

Interview Log

Interviewee: Louise Clayton
Connie Marshall
Patty Laird
Christine Smith

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Interviewer: Kelly Feltault

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Comments: No voice identification except at very beginning, and all recording is on one channel, so some speaker identification may be incorrect.

Phonetic spellings: Bobby Leets, Dennis Ebayer

BEGIN SIDE A

KR: Well let's start here, and if I could have you all just go around and say your names, and I'll make sure this is going to pick us up. So we'll start with you.

L.C.: Louise.

K.F.: And your last name?

L.C.: Clayton.

K.F.: Okay.

C.M.: Connie Marshall.

P.L.: Patty Laird.

C. S.: Christine Smith.

K.F.: Okay, all right. Now let me ask all of you all how long have you been picking crabs, either here or previously?

C. S.: Well I've been picking really ever since I've been married here, married here. That's been almost 30 years.

K.F.: Okay.

C.M.: I picked up at Yule before I ever got married and since I got married, ;o that's been about 48, 50 years.

L.C.: I've picked 19, ever since I've been married.

P.L.: Let's see. I moved here when I was 31, and I picked that next summer, and I was 32. So I've been picking 18, 18 years.

K.F.: Okay. Well how did you all learn to pick crabs?

(Laughter.)

C.M.: That's a natural thing when you live Smith Island.

C. S.: I was getting ready to say. I don't know.

P.L.: I don't know, I was getting ready to say, I guess it seems like when you live on the water, because even when I lived in Rock Hall -- now I didn't pick for a living over to

Rock Hall, but I mean we steamed crabs, and we just picked 'em, and we just L.C.: You grow up around it, watching people do it.

P.L.: Yeah, it's natural.

C.M.: It's a natural thing.

L.C.: My sister-in-law taught, kind of taught me how to do it. Or Janice, she taught me, and Dora. She's another member of the co-op, she taught me some things.

P.L.: Well I knew it was either do it or have to get out.

C.M.: Or starve to death.

(Laughter.)

P.L.: I had been a (indiscernible) technician. I sold my home and moved over here, and like I said, I was 31, and really 32 before the first summer that I picked. So I knew I had

to make some money, I was always used to spending money of my own., So C.S.: She picks left handed, too.

PL.: Yeah, and I'm a left-handed picker,

K.F.: Oh, okay

P.L.: There's not too many of them.

K.F.: That's right. Okay. Well what has it meant for you all to be able to pick crabs and, like you said, earn your own money?

L.C.: It's nice to have your own money.

C.S.: Well that, and also you can -- you help your husband out. It's an income, it's two incomes coming in instead of just one, and you help out with the finances, and be able maybe to do some things to your home that you wouldn't normally be able to do.

C.M.: We're no different than the ones on the mainland, you know. Takes two to --

C.S.: Make a living.

C.M.: Make a living. And, you know, we're just like that. We all have the same needs and wants. So in order to get some of the needs met and get our wants met, we have to pick crabs, and that's the onliest other thing around here, you know.

L.C.: 'Cause I mean, I don't know about anybody else, but when I helped my husband to the shanty --

C.M.: You don't get paid.

L.C.: I don't get paid.

C.M.: Just don't even get --

L.C.: I will say when I cut -- soft crabs, he'll say well when that money -- when they're sold, that money's yours. Well I don't ever really see it. I mean it goes to the same firm, as they say, goes down for bills or whatever. But you don't get paid like an employee would in that work to the shanty.

C.M.: It's a thank-you job, really.

L.C.: Yeah, that's it. Yeah, thank-you job.

C.S.: Well for myself, I know we're insurance poor. You know, we've just got so many different types of insurances, and it takes two to work, and I mean we would really have to drop a lot of things if I didn't, I mean, you know, to keep our health insurance, and to keep our boat insurances, and our fire insurances, and a lot of things.

L.C.: Life insurance.

C.S.: Yeah, things would be completely --

P.L.: Car insurance.

C.S.: Yeah, we have car insurance, and truck on the mainland. And also, the kids, I got two kids in school, and it's expensive, you know, to outfit 'em in Tommy Hilfiger and Nautica.

(Laughter.)

C.S.: And we certainly want our children to go like the rest of the kids.

C.M.: And Nikes and Reeboks.

C.S.: Yeah.

K.F.: Right, right. Well let me ask you all specifically how much does like fire insurance cost for a boat or anything like that? Is your insurance higher here on Smith Island than, say, some of the other areas?

L.C.: Well my husband's boat insurance, we've got it insured for 60,000, and it's a thousand thirty-six. Our insurance for our homes now are similar to a lot of areas like Ocean City, I think, and all around the water have gone up.

C.M.: Yeah. They've doubled.

L.C.: You know, just this weekend with this wind they say they clocked at 80 miles an hour. We've lost -- we just had somebody put new shingles on the house, and we've got a whole yard full again. And the minimum now is \$2,000.

C.M.: I know.

L.C.: So we're just, you know, so out here in the open for all these kind of storms. But like I said, I think most, I think even probably Crisfield, but I know Ocean City and a lot of resort places that are, you know, on the river, or on the ocean, or on the bay are probably have to pay that \$2,000.

C.M.: Yeah. And you got insurance.

L.C.: I think they just changed it like, what, two years ago?

C.M.: Last year the insurance went up almost double on our home 'cause I called the insurance company when I received my bill. It was last September, because I pay it by the year, and it had almost doubled, and they said due to all the storms and we live right, you know, on the water. And a lot of insurance companies now don't want to insure anyone around here now because of -- and if you've got it, as it goes up or what, you just pay it, don't say anything else about it, be thankful you got it.

K.F.: Because it's so hard to find a company that will insure?

C.M.: Yeah, yeah. 'Cause Bobby Leets has had a time getting their home iniured.

C.S.: Have they?

C.M.: Because they live close by to the fire company. It's crazy. I know.

L.C.: I would think that would be more of an asset.

C.M.: No, sir, because they live so close to the fire company. I've never heard anything like it. And then because of, you know, the hurricanes and all that.

K.F.: Well can you all tell me what it was like picking crabs before the co-oh was here?

L.C.: It was a lot different.

C.S.: Yeah, it was. It was different. Now I would go down to Connie's house a lot of times, and we would pick together in her kitchen.

K.F.: Okay.

C.S.: You know, and some did do that, and others just picked by their selvei, in their own kitchen, you know. But here, we're all together and I don't know, it's --

L.C.: Most of our husbands when they would come in with the crabs, they had --

C.S.: Yeah, had to steam 'em.

L.C.: -- them set up right there in a big stainless steel pot and they would steam 'em in their crab houses. And most the time, I would pick to my home, or I'd pick with my mother. And so we didn't -- or I didn't think I'd ever want to change from it, but since I've been here, I wouldn't want to go back the way that it used to be. I don't think my husband would either, 'cause it's a lot easier for him.

C.M.: Yeah, it's a lot easier.

L.C.: 'Cause they just bring the crabs here, and then we have somebody, we hire men that steam 'em for us, and they, you know, bring 'em in and put 'em in on the table for us.

C.M.: Your first steaming is put on the table, and our men don't have to --

L.C.: Handle 'em.

C.M.: --handle 'em other than to bring them here.

L.C.: They bring them here and that's it.

C.M.: And we put our name on our lid, the top of the basket lid, and when they steam 'em, we have three to steam, Lindsay Bradshaw, and Everett --

L.C.: Blandon.

C.M.: -- Blandon, and Buddy Marshall. And they know when they'll see like Patty's, and he'll go put the first -- on her table to be cooling. And he does that, they do that each one

of our places, and that way, you know, our husbands don't have to -- when they bring `em here, that's it. They don't have to lift on `em anymore.

C. S.: Where before when it was hot in summer, and they'd be in their crab houses, and tired, and have to tend to their crabs and get them ready to ship out, they would have to be steaming our crabs and all that to eat, you know, that would come from them. And it was a lot harder for the men as well as us, you know.

C.M.: Yeah.

P.L.: The thing I miss really about not picking home was that I would pick in my out kitchen, and my two sons and my husband would come out there every evening. My husband used to sit down and eat some claws, and we'd have some time together because most of the time, I pick of evenings, and I pick late. And but if they want, then they can come by or they can call, or I can slip home. You know, put my crabs in the cooler and slip back home for a while if they're sick or if they need me for anything. But they're 14 and 16 now. But I do miss, you know, not being in the out kitchen with them right, you know, in the house. So that's the part I miss about it. But picking down here's been fun. It was hard to get used to it at first, but now it's so convenient and easy to keep clean and we

C.M.: The first year we didn't --

P.L.: Yeah, it was kind of hard, we went in there with 15 --

C.M.: Different businesses.

P.L.: -- different businesses.

K.F.: Tell me about that first.

C.M.: Oh, it was terrible for a little while.

P.L.: It was.

