. It really makes a tough year, really a

tough year. And so whether you ever are coming, I don't think you will, but you sit here and say well, just go ahead and shut the thing down, or should I try one more season, you know. It's really to that point today. And it's not only me. I mean `cause you just got, just like something like this happened to me, you know, it's sort of something like that's something that the straw that broke the camel's back, you know.

K.F.: Right.

J.D.: Is this going to break, you know, the camel? I don't know. But, you know, your girls, you sort of watch out for them and say well, I guess they could go elsewhere to go to work to pick crabs if they wanted to pick crabs. But most of `em are dedicated to a house. Most of `em, the women that have been here, they've been here for 50 years, you know, however old they are.

A. W.: Got another one for you.

J.D.: Hey, girl.

A. W.: Must be your lucky day.

J.D.: My, word.

A.W.: Gosh, can you handle it?

J.D.: Yeah. This is Kelly from the Maritime Museum.

K.F.: Hi.

A.W.: Hello, Kelly. Nice to meet you.

K.F.: Nice to meet you too.

J.D.: She's in St. Michaels. She's doing a thing on the crab picking industry. Arlene, she works over at the Handy Corporation over there.

K.F.: Okay.

J.D.: And she does the soft crabs, and she's doing the crab meat. I sell `em a lot of crab meat over there.

K.F.: Oh, okay.

J.D.: She brought me a little check.

(Laughter.)

A. W. : The best part of the day.

J.D.: And so anyway, so they do the crab cakes over there and --

K.F.: Oh, this is a processing plant.

J.D.: Right, yes. And so she's concerned also with the foreign crab meat situation.

A.W.: Yes.

K.F.: What's your last name, Arlene?

A.W.: Worton.

K.F.: Worton. Do you have a phone number I could call and getup with your later?

A. W.: Seventeen -- wait.

J.D.: Seventeen --

A. W.: Ten-sixty-nine.

J.D.: Oh, yeah.

A. W.: That's my direct line.

K.F.: Ten-sixty-nine. Nine-six-eight?

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

A. W.: Uh-huh (Affirmative).

J.D.: They're doing a thing for the museum. They want to -- she was telling me they're going to do a special display. Going to build a new building and all you said?

K.F.: New building, permanent exhibit on the seafood industries, and we're starting with crab industry and oysters. Somebody else is doing oysters, I'm doing the crabs.

A. W.: Oh, well that ought to be really nice.

J.D.: Yeah.

K.F.: We realized there's nothing written down about this industry, nothing.

J.D.: Right.

K.F.: So we're out interviewing people, and interviewing pickers, and looking at people's books, if they'll show `em to us, and trying to collect objects and stuff so we can have -- they want to have like a picking house like a visitor would walk into a picking house.

A.W.: Oh, that would be nice. That would really be nice. It would be good for you all.

J.D.: Yeah. Well good for you too.

A.W.: Yeah, yeah. That's true.

J.D.: You'll be part of the "crab industry" with the soft crabs.

A. W.: Uh-huh (Affirmative).

K.F.: Yeah. The soft crabs we're going to do separately. We wanted to do them together this year, and we realized it was too big a project. So we're going to do the soft crabs separately `cause we got to, you know, talk to all the women who work their husband's shedding tanks on the banks.

(Laughter.)

A.W.: Yeah, I can just imagine. Well that'll be nice. Well don't let me interrupt you. I just wanted to drop that by.

J.D.: All right. Thank you.

A.W.: You gonna be working tomorrow?

J.D.: No, I don't think so. Probably Monday.

A.W.: Monday?

J.D.: Yeah, probably Monday.

A. W.: Okay.

J.D.: Maybe two days or so next week, and that might take me up, I don't know. It all depends when these crabs --

A. W.: Okay. Well just let me know when you think, you know, how long you're going to be working.

J.D.: Yeah. Probably about a couple more days anyway, I guess. I'd like to get three days in next week, but I don't know whether it's going to work or not.

A. W.: I can imagine.

J.D.: `Cause the crabs fell off pretty bad.

A.W.: Yeah, I've seen that all over.

J.D.: Yeah, so --

A. W.: Took just a little bit longer.

J.D.: Yeah.

A.W.: Nice to meet you, Kelly.

K.F.: Nice to meet you too.

J.D.: All right, see you. Thanks.

A.W.: Thank you.

K.F.: Well let me ask you -- as we understand the business, I'm asking people how they pay their ladies. Everybody has a different system, apparently.

J.D.: Two dollars a pound. That's what they get paid.

K.F.: And when do they get paid, and all that good stuff?

J.D.: They get paid every Friday. They get paid 11:00 Friday. That's why you can't get `em to work but a half a day on Friday. I mean they will not work, but yet you get your Mexican girls come in, they will work all day Friday. That's what they do.

K.F.: Do you all have a draw day or anything?

J.D.: Yes, yes. You got to have a draw day. Draw day's on Monday. You got to lend `em Monday, and my policy is \$20 that they can draw on Monday. I won't give `em over \$20, unless somebody's got an emergency. But most of it is to buy cigarettes or something like that, you know. But you have the certain ones every week that's got to borrow the 20. I don't care if they made \$400 the week before, they got to borrow the \$20. If they made \$10 that week, they still got borrow \$20. That's got, they just got to think they're ahead of you. That's their thing, they're just gonna think they're ahead of you. And they know the systems. They know how much they can work, how much they can make. They figure well how much do I need in this

quarter to draw the maximum which I'll be able to draw. Or if I go -- I can't make but so much or I won't have my food stamps. Or I won't get my oil subsidy if I work over this. They won't pay my electric if I go to the -- I live in the projects over there -- if I make over a certain amount. So they just don't show up. And this is the reason that you need the others to come in to pick the crabs. They're not worried about making too much money because the government's not going to subsidize `em, and that's what these people are. You know, if they know that they can only make \$5,000 that year or \$4,000, well that's all they're going to make. And they know. I mean they know. You know, this is the reason there probably is too many give-away programs, you know, to make `em work. There's no incentive for `em to work. There's decenterive.

