

Interview Log

Interviewee: Alice Palmer **Tape #:** OH141

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

Date: February 23, 2000 **# of Sides:** 2

Location:

Topic: Crab Picking Project

Corresponding Photography Log #:

Comments: Landisnay, Merlee, Jarbo, Joe Sperry, Carena

BEGIN SIDE A

K.F.: Okay. If I could have you say your name for me.

A.P.: Alice Palmer.

K.F.: Okay. And, Alice, what year were you born?

A.P.: 1933.

K.F.: Okay. So were you born any time near that big storm in '33?

A.P.: They tell me I was.

(Laughter.)

A.P.: Yes. My mother said I was.

K.F.: Okay. All right, that's another thing I've been talking to people about. So where were you born?

A.P.: In a little place called Greenbackville, Virginia.

K.F.: Really? I know where that is.

A.P.: Yes. Oh, yes.

K.F.: Greenbackville. All right. And is that where your family was originally from?

A.P.: No. No. My family's originally from Norfolk, Virginia and Cape Charles.

K.F.: And how did they get up here?

A.P.: Oh, well. Like summertime, I imagine, or when tomato factories were open and full blast --

K.F.: Right.

A.P.: Well in the -- it seems like in the summertime, work was scarce where we were, and they decided that they would move, or my uncle decided that he would move the family because my uncle was more like the overseer of the family.

K.F.: Okay.

A.P.: And he moved the family to St. Michaels.

K.F.: Do you know why he picked St. Michaels? Was there a reason?

A.P.: No, I don't. I was only three years old.

K.F.: Wow. Okay. So in '36, you all moved. Okay.

A.P.: I moved to St. Michaels then. So I think I was too young to know the reason. And I never asked. I always liked St. Michaels growing up as a child.

K.F.: What was it like as a child here in St. Michaels?

A.P.: Well it was hard. Some things I liked, and but as I grow older, I understand things happen in life, but on the whole, I think it was nice.

K.F.: Yeah.

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

K.F.: Can you give me a little bit more about why it was hard?

A.P.: Well it was hard because things -- I imagine it's more -- it became hard to me because -- growing up as a child, okay, going to school, I started out in Vernon, New Jersey in school. Never had attended school with all blacks or, you know, and I did not know anything about segregation.

K.F.: Okay.

A.P.: We lived --on my father's side was Jersey, New Jersey. And we never knew no division. We were all together.

K.F.: Black and white.

A.P.: Yes.

K.F.: Okay.

A.P.: And when I came here and it was a separation, not only for me, for my sister and my brother too, it was sort of hard for us to understand why it was a separation because we didn't know this, you know. And then to find that when the school, I think burned down or I can't remember, it closed up or something. We would have to pass another school and bus all the way to Easton to school when we passed the school. And that was hard, you know, for me to understand why we had to do that. But then after I had been here for a while and I was growing up and all, and my brother was talking to me and my sister, because I was the youngest, and it seemed hard to me 'cause, you know, being around Italians and all, and eating with them and staying at their home, and they were staying at our home, and it wasn't no difference in white or whatever, you know, nationality you was, it wasn't no difference. And it just seemed so hard. But then eventually after we had been here, and I knew I had to get accustomed to the ways because this was going to be home, it was all right.

K.F.: Can I ask what made you go to school in New Jersey originally?

A.P.: It was -- I think it was more like my parents was working. And because I was trained, I could go to school with my sister and brother. But not to be in a class, at that time I could go, just attend with my sister. I had to stay with my sister. And she's two years older than I am. But it was more like she was babysitting me while she was going to school, or my brother was watching over me. But they allowed it because I was trained, you know, I was potty trained and all.

(Laughter.)

A.P.: But really, I never really attend school until we came, you know, I can't understand. I don't know whether we were here in St. Michaels, but my first school that I can remember was in Landisnay. That's up Easton way, and that was the first school that I really attend, to say that I was going to school.

K.F.: Where you were a student.

A.P.: Yes, yes.

K.F.: Okay. And I know I've read historical stuff and some old newspaper articles about African Americans working in New Jersey and then coming back to the shore. Was that what your family did? They were coming back and forth?

A.P.: No, no, no. When we left Jersey, we never returned to Jersey, and I was grown when I went back to live with my family in Jersey for a while. But when we left Jersey and came here, this is my mother and my brother and my sisters -- my sister, I only have one sister. That's when we left Jersey. My mother had moved from Virginia to Jersey, and then we left Jersey and came to Maryland because my uncle had already moved other part of the family to Maryland. Then my mother decided that she wanted to come where the rest of the family and her mother and sister and brothers were living here.

K.F.: Oh, right.

A.P.: So she brought her family here to live.

K.F.: Okay. What did your parents do for a living?

A.P.: Most of 'em worked in the factories, like shucking oysters and skinning tomatoes and picking crabs and, you know, the older ones. And the younger ones went to college

and teachers, and doctors, and pilots. Different, you know -- I have one niece that is in the White House. She can't tell us what she does.

K.F.: That sounds typical.

A.P.: Have a school teacher in Bowie. She start, she start children that has had children, and now their children has -- I said Merlee, how long are you going to teach? She said until they put her out. That's what she said.

K.F.: That's great. So your family moved here. And what was St. Michaels like then when -- I mean that you can remember? I know it's very different from now.

A.P.: Oh, my. Yes. What was it like? It was quiet. Very quiet and quaint. It's busy, busy, busy now. You know, with the tourists and all coming in, going and so much is happening, and all of the stores is mostly antique and shops like that, you know. It was hardware stores and soda fountain, right on the corner, the drug store and the soda fountain were -- what is it, used to be a food market where the bay, what, Bay Hundred? What is that?

K.F.: Oh, the --

A.P.: Chesapeake -- you know, the restaurant?

K.F.: The Cove place?

A.P.: Yes, yes.

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

A.P.: Oh, yes. Was a food market there. And right where the Acme is now, it was a movie.

K.F.: Really?

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

K.F.: Wow.

A.P.: Yes, it was a movie.

K.F.: Wish it was still there.

A.P.: Oh, yes. Yes. So many things have changed. You're taking me back today.

K.F.: Well you're taking me back too 'cause I've, I mean I've only read and seen a few pictures, but it's much better when I can hear somebody's own memories.

A.P.: Oh, yes. And out where Rio Vista and where Higgins Crab House is and all, that was nothing but woods when I was a child. It was all up in there but nothing but woods when you came in St. Michaels. It was just a woody area.

K.F.: And then what about the factories that were around here?

A.P.: Well like I said, it was crab houses and oyster houses, and everything down where the museum is now was factories. It was crab houses were -- and they picked crabs year round, year round.

K.F.: Right, okay.

A.P.: And the children, we would go in and crack claws, sometimes before school, but we know that we -- we knew that we were going to crack claws in the afternoon when school was --

K.F.: After school, right.