C.M.: It was. And everyone that picked here, if they're telling the truth, will own it that the first year --

C. S.: Was hard.

C.M.: -- was hard. Because each one of us has our own business. And you put 15 women in 15 businesses, then --

C. S.: In one little room.

C.M.: In one room, and you're running into each other, and I want mine done this way, and she does her packing another way, and she does her packing another one and, you know --

P.L.: All used to being their own boss.

K.F.: Right.

P.L.: Which we still are, in a sense, but we're all together, we've had to learn to work together and --

C.M.: We've had to learn to.

P.L.: Be more flexible, I think.

C. S.: I think it's brought us all closer together.

C.M.: It has.

C. S.: We cry together, we laugh together --

L.C.: And we --

C. S.: Yeah.

L.C.: -- help each other.

/" (Laughter.)

L.C.: If somebody can't lift or --

C.M.: We help each other.

L.C.: We help each other, you know, if they're not feeling well, one of them has to leave. You know, all the sudden, we're always ready to help put their crabs away or whatever needs to be done, you know, we work together that way.

C. S.: There's been times that somebody's sick and two pickers are getting ready to leave, they'll jump in if there's just a half a basket left and pick `em, you know, for each other. Or some nights I've stayed here with some of the girls that's got small kids and help them pick off so they won't be by their self. And other times, they sit here and help me. So it's, like I said, we've grown a lot, an awful lot.

C.M.: From that first year, we have grown an awful lot.

K.F.: Well how did you solve those problems the first year?

L.C.: We just, we knew we had to get along, you know, we knew we had to do this, and we just --

C.S.: We had to pray an awful lot about it.

L. C.: Yeah, pray a lot about it.

C. S.: We had to learn to watch our tongues, and before we spoke, think about how it would affect --

L.C.: How it would *affect* somebody else, yeah.

C. S.: Yeah.

C.M.: For what we would say, we would have to think over what we were going to say because one little word could offend somebody bad.

C. S.: We decided that if we were going to stay here, we just had to get along, and that we had to, you know, we had to be kind.

C.M.: Yeah.

C.S.: Kind to one another, work together.

P.L.: Improvise.

C. S.: Yeah, that's right.

C.M.: And ever since then, it's been fine.

P.L.: Yeah.

C.M.: I guess that first year --

P.L.: Yeah, boy.

L.C.: That's like a marriage or anything, you know, that first year is the hardest.

P.L.: Yeah.

C.M.: Yeah.

C. S.: Yeah.

L.C.: And that's how it was here.

C.M.: And I'll tell you it was a lot of people on this island didn't think it would work. But it has.

P.L.: I know one thing, if we had to go back, my husband would -- go upstairs, steam them crabs --

(Laughter.)

L.C.: I think everybody's husbands would be in the same boat.

K.F.: Well what did your husbands think of this idea when it was first proposed?

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P.L.: My husband wasn't too happy about it at first.

C.M.: Mine neither.

C. S.: Well mine was kind of, he was optimistic so -- I don't know. He didn't think much of it at first, but I was one of the first ones that helped get it started. And the more I got into it and I found out about it, and a lot of it that we did, you know, and what was it, four years we were trying to get it started, a lot of it didn't turn out the way we expected it to, you know. But it was a lot we had to learn. And the more we got into it, the more he was encouraging me. You know, he thought it was going to be a good thing once it, you know, when we found -- especially when we had grant money funded and, you know, it just seemed like this was all working out for us.

C.M.: But who thought little Tylerton would get such a place like this, you know. The other parts are bigger, the one part's bigger than what we are, and we never thought we'd get anything like this.

P.L.: About like we do with everything else. You pray about it, and ask the Lord to --

C.M.: Work hard for it.

P.L.: -- guide, you know, the directions to take and doors were just opened all the way, I mean they just kept being opened all the way down the line. So it was just intended to be.

C. S.: I'll tell you something else. As far as bootlegging, I'm not as brave as some of the other women around here, or anywhere, you know. I'd rather stay on the good side of the law.

(Laughter.)

C. S.: And I just thought, you know, why not try it. You know, let's go into it. Suppose they should put a halt on us picking all together. I mean, it's possible. And I thought I've just got to have some income coming in. So that's what, more or less, made me -- one of the things that made me -- I think all of us probably. Don't you think you had that on your minds?

P.L.: Yeah, absolutely.

L.C.: Yeah. That's the chance you're taking.

C. S.: I mean there's one way to get that crab meat off of here is on a boat. And I mean, you know, it's easier to get caught in a boat than it would be in --

C.M.: Cars.

C.S.: Cars and trucks and automobiles.

K.F.: Now did any of you ever get caught?

C.M.: Huh-uh (negative).

C. S.: No.

P.L.: No.

P.L.: I can remember when I was a teenager living in Crisfield, my mother and father had a restaurant and a grocery store. And I can remember when -- this is years ago, probably 35 years ago when they sent it over and the -- what is it, not DNR, but state inspectors would get a hold of it, pour bleach on it. I can remember we'd buy a lot of frozen crab meat for our restaurant. And when mom would hear that they're coming around checking, we'd have to go get boxfuls of crab meat and take it to other people's freezers, you know, to other friends' houses and put it in their freezers, and get it out of the store. Because it was illegal. Like I said, that's been 35 years ago.

K.F.: Right. But they would pour bleach on it then.

P.L.: They would pour beach on it and throw it back overboard. That would be down to the depot or when they went -- just when they were confiscated.

K.F.: Right.

P.L.: But then they would come look in the restaurants and say, you know, if you sell crab meat, where's your containers, you know. Are you legal, you know. And so we would hurry up and put it in a box and move it to somebody else's freezer 'til we got afraid the next time.

K.F.: Did the health inspectors ever come to the island?

P.L.: Oh, yeah.

K.F.: To look at the, you know, at your out kitchens or anything like that?

P.L.: Oh, yeah.

C.S.: Oh, yeah.

C.M.: Not first going up, they didn't say they were coming or the health department was coming. But those four years that we, you know, the building was being worked on, they were working on --

P.L.: As long as they were working on this project, they worked with us.

L.C.: How many summers was it? Was it two summers that we picked with Jay running around?

C.M.: I think it was three or four, weren't it?

P.L.: Three I think.

L.C.: We had him come to our place, he said he'd check it out.

C.M.: And we had the same crab meat --

P.L.: Yeah, samples.

C.S.: We sent samples over.

K.F.: Oh, right, so they could test it.

L.C.: Yeah. And we got real good results even at home.

P.L.: Yeah.

L.C.: I mean it was so far above the picking houses on other parts, it was unbelievable. (Laughter.)

P.L.: Yeah, it was.

L.C.: Our count was always a lot better than the mainland's. We even thought, suppose we get in here and we steam it under pressure, and they do a repeated, you know, counts on our crab meat. We even thought wonder if we'd get a less of a report, you know, at home than we did when we got down here. We didn't know if we'd get as good a reading or if we'd get better, or maybe even possibly the same. So it was kind of interesting to see.

C.M.: But we've always got good ratings on our crab meat samples.

L.C.: Yeah, I mean nobody ever failed.

C.S.: Huh-uh (negative).

K.F.: Now when they come, do they have to -- because you all are your own independent individual businesses here, in here, I mean 15, do they have to check everybody or do they just do a sample?

C.M.: No, they just do one.

L.C.: They just do --they take one or two pounds, and that's it. And we take turns.

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C.M.: Each one of us takes a turn.

L.C.: Each one of us gives a pound, you know, and the co-op reimburses us for it. And we just take turns giving it to them to take back.

K.F.: Now when you were picking at home, were you picking, I guess what's called Smith Island Crab Meat where the lump, and the regular, and the claw and everything goes into one?

L.C.: Uh-huh (affirmative).

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

L.C.: We pick exactly the same way.

P.R.: Same way.

L.C.: Put everything in one container. And that's what makes us different, unique, 'cause we've got all parts of the crab, and it's flavorful, you know. There's people that wants us to separate it, but we'd rather not. One thing, we're not used to doing it. And for another thing, it's just what -- we pride in that, you know, the whole crab instead of the individual different, just claw or just backfin or special.

P.R.: I guess we would for the right price, consider it.

(Laughter.)

C.M.: Offer us a good price, and we'll separate it.

P.R.: Yeah, we'll separate it.

L.C.: But not for five pounds, something like that.

C.M.: No.

L.C.: It's really not worth your while.

K.F.: Well now what about some of the traditions here in the crab house, in the co-op?

L.C.: Like we do devotions.

K.F.: Okay. Is that every morning?

C.M.: Every evening.

L.C.: Every evening.

K.F.: Every evening.

L.C.: Yeah. 'Cause most all the women are here in the evenings. And we have a devotion by reading and all, and we sing religious songs.

C.M.: And if a storm comes up, we sing even harder.

(Laughter.)

L.C.: Some even hide in the closet.

