

Interview Log

Interviewee: Henry Gootee

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BEGIN SIDE A

K.F.: This is Kelly Feltault doing an oral history with Mr. Henry Gootee on recreational fishing. Can I have you say your name?

H.G.: Okay. My name is Henry Gootee, and today's date is March the 20th, isn't it?

K.F.: Yes. First day of spring. All right. Let me just start off real basic. Where were you born?

H.G.: I was born in Dorchester County on December the 22nd, 1942.

K.F.: All right, Christmas baby.

C.B.: Christmas baby.

H.G.: Yeah, almost.

K.F.: All right. And how long has your family been in Dorchester County?

H.G.: From the early 1700's.

K.F.: Wow. And you run a marina, right?

H.G.: That's correct.

K.F.: Okay, how long have you –

H.G.: That's a family-operated business.

K.F.: Okay.

H.G.: I start, my father started that business in 1944.

K.F.: And how many – what was it like then?

H.G.: Well basically back then, you know, he ran a general repair shop, and mostly it was farmers and watermen. And, you know, it's just local, that's all you – just local trade is all you had. And then about 1955 is when we really started getting into the marine business more so.

K.F.: And how did that start? I mean what made you –

H.G.: Okay. I would say that my father had the foresight more so than I that the recreational end of the business was going to be greater than the local business. And I guess he saw that coming out in his early days, you know, from a lot of farmers, a lot of local watermen, and then the numbers started to dwindle. And then what happened, what I can remember, is that we started having a lot of people coming down and hunting in our area. And that's when we really started to realize, you know, what the potential was to – in the recreational end.

K.F.: And how would the hunters affect your business?

H.G.: Okay. Here's how the hunters – the hunters needed boats and motors, okay. So hunters are also fisherman. And that's how I got into the fishing business is through people that would come down and hunt, and they would say well this looks like a great area for fishing. My gosh, we've got more fish than you know what to do with, you know, really. And they said well how about taking us out, showing us around? And that's how it started. I started out with just the plain wooden skiff, about 19 feet, with a 35 horsepower outboard motor on it, had two or three guys come down, and we'd go out, we didn't have to go far then. The Hunger River, at that time, had all types of fish in it. A lot of – I'd say one species probably nobody ever sees anymore is what we call the sand perch. It's like a white perch, but he's got a sandy or rusty looking color. And they were, you could fish anywhere off the shore, you know, just take a boat and run 2 or 300 yards off, hit a oyster shell pond and catch as many as you want, and white perch too. That's, and actually, that's what really got everybody, you know, the fish were plentiful

at that time. And I mean anybody could catch them. You could be onshore, offshore or, you know, didn't make any difference. And that snowballed from that era.

C.B.: So when you would take these three or four fellows out, how long would you go out? Did you like say well I'll take you out for four hours for a fee? Did you pack a lunch?

H.G.: At that time, no. They would just, you know, they would call you up and see what was going on. You know, see can you get off today, you know, 'cause I was working at the marina. Can you get off today to slip us out in the river and see what we can do? And that's how it started from that point right there.

C.B.: Where would these people be from mostly?

H.G.: They were from all over. I mean as far reaching as New York. We had a lot of people that owned property and hunted in New York. There's Pennsylvania and even Virginia. D.C. area, Baltimore area were big people that would come down here. In fact, they had one of the Phillips' Packing Company in Cambridge, they had a big hunting lodge at Bishop's Head.

K.F.: Oh, right.

H.G.: Bishop's Head Point, which is now the Foundation, Chesapeake Bay Foundation. And they probably had 25 guys or more, and would take, you know, all their business associates and all that from all over. And that's how – that's what really started bringing more people in to see what was going on. Then they wanted, you know, more of it. Instead of having to be invited down, they wanted to buy a piece of property and get close to it, and that kind of stuff.

K.F.: Right. So they really became property owners then in Dorchester.

H.G.: A lot of them did. A lot of them did, yes.

K.F.: So they'd come there on vacation?

H.G.: In fact, Applegarth Island, right now, is owned or partly owned by some people out of New York. Their – it has been handed down through the generations through them, and they still hunted. And that's all, it's the lower island of all, Hooper's Island. Hooper's Island is made up of three islands, really. There's Fishing Creek, and Hoopersville, and then Applegarth. Nobody lives on Applegarth at all.

K.F.: And tell me more about the types of fish in the early days that you would catch.