A.P.: So and our mothers and some of the men would pick crabs.

K.F.: Oh, really?

A.P.: Uh-huh (Affirmative). And I think it was about two crab picking factories, and then --

K.F.: And there was Auburn and --

A.P.: Yes, Harrison, Jarbo. Uh-huh (Affirmative).

K.F.: Right.

A.P.: And later years, after they went out of business, Mr. Jones and Higgins where the Crab Claw, that was -that was a crab factory.

K.F.: Oh.

A.P.: Yes. We shucked crabs.

K.F.: Okay.

A.P.: Surf clams, those big clams, the manos, we shucked those. And we shucked oysters there.

K.F.: Okay. Now was your -- adults in your family were working at the seafood factories here in St. Michaels?

A.P.: Yes, yes.

K.F.: Okay. Do you remember which ones they worked at or --

A.P.: Both.

K.F.: They worked at both?

A.P.: Yes. Harrison Jarbo and -- what is it, Jewits, Jewits. Yes. It seems like it was another factory, but I can't remember.

K.F.: There probably was. There was also some sort of ice factory or --

A.P.: Well the ice --

K.F.: -- or something down there.

A.P.: Yes, it was an ice factory. Well right over on that corner was an ice plant.

K.F.: Really? The corner here on North and Freemont?

A.P.: Yes, right over here. It was an ice plant.

K.F.: Where the housing is now.

A.P.: That's right.

K.F.: Oh, okay.

A.P.: Yes. Was an ice plant when I was a child, and I would slide down the chute on the ice. And Mr. Road would, he had permission from my mother that every time I did something wrong, I was to get a whipping. And I was raised by the community.

K.F.: Right.

A.P.: But it's not allowed now, but the whole community raised us. You know, everyone taking care of you.

K.F.: Who was in your community? Let me ask you that. Who was in your community then?

A.P.: Oh, my. They've gone on.

K.F.: Do you remember some people?

A.P.: Yes. Miss Bulah Salner, Mr. Andy Salner, Miss Blanche Jewits, that was Mr. Jewits' wife. And they lived right here. Was a large house right on the corner where The Parsonage is.

K.F.: Oh, here, Uh-huh (Affirmative).

A.P.: Right here on the corner. Oh, and Miss Rosie Brooks. Oh, my. It was so many of `em. And well my grandmother, Eva White, she was my pillar. They guided me. When people said in the neighborhood that I would not be anything, well I can remember Miss

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Bulah one day said that we're going to make them out a liar because you are going to be somebody.

K.F.: Oh, great.

A.P.: Yes. And we had a hall. It was up near where the -- where the library, the free library is.

K.F.: Oh, okay. Right.

A.P.: It used to be a hall there, and on Wednesdays, they -- I was in my teens then, and I wanted to do other things, but Miss Bulah and -- oh, I just can't remember all of `em, but they would say no, Alice. This is Wednesday night, it's prayer night, and you are going to the hall to pray. You cannot run the streets tonight. And I think about it often, you know. I had so many people, not only my family, but outside of my family. I think more so outside of my family because my family worked so and I was in my brother's care, and he would just let me go. And the neighbors, they took care of me.

K.F.: Right, right.

A.P.: And I looked to them, and I did until I was grown. Some of `em is the reason that I am where I am today, the things that I do in my community is because of the leadership that I had when I was growing up. And now I try when I can to give back to my community.

K.F.: Was this a tight community here?

A.P.: Yes. Yes. Like I said, the older people helped raise the children, and no one was without. No one went hungry. You know, sometimes food was scarce, but they all would bind together. And if you were hungry, you had something to eat. If the community knew, bags of food would be coming in. If you needed clothes, you did not go without clothes. It was just, it was just like a big family, a large family, just a big large family growing up. Miss Grace Chester, yeah, think about her a lot. And Miss Edna Chester. And Geneva Thomas' mother, I can't remember her name. She's the lady that started me when I was 17. And I don't want to forget Hazel Pinkney. I think the museum bought her home. But she was the one that started me out in the United Methodist Women when I was 17 years old. And for the last eight years, I have been the Easton District Coordinator of Membership Nurture Night, and I have been a United Methodist Woman ever since I was 17.

K.F.: Wow.

A.P.: And I am 67 years old.

K.F.: Fifty years. Fifty years. That is great.

A.P.: Yes.

K.F.: Now let me, since we're talking about the church, what role did the church play, not only in the community, but in the workers at the factory while they were at the factory?

A.P.: Oh, the singing -- oh, they would start from the time we would go to work until quitting time, there would be a song raised by somebody. Was all day you would hear spirituals being sung, you know, and it was just, if we would stop, I remember one time, I can't remember his first name, but anyway, he came out and he said oh, don't stop, don't stop. They would enjoy our singing as much as we enjoyed singing. And we would sing the old spirituals.

K.F.: Can you tell me some of the names of the spirituals? Do you remember?

A.P.: Oh, my. Just -- oh, golly, I can't remember. So many old ones. Sweet Our Prayer, and Blessed Assurance, and My Hope is Built. Just someone would just start one up and everyone would join in.

K.F.: And I guess I have two questions. Was there more singing in say the oyster house than there was the crab picking house?

A.P.: No. I think -- I would say it was equal. But more, I think more singing than the crab picking. Yes.

K.F.: Okay. And were there certain songs that were known to be sung in certain houses, like they would have their own repertoire of songs? You know that a certain crab house would sing these certain songs?

A.P.: Well, no. I think it was like individual. No one knew what was going to be sung until someone just would go just start up.

K.F.: Okay.

A.P.: Singing it. And then everyone would join in, and then after we finished that one, then someone else maybe over on the other side of the table would get another one going. It was always -- would be something that would be with joy, you know. Very seldom sad, sad, you know, something with joy, something to keep your emotion with picking the crabs. And you get the song, and you get the motion with the picking, and -- how do you say it, your hands would go fast with your singing, and your movement would make you -

K.F.: Be like in rhythm with the song then.

A.P.: Yes, yes, yes.

K.F.: All right. Do you recall yourself starting up any songs?

A.P.: Oh, yes. My favorite one -- I would always mostly talking, and then they would sing My Hope is Built. I love that one.

K.F.: Can you give me a sample of it?

A. P.: Oh.

(Laughter.)

A.P.: *When He should come with trumpets sound, oh may I then in Him be found, dressed in his righteousness, alone, thoughtless to stand before the throne. On Christ a solid rock I stand, all other ground is sinking sand, all other ground is sinking sand.* It's three, I think it's three verses to it. And mostly, we would grab that chorus and hold onto it for the longest time, we would sing it over, and over, and over. Yes.

K.F.: Now what would make you decide that you were going to start one, you were going to start to sing at that time?