C.M.: Yeah, some get in the closet.

L.C.: I won't mention no names.

(Laughter.)

P.R.: But that's what we do, we have a devotion.

C.S.: We pray and sing extra hard when we're in here and a storm's coming up because our boys are --

L.C.: When you look over there and it's black --

C.S.: We know our teenage boys are in a boat somewhere, and it just doesn't *affect* just my -- it *affects* everybody in here, you know, thinking about all of our kids.

P.R.: We're all thankful for the phone, we can call make sure everybody's home all right when it's looking stormy.

K.F.: Do you all have a radio in here that you can contact the guys in the boat or --

L. C.: No.

L. C.: No.

P.R.: We've got a telephone, and we can call home just see if they're home.

C. S.: We've always talked about having a VHF radio inhere, but we've just never, we've never really done it.

L.C.: We've not gotten around to it yet.

C. S.: No.

P.R.: Sometimes if we get word that somebody's sick, we all stand up and hold hands and pray for that person. I was trying to think of some other things that we did on a regular basis. I guess that's probably it.

C. S.: That's about it really, you know. Devotion and singing and praying for someone where they were ill or something.

K.F.: Well now how much -- what kind of role did the church have in getting this building together, if any?

C.M.: None as I know of.

P.R.: They -- didn't they loan us some money?

C. S.: That first year, they loaned us some money. I've forgotten what it was now.

P.R.: The amount.

C. S.: The first year we were in operation, remember, 'cause we paid 'em back.

P.R.: Paid 'em back.

C.S.: What was that, two --

C.M.: 1,595.

C. S.: Was it 2,000 or 3,000, or something like that?

P.R.: I've forgotten.

C.M.: 3,000. Was it 3,000?

P.R.: I'm not sure.

C.M.: We got the --

P.R.: I know that they loaned us some money when we first started, the first year.

L.C.: And we paid it back, yeah.

P.R.: We had to pay that back our first year. So they did do that. Oh, I know something else we do too at the end of the year. We always pay, like we give the church \$1,000, our co-op does. At the end of the season, we give the church \$1,000.

K.F.: Well 'cause I know the church is an important part of everybody's life here on the island.

L.C.: Uh-huh (affirmative).

K.F.: And --

C.M.: If we would need anything, you know, and we didn't have the money in our co-op, we could go to our church and they would loan it to us.

L.C.: Didn't we have to do that with --

C.M.: We had to do that. We needed something to take our crab meat to the dock and, you know, get our boxes, and get all of our stuff that we need for cleaning supplies. And so this guy had a John Deere for sale, and we didn't have enough money to get it 'cause we had just started out. And it was the second year, wasn't it?

L.C.: Yeah.

P.R.: Yeah.

C.M.: 'Cause the first year we used all of our golf carts.

L.C.: Yeah, hand carts.

C.M.: Hand carts and everything, anything we could roll in. And the second year, we decided we had to have something, but we didn't have enough money into the treasury to, you know, to buy it. So we asked the church if they would loan us some money. I can't remember. Was it 1,500 or 3,000?

L.C.: Seems like to me, I think we paid half and they --

C.M.: And we got 1,500, I think, from the church. And then we paid it back when we finished picking that year.

L.C.: That season. Yeah. That's right. That was the second year that we were here. But thank the Lord, we've not had to borrow nothing from nobody since.

P.R.: No, we haven't. We've been very fortunate.

C.S.: Yeah.

P.R.: But we know if we had to, we could turn to the church. They would give it to us right away.

C.M.: We know if we needed something and needed it bad, all we'd have to do is ask. They'd right us out a check for it. Because they would reimburse whatever we got.

K.F.: Well what kind of role then does religion or your faith play in keeping this co-op up and running, getting it started?

P.R.: Well I don't think it would be here.

L.C.: No.

C.S.: No.

P.R.: If it weren't for --

L.C.: Like I say in the beginning, you know, we all prayed about it and asked the Lord to open doors for us.

C.M.: To guide us.

L.C.: To guide us and direct us in how to be done, and keep opening, and he just kept opening the doors.

C.S.: One of the first, when we first started meeting about it, trying to, you know, we were trying to become legal because we know we weren't going to be able to continue the way we were, the health department was breathing down our necks. And when we were meeting with Dennis Ebayer, he was one of the ones that helped us when one of the meetings, Janice -- he was telling us all what it was going to take, you know, how much everything was going to cost. And Janice looked at him, she said well it's just no way if you're talking about -- you know, we can't afford things like this. It's so above our heads, it weren't no way, you know, we could do it. Take such a big amount of money, you know, we'd have to take of our own. Weren't nobody had that to do that. And she said we're just going to have to try for a grant, do you think we could get a grant. He said no. He said no right then. She said well we're going to have to try. And I mean we tried, and we had all that give to us. And, you know, it was just like doors kept opening. Everything that would backfire on us, you know, we just grab at it and another door was opened. You know, things would just happen, you know. And that's the same way, I think, with this data center. That's the way things is happening here. It's just like, it's unbelievable. It's like we've not even, at first, weren't even trying and things was just steady opening up. And that's the way I feel about it.

L.C.: And the Governor's giving us --

C.M.: The Governor come last year, and he said that he would have so much money put there to pay for, what, three years of whatever we need, \$3,000.

P.R.: Yeah, for three years. Just to run the building.

L.C.: Just to run the building, you know, the utilities,

C.S.: I'll tell you something else that plays a big part about the faith. A lot of people compare our husband working on the water to farming, you know, being in the farming business. But farmers reap. I mean they sow and they reap. We don't sow, but we reap. And we have to depend on the Lord for everything, I mean whatever he supplies. We, you know, that's why we have to be especially thankful for what we have. 'Cause like I said, we don't sow it, but we do reap.

C.M.: Well you always hear the watermen'll say the grass is gone, it won't be no crabs 'cause the grass is gone, and you get to church and we pray about it. And the next thing you know, there's the grass.

L.C.: And we don't have very many in our community. You can see that for yourself. But it always seems like Sunday morning, they'll say, you know, it's not many crabs, and we don't know where the crabs is coming from or the oysters. But when it comes Sunday morning, everybody's church, we always have big collections.

P.R.: I'll tell you something else too. A lot of the men that aren't parishioners, they like to give a big amount. And not only that, they don't work on Sunday. I don't think you'll see a Smith Islander that'll work on the water on Sunday.

L.C.: Other than in the summertime, they have to go down and fish out.

P.R.: Oh, yeah. But I mean go out in their boats and scrape or anything.

C.M.: Or pot. They will not do.

P.R.: They take their Sunday off

C.M.: That's been a thing that's been done --

C. S.: For years.

C.M.: -- all our lives. Our ancestors did the same thing.

L.C.: And it's been plenty years when it's not many crabs. And we don't do good, you know, catching crabs either. I mean if the men don't do good, we don't do good.

P.R.: We don't do good.

L.C.: You know, we just have to depend on the Lord to see us through, and he always does for everybody.

C. S.: As the preacher says, he supplies all of our needs.

K.F.: Do you all foresee a time when you might have to buy crabs from North Carolina to keep the place going or --

C.M.: We hope not.

P.R.: I hope not.

L.C.: I mean that's a truthful answer. We hope not, you know.

P.R.: We hope it doesn't have to come to that. We'll just keep on keeping the faith and praying that the Lord will supply all our needs for us as long as there's a Smith Island.

C.M.: And we all fought for this place too, but the main one that did do a lot of hard work on this is Janice.

P.R.: Janice. Yeah, she did.

C.M.: She worked more than anybody. She give it her all.

C.S.: Patty's the only one here that's one of the original.
P.R.: The five.
C.S.: It was you and Janice, Robin and Katie --
L.C.: Tina.
C.S.: And Tina.
C.M.: But Janice went overboard for it. She was the one got caught. But she was the one got all this going.
L.C.: She's the one put her heart and soul into it.
C.M.: Yup. She never give up, no matter what they would say as if that, you know, she wouldn't be able to get this, or we wouldn't be able to do that. It was like something else would come up and she'd go for that until she got it. And she was the instigation of this place being here and what we got.
P.R.: I don't think I could've done what Janice has done.
C.M.: I don't think I could've either.
P.R.: All the meetings and all that that she went to.
C.S.: I don't think it's nobody really.
P.R.: Yeah.
C.S.: I know I couldn't have.
L.C.: Well I've heard her say too, what was it, not too long ago, all the thank you notes and stuff that she would send out to people that helped, she would hand paint every one of them.
K.F.: Oh, wow.
L.C.: 'Cause she likes to paint too, you know. She'd hand paint every one of `em.
P.R.: Personal touch.
L.C.: Yeah.
P.R.: Personal.
L.C.: 'Cause I think a lot of `em she's met going to meetings and all now, and they'll say well we still have that little thank you note that you sent us.
P.R.: That's right.
C.M.: She would put like beacons and like the canal coming in.
C.S.: Water scenes.
C.M.: It would always be a water scene, a boat or something that would be coming in the canal.
K.F.: Now tell me about some of the singing you all do.
L.C.: Let's see. Our theme song is Til the Storm Passes By.
C.M.: Especially when a storm was coming.
P.R.: Or one's just passed.
C.M.: Or one's passed over.
L.C.: We sing mostly religious songs. But we fool around too.
(Laughter.)
P.R.: One song we sing a lot --
L.C.: Play that Funky Music White Boy.
(Laughter.)
P.R.: That's by request.
L.C.: That's by request only.