H.G.: Well basically we would catch sand perch, white perch, like I was saying, hard heads or croakers as a lot of people know them. Very few rock fish or striped bass as we know it. They come on later, you know. Probably they really got going real good with us probably in the mid 50's, probably. Mid 50's to the early 60's. You know, they just, I mean we can always catch some, but not in the numbers like you could then. Of course we have plenty of eels, spotted trout, yellow fin trout, black drum, red drum or channel bass as some of them are called. Probably a couple more that I can't mention right now offhand. But they were pretty plentiful at that time. Bluefish, bluefish we had plenty of through the 70's and into the 80's. But, you know, it's a funny thing, we in Easton get the bluefish probably sometime in late July probably, first of August. And I can remember when people would say when is the bluefish run going to come, you know, because nobody else – they were a new fish to us at that time coming in.

K.F.: Right.

H.G.: And, you know, flounder too. We had – but, you know, we've never been a big flounder area, you know, like on the coast.

K.F.: Like in Chincoteague it's really –

H.G.: That's right, we never have been. You know, we catch some and all that. Now we used to catch them 12 and 13 inch ones, which you can no longer catch. They got to be, I think 16, 16 1/2 or something like that. You won't find too many. If you go out and you may catch 25 flounder, maybe get one or two keepers.

K.F.: Right. Well, what about regulations? How have those sort of changed since you got into the business? What were the regulations when you first started?

H.G.: Had none.

(Laughter).

H.G.: Take all you wanted, all you could carry. That's when we first started. If you want to get back to the, you know, how I got all the way into the fishing end of it, what happened was, you know, we started off with the 19 foot boat, and old wooden boat that just putted around in the river. And then I had some people that wanted to do a little bit of bay fishing, so I bought a larger boat at that time. I think she was right around 30 feet. And just a regular old workboat with an inboard engine into it –

K.F.: Commercial.

H.G.: As the old timers used to call it, the dog house on the front of the boat.

K.F.: Oh, okay.

H.G.: See what the cabin is, they used to call it the dog house. Well anyway, I had that boat for about, I think, until '73. Along in there. And then we had the clientele started, you know, that we had the customer wanted to bring some mixed company on the boat, they wanted to bring children on the boat and whatever. And that's when I decided to build the first striker. And she was 40 foot. Cecil Robins built her in 1973.

K.F.: Cecil Robins?

H.G.: Uh-huh (affirmative).

K.F.: Is he a local guy?

H.G.: That's right. He built it down to a place called Drawbridge.

K.F.: Okay.

C.B.: And what was that, what did that offer you?

H.G.: Okay. That give us the opportunity to take mixed company out fishing so to have a place to go to the bathroom and all that, you know. You know, you could go out and spend six, eight hours on the water, you know, you didn't have to worry about going to bathroom. And that did, it was surprising to me because when I first started, I thought the only people fished was guys, you know. I didn't think that women did any fishing. I guess I thought they were all supposed to stay home and do nothing, you know. But anyway, it's surprising how many women do love fishing. I mean more so than a lot of men do. They really do. But that really snowballed. And that's when by the 70's, we were getting into – at that time, we were running all over the bay. You know, when I say, hardly ever fished much above James Island. James Island is usually our cutoff. Now we'll fish all the way to the Maryland-Virginia line. We always did that, you know. But you know, you catch the fish when they were coming up the bay, you know, the larger fish in the spring, fish for them. Then by the time that that was over with, I'm talking about the stripers now, and we had some big blue fish back there in the 70's too. I mean, you know, 13, 14, 16 pounds, which a lot of – created a lot of interest for people, a lot of interest. And then we had like, I think it was '81 or 2, we had the Yellowfin Trout come in play. And I mean it was awful what we really done to them, as many as we caught. It

was just, you know, take as many as you wanted. I remember I've seen guys come down with these big coolers, and there was two at a time, and they fill them coolers up that would hold probably 3 or 400 pounds of fish, and they'd have 3 or 4 of them when they'd take them home. I don't – they had to sell them. Ain't no way in the world they could eat all them fish. But I mean that was –