A.P.: Well I think it's after you hear the songs, and you get the feel, you know, something within you, let you know that it's time for you, you know, to either talk, to say something, or to sing, to express how you feel within yourself

K.F.: Was it anyway involved, you know, getting the spirit, or getting in touch? Did that happen at all?

A.P.: I think that most of the time someone may say well you know I thank the Lord that we are able to pick these crabs, and thank the Lord we have a place to work. And that would build, what you say, the momentum?

K.F.: Yeah.

A.P.: Build it up. And then everyone would want to express their self in some way. And what better way to express yourself in a building like that than singing?

K.F.: Okay. In a building like that. Was there something about that building? I know those buildings are kind of -- open.

A.P.: In crab houses, yes. The atmosphere of the crab house and all is different from the atmosphere in the church. So why not bring that atmosphere that you had from the church into the crab house and make your job easier for you?

K.F.: Okay.

A.P.: I believe that's why things went much easier and pleasant with us because we would always back up a song or a hymn to sing, you know. And that would, singing the song would bring joy.

K.F.: Right, right.

A.P.: And see, when the joy come, you don't mind what you have to do. And we knew that we had to work, you know, and this was the work that was here for us to do, and so we had to do it. And at that time, you did not make much money.

K.F.: Uh-huh (Affirmative). Do you remember how much you made when you first started?

A.P.: Oh. I can't remember how much a pound of crab meat. You didn't get, oh, I don't know. I can remember one time getting 50 cents a pound. But I don't know what was the first time, what was first -- I can't remember. I do know 50 cent. I can remember going back that far, and that low.

K.F.: Right.

A.P.: Yes.

K.F.: Okay. And you were talking about the difference in the atmosphere between the crab house and church. And what was that atmosphere of the crab house?

A.P.: I think that what I mean is, you know, the joy that you have, and there's a different feeling that comes over you when you go to church. You can feel Christ. Okay. Well not only do you want to feel Christ when you go to church, but you want to feel Christ when you're walking, every day life, and when you're working.

K.F.: Okay.

A.P.: And if you do, it brings the joy, and you don't mind doing what you have to do.

K.F.: Okay, okay.

A.P.: Have you ever seen people working in the fields? Have you ever seen --

K.F.: In North Carolina where I used to live.

A.P.: And have you noticed that they will always strike up an old hymn?

K.F.: Actually, I guess some of `em were humming, but they weren't --

A.P.: Yeah, well they would hum, or they would sing. Well that eases all of that, the hardness of the work makes it easy by you striking up that melody in your heart. It just, it changes. I may not be expressing it --

K.F.: No, it's great.

A.P.: But it changes how you feel about it. You know, you can -- as a child cracking claws and oh, I got to crack these claws, I got to do this. But at that time that they would start singing, you will forget that you had to crack the claws, and you would go on crack the claws, and you'd be singing, and the melody would get in your heart and in you so that you didn't mind doing what you had to do.

K.F.: Right. Right. Okay. Okay.

A.P.: I think, I think that -- well that has gone, I think it's been instilled in me from a child on, and I'm still like that, I know I'm not a songbird, I can't sing, but I can get that little hum, or that little song when I'm feeling a little down. And when I know anything, I forget all about whatever it was that made me feel down.

K.F.: Right. Okay.

A.P.: And that was the same way with picking crabs and cracking claws.

K.F.: Do you remember a time when the singing sort of slowed down?

A.P.: Oh, yes. It would get quiet. And everybody was, all you could hear was the crabs, throwing them in the hulls and all, the picking and all, but they would be really into the work. I guess people were thinking about what they had to do and all, but it would be quiet at times.

K.F.: Well let me back up here and ask you when you started working in the crab house, and which crab house it was.

A.P.: I started working at Harrison Jarbo, and I don't know whether I can say this part.

K.F.: You probably can.

A.P.: I can now. Well when I started cracking claws, I was so young that when the inspector came, we would have to wash our hands and go outside before -- we knew they were on the way, and we would go out and play. And when the inspectors left, then the parents would come out and tell us it's time to come back. And we would have to go back in.

K.F.: Now how many children would've been in the crab house?

A.P.: Oh, my. I think just about every child in -- well at my, during my time, just about every child in the town would crack claws.

K.F.: Really?

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

K.F.: Wow.

A.P.: Because one thing, I think parents knew where their children were. If you didn't do much, you would be there and they would know, you know, that you were there with them.

K.F.: Right, right.

A.P.: 'Cause sometimes it would take me all day long to crack a pound of crab meat.

My mother didn't care. Just as long as she knew I was sitting there beside her.

K.F.: Oh. Best job of babysitting ever.

A.P.: Yes, yes. Yes.

K.F.: Okay. Well at what point did your mom decide it was time for you to stop cracking claws and move on to picking the crab?

A.P.: She never did.

K.F.: She never did?

A.P.: No. I never picked crabs until about 1980, maybe 1979 or 1980 at Higgins Crab House. I was cracking claws for them, and he had a few ladies that were picking the crabs. And I run out of claws one day, and he said to me, Alice, you're fast with your hands, and you always learn things quick. Why don't you try picking some crabs? And I said I don't know, Ed. I may throw away more of your crab meat than -- he said oh, no, I don't believe that. I don't think that. Try it. And if you don't like it, well you don't have

to do it, we'll find something else for you to do, but try it. And I tried, and eventually I got to be as fast as the other ladies. But I didn't start that until in 1979, 1980. But I always cracked claws.

K.F.: You always cracked claws.

A.P.: Yes. And when the factories closed up here, then we went to Tilghman's Island.

K.F.: Oh, okay.

A.P.: Yes. It was down Tilghman Packing Company.

K.F.: Tilghman Packing Company.

A.P.: Yes.

K.F.: And you cracked claws there?

A.P.: Cracked claws at Tilghman Packing Company. And I bought my school clothes at Miss Grace. I don't know if you talk to anyone down to Tilghman, but Miss Grace, I don't know her last name. But she had a store, clothes store. And she would get all the latest fashions from New York. And that's where I would -- and my mother didn't mind as long as I used the money to buy my clothes.

K.F.: Right.

A.P.: So what I made in the factory, I could stop there at Miss Grace and buy my clothes.

K.F.: And I heard one crab picker tell me that when they were teenagers, and they were all working, and they all had their own money, that crab pickers were the best dressed girls anywhere 'cause they made their own money.

A.P.: That's right. That's right, made our own money. We had to pay, now I don't know about the other people, but I did. I had to give my mother, I think it was when I first started, about \$10 or \$5 a week for food. I don't know which one it was, five or \$10. But that had to come out of my money, the five or \$10 before I spend anything on the clothes, I would have to give my mother that five or \$10. Then I could buy whatever I wanted to because I would have my food money. But if I decided that I was not going to save out my five or \$10, then I had to eat with my grandmother or somewhere the next week because I didn't eat home.