C. S.: And I'm Feeling Mighty Fine, we'll usually sing that.
 P.R.: That's Ruth.
 L.C.: Yeah, Ruth's favorite song. But mostly we sing religious songs.
 K.F.: Which ones are your favorites?
 C.M.: All of `em.
 L.C.: Well we sing Onto Your Home, and Feeling Fine.
 P.R.: Til the Storm Passes Over, that's the main one.
 L.C.: Til the Storm Passes By.
 C.S.: What's another fast one?
 L.C.: The Tribute Song, we sing that sometimes.
 C.S.: Tribute.
 L.C.: A lot of saviors.
 C.M.: Yeah.
 L.C.: We don't know all of the words of that. But we know one of `em, chorus.
 P.R.: -- of Jesus.
 C. S.: Yeah. If That Isn't Love, and I Don't Know About Tomorrow. I don't know, we just -- somebody!! pick one out and we'll go with it. I'll tell you, I can't sing very good. I've got a good singer on each side of me, and sometimes I'll bear right down with `em.
 P.R.: You've got a pretty voice, Christine. You do.
 C. S.: But it does, it touches everybody when we sing, it touches us.
 P.R.: We got one, Betty Marshall, we'll look down there and the tears is a flowing. Crying.
 C. S.: She's our cry baby.
 P.R.: Sometimes we all cry.
 L.C.: I imagine Janice has played our tape for you, hasn't she?
 K.F.: No.
 L.C.: No?
 P.R.: I bet she's still got that Crisfield.
 C.M.: She taped it.
 P.R.: I know.
 L.C.: Are you checking, Louise?
 C.S.: It's gotten cooler. It's supposed to get colder tomorrow. Just so we don't have any snow. That'll do it.
 K.F.: Now tell me what it's like when it's not crab picking season.
 C.S.: We're poor.
 K.F.: All right.
 L.C.: Right after we're done picking, we don't have much time left.
 C.M.: I know.
 L.C.: We do our cleaning.
 C.M.: Our fall cleaning and --
 L.C.: Fall cleaning. By then it's winter cleaning.
 C.M.: Our Christmas shopping, and our Thanksgiving baking and --
 L.C.: Decorating.
 C.M.: Decorating.
 L.C.: Plenty to be going on in the community -- church.

P.R.: It's really hard.

C. S.: Yeah.

L.C.: Decorate the church.

C.S.: And some of us have odd jobs.

L.C.: Yeah, she's postmaster, and Patty and I are home care providers that care for elderly people.

K.F.: Here on the island?

C. S.: Yeah. I got three men I'm a home care provider for.
(Laughter.)

L.C.: This is our Avon representative.

K.F.: Okay.

L.C.: And sometimes after December, maybe January or mostly in February, some of us will crochet or something like that.

C.M.: January is our leisurely month.

L. C.: Yeah, but it's generally always something going on.

C. S.: Always something.

P.R.: Ladies Aid, or Ladies Auxiliary.

L.C.: January, February, some of March.

P.R.: But February's always a month that we feed the firemen, so --

C.M.: And we have Bingo on Friday nights.

C. S.: It's nice, 'cause if someone happens to get sick, we have EMT's that will go to 'em until you either get the helicopter to take 'em up or a boat.

P.R.: I personally couldn't 'work all year long like I do in the summer.

C. S.: No.

P.R.: I think I'd probably pull my hair by the roots.

C.M.: We none could.

C. S.: No.

P.R.: We need that. You need them few months to kind of rest up.

L.C.: Some's leaving here at -- some's leaving here at 1, 1:30, 2:00 of mornings a picking, and some's a coming in 2:30 and 3:00. So really the doors are never locked. I mean --

P.R.: Hardly.

L.C.: Hardly, from Monday to Friday anyway, and Saturday morning. 'Cause sometimes she'll stay to 1, 1:30. Robin, Janice's daughter, she's, you know, got three children, and she picks most in the night. Or at least sometimes she'll come in 2, 2:30 in the morning.

C. S.: What's really funny, when we really started talking about it, I was the only one that really picked of an evening. I'm an evening person, a night person. And now usually there's two -- I mean Tina and Robin are here when I leave. So I'm not picking that late anymore. And --

C.M.: She used to be our late picker. Now we've got two more.

C. S.: And Tina even said, Christine, we just want to give you a hard time about wanting to pick every evening. Most women pick 'til 7 or 8, but when I get going, that's just my best time. I'm not a morning person. She said and if I give you a hard time, I apologize

to you. She said because now I can see where it's beneficial to me. If I couldn't pick this shift the way I'm doing it, I wouldn't be able to hardly pick at all.

C.".: Because she has a little girl. And at that time, she didn't have no children, and she couldn't see picking, going down there picking late, and staying late of nights. But after she had her little girl, her husband's home, her daughter watches her a while until her husband comes home, and then he takes over, and Tina can come down here and pick and, you know, not have to worry about nothing at home. So she then understood where Christine was coming from.

C. S.: It's surprising since we've been here, there's a lot of people that stays 'til 10 or 11. Because if you know somebody else is here with you, you know, you'll go ahead and get it done. You know, you still leave your two pounds of crabs --

C.M.: To come to in the morning.

C. S.: In the morning, just pick off and we're done. So that makes it nice. It's fellowship too.

K.F.: And have you found that maybe you get a little faster now that you're picking across from somebody or next to somebody or --

C.M.: I think we've all got our own speed.

P.R.: Own speed.

C. S.: We've got our own speed, but I think it causes time to go by.

C.M.: Pass by faster.

C.S.: Faster, yeah. It seems like you're making better headway because just around everybody and you're talking, and you get into the subject, don't pay any attention what you're doing, before you know it --

C.M.: You've racked up pounds.

C.S.: Yeah. Like I said too, sometimes you have a basket to pick that morning when you first get up. Been many morning I've woke up and don't feel like picking. I'll say well I'll go down there and I'll pick so many, but I like to stay down there for that whole basket. But when I get down here and if it's four or five women here picking, and they just dump the basket and I'll dump mine, we get talking and I'll say well might as well stay here and finish these with them, I've got some company. And before you know it, we're all done and leaving and going home.

P.R.: Yeah.

C. S.: You forget how bad you felt that morning.

(Laughter.)

C.M.: And everyone is responsible for their own cleaning station. We each one have our station, and we got to see that it's clean, and --

C. S.: This is the truth. When you look through of evening and we're all picking, it looks like my God, how will all this ever be cleaned up.

C.M.: I know.

C. S.: By the time everybody starts leaving, and there's a bunch of us left, I just look around in awe, because I can't believe here's just my little mess, here's somebody else's little mess, and the rest of the building is clean. It's unbelievable, you know, how it --

C.M.: Yeah. And then on a Saturday, we have two different crew clean up. What is it, six of us?

P.R.: This year it was.

C.M.: One Saturday, six of us the next Saturday. And that's to clean and sanitize this whole building. I don't mean just this part.

K.F.: Right.

C.M.: The whole building. Even to the core.

K.F.: Okay.

P.R.: And then out of that group, it's up to somebody to do the paperwork for the week.

C.M.: The books.

C. S.: The book work, pay Captain for the freight, the paperwork to pay the steamers --

L.C.: And what each --

C.S.: And what each member owes the co-op for how many baskets they've picked, their supplies that they've used.

C.M.: And then we put this on a slip of paper, and then that's give to the treasurer and she writes the checks out or whatever it is and puts down our pounds. Like if I picked 50 pounds, then I've got to pay the co-op \$100, 'cause it's \$2 per pound.

K.F.: Okay. So do you all like someone to keep the books for everybody during the week --

C.M.: No, one out of that six does it. We'll take it in turns.

L.C.: We take it turns. Not one person.

P.R.: Most everybody has different --

K.F.: Okay.

C.M.: And you think I don't know if I'll get through Saturday or not. Last year I was president, and I had, year ago today, I had surgery. And I thought to myself, after I'd taken it, and I found out I had to have this surgery, how am I ever going to get through the year? How will I ever do it down there? Only with God's help will I. So the 11 women here, they knew I couldn't do certain things here, and they would jump in and, you know, help. Like my husband would bring boxes, and they were all here, they would help get 'em in, then they'd help me get 'em put away 'cause I couldn't lift on that. And we just worked together that way. That first year, we didn't think we'd ever be able to do that, did we?