C.B.: Now is the – are there no more –

H.G.: No, the last of them trout, you know, the numbers – actually it was good 'til '83, and then it started to fall off. And then by '88, I'd say, the Trout was almost zero. You'd catch a few around stone piles or rock piles or whatever. But prior to that, like in the early 80's, you'd go in the bay and you could find the birds on them, you know, they would be breaking, sometimes they'd be mixed in with Bluefish, and I mean you could just slaughter them. I really – looking back on it, it was bad. We should've never – we just didn't think there ever going to be no end to it. That's the problem. That's – now on the Rockfish end of it, Rockfish was good from about '60 – far as I can remember, '63 or 4 up through probably '71 or 2. And then we told – a group of us guys told DNR in 1977 that the Rockfish were in trouble, there was not that many out there. And they said it's just a cycle they're going through, they'll get back. And they started having meetings on the Rockfish about '83, and then they had more in '84, and then in 1985 when Legislature says cut it right off. But that was really one of the best things that ever happened because it really brought them back big time, the Rockfish. Now the Bluefish died off on us probably '89 and '90. And we never have got them back yet like they were. Now DNR claims that the Gulf Stream has moved away from the bay, the mouth of the bay. And so when they would come up that, you know, following that warm water, a lot of them would come on in the bay. And what happened is, they said it smoothed out, so we missed that. So we still get that run of fish, but they're always about that size, you know, maybe a couple bigger one in, like I say, in August. But one thing that has really come on for us and really helped us out during the summertime is the hardheads, the croakers. That has really brought – I mean the thing about the hardhead fish, you do not have to be a fisherman to catch them. And what I mean by that, once you get the people on the boat that lure the lines down so they get on the bottom, the hardheads do the rest. I mean they just jump on – I guess that's why they always call them hardheads, or local name's hardheads because they just grab hold of that line and hang on for dear life. And that's the –

C.B.: That was the first fish I caught. You're right –

H.G.: You drop it right down, and all at once somebody says oh – what is this, what is this.

C.B.: Five minutes.

H.G.: What is this? You know, it's one of them deals, you know. But what happened, and what I insist on people that's looking, a lot of families now, especially fathers and sons, you know, when they get like 12, 13 years old, you know, everybody wants to go their separate ways. But one thing about fishing, it doesn't have no age barrier. I mean it could be 5, or he could be 85. You know, it's all the same thing. You know, and it does bring the family together to go out and have a good time all together. In fact, I think it was three years ago I had four generations on the boat at one time. So that was, you know, I had to sit back and think about that. That's pretty good, you know, when you thought about that.

K.F.: Well can you tell us about some of your more memorable trips out on the bay? I mean what's it like when someone catches their first fish?

H.G.: Well you almost have to be there for to watch the first one to catch their first fish, you know. I mean they'll – most of the time, the girls will squeal and holler. Some of the young guys moan and groan and all that kind of stuff, you know. But, yes, I've seen some of them when they have one on, the first fish, the rod and reel and patting their feet on the floor of the boat all the same time. I said what's going on back there anyway? I got a fish on, you know.

K.F.: And how about some other memories of taking folks out?

H.G.: Well some of the worst times that I ever had is during thunderstorms.

K.F.: Oh, tell us about some of those.

H.G.: We had, I think it was in '84 or '85 when they had that bad storm over in D.C. and tore all of the trees down and – we were out there in the bay. And what happens is when you're catching fish, no one wants to leave. And I told the party then, I said I think we better get out of here. Oh, no, Captain, said, we're all right, we're all right. I said – it's a bad time in D.C. coming this way. And you could see it starting to get dark over there all the time. I said I think we should pack it up. Give us five more minutes, Captain. Give us five more minutes. Give them five more minutes. I said all right, let's wind them up. Just five more minutes, because everybody was catching them. And that was the problem, you know, it just, you know, it's like giving you a piece of candy and taking it away from you almost, I guess. And we stayed too long. And it caught us before we got ashore. And you know everybody's talking about the tornados on the water you see, they call them water spouts. And when I seen them coming across that bay, everywhere you looked was one. And one of them hit us right broadside. And whatever was loose in the boat, like if they had a drink can in the back or anything, hat or coat, it sucked it right out of her. And I had the life raft on top, you know, nothing holds it down, it just sits on the boat because if the boat sinks, it's supposed to float off. It took it off, we never did find it. Never, ever – nobody to my knowledge found that. I don't know where it went, but it was nowhere around.

C.B.: What were the passengers doing?

H.G.: Nobody was saying a word, including me.

(Laughter.)

H.G.: Because, you know, I mean that was probably the worst experience I ever had on the water was that time there. And I mean everywhere you looked, everywhere you looked, it was, you know, it was just one waterspout after another. I mean that was, you know, you could –

K.F.: What did it look like?

H.G.: You could feel the pressure when that went over you. You could feel it on you. I mean you could feel it. I mean I could feel it in the boat. I tell you, you know, I just said my gosh, I hope this boat stays together. That's how bad it was. But that really taught me a lesson. I mean no matter how bad them people want to stay there, whether they get upset with you and don't come back or whatever, you know, you're responsible for them people's lives. And, you know, it's not a very good feeling when you're out there like that.