K.F.: Oh, okay.

A.P.: Oh, no. My parents -- my mother was very strict.

K.F.: Wow.

A.P.: Very strict. She would, if her -- her rules, if she said that you were to do this by the time I come back, and if it was not done, she would not, she would not raise her voice, or she wouldn't say anything. But when Saturday came and we was always allowed a certain amount of money to spend and the movie money, well when Saturday come, she would let us get dressed to go to the movie. And then when we would ask for the money, she said well now do you remember such and such a time when I told you to do such and such a thing? I don't think you deserve to go to the movie. And that was it. And you didn't ask my mother over, because once she said it, it was not no changing her mind. No. She didn't change her mind.

K.F.: I have a mom like that too.

A.P.: Oh, yes. I can get round her a little better now, I'm sorry, but she's sick. She has -- my mother has Alzheimer's. Yes, she's in a nursing home.

K.F.: So let's see. Let me go back to working in the plants here in St. Michaels and try to get a picture of what it was like in the plant. Can you describe some of the other workers that you worked with?

A.P.: Oh, yes. Like on this side you have long tables, on each side, they will face each other, and they would empty the crabs right in, two -- you'd be paired off, two people, they empty the basket of crabs and you would pick these crabs. On this side it would be the same, and then maybe back farther on that side over would be the children.

K.F.: Oh, okay.

AR: And they would take, and they would separate the claws and put `em in buckets. Then we would go round and gather them up and empty them on the table and crack all the claws. And we would have nothing but claw meat, the children. And grown-ups would do the crabs.

K.F.: Okay. And about how many pickers did they have at that time?

A.P.: Oh, my. I know at least about 30 or 40 at one time. You know. At one time when it was really in full bloom, I guess it was more than that. But I can remember that many being in.

K.F.: And were the pickers black and white, or was it --

A.P.: In St. Michaels?

K.F.: In Harrison and Jarbo.

A.P.: Harrison and Jarbo, I remember black and white. And at Tilghman Packing Company, black and white. Yes.

K.F.: Uh-huh (Affirmative). Now were those picking rooms segregated like the rest of life was, or were they --

A.P.: No, no. Now this was later years down to Tilghman Packing Company. I don't remember ever being segregated in the factories at all. I can't remember.

K.F.: Well they probably weren't if you don't remember them being that way.

A.P.: No. I don't remember.

K.F.: Kind of odd that it would be segregated once you left the factory. Life would be that way.

A.P.: Well, let's see. When I -- see in between, sometimes, somewhere, 37 years I was a care giver. So I didn't pick crabs. And then I left. I left and I traveled a lot after I graduated from high school. And I didn't graduate from here. I was living in Baltimore.

K.F.: Oh.

A.P.: Uh-huh (Affirmative). And I was trying to think how long was it when I picked crabs, and I can't remember -- I mean cracked claws. But I was not grown when I stopped. I think I've stopped when I was young.

K.F.: Okay.

A.P.: I did because I took sick. Yes. I did. I had to stop. Had to stop working when I was --that's what happened. I was sickly. And they said I had Leukemia.

K.F.: Wow.

A.P.: I had 59 blood transfusions. I've been in hospitals 62 times.

K.F.: Oh, my goodness.

A.P.: So a part of my life, you know, was spent in and out of hospitals. And I couldn't work at that time. So I had to stop. And that was, I was still a child. `Cause that was way before I was grown. Twelve, thirteen, like that.

K.F.: Wow.

A.P.: But they were still picking crabs, but I don't remember it being segregated. I can't remember that.

K.F.: That's something I've been asking all the pickers, whether they're black or white, and --

A.P.: What do they say?

K.F.: Nobody remembers the picking rooms being segregated.

A.P.: No.

K.F.: But they remember once they left the packing house, life was.

A.P.: Yes, yes.

K.F.: A few people have remembered separate bathrooms.

A.P.: You know, yes.

K.F.: Were the bathrooms separate?

A.P.: I think that, yes. I think that. I believe that. Yes. I believe that.

K.F.: Okay. And we've been talking with the owners. And, of course, they said you know we couldn't afford to build two factories or two picking rooms, and people just had to work together.

A.P.: Had to -- yes, had to work together. And I don't think it was no conflict. I can't remember. I think if we did have it, I think I would remember something like that. But I don't remember. And I can't remember too many white ladies or men working down to Harrison Jarbo's, or Jewits.

K.F.: Wow.

A.P.: But see I remember Tilghman Island was mostly where we were. And, yes, we did have the separate bathroom, restrooms, but everybody was friendly to one another. Of course, I've never had any problems. My mother was scared to death. I've been down Tilghman and nursing -- Mr. Harrison that owned Chesapeake House down there?

K.F.: Oh, yes.

A.P.: I was with him until he died. And I nursed his wife, Miss Alice, and I nursed quite a few down on Tilghman Island. And my mother would always get so nervous because she was scared they'd put the bridge up on me. I said mom, they're not going to put the bridge up on me if you don't do anything.

(Laughter.)

K.F.: Well do you remember when you all decided or you had to go to work at Tilghman Packing Company, how did you all get down there?

A.P.: On the bus.

K.F.: On a bus.

A.P.: Just like -- well when they get tired -- the school buses, somebody will buy, the company will buy a school bus, and they have a worker to drive the bus, and we would have to meet 'em different places like on the corner of Union. We would have to be on the corner of Union or on the corner. And at that time, that used to be Sam Thomas' filling station where Big Al is, we had to be out there and meet them. You had, you know, places that you were designated to meet the bus.

K.F.: Okay.

A.P.: Yeah. And then they would take you on down. And the bus driver, he would work for the company. And when we'd get finished working, we'd all get on the bus and

-- or he would carry us out to the store, and we would get what we wanted, then he would bring us back home. And that was every day.

K.F.: Wow. Okay.

A.P.: Yeah. And do you remember the first day at Tilghman Packing Company? Do you remember what that was like?

A.P.: Oh, my goodness. I can remember that I had a certain way that I cracked claws. And the older girls was trying to teach me to crack `em the way that they were cracking `em. Said it was easy and the right way. And I had a time trying to crack `em the way that they wanted me to. So one of my girlfriends said to me, said Alice, will you please just crack the claws?

(Laughter.)

A.P.: So they just left me alone and let me crack it the way that I had learned how to crack myself. It wasn't the way that they did, but I was getting the meat out. Trying to crack `em the way that they were teaching me, it was awkward to me. I had taught myself to crack a certain way.

K.F.: Right. Well how did you crack yours the way that you taught yourself?

A.P.: Well I always take the one with the -- the claw with the teeth, I crack that first.

And see, they wanted me to turn around and crack the other part first. And I just couldn't get in the habit of doing that. And I still, I still crack the claw end first.