P.R.: Huh-uh (negative). We worked together.

C.M.: But we worked together. We work good together. For 15 women, we work good together.

L. C.: Yeah, and we don't really boss our steamers either.

C. S.: Nope.

L.C.: We let them steam. Once in a while, we might tell 'em they're not steamed very good, but that's not too often. You know, they pretty well know --

C.S.: Sometimes in the fall they have to be steamed long, but we just --

(END SIDE A.)

(BEGIN SIDE B.)

C. S.: I'll be honest with you now, when you're in it, you don't really smell it. But if you're not the one picking and you happen to come in, that's not a very good smell, or to me it's not. I don't know about anybody else, but it's just not a very good smell. I know when I used to go to Crisfield for -- pickers to the picking houses would be in a store or

getting a sandwich or something, well that was the awfulest odor to me. But then I thought to myself well I guess that's how I smell too, you know, when I'm in it.

P.R.: My mother was born and raised here off Roads Point. She was born in 1919. And she started going to high school to Crisfield when she was like 13. And they moved completely when she was about 17. And she really, at that time, it was mostly black ladies that picked. And she thought for years that just black people had that odor. Because they worked in seafood, and she didn't know, you know, that was their line of work, and she smelled that odor, and she just thought that was just a crab -- that smell, she associated it. She didn't realize it, she said, for a couple years, you know, that it was from seafood.

C. S.: But that's the only thing that I can say about the smell.

P.R.: What I don't like is if my crabs is back by me, and I'm sitting by one or two and theirs is fat, that kind of puts you out of heart. They're getting the pounds, they're steady shoving them on the table, and I'm still on the one because they're not very fat crabs. I don't like that when they're not fat for me. And the first couple of weeks when I first start picking is usually the hardest because I've got to get back into that routine.. And what I hate most about when it first starts is, you know, we eat our supper early, around 3:30, 4:00, I do, and it's try to hurry up, clear the table off And I've got a daughter, she does my dishes, but I usually stack up the dishes, do things like that, and I feel like I'm in a constant rush because I've got these crabs down here and I've got to get down here.

C.M.: You've got an order for `em the next morning, and you've got to get them picked.

K.F.: Right.

P.R.: So first couple of weeks is really the hardest for me because I have to get into that routine. I feel like from lunch time 'til I get down here, I'm in a, you know, steady looking at the clock, how much more time have we got? I've got to hurry up, got to get down there.

C. S.: Well lots of times too, our mail doesn't get here 'til about 2 or quarter of If we want anything to the store, by the time the boat gets here, and all the things he's taking from the boat to the store, it's about quarter of 2 or 2:00, and we all try to get down here about 4 or 4:30. So in between all that, we're cooking supper, going to the store, getting our mail, you know, cooking and all that. And it's just --

L.C.: And I don't get home 'til 3:30, and you're all having all that done and I'm not even home.

C. S.: Yeah. I have to stop home 2:30 or 3.

P.R.: If you've got clothes on the clothesline, all that's got to be took care of, you know, it's just --

L.C.: When crabbing season starts, you've got a routine whether you have a job outside or not, you've still got to get in a routine of an hourly thing of when you get up, it's picking, then it's back to the house to get your housework done, then you go to your outside job. You come back home, you line up supper, or you go down and fish up, come back, line up supper, go to the store, get all that done. Then you get supper, get that cleaned up and you're back down here again in the evening. Then you clean up around 8:00, go home, get yourself straight and go to bed, get up. But you have that routine, and you try to keep that routine in the summertime.

C.M.: If you miss it by 15 minutes --

L.C.: You're out of --

K.F.: Out of luck.

L.C.: Yeah. But once you get down here, the way I am, once I get down here and I get settled and sit down and start picking, then I can rest.

P.R.: I know, I know.

L.C.: Once you're sitting down, that's not a hard job, sitting there picking.

P.R.: Sometimes you will even crave, if I can just get there and start picking.

L.C.: Yeah.

C.S.: Time to unwind.

L.C.: Sometimes you get kind of lazy.

C.M.: I know you do. Unwind.

K.F.: I was going to ask you all how you fit in fishing up all these soft crabs in that schedule.

C.M.: We just do.

K.F.: I mean, I know they have, you know, you've got to --

P.R.: Everybody has a different time table of fishing up. My husband tells me about what time to be down there and fish up while he's out scraping. Well he fishes up early in the morning before he leaves. And then he'll leave what soft crabs needs to get cut and run out. And then I'll go down before lunch and fish up, and then I'll do my cutting and wrapping then and go back home. And by that time, he's back in. And then from then on, he goes to fishing up and whatever crabs need to be cut and wrapped goes in the refrigerator, and I do `em the next day when I go down fishing.

C.S.: That's one woman down here, she'll comedown and pick, and when she gets done picking, she goes right to the crab house, and it's been many days she don't get home 'til it's time to get supper, has to go home, go right to fixing supper and she's got, you might as well say four grown men, her husband and three grown boys with hearty appetites.

P.R.: She had to -- what was it, 10 --

L.C.: Twelve, wasn't it?

P.R.: Twelve sandwiches for their lunch the next day. So she, you know, by the time she gets supper on the table, you know, I think they all chip in and help her now. She said they did last year, and get down here and pick again. And then go home and pack all them lunches. So she --

P.R.: -- the house, what, 7:30?

L.C.: Uh-huh (affirmative). She don't have much time. Some days, now I don't know if that's like that all the time, but I know it's like that all the time in the summer. I don't think I could handle it.

P.R.: I know I couldn't.

L.C.: I'd have to have some help, I'm afraid. I don't know what that was for last year. Her mother used to help her, but she had to move away, And last year I helped her for a while 'til I got, you know, picking and all. And then she was on her own -- I mean.

C.S.: I can't swim.

(Laughter.)

P.R.: And I'm not too graceful getting in and out of outboards.

L.C.: I was going to say what's that got to do with it, about fishing up.

P.R.: I'm getting ready to --

L.C.: Anything else you'd like to chat with us?

P.R.: Hey, we can't swim.
 C. S.: My husband and his father and brothers all one's got one shanty across the way.
 L.C.: That a way, that a way.
 C.S.: You have to get in a boat. No, that a way.
 L.C.: No, it's that a way.
 C. S.: That a way.
 P.R.: He can't swim?
 L.C.: He can't, I can.
 C.S.: Oh, I have to run to the -- if I shout to one side to the other, but if I -- aboard the channel, that would do it.
 P.R.: Well that's our class this summer. We're all going to learn Christine how to swim.
 L.C.: Yeah, yeah, Our goal for the summer is to teach Christine how to swim each evening.
 P.R.: First you start with doggie paddle.
 L.C.: We'll throw you in --
 P.R.: -- but if I get overboard, I sink like a -- she was dead serious.
 C. S.: Well I can't swim.
 (Laughter.)
 P.R.: So I did not get out of going to the shanty over there. They've got to do it round here. And I told `em I'd be glad to help `em around here. But I'm not going to --
 L.C.: If I get in my front window and saw you --
 C. S.: Overboard.
 L.C.: -- before Patty tried to start. We'd be laughing, get you in. We'd have to tow you.
 C. S.: You'd have to tow me right over to this boat ramp.
 L.C.: You look like Mary Yeager that time that Larry flipped her off of that jet ski, and they had to bring her all the way into the shore, tow her in the shore, and she had to get up on a raft. That day on the raft, I got pictures of her, I told her she looked like a beached whale. I can't swim.
 P.R.: I'm afraid that's her excuse.
 C.S.: I swear I can't. I mean I can in a pool just for a short distance --
 C.M.: Well he'll have to shed his crabs in a pool.
 K.F.: Now what kind of stuff do you all talk about while you're sitting here?
 C.M.: We men bash.
 K.F.: You men bash?
 C.M.: Yes, sir.
 L.C.: We solve everybody's problems.
 C.M.: Ask Janice if we don't men bash.
 L.C.: And we man bash, and we solve all the problems on the island, and all the problems in the world.
 P.R.: Yup, yup, we sure do.
 L. C.: We do. We might not get `em to nobody, but we sit here and solve `em.
 C.M.: We'll tell everybody how to do something.
 P.R.: Yeah, if you say you don't know how to do something here, you'll get told how to do it.

C.M.: Do that.

P.R.: Yeah, Christine. You better not tell everybody you don't know how to swim.

C.M.: Janice will take you down there and plug you over.

C.S.: Plug me over.

L.C.: Yeah, you name it, we solve it. Problem solvers.

C.M.: We like to men bash.

K.F.: Is this husbands, sons, anybody, or just --

P.R.: Usually husbands.

L.C.: Usually husbands.

K.F.: Husbands.

P.R.: Yeah. We don't generally bash our sons, but we bash our husbands. We'll always say what our husbands done round a day if it's something we ain't like. Then we start comparing notes, whose is the worst.