C.B.: Well, Captain, that was a breathtaking story. And it leads me to ask you how do you get your captain's license? Because you obviously are trained to deal with a crazy crew, or at least somewhat.

H.G.: Well they don't want to quit. It's not crazy, they just don't want to quit.

C.B.: So what do you know? You know, how do you learn what you know, and how do you prepare to be a captain?

H.G.: Well a lot of the ways that you get your license, I really don't agree with.

K.F.: Like?

H.G.: Anyone could take a book and read it that's a good test-goer. You know, some people can read it, take it – you know, I mean hand them a test and they can ace it just like that. But that don't give any of them any practical experience – I mean the Coast Guard don't know. Now what they do do, they're supposed to have 365 days of experience on the water within the last five years to qualify. But that don't mean they're really a qualified captain. I mean that says that he's been on the water, basically that's all it tells them. He's been on the water, he's had that nine days on the water, and now he knows the rules of the road and all that. Outside that, anybody can get it. You know, I mean if you – and when you document your time, you can get it done by somebody that fished with you, where you bought your fuel, that type of thing. That's – so I feel like that yes, they should know the rules of the road, for sure. Everybody should know that. But I feel like the Coast Guard should take them people out on that boat and let them show them what they do know.

K.F.: Like a driving test.

H.G.: Exactly. That's my feeling.

C.B.: Driver's license.

H.G.: Outside of how to handle people in storms and whatever, they always stress them people's lives are in your hands, and you're supposed to have enough experience and enough know-how to not jeopardize their life. That's the way the Coast Guard feels. That's the way they feel.

C.B.: Well you're in the chain of command with the Coast Guard. The passengers, then you, then you would rely on the Coast Guard in an emergency, so they want you to be able to handle that emergency.

H.G.: If they would – you know, if anything would happen that day with us, the first thing they would've said, you had no business being there. You went against your better judgment. And they would've been 100 percent right. That's the way they treat it too. And the thing that I've found out with the Coast Guard, you know, they – it's white or it's black. There's no in-between.

C.B.: So you're leading me to ask a question a little off-track, but what if something had happened, and they had said it's your fault? Is there a penalty system?

H.G.: Yes.

C.B.: And what would that –

H.G.: It all depends.

C.B.: Okay.

H.G.: It all depends on how they found – if they found that you were negligent in your job, they could even put you in jail. You know, I mean they – number one, they pull your license right on the spot. Number two, you know, you would go to court. And who knows from there.

K.F.: Well when did the Coast Guard get into the picture? I mean if you started and there were no regulations –

H.G.: It's always been a law that you had to have a passenger-carrying license. Now I would say up until, oh, I guess probably the mid-60's, nobody really knew that you had to have, or if you did, nobody said anything. The license deal never come in play until – I'm sure on the Western Shore because they had more boats over there and they were carrying more people fishing. But I mean over here where it was just a few of us and they only did it every now and then, you know, and it wasn't a livelihood or whatever, some people come down and they wanted to go fishing, you know, you just took them out. Basically when we first started, it was whatever the person wanted to give you, seriously. I never will forget when I got the first 30 foot boat, workboat with the workboat cabin on it, a guy come down and he said how much you charge? I said I don't know, how much is it worth to you? Seriously. He said what have you got involved? I said well I've got gasoline, and I've got bait and whatever. He said will you be satisfied with \$45? Man, I said yes, indeedy.

C.B.: Hop in.