K.F.: That way.

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

K.F.: Okay. There aren't too many claw crackers left, so I haven't talked --

(END SIDE A.)

(BEGIN SIDE B.)

K.F.: Okay. Well when you were younger and went into the crab house, and this is something I've been asking everybody, can you describe what your thoughts or feelings were about the smell of the crab house?

A.P.: The smell of it?

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

A.P.: Oh, yes. Oh, I thought that was the worst smell. And today, if I eat crabs, of course I can't eat too many of `em, I'm allergic to `em, but every now and then I eat like two or three. If I get the smell, I have to take a bath. That smell is the worst smell. And I know that some people, they think that because they can't smell it, that no one else can smell it. And they would go shopping, and we would get in the stores, and you could smell `em. I would never go shopping. I always would carry my clothes, and I would change my clothes. Because I knew that you could smell it. And it does not smell good. It's a fishy smell. It's terrible.

K.F.: And it penetrates. It goes all the way down to your under clothes.

A.P.: Yes, yes, yes. Uh-huh (Affirmative). You don't need to be around anyone but yourself when you pick crabs, not unless you're in a group of people that's picking crabs and all of you going to be just you there. But to go out in the store or around people, no, I can't do that. I have to go home first.

K.F.: Was there some sort of process or ritual when you got home from working at the crab house that you, and your mom and everybody else went through --

A.P.: Yes, taking turns.

K.F.: Yeah. Can you describe that to me?

A.P.: I would try to beat everybody because at that time, we only had one bathroom, you know. Not a bathroom, a correction, we did not have a bathroom. I have the tub now. It's an oblong tub. My mother gave it to me to remember where I came from. She said when we built our home in Claiborne, she said you have three bathrooms in your home. But I want you to have this tub to remember where you came from that you don't go too high, that you don't remember that you can come back down. And I always remember that. But I kept that tub. And it was an oblong tub, and we would heat the water on the stove, and you know, when there is about six people in the home that have been picking crabs, and you have to wait in line, everyone's using the same tub. It is late when somebody gets their bath. So I would always try to be the first one to get home and put that water on the stove, and grab that tub. And my sister would get so upset. But she was always -- she couldn't work in the factories like I did.

K.F.: No?

A.P.: No. My sister worked in the soda fountain because the smell, and she was scared of the crabs, and the smell of the oysters, and the smell of the crabs, and she would always upchuck, so she couldn't work in it.

K.F.: Oh, wow.

A.P.: I don't know whether she made herself like that.

(Laughter.)

A.P.: But she never did any work like that. She never could. No. But she worked in the soda fountain. And Mr. and Mrs. Chester, Alfred Chester, owned the soda fountain on -- right where that, it used to be a shop selling pictures and black crabs.

K.F.: Oh, okay.

A.P.: Was right there. That's where when I was a child, the soda fountain was there.

K.F.: Okay. And so I guess doing laundry was kind of the same thing?

A.P.: Oh, yes. And that was --

K.F.: Trying to get that smell out of your --

A.P.: And see, you was on the wash tub, and we had to wash often 'cause especially in summertime, you know, you couldn't just lay the clothes around or put 'em in the hamper, you wouldn't be able to stay in the house with the crabs. So we had to wash often and fill the tub up, sit it out in the sun, and had the scrub board. Yes. And we didn't have electric lights. And I still have about five of the kerosene lamps. When we had those storms and I always pull out my lamps, and I still had my light as I remember.

K.F.: What were the work hours like at the crab house?

A.P.: Early. I'd say from seven 'til about five. But when I say seven, some people would go earlier than that and get set up, you know. 'Cause you had to get your cans, and you had to dip 'em in the solution, you know, 'cause -- board, you know.

K.F.: Right.

A.P.: And you have to get the lids and dip them, and you get your tray and you dip that, and you be sit out, and you get your apron and put your aprons on, and all your knives laid out. And when 7:00, then whoever was, the men would bring in the crabs, and you start.

K.F.: You mentioned knives. How many did you bring with you to work?

A.P.: Sometimes I would have maybe two because you never know, plenty of times you would put -- lay `em down, and before you know anything, you done threw it out in the trash.

K.F.: Okay.

A.P.: So you would bring more than one, and most of the crab pickers would have two or three. And we always tried to have two claw knives. And claw knives are much heavier than -- they're like crab picking knives, but you try to get the heavy ones for the claws.

K.F.: Okay. Okay. And can you remember what the cans and the lids looked like at this time?

A.P.: Oh, yes. Some of `em, I remember one was red, black and white and would have a symbol on it, but I can't remember that symbol. Then they had the green and the white with a symbol on it, and the lid would tell, you know. And some of `em, on some cans would tell how to make crab cakes.

K.F.: Oh, okay.

A.P.: Uh-huh (*Affirmative*). Yeah. But everyone would have their own symbol on the cans, you know. And they would have the color, maybe Pewit would have the red and the black and the white. Harrison would have the green and the white cans. I think it was Harrison that had, Harrison Jarbo. Uh-huh (*Affirmative*).

K.F.: Okay. And what about the other people who worked in the crab house like the guys bringing in the crabs and that kind of stuff?

A.P.: And taking out the pickings and all. Yeah, they would keep the crabs, they would have one to bring the crabs in for the ladies. And when you got out of crabs, you would say `crabs, crabs', and then they would bring you more crabs. And your picking can, if your picking can was full, you'd say `pickings', and someone would come and take the can and empty the can out and give you a clean one.

K.F.: Okay, okay. I haven't heard that one before. Now was it always men who did those jobs?

A.P.: Yes. Yes, the men did those jobs. And the men scored up the pounds. Or sometimes women. Now my sister did, Joyce, my sister did that for a while. You get about four pounds, and then you would weigh `em up, or five. Sometimes the ladies would go to six or seven if they didn't think the inspector or the boss was going to say anything. They would sit down and pick, you know, longer than what they was supposed to. And then you carried up and weigh `em. You carried a little extra just in case that you didn't have a pound on when you put it on the scale.

K.F.: Oh, okay.

A.P.: So you make up that pound, or else sometimes you would pack it so full, you could take some off and put it in the can. You would always carry a can with some crab meat, not full can because you may have to take some off to the scale with you.

K.F.: Okay, okay. All right. And --

A.P.: And they would tally `em up. If you carry up five, you'd have five marks, and you would know how much each mark was. If you say 50 cent, you know, like that.

K.F.: Right, right. And when did you all get paid?

A.P.: On Friday.

K.F.: Was that in cash or check?

A.P.: Some people got -- sometime they would get paid, most of the time back then, it was mostly cash or when I first started, it was mostly cash. And sometimes now Harrison would be checks, but you got it in an envelope, and it told you how much on there, it tell you how much was taken out for this, and how much was taken out, you know.

K.F.: Right.