(Laughter.)

L.C.: That's when you should have that head.

P.R.: Uh-huh (affirmative). And I'll tell you something else. If you don't want nothing spread down here, don't you open your mouth. 'Cause my Lord, if you just get a little tiny bit of a detail, you got to keep on going with it.

L.C.: Uh-huh (affirmative). You got to finish it.

P.R.: And you want to say something not right. You want to get something wrong --

L.C.: They wouldn't let you know when you said it wrong. And it's usually not dropped either for a while.

P.R.: I'm one for taking notes.

L.C.: She takes notes.

C. S.: Yeah, Patty writes the dictionary. She keeps a log, of every log.

P.R.: If somebody does something funny or something wrong, I write it down so I can hold it against 'em. And we use that entertainment for our Christmas party or whenever we have any, what, suppers or anything, I pull out my notes. I've got 11 pages.

L.C.: Every year since we've had the co-op, we've been having Christmas parties. We have a Christmas party, and invite our men. And if it's anybody that's here visiting, we ask 'em to come to our party. And we have all kinds of eats. We don't look like we get much to eat.

P.R.: We all make something. We'll get a ham.

L. C.: Yeah. Get a ham.

P.R.: The co-op will get a ham.

L.C.: And we make something. And whoever is the president, they have to decorate. And have a good time.

C. S.: This year we --

C.M.: We changed names.

C. S.: -- exchanged gifts.

C.M.: Last year we did too.

C. S.: Yeah. Homemade ice cream.

C.M.: We have homemade ice cream. And this year -- or last year I had a big cake made for the co-op. And all kinds of foods we have. And we just all sit around and --

P.R.: Tell stories.

C.M.: Tell things on each other that's happened.

C.S.: This will be our fifth year, won't it?

C.M.: Yup. This will be our fifth year.

L.C.: Something else, I don't know if it's a tradition or not, but ever since the co-op's been opened, we have like widows, if we have a lot of crabs, and one of us has a doctor's appointment or for some reason can't be here the next day or something, or just too many crabs-that we can't pick `em all, we might get somebody in the community to come help us, like a widow come in and help us. And that helps them too once in a while.

K.F.: Right.

L.C.: So that's good that we can call on somebody to come in and help us sometimes. That helps them too.

P.R.: Yeah.

K.F.: So if you're a single girl here on the island, do you end up picking, say, your father or brother or somebody's friend?

C.M.: Jacqueline, we have two of the girls does, her daughter does, will come down here and, you know, sit there nights after she babysits for Tina, and she'll sit there and pick a few pounds. And Robin's daughter, Jacqueline, she's a good picker. She picks.

P.R.: They get hooked, once they start making that good money.

C.M.: Start making that good, start making money. And then they --

C.S.: Yeah. When my daughter started, her name's Diana, I told her, she said she wanted to make some extra money. I said well if you pick one pound an evening, you know, that'll help. `Cause at first, she weren't a very fast picker. She started off with the one pound every evening, and she picked up, you know, speed. And then she got so she was picking three pound an evening, four, 'til she got to four and five, picking the last one off. She was surprised when I added up how many pounds she. picked last year. She couldn't believe it. And it made a big difference, you know.

L.C.: That's how Jacqueline started when she was picking two pounds. And she would pick two pounds every evening.

C.M.: They're good pickers.

L.C.: Now she picks a whole basket.

P.R.: And once she started getting paid for it, you know, seen that money, that would encourage her that much more.

L.C.: Yeah, we all definitely do it for the money. We don't do it for the --

C.M.: My daughter used to do it, and I'd have to pay her off by \$100 bills. She didn't want no 20's or nothing like that. And she was a miser. She put it away. And one day when I went home, she had all this money laid out on the bed. I said what are you doing, put that away. She said I'm taking a picture of it.

P.R.: When I moved over here, my daughter had just turned 11. So she would cut soft crabs for my mother-in-law. But I had a son in `84, and I had another one in `86, so she'd pick my crabs those three summers.

L.C.: She was a good picker too.

P.R.: Yeah, she was.

L.C.: All of our girls were good pickers.

K.F.: Now do you see them coming into the co-op at sometime full time or --

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L.C.: My daughter don't live here. No, because if she had to bring them two little boys, that would be the end of the co-op.

C. S.: I don't know. I mean I didn't have any daughters. Most of the time, they go to college and they get jobs away, and they don't -- they usually stay on the mainland.

P.R.: As long as they're in school or, you know, living here, I imagine they'll --

L.C.: In high school, yeah.

C.S.: Yeah, and if they, you know, if they live --

L.C.: As long as she was in high school, she did it. But then after she graduated --

P.R.: `Cause they pick crabs and cut grass, the girls do. And babysits.

L.C.: She went to college once a month, but never finished. And then she moved away.

P.L.: I'll tell you, things are so expensive, it takes so much money, the way we always told our children, I got a son, he's out of school now, he's 19, but when he was going to school too, I told him, I said I'll buy your school clothes, but I want to buy what I want to get, and I can't get everything real expensive, just can't afford it, when you're getting for two. So we told him a long time ago, if you want the designer names, you're going to have to pay for the designer names. So ever since then, they both work, make their own money and bought their own school clothes then. If they wanted something that cost, pair of jeans cost \$50, I weren't going to stop `em `cause they worked for it, and if they wanted it, they got it, you know. When Diana started picking crabs this summer, she realized how expensive things was, and she got a little bit more conservative.

C. S.: Tighter, yeah.

P.L.: Conservative with her money. She realized it more than ever. I think that's the best thing for her that she pick the crabs. And now my son, he weren't always as bad as she was, you know. He didn't care if everything weren't the good name. But she did, until she picked this year, and then she stopped -- I heard her say I weren't pay all that money for that.

L.C.: I've heard her say it too.

K.F.: It's different when you're spending your money.

L.C.: Yeah, yeah.

P.L.: It's different when you work hard and, you know, now she gets good stuff, I ain't saying it, but she's, she's satisfied with some things from Wal-mart too now. And a lot of her friends will see shoes or something she's got on, and they'll think she's got `em to a nice place, you know. Well it is nice, but they think she's paid \$45 for some shoes, and they find out she's got `em at Payless. So she's got a little bit more conservative, and I'm glad of that because she's seen how hard it is to work to get the money.

C. S.: I'll tell you something else, there's plenty of times we'd like to hire somebody to help us do things, but there's not many people out here to hire. There's only a couple with us. Most -- I've always said there's times you couldn't pay somebody to pick up gold nuggets. `Cause I mean there's just nobody, there's nobody here now to hire.

P.L.: I'll quit what I'm doing whenever you want some gold nuggets picked up.

(Laughter.)

L.C.: She must have `em down there, Patty.

P.L.: I think so.

L.C.: She's got to go swimming to get `em.

P.L.: Yeah. If they're overboard, I'll go to dive in the sea.

(Laughter.)

K.F.: Who do you all see continuing the co-op?

L.C.: We hope we will.

P.L.: I think everybody, most everybody. Unless it's sickness. My mother, she used to be a member, but my father had a heart attack last spring, so she weren't able to come back last year, she couldn't leave him. She's hoping that she can come this year, hopefully she will. 'Cause she said she never dreamed she would miss it as much as she has, you know. She really wants to come back. And my sister, she's got a little boy, and he keeps her busy, and she wants to try hard to come back too. She said she misses it.

C. S.: There's a lady over here -- she said I didn't hardly think years ago when I was raising my children that at 70 or 72, I'd still be sitting out here picking. So and then Norma, she's in her 70's also. So I imagine we'll be like them, Lord willing, we'll have crabs. Because I'll tell you the truth, out of all the young people right now, unless one of the girls should marry somebody here, which right here on Tylerton, I don't foresee it right now, and we've only got three smaller children. We've got two girls that are three.

P.L.: Two and a half.

C. S.: Two and a half, right?

P.L.: Uh-huh (Affirmative). The little -- Kelly's two and a half.

L.C.: And Cody.

C. S.: Oh, yeah, and Cody. He's six. Other than that, that's -- unless the boys bring some mail order brides, my son's got the bright idea he doesn't think he'd like to continue high school. I said well, Daniel, I don't mean any harm, you have a bright future. If that's all you could do on Saturday nights is go up and sit on the store porch -- I said there's no girls to Smith Island. If you want a wife, you'll have to get one to Tangier or Crisfield or somewhere. I think that's a stage they all go through over here. They'd rather work with their dad to make money. They can't --

P.L.: Especially this time of year, they get kind of, you know --

C.S.: They want to start making money.

L.C.: Then along about the last of August, they're ready for to go back to school. They get tired of getting of getting up 3:30 and 4:00.

K.F.: Right.

C. S.: About like Ruth says. It's a good thing the good Lord made me a woman 'cause I'd never make it on the water.

L.C.: No way.