H.G.: Come on. Actually, that's how you got – now it was no regulations on the hunting deal, you know. I mean you could carry people hunting or whatever. Nobody, you know, you didn't have no guide license, you didn't have anything. I think the guide license started coming sometime, like I said, in the mid-60's, early 70's. And then the state got in it and I think they realized we made some money out of this deal. So they jumped on that big time. But the – getting back to you on your requirements, you've always had to have that license for carrying passengers. Now the one that the state has is your guide license. That come in somewhere, I think, in like '79 or '80 or something like that. That's when you have to have that every year. You buy that license every year for that. Now getting back to your limits or restrictions or whatever, it all started about probably '83, '84 when the Rockfish got like it did. And then they started talking about putting limits on everything. And actually, the fishing went down, I mean really went downhill probably in the mid-80's until about '88, '89. I mean it was, it was a few people – what happened was people would come down and they would go fishing with you maybe once or twice. And it was hard pressed to catch them some fish. I mean you run all over the place to catch them some fish. And, you know, it may have been – well one species I didn't mention was Spot, the Norfolk Spot. They were in pretty good shape in the mid-80's, or '85, '86, '87. I mean and they were good size, about like that. And they were fun to catch. That probably, you know, if you go out and you catch 100 Spot, you know, what are you going to do with another 100 a month from now, you know? I mean you want to catch something else. You know what I'm saying. But the way they got the regulations set up now, you know, it's like duck hunting. You know. You're going to be allowed two Rockfish. Or like in the spring, you're allowed one. You know. So and believe it or not, I was one of the guys that when they were talking about restrictions and regulations on everybody, said if you do this, nobody's going to come go fishing because they don't want to know, you know – if they started catching fish, they wanted to carry more home than what you were going to let them carry. And believe it or not, it's just been the reverse. Because, you know, you only can get two fish. So you know, you take them home or whatever, and they're gone. So if you want more fish, you got to go out and catch some, or go to the store and buy some.

K.F.: Got to cut back your repeat business.

H.G.: That's right, that's right.

K.F.: Well I had two questions from that. What other fish are fun to catch, and what does that mean?

H.G.: You mean from Rockfish or –

K.F.: Just when you go out, what other fish are fun to catch?

H.G.: Okay. The primary fish right now that we're fishing for now really are stripers or Rockfish as we call them. Some people call them striped bass, we call them Rockfish, other people call them – whatever. Up north they call them a different name.

K.F.: Yeah.

H.G.: And the Croakers. Now we'll fish for them – well let's back up. In April and May we'll fish for Stripers alone because it will be a few Croakers around, but you won't – you know, it's not enough to fool with. But when you get to June, you go out, what we try to do is set up, catch everybody a couple Rockfish. And then, you know, for the people that want more and more fish, you take them, put them on some Croakers. And the size that they've been for the last couple years, they've been like this for 18, 19 inches. You know, I mean you can load them up pretty quick on fish.

C.B.: How do you change people? You mention an interesting thing –

K.F.: Set up.

C.B.: How do you set them up to buy – to catch Rockfish, and then to catch Croakers? What do you do?

H.G.: Okay. Two ways you can catch the – well actually three ways you can catch the Rockfish. You can troll for them. We do that in the early months in April and May. June, we switch over to chum. And we chum Manhate or Monkers or whatever you want to call them, or scrap fish, as some people call them. Just grind it up in a grinder and we just put it overboard, then we cut up pieces of the fish on bigger bait on the hook, just float it out into the tide. And one thing about it, a lot of people like to fish with light tackle. You know, they like to be able to really feel that fish when it hits and all that. So then, just as soon as we catch them, the Rockfish, we just catch them, put it in the boat, then we take them rods up and put them away. And then we pick out the bottom fishing rods, when we're going to go on the bottom, they got the little sinker and the two hooks. And we use, it's a number of baits you can use. You can use bloodworms, squid, peeler crab before it becomes a soft crab. You can use soft crabs if you like. Some people use them little small shrimp, you know. The hardhead, as a rule, he's not picky. I mean he's there to get something to eat. So, you know, you can go there and catch them few no time.

K.F.: And what makes a fish fun, I mean to catch it?

H.G.: Well actually, it's the pull on the end of the rod. You know, if you take, like if you're using light tackle, and you catch an 18 to 20 inch, or 22 inch fish, and you've got it on a 15 pound test line, and the drag is not set, you know, just so it don't break, and he winds it in with three or four cranks, and he takes it out 10 cranks. You know, back and forth, it's the fight of the fish. Now trolling is like that too. You've probably seen them on t.v., or maybe you've done that kind of fishing where you've been out there or, you know, you're using a lot bigger rod, a lot bigger gear. And when that fish hits and you've got the clippers on, you know, the rod goes bzzz, bzzz, bzzz, you know, everybody jumps up. You know, they might've been all half asleep. But when they hear that go off, they

jump up, run, everybody's outside hoping and hollering, got the one on top or down bottom or whatever. And then same thing. He cranks it in, you know, and just about time you get it, you know, when it's first on, and he'll pull it back off again. It's the fight, the fight. Now the catching of the croakers, what I've found is especially people that haven't done a whole lot of fishing, when they get hold of it, they think they're hung in the bottom. And if you go over and get hold of the rod and the rod's going like this, I said no, it's not in the bottom, you got fish on it. They make two cranks and then they say oh, my God, I got one, you know. One of them deals. So, yeah.