A.P.: Yes.

K.F.: So it was like taking out taxes and that kind of stuff

A.P.: Right, that's right.

K.F.: How did you all ever get a raise? Did you have to ask for it?

A.P.: Sometimes. Sometimes you would have to ask for it. It would be long and in between before you got a raise. And maybe you would get two or three cent, but not much. Not until the later years, you know, these later years. They would just say well I think you're entitled to a raise, and give you 25 cent, something like that. But I stopped. I was working at Higgins. When I stopped, I was get 2.50 a pound. I think I was the highest paid one around, It wasn't -- just me. So but I think, I think that Joe Sperry pays them, I think it's 2.25, I believe.

K.F.: Okay.

A.P.: I think they've gotten up to 2.25 now. I don't know.

K.F.: Okay. And well you started working at Higgins in the 80's, and they showed you how to pick crabs. I haven't heard of too many restaurants that have their own crab pickers.

A.P.: Yes. Well he had a place built right off from the restaurant. They could come -- it was just like we was in a glass room, and the people that came in the restaurant could come and stand at the windows and could watch us pick.

K.F.: Oh, really?

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

K.F.: Okay.

A.P.: And then --

K.F.: What was that like, having all those people look at you while you were --

A.P.: Oh, I didn't mind. I didn't mind that.

K.F.: Yeah.

A.P.: And then after a while, after he sold some of his restaurants and they stopped selling, he kept me on because I was the youngest one, and the only one that wasn't drawing social security. So he built a room in the back, he made a bar out front where the restaurant, where we was picking, and they built a room in the back for me called Miss Alice's room. And the room is still there, Miss Alice is not, but --
(Laughter.)

A.P.: And I stayed there, I think I picked about a year after Eddy died. But I started out with Eddy in the business.

K.F.: And Eddy was?

A.P.: Eddy Higgins.

K.F.: Okay. And you started out with him?

A.P.: Yes. When he started in the business, we were down to the Crab Claw, see. That's where it started out, into the business of selling clams, and crabs and all that was down -- what's the name, him and Billy Jones. And then he branched out, and I went to

work for him then, back. And that was some years. It was a long time. I said Eddy, I said I used to work for you a long time ago. Have you got anything for me to do? He said, yeah, we're picking crabs now, come on up. So I went up there and cracked claws. Yeah. And I did it. I think it's been about four years, but in the summer when crab day, I always go down for him, Carena asked me would I go down for them for the crab day. And I always -- and they had another affair. The museum that was in the fall, I picked crabs in one of the buildings. I forget. For a group of people. And I've forgot, I've forgot when it was. But I do it. And I go around and demonstrate if anyone wants me at a party when they have a party.

K.F.: Oh, okay.

A.P.: You know, catering party.

K.F.: Yeah. Well how do you show other people how to pick crabs the right way?

A.P.: I show `em. How do I show `em?

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

A.P.: I go ahead and show `em with the crab. Step by step. And then they ask me well why don't you take the apron off That's the main, that's one of the first questions I get. Why don't you take the apron off? And I said well the apron's no, it's not bothering the crab, and it's not bothering me. It's giving me support to be able to hold the crab in my hand. And then another question they say is why don't you take the meat out of the legs? Well when you're sitting down eating crabs, that's different. But it's not enough meat in those legs for you to bother with when you're picking crabs, you just take the claws, and that's it. And I just, I open it and show `em step by step. And what amazes people so is that when you cut that top part off, and they see that you only have two big pieces in the whole crab, that amazes them. But that's all you get, two big pieces out of the crab from each side. Yeah.

K.F.: Yeah. It is pretty interesting when people see, you know, a professional do it. Especially, you know, after they've been smacking them with hammers for a while.

A.P.: Well now the first time I went to a party across -- Clarksville, across the bridge?

K.F.: Okay, yeah.

A.P.: We did a catering party, and we had a crab feast, and I was demonstrating. And when they brought that, first time I ever seen the hammers, and I said to my husband I said, Les, what are those things for?

(Laughter)

A.P.: He said, Alice, you not gonna believe this because you're a crab picker, you're not going to believe this. I said what do they do with it? He says they crack the claws and they pick the -- I said not with that. He said well you just watch `em, watch `em. And I stood around and I was looking. And when I -- they smack that claw, they mash it, the shell and the meat's all up there together.

(Laughter)

A.P.: But I think that's when someone not, you know, they don't know any different. Some people never seen a crab until they come down here.

K.F.: Right.

A.P.: Many of the ones that come to the Crab Deck have never seen a crab before. And they'll say will you sell, are you selling that?' And I said sure, I sell all that I pick, I sell it.

K.F.: Oh, you do?

A.P.: Yes. `Cause it's a lot of people that don't want to sit down and pick that crab meat out of the shell because they don't know how to do it, and they don't want to take time, you know. And so they just buy the can, a pound of -- I had my scales and everything down there, and I just weigh it and sell it to `em, \$10 a pound.

K.F.: Oh. Now do you have to buy the bushel of crabs from Higgins or something first?

A.P.: Oh, no. That's all his.

K.F.: Okay.

A.P.: It's all his. I just, I just sell the crab meat whether he want me to or not. I give him the -- the money is his.

K.F.: Oh, okay.

A.P.: Yes. And sometimes I crack claws. And when I get some customers that have never seen the claw cracked, then they'll say will you crack a few of the claws? And I'll crack `em for `em, and I said well you want to try `em? I'll give `em samples.

K.F.: Now some people think the claws taste better.

A.P.: I do.

K.F.: Do you?

A.P.: Yes. I think the claw is the best part of the crab.

K.F.: Uh-huh (affirmative). My husband thinks so.

A.P.: It's sweet.

K.F.: Okay. Well let me jump to a different topic here. You were talking about driving with your husband to deliver the crabs with Higgins.

A.P.: Oh, yes.

K.F.: Can you tell me a little bit about that?

A.P.: Okay. Like they get an order, maybe at a restaurant or a recreation place, or they're going to have a crab feast. And the family may get together and want to have a crab feast. And they'll tell them how many bushels they want, and what day they want `em on. And then they load `em up from the restaurant. Because see they buy -- crabs come in, the crabbers come in right there, fresh every day.

K.F.: Right.

A.P.: And when they come in, they load right on his truck, and he has the cooling system to keep `em cool, and they stay alive. Or if they want a load that is cooked, he can cook `em and season `em, and all they have to do is just let `em know, and he deliver `em to wherever they want `em delivered.

K.F.: Okay. And you and your husband have been all over?

A.P.: Oh, yes. Yes. And before I stopped picking, before they got so they didn't have enough crabs for me to pick, claws was scarce, they would stop and tell me Lester's getting ready to go out on the truck, and get ready. And I would stop picking and get myself ready and go on the truck with Les. I always bring my clothes and we have a shower and everything upstairs right there.