K.F.: So all these changes in welfare reform and all that kind of stuff is not --

J.D.: Doesn't affect us.

K.F.: Doesn't *affect* you guys at all.

J.D.: No. Because they just won't show up for work. You know. They won't go down --

K.F.: There's no firing `em. I mean you can't --

J.D.: Oh, no. What are you going to do? You fire `em, well they go down to the next crab house and go to work, you know. So if you fire `em, you know, because you don't have a big pool, a labor pool to draw from. I mean there's nobody standing there waiting outside to come in to pick crabs.

Anybody that comes in says I want to pick crabs, all right, come on in. You know, you don't care who they are, right. You know, really, you don't care who they are. You want `em to come in and pick crabs. Now years ago, you had that problem, you know, they would lose their seat if they didn't come in. They would lose their seat. But now, you know, you need anything you can get down there to pick a crab. And that's some of the things why some of the quality in some of the crab meat that people get, `cause you know, they don't care about it, you know. Like some of the older ones I got here, they do take, some of `em take pride in their crab meat, you know, when they bring a pound of crab meat up and it's got big lumps in there. I say boy, that's pretty. And they're really proud of that can of crab meat that they brought up. Although you throw a lid on it and it goes in the thing, but they want to bring it up and show you what nice work they did. But you got some of `em come up, they just -- they don't care if they got a claw hanging out of it.

(Laughter.)

J.D.: But most of `em I got here, you know, pretty decent workers.

K.F.: You were talking about them being very loyal to a single house. So like what happened when like Maryland Crab meat didn't pick blue crabs this year and they didn't bring back their pickers? Did any of them come here or go to Metompkin?

J.D.: Right. Some come here, and some come to Metompkin. They had a friend that worked here, maybe they came here. Maybe some of `em had a friend that worked at Metompkin, they would go there. So that's how that would happen.

K.F.: Okay.

J.D.: But even with all the crab houses being out of business, you know, you're sitting here, I'm sitting here with about say 40 pickers, which eight of `em -- it's only 32 pickers that I had that was considered "full time". But over half of `em part time, you know. But, you know, that's the status that this came to be. There's just not enough of crab pickers in Crisfield at all.

K.F.: Well I'm wondering if I can take a few photos of some of the machinery.

J.D.: You can do anything that you want.

K.F.: Okay, great.

J.D.: You can talk to Bill downstairs if you want to talk to him, he's down there somewhere.

K.F.: Okay.

J.D.: You can talk to him. And like I say, if I had any old stuff for you, I mean I got an old piece of --

K.F.: Well let me give you one of my cards just in case something comes up.

J.D.: I do got something here that you can probably have. I got one of these. This was -- this was old, believe it or not. Now this was the only two kinds of crab meat years ago that they picked. So this is going to be somewhere in the -- I'm going to say the 60's. Okay. This is only special and backfire.

That's the only two things. Now they got five different grades that they pick.

K.F.: What do you pick now?

J.D.: I only pick three grades, you know. But I pick a mixed, and then I pick a jumbo lump and I still pick a special. You know, or I pick a special, backfin and lump is really what I do. Backfin is what I call a mix today. But backfin years ago was nothing but the lump.

K.F.: The lump.

J.D.: Everything else was special.

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

J.D.: There wasn't such a thing as -- well there wasn't such a thing as jumbo lump. Then they have lump, then they have backfin, then they got special and claw. And the claw's always been claw, but --

K.F.: Right. Now where did you guys come up -- or where did the industry come up with these two designations?

J.D.: Well that was all just from years ago when you had a woman picking crab meat, she picked either regular meat, which was the -- I mean everything but the jumbo lump. She picked regular meat, she picked the backfin, or she picked claw meat. That's all she picked. There wasn't anything else. But then you had customers wanting what they call a backfin which original backfin was you had maybe a 40/60 mix, which I still do today, which is 40 percent jumbo lump. So you had say 20 percent on the top, 20 percent on the bottom, and then in the middle, you would put your special meat, and that's what I still do today.

K.F.: Oh, okay.

J.D.: But like I say, that's the original thing. And that's all they used to do. And I'm going to say that's going to be dated somewhere in '60 is when that -- and that's what, if Byrd's went out to try to do anything with crab meat, they would put that up as a little sign. I think there's only about three of 'em left. I think there's two more.

K.F.: Okay. So are there any other special ways that you like to put the meat in the can that you think makes it more attractive to the customer?

J.D.: No. That's the only three that I do. Now some of the other ones, they do some stuff at this -- I mean that's the only thing that I've ever had a call for. So that's all I do. And I probably wouldn't do anything else, 'cause I have no problem selling, you know, what I got. Even going into the winter, I save some back for, you know, Christmas orders and --

K.F.: Right, holidays.

J.D.: 'Cause we do a lot now in the trade. In fact, we're trying to see about getting on the Internet, you know, putting our stuff on the Internet. Whether - you know, I know it'll work because we do sell a lot just by phone orders.

K.F.: Well we have everyone fill out one of these so we can deposit the tape in the archive at the library at the museum.

(END OF INTERVIEW.)