C.M.: My family would be on Welfare.

L.C.: -- I can't say I do. Not a very good job.

C. S.: No, I'd never make it.

P.L.: When it's raining or real rough --

C.M.: I wouldn't make much money.

P.L.: No.

C. S.: Sea nettles and green heads.

L.C.: I'd have to come down here and clean crabs.

(Laughter.)

P.L.: I bet we have 12 men to leave Tylerton and go to work to the prison. I think we counted up one time, it's 12.

C. S.: Is it 12?
P.L.: It's many.
C. S.: It's women too.
P.L.: Yeah.
C. S.: Few women.
K.F.: The younger men or --
L.C.: Yeah.
P.L.: Not all of `em. Some of `ems in their 50's.
C.M.: One of `em.
P.L.: Johnny Tyler.
C. S.: It's a lot of `em from here.
L.C.: But he was already gone. They moved before he done that.
P.L.: But I think that's why --
C.S.: Around the same time.
P.L.: That's why he left, though.
C. S.: Yeah, `cause he got that job.
P.L.: And Mike was going to go to Christian school.
L.C.: Didn't go to the Christian school very long.
P.L.: Just one or two years.
K.F.: Well I asked you what you didn't like about picking, let me ask you what you do like about it.
L.C.: The money.
P.L.: Yeah, greenbacks.
C. S.: That and well I like having the fellowship with everybody when we're down here.
P.L.: I miss our fellowship in the winter. We're closer in the summer, and we get to see each other more. We keep on top of things with each other more.
C. S.: The main thing's that extra money coming in.
L.C.: Yeah, `cause right about now --
P.L.: It's been times when we don't know what to do without it, you know, get by without that little extra, some times. That's the main thing, I'd say.
K.F.: What about health problems that crab pickers usually have? Are there any health problems?
C.M.: We just keep right on picking, health problems or not.
P.L.: Some of the old ladies have trouble, or the younger, with their backs, we help `em lift the crabs.
C. S.: Health-wise, it's not what you call too bad of health. I mean you sit a long time, you are going to have back problems or, you know, you have to get up ever so often and stretch and everything.
P.L.: I'd say the worst thing here is the lifting.
C.S.: Yeah, yeah.
P.L.: You know, that's hard on you.
C.S.: It's really hard work lifting all those boxes of crab meat, getting `em on the John Deere --
L.C.: A box with 35 pound -- full of that crushed ice.
P.L.: Oh, that's heavy.

C.M.: About 70 pound, I'm sure.

P.L.: And you lift about six, seven of them boxes some mornings and take them out of the cooler, you know, when it's cold and pack it up, put it on the cart and then put it out on the John Deere, and take it down to the dock, and then lift on it and take it out. That's hard.

C. S.: Yeah.

P.L.: That's hard on you. At the end of the year, you start --

L.C.: Feeling it.

P.L.: Especially in the fall. It's just -- when it starts getting cooler, our job's the pits.

L.C.: Yes, it is.

P.L.: It ain't much fun when you're out there. Cleaning up too is harder. When you're out there cleaning out that cooler, and it's cold in there.

L.C.: Yeah.

P.L.: Not much fun then.

K.F.: What about your hands?

C.M.: We don't get manicures very often.

P.L.: You know what I told my husband? If he had my illness and I had his, we'd be in a Welfare line with our hands stuck out because he's got carpal tunnel, and he's had to stop making pots and buying pots. And it doesn't usually affect his work, scraping or hard crabbing it does a little bit. I've got spurs on both of my heels. I just had surgery. I couldn't stand up and make a living to save my life. But I don't have anything wrong with my hands or carpal tunnel. So the Lord blessed us with --

C.M.: In other words, your upper parts is good. It's your lower parts.

L.C.: Yeah.

(Laughter.)

L.C.: That's right.

C.M.: And for picking, we need our upper parts.

L.C.: We sure do. Just as long as your hands work.

C. S.: Yeah. We couldn't have been blessed any better. That's the truth. I thought about that. I told him, I said Ed, if I had carpal tunnel, 'cause he can pick three crabs of himself, and he can't even hardly feel, he starts up. And I couldn't, there's no way I could stand up 'cause my back and my heels the way they are. Had one done.

C.M.: One down, one to go.

C. S.: Yeah.

P.L.: When you first start picking, or mine is, my hands go to sleep. And you just sit there and shake it and get right back into it, and then you start doing it, and then it just wears off.

C. S.: Has to get broken.

L.C.: I was looking at a magazine. Was it -- anyway, it was showing on there the computers, the ones who are at computers all the time. And they have somebody to come in now to give an exercise.

P.L.: Uh-huh (*Affirmative*). Saw it on t.v.

L.C.: That's where I saw it, television. Give exercise. It would never be good for us, you know. If you've been sitting a little while, stand up, stretch, shake your hands, move all around for about five minutes.

C. S.: I have little rituals that I do every now and then.

L.C.: What is that?

C. S.: Here, remember that, what did we call it? Remember I got all --

L.C.: Oh, yeah. She does the bogaloo.

C. S.: I forget what we call that. I can't remember now.

L.C.: Who knows?

P.L.: Shake your booty.

L.C.: I was out of sorts that night.

K.F.: Now are there still women on the island who are picking illegally?

C.M.: No comment.

L.C.: You saw the heads but you didn't hear the voice.

P.L.: Here's how I feel about that. As long as I can fill my crab meat and make a profit and enjoy work, you know, stay where I'm at.

L.C.: Until you learn how to swim.

(Laughter.)

P.L.: I'm thinking long and hard about that. Well it's better down here. It's like you say, it's more convenient, it's easier in a lot of ways, it's more money, and you ain't got to worry about getting caught.

L.C.: What we put on the boat of mornings to be picked up in Crisfield, we don't worry about it any more.

P.L.: No.

C. S.: We're not worried about that it might be confiscated or anything.

P.L.: That's enough off your mind.

C. S.: That's a lot off your mind.

P.L.: Plus just like you said, you make more money this way. I mean it's pay a dollar to the co-op on every pound --

L.C.: Two.

C. S.: Two.

P.L.: I mean two. As long as I'm selling mine and don't have that worry, that means a lot to me.

K.F.: Now do you all have your own customers that you deal with individually?

P.L.: Yeah.

C.M.: We have joint customers, and we each one have customers.

P.L.: Individual ones.

C.M.: If I get a big order, and I don't have enough crabs to finish that order to fill it, enough pounds, I go over to some of these, and you want to have five pounds and you want to let me have 10 pounds, and they do the same thing if they get an order. And then we have main customers.

P.L.: Yeah. The first year, we all basically sold to the same -- individual, smaller orders. And the second year, I just thought, you know, maybe it would be better to have one more big buyer, you know. Not put all your apples in one basket. Now I'm glad I did because the man to the Rusty Rudder sold his business. I believe this year the person who bought it's going to take just about everybody's crab meat, but I don't -- it helps to branch out try to fill all these -- sometimes these orders, we really can't fill `em or don't want to fill `em, but we try not to turn any orders away in case, you know, if we can't pick

all of it, we try to pick a portion of it so that we can sort of keep it going, you know. Because right now we've got two, basically, two big people that take our crab meat. The other orders are probably individual or --

C.M.: Or call-in orders.

C. S.: Or walk in.

P.L.: Somebody'll call and say they want to buy 20 pounds. And sometimes 10 of us put two pounds each. Somebody else might put the whole 20, you know, whatever they, some picks more than others, you know.

C. S.: We had a lot of walk-in orders too since the --

L.C.: Inn.

C. S.: -- the inn's been here. Sometimes, especially like on Mondays or weekends, you know, we have a lot of people walk in and buy. Sometimes it's just a couple pounds, sometimes it's been around 12 or --

C.M.: Six, ten, twelve, like that.

C. S.: Yeah, eight. And most the time that will happen around a holiday when --

C.M.: We need it.

C. S.: -- your biggest buyer, the one you want to get as much as you can for, but you don't want to turn away these customers either, so we all try to -- if we just all --

C.M.: I don't think we've ever turned away anybody.

C. S.: No.

C.M.: We've all, like I say, if one of us don't have it, we'll go get a pound from each one of us and fill an order, or we'll get two pounds from each one and fill her order. Because we don't want to go away saying, you know, we went there to get crab meat and they wouldn't let us have it. That wouldn't be a very good thing for our --

P.L.: Like if six is here that morning and we all give a pound, then that next evening, it's six more women here, they'll do it that evening if somebody comes in, you know. A pound a piece. That way you don't miss it that much.

L.C.: We ice it down, put it in something and ice it down for them, or they'll bring their ice coolers and pack it up for `em and ice it down and keep it here, you know, for `em until the boat leaves, or if it's like any more than a couple pounds.

K.F.: Well what would you all like people to know about crab picking as the museum puts this exhibit together?

L.C.: Come buy from us.

K.F.: Okay.