K.F.: Wow.

A.P.: And I would take, put my clothes on and go on the truck. But now, see, I leave right from home here, he'll call me in the morning and tell me, Alice, we're leaving out 10:30, be up here 10:30, and I'll be sitting up there at 10:30, and then we go wherever we have to go. We go all down to the beach down Chicken Heads in, what, Bentley? Is it Bentley? I think. Down there near Rehoboth.

K.F.: Oh, okay.

A.P.: Yes, we go all down in there too. And he deliver. And then we come back. And sometimes -- now if he doesn't have to go a long distance, he can take two runs in one day.

K.F.: Oh, okay, okay. Well how long has your husband been doing this?

A.P.: Oh, my. Well before he went to Higgins Crab House, he worked for Ray Jones Seafood down in Wittman until he went out of business. He stayed with him, oh, for near about 20 years. And when he went out of business, then Eddie knew that they were going out of business, and they knew that Lester -- the kind of work Lester do, and he's a good worker. And because he was catering with Eddie Higgins, for Eddie Higgins before when he was working here in the evenings, so he knew what he was getting. So he asked Lester would he come to work for him when Ray Jones closed up, and he told `em yes. And he's been there ever since. So that's, I don't know. That's been some years now.

K.F.: How did you meet your husband?

A.P.: Oh, I knew my husband for years -- we all, I don't know. I met him one time I went to a -- they used to have lawn parties, Lafayettes or whatever you call `em. And I saw him one time, and I told him, I said I'm going away, but I'm coming back. And one day I'm going to marry you. And he said no, you're not. And I said yes, I am. And I went away and came back, and I guess it was the right time. In 1966, '65, he asked me to marry him. And in 1966, we got married. Been married, it will be 34 years June the 17th.

K.F.: Wow. That's great.

A.P.: He's my best friend. Yes. And he is a cook.

K.F.: Oh.

A.P.: Oh, I love it. I love it. Oh, he can cook. And he just love to cook. And I don't have to cook.

(Laughter)

K.F.: He can cook anything?

A.P.: Oh, anything, anything, anything. You tell him. Anything. Anything, prepare any kind of dish you want.

K.F.: Wow.

A.P.: If you look at him and look at me, you can tell it.

(Laughter)

A.P.: Of course, I'm going down now. I was 308 pounds. But I'm on my way down.

K.F.: Yeah.

A.P.: I'm watching my diet. I gave up all cookies and ice cream and chocolate candy, all pastries, cakes, pies and cookies. I don't eat none of that. It's been over a year now.

K.F.: Wow. That's good, that's good.

A.P.: And my doctor is so pleased with me.

K.F.: I bet.

A.P.: I'm pleased with myself too.

K.F.: Well that's the most important.

A.P.: `Cause I feel so much better.

K.F.: Yeah. That's the most important.

A.P.: Yeah. I have bad back, and my knees are bad, and a whole lot of weight, you know, was making it hard on me. Pain. And so I just made up my mind I was going to take it off

K.F.: Well that's good. That's good. Now you said you used to shuck oysters.

A.P.: Oh, yes.

K.F.: Well let's talk about that a little bit.

A. P.: Okay.

K.F.: That's part of the seafood process too, and we are going to do a little --

A.P.: I shuck, mainly I shucked oysters for Eddie, Eddie Higgins. And I shucked oysters down to Tilghman for Buddy Harrison. And I love to shuck oysters. One of the best. I don't know too many men can beat me round here.

K.F.: Really?

A.P.: Uh-huh (affirmative). I will not go into a contest with women because I don't like to beat women at anything, but I go in contest with men, and you can't find one round here that can beat me.

K.F.: Now what is the -- what's the difference in, you know, what your body had to do between shucking oysters and picking crabs? Is there one that's more difficult?

A.P.: Oh, yes. Shucking oysters is much harder on you body. Some people shuck from the chest, or you can shuck from your wrist. And I learned to shuck from my wrists. And you have -- well I don't say you have to stand up because I can shuck just as fast sitting down as I can standing up. So but it is a job that most of the people standup and do.

K.F.: Right, right.

A.P.: And you have standard and select. And -- well it used to be a third bucket years ago, but I think that's out now. That was the -- standards, select, and I can't think of that other one. But it was a larger oyster.

K.F.: Like a cranium or something like that? Something bigger?

A.P.: Would be bigger than the select.

K.F.: Okay.

A. P.: And you separate `em, and when you get a gallon, you carry it up to the skimmer, and you empty it out on the skimmer, and he marked that up, and he gets paid by the pound, I think, now. By the pound. We used to get paid by the gallon. And I can't remember how much I got by the gallon. I can't remember. But oyster shucking is real -- but I love to get a rhythm with it.

K.F.: It's easier to get the rhythm with shucking than it is with picking?

A.P.: Yes, `cause you're standing on your feet.

K.F.: Oh, okay.

A.P.: And I think it's easier. But I look for -- I look to get a rhythm of shucking oysters more so than picking crabs because once I get that going, I really can go with shucking the oysters. I have to get that mood. It's, you know, just a certain mood that you got to get there. And then you can really swing into it. And know what you're doing, you got to know what you're doing. Some people shuck oysters from the hinge in the back, but I like to hit him from the mouth in the front. And it's a art to it, knowing where to hit `em.

K.F.: Right.

A.P.: I think your knife has a certain point, you know, you have to have a certain point on the knife and all. It plays a certain part, your knife. And the hammer, some people like

big fat hammers, some like the small skinny ones, and medium size. And I like that small handle.

K.F.: Okay. Now do you sharpen the point on your knife yourself, or --

A.P.: Yes.

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

A.P.: Uh-huh (affirmative).

K.F.: Okay. What do you use to sharpen that up with?

A.P.: A file. I never sharpen my knives picking crabs though.

K.F.: No?

A.P.: Never. The shells sharpen `em, but I never sharpen `em. But I sharpen my oyster knives.

K.F.: Now what is the worst injury that you've either seen or had shucking?

A.P.: I've never had, but I've seen a lady stab her wrist one time. And I saw -- my husband stabbed his thumb. But I never stabbed myself, nor do I cut myself picking crab. I may stick a pin in picking the crab up, but never have cut myself.

K.F.: Well you mentioned you were allergic to crabs.

A.P.: Yes.

K.F.: Well can you still pick `em if you're allergic?

A.P.: Yes.

K.F.: Really? You just can't eat them.

A.P.: Can't eat `em. I can eat maybe -- I can't go over four crabs. But I can't eat anything in the shell. Like oysters, clams, hard-shell clams, soft-shell clams, all that. Lobster, yes, maybe about one in say about three or four months. Shrimp, I'm pushing it. (Laughter)

A.P.: Fish, maybe once about every three months or four months I can have fish.

K.F.: So seafood just in general, you're allergic to seafood.

A.P.: Seafood. Uh-huh (affirmative),

K.F.: My goodness. And you've worked in it all your life.

A.P.: Yeah, been around it. But it doesn't bother me to work in it. It's just when I eat it. Yeah. And I love oysters, I love the taste of oysters. And I didn't want to believe it. And the last time I ate some, my husband had to take me to the hospital. And I was just swelled up. And he said oh, look at you. And I went to the mirror and looked at myself. I said oh, it's true, it's true. `Cause I did it too many times now. I just didn't want to believe that the oysters was doing it to me.

K.F.: Right.

A.P.: And so the doctor told me not to eat anymore. I told him no, I wasn't going to eat any more. But I really love `em. Oh, golly. Yeah.

K.F.: Well let's see. Can't think of any other questions to ask you. Is there anything you want to add?

A.P.: No. I know one thing that I would like to say is that I am really glad that I learned how to pick crabs and shuck oysters and crack claws because there was never a time that I couldn't take care of myself because there was always someone wanting something like that done that everybody don't know how to do it. And I'm glad that I learned how to do it. I wouldn't take it back.

K.F.: Are you sad that younger people are not learning how to pick crabs?

A.P.: Yes. Because after my generation, it's gone. You don't -- I mean they don't want to hear about no picking crabs. They'd rather walk the streets than pick crabs and crack claws, you know. And that's why, why we don't have any more factories than we do because we don't have the people there that are going to do that. Joe Sperry has to go and get -- it's another, what, nationality that comes down there.

K.F.: I think he said he has Cambodians or something come in picking crabs.

A.P.: Yes. I didn't know what nationality they were, but I do know it's another nationality that comes because he can't get anyone. See after mine, that's it. And I know the oysters is gone, oyster shuckers. Because if they don't pick crabs, I know they not going to shuck oysters.

(Laughter.)

K.F.: That's a lot dirtier too, isn't it?

A.P.: Yes.

K.F.: I mean it's muddy.

A.P.: Yeah, muddy. Yeah, you have to wear boots keep your feet dry, and you wear the gloves, you know, on your hand. But it's a art, and it's good to know it, I think. I think it is. I pick crabs from eight to four. And from eleven to seven, I worked at the hospital.

K.F.: Really?

A.P.: For 12 years, I did that.

K.F.: Oh, my goodness.

A.P.: Uh-huh (affirmative).

K.F.: And was this, you were picking crabs over at Higgins?

A.P.: Yes.

K.F.: And then working at the hospital?

A.P.: At the hospital. Yes.

K.F.: My goodness.

A.P.: Yeah. I did that until my husband told me it's time to stop. Yeah. But and now I stay, mostly it's volunteering and I go, you know, to the nursing homes to the hospital every day. I would get up and go just like I'm going to work. I would be out to Talbot House and House in Pines, and William Hill Manor, and I push the patients up to the table, you know. And the ones that can walk, walk to the bedroom and talk to `em. And like I have an uncle in one, so I go and feed him. And today, someone else is going to feed him for me. One of the girls will feed him.

K.F.: Okay.

A.P.: `Cause I told him yesterday I wouldn't be there today `cause tonight I have a program that I have to go to that I have to be the M.C.

K.F.: Okay. Well let me ask you this. You just reminded me of a question. All the people who picked in the crab houses, did everybody socialize outside the crab house too? Was that --

A.P.: Some of `em. And like I say, some of `em come from different places. And they all didn't live in St. Michaels. So the ones that lived in St. Michaels, most of us went to the same church and we were friends and all. And the ones that came, like I said, from Bellevue, they were all friends. And we were too to some of `em, you know, that came from Bellevue and different places. I would say on the whole that it was , you know, we were friends outside of the work place too.

K.F.: 'Cause I've often heard people tell me that working at the crab house, it was like a family.

A.P.: Uh-huh (affirmative).

K.F.: And so I was trying to figure out, you know, do people help each other outside of the crab house? Do they still socialize with each other outside or --

A.P.: Yeah. They would bring, you know, lunch. And maybe a lady would know that you like pound cake, and she would bring three or four slices of pound cake and pass it around. And somebody else would bring chocolate chip cookies, or somebody else would bring sandwiches. Just, you know, it was just like a family. And they all shared together.

K.F.: Okay. Was lunch like that every day, that people just brought stuff every day?

A.P.: Yeah. But everyone didn't stop and eat lunch at the same time.

K.F.: Oh, okay. So you ate whenever you got hungry?

A.P.: You ate whenever you wanted to. Uh-huh (affirmative). But you shared with, you know, if someone said what's that you got smells so good? Well I brought extra, would you like to have? Yeah, I'll eat it after a while. Like that. But it was all, it was just like one big family. Yes.

K.F.: Now how did everybody get along with the manager or the --

A.P.: Very seldom you seen the boss.

K.F.: Really?

A.P.: Yes. Very seldom you seen the boss. They would have like a supervisor, you know, like that. And everybody got along with him 'cause everyone knew what they were supposed to do, and they did it because that was their living. You know. I mean we didn't make much money, but during that time, we didn't have to spend much money.

K.F.: This is true.

A.P.: Because a lot of food, we raised it in our, you know, yard, vegetables and all. And what we did buy, it didn't cost that much. The prices of food wasn't that high. So, you know, we could live. And I don't think we worried as much as we do now. We have so much now and we worry more about it. I think we worry more about keeping it than getting it.

(Laughter)

K.F.: I think you're probably right.

A.P.: Yes. And back them days, you know, you said I just don't know how ends gonna meet. And if you said that long enough and you said it in the right place, I just don't know how we gonna pay the bills. And by Sunday afternoon, you would have money to pay the bills 'cause they would take up a church offering, or friends would get together and bring the money for you to pay your bill. Or if you didn't have food, they would make sure that you had food. It was just, it was just everybody trying to get along, you know, and live together. It's changed. It's not that way.

K.F.: What do you think changed it?

A.P.: I don't know. I really don't know what changed it. But to me, I think most of our young people think that the world owe them, you know, they owe them something. But nobody owes you anything. You have to make your own way in life. If you want, if you want a million dollars, are you going to get it by walking up and down the street, or are you going to get you a job and try to get you a million dollars? Or are you going to stand on the corner and smoke that dope and think that I'm going to give you my money for

Welfare and everything else to pay your bills? I don't think so. No, no. Now I pulled a line and it can be my relatives or anybody's relatives, but if you can stand up and smoke dope, you can get a job. You don't need no check coming into you every month. If you got your health and strength but you done messed up your mind so with those drugs that you can't hold a job, that's not my fault.

K.F.: Right, right.

A.P.: And that's what we got, a whole lot of it. But every time I see somebody passing it -- I better not say what I'm going to say on tape.

(END OF INTERVIEW.)