C. S.: I'd say our crab meat is the best you can buy.

C.M.: Yeah.

P.L.: Yeah.

C.S.: I think. I mean --

C.M.: It's finger-licking good.

C. S.: Because we're all individual, and our name is on it --

C.M.: Lip-smacking good.

P.L.: You know, we take pride in it. And we want to make sure that what they're getting is something that we would want to put in our mouth, try to feed our family, you know. Try to keep as little shell as possible.

C. S.: Like they said, it's never --health department's never found anything wrong with it. It's always been good.

P.L.: We keep the building --I think this is the cleanest picking house you'll find. We take care of it.

C. S.: I'll tell you something about myself about the dignity of it. Like I said, I was a lab technician before I moved here. And when I moved over here, people would say well, Christine, what are you going to do now, and I said pick crabs, and they sort of frowned on it, you know. And I'm just as proud right now of my work as anybody else is because it's an honest living. It's the only thing that I can do to make a living here, and I'm just thankful that I have the crabs to pick, and I have the health to pick. And I just, you know, am glad that we've got a good place to come to. And I'm proud of my product and what we do. And I don't think of it as being a, you know, like a -- I don't know how to explain it. I don't know what I want to say. You know, like when you hear people say, God, she picks crabs for a living. Is that the only job she's got? You know, and I found out it's the way to make money. I make more money now than I did before. Like I said, it's hard work, and you've got to dig your heels in when you're going to do it, you can't fool around with it. You've got to stick to it every day and get `em picked off and all that, but it's a good, decent way to make a living. And to help your family and your husband pay the bills. If it wasn't for the crabs, I don't know what us wives would do, I really don't. I know there would be a lot of people with a lot less insurances, and a lot less cars, and a lot less new furniture, and carpets, and clothes and --

C.M.: Designer clothes.

C. S.: Yeah.

L.C.: Well it's like Patty said. I mean what goes out of this building, we're proud of it, we're very proud of it because we -- well we're proud of it, we're proud of our product, and we're -- it's clean. And like Patty said, it's very little shell in it.

C. S.: I'll tell you something else. I will not sell a pound of crab meat if I would not eat it myself.

P.L.: Me too. I pick, I sell every pound as if -- and I pick it as if I'm going to eat it myself. And I wouldn't sell it any other way than like that.

C.S.: And like sometimes you hear people say well you could eat off the floor. Well that's how clean this building is compared to other buildings on the mainland. And it's just -- well if I'm going to be boastful, I'll be boastful, it's just a good crab product.

P.L.: Plus if you get, like I say, I sell my crab meat to the Rusty Rudder. If they were to get a pound of crab meat and it would be full of shell or something would be wrong with it, and even if my name was on it, it wouldn't just hurt me, it would hurt the whole co-op. And you don't want to do that. I mean we want to keep this as, you know, we want it to be something that we're all proud of. Don't want to get nobody in no trouble, you know. And even though if it was my name on it and I'm the onliest one got in trouble, it would look bad on the co-op, you don't want it to do that. You want to make sure that you get nothing but good reviews --

L.C.: The best.

P.L.: And keep everybody happy, you know.

K.F.: Now have you all felt any of the crunch from the Asian crab meat coming in at all? I know the bigger plants are having a big problem with that.

C.M.: Not so far.

P.L.: Not so far.

C. S.: We're wondering in the future if it's not going to be a problem, but the way they're starting to regulate it, and they've got like six, six -- is it, they started putting some kind of different kind of seal.

L.C.: What was it? It was an article in --

P.L.: I think it was the Bay Journal, Bay Journal last week --

C.S.: They can't put on there any more that it's blue crab. They have to put on there that it's the other names of that crab, it's not Maryland Blue Crab. They have to put on there that it's an Asian product. Before, the only thing that you would see in their packaging was their crab meat that would say it was Asian crab meat. The rest of it, if it be like spinach and crab souffle, or some of their other dishes that were frozen, it would say blue crab meat, Maryland style.

K.F.: Right.

C. S.: Maryland prepared. It wasn't Maryland crab meat, it was prepared in a Maryland style, but it certainly wasn't Maryland Blue Crab, and it was deception, you know. And now they're making them put that on there.

L.C.: But do you know that bill was turned down?

K.F.: Yeah, it was.

L.C.: That bill was turned down. It was in the Bay Journal last week. Billie got the paper, and he was reading it to me, and he said Louise, look --

P.L.: What, they don't have to put that on there now?

L.C.: He read the whole thing to me. It was vetoed in the highest -- or whatever. But anyway, it was turned down.

C. S.: You know, that's sad,

L.C.: That's bad.

K.F.: Now what they have come up with, though, is a sticker to put on the cans that are picked in Maryland that say Maryland.

L.C.: That's what I thought, yeah. Maryland picked, okay.

K.F.: So it means they're allowed to do that because states can do it on their own crab meat.

L.C.: Even like the North Carolina Crab is Maryland picked, but they can't say that from Taiwan and Philippines.

C.M.: No. Yeah.

P.L.: A friend of mine, they got crab meat. I heard him talking about it. He said he had such a good recipe for crab cakes, and he said I'll put my crab cakes to anybody else cooking, he said, but I went -- I won't name the places he got it, but he went and got a pound of crab meat, and he come back and he mixed it up just like he always did. And he said when they sat down to eat, he said that was the commonest crab cake that I have ever put in my mouth. And he said -- and I went over in my mind what I had put in it, and it was the same thing he said I've always. So he said he went in the trash and got out the container, and it was Asian crab meat.

C. S.: See they treat it with something too.

K.F.: Yeah, they do.

P.L.: He said it tasted like bleach was in it. He said it tasted terrible.

C. S.: They whiten the meat, I think, don't they?

K.F.: They do whiten it. And they also, you know, Maryland has a law that you have to pick into the can and then just pack it?

C. S.: Right.

K.F.: They don't have that law in Asia. So what they do is they all pick into --

L.C.: The trays.

K.F.: -- the trays. And then they dump it into a shallow large tray about as big as this table. They shine a black light on it because the shell glows in the dark.

L.C.: Uh-huh (Affirmative).

K.F.: They pick out all the shell. Then they treat it, and then they pack it. But they've got to pack it so it can be shipped, you know, from Asia all the way here. So they do put a chemical, like a preservative or something in there so --

L.C.: He said you could taste something in it.

C. S.: Do they pasteurize it before they send it?

K.F.: A lot of it they do if it comes in the cans, you know, the metal tins.

P.L.: We had a pound of it down here. I forgot who --

L.C.: Janice brought it.

C.S.: Janice brought it and dumped it on one of our trays and showed it to us. It had a --

L.C.: Greyish color.

C. S.: -- a grey color.

P.L.: Now some people tasted it. I didn't taste it.

L.C.: I didn't either.

C. S.: And I don't like the way it smelled either.

L.C.: No.

C. S.: It didn't smell, I mean --

L.C.: Now some people tasted it.

P.L.: When I looked down, I touched it like that. I said from now on call Smith Island Co-Op. You get the best crab meat going. She said I never thought of that. She said well you better from now on think of it.

(Laughter.)

L.C.: Hey I'll tell you something else. Maybe now they have to pick in a container, but I've seen before the crab pickers to Crisfield that's won the picking contest, and they've been there -- in talking to `em, they had a great big pan in their lap, and I seen that Joyce Fitchett -- not Joyce Fitchett. Gold tooth. Her and Joyce -- oh, gosh, I can't think --

P.L.: Hazel Crocker?

C. S.: Hazel, Hazel Crocker. I seen her take her hand and mash that in there, and she had a whole pound full of crab meat, and she just started mashing into the cans, you know.

C.M.: Not picking in the container?

C. S.: No. Have you seen on television? Yeah, I've seen it. That was Henrietta. I mean, not Henrietta, Hazel. Hurricane Hazel they call her.

C.M.: Hurricane Hazel.

P.L.: See now we pick right in our containers.

C. S.: I'll tell you something about those containers too. Those plastic containers sometimes I can hear a little piece of shell hit the side, and I'll go looking for it. And I didn't hear when I was doing it in Ziploc baggies.

L. C.: No.

P.L.: Now we don't pick like those women either. They do the claws. My God, they're faster than a speeding bullet.

C. S.: Plus they're picking for an organization. Their name's not on it. They don't care. They're getting paid --

L.C.: Regardless.

C. S.: -- by the pound, you know. And they just put out as many times as they can --

P.L.: -- more money.

L.C.: -- with shells in it.

P.L.: My daughter did bookkeeping to a place to Crisfield. And they would have two people go through every bit of the crab meat and get the shell out of it. And the time they got through with it, it looked like it were shredded.

K.F.: Right.

P.L.: You know, the crab meat looked like it was shredded because they were picking through all that shell. And it was something else that she told me. I can't remember now what it was. I had it in my mind.

(END OF INTERVIEW.)