K.F.: Well we were also wondering if you could tell us about some of the other things you see out on the bay related to recreation. When did you notice that there were a lot more other recreational boats out on the bay, and do they get in your way?

H.G.: Well, you know, we don't – I guess I'm a little different than a lot of the captains 'cause we got a marina, and we sell boats and motors. And a lot of them people out there are spending money with us, you know. So we try to help them along, 'cause we don't want to see them get disgusted and quit fishing, you know. I mean we like to see everybody – so that goes back to the same thing I was talking earlier about how large an area we got down there. Really, it's two times that you get a little crowded is early spring when the fish are concentrated in the channel or late fall. That's really the only time you have any problems in our area. Now I do know up the bay up further, they have, you know, they're fussing, 'cause what happens is you got a guy that comes out, he just bought a boat, he don't know have the first clue. So what is he going to do? He's going to go to a charter boat, and get close by and watch what goes on. It's just a natural thing that people are going to do. In fact, I've had them come out and they get so close, they say captain, I think you better pull your act up and move over a little bit because we're going to bump here in a few minutes. But, you know, it's ways to handle that without having people getting mad or whatever.

And but it started, I guess really the big push was when the Rockfish opened back up. Now we knew that it was prior to that like in the, I would say with our business at the marina until 1975, 6, it was probably 70 percent commercial and 30 percent recreation. And by 1990, it's probably maybe 5 percent, maybe 5 percent commercial and the rest is recreation. You take the recreational people away from us down where we're at, we won't be there long. But I'm telling you, it's growing every year. And if you don't think so, all you have to do is go to one of these boat shows, or get DNR and look the boat registrations up, it's more boats going on the Chesapeake Bay every year, every year. And I feel like the fishing boats have increased more than any of the rest of them, outside those little jet skis. Now you can't count them.

(Laughter.)

H.G.: I think everybody's got one of them.

C.B.: Do you think that will ever lead to a problem, or is that a good thing, this growth you can see every year?

H.G.: Not in our area. Not yet. You know, I mean we got so much water down there, you know, especially when you get off the lower end of Hooper's Island and you go all the way across to the Western Shore, it's probably 16, 17 miles across our area, and it's a lot of open water, and you know, you're going to have to have a pretty good size boat to fish them types of water, unless you hit a real pretty day. That you never know unless

that's in the middle of summer, then you better watch out for thunder storms then. But you take the Honga River, the Blackwater River, where we're at, the Hooper's Strait area, Fishing Bay, the Wicomico, you know, all them are, I mean they can have 12 foot boats with, you know, with a 3 horsepower motor on it, or maybe, just you know, you can go and catch some fish around them places. Perch, might catch a couple rocks. Hardheads even come up in there when they're spawning, you know, in June. So, you know, it's a lot of area where, you know – and when I say that, when I say the boats are growing, I'm saying, covering all aspects of it, you know, I mean when you think about it. I'm not just saying the fishing end of it. You have to look at the whole big, the whole picture on that.

C.B.: So I was thinking when was the first time, how old were you when the man came out and asked you to take him out for the day? About how old, what year was that?

H.G.: I would say we're looking at it just about – I guess it was '59 or '60, along in there. Just about – I guess I was about 16, maybe 16 years old.

K.F.: How did you learn this business, Mr. Gootee?

H.G.: Well, you know, the fishing in the rivers and backwaters and out around the island was, you know, I'm an old timer, I used to go fishing with a lot Otis Crating. And he fished, and his father was a fisherman, and his father's a fisherman, and they like to fish, both of them did. And we did a lot of fishing when I was like, you know, a lot younger. And before I had a boat myself, going by myself, I used to go with him. So, you know, and when I got older and got fooling with it, then you know, he was ready to go with me. (Laughter).

H.G.: But that's how I got started. Now when I really got into the fishing party business, really got into it, I had a couple guys on the Western Shore coming out Solomon's Island or Patuxent River. One lived St. Mary's County, and one lived in Calvert County. And one was named Bill Dixon, and the other one was Buzzy Osworth. And for – they wanted to learn a little bit about the Honga River fishing at the lower end, because it was good protection, and it had a lot of wind in fall of the year, and used to have a lot of breaking fish come through there like the last of October, first of November. So, you know, I was fishing in the bay catching a few Bluefish or whatever I could catch. And, you know, you get talking to them on the radio, and they say what's going on down the Honga River, you know. Only been catching one or two fish down that area, you know, right along. So when did them fish break down there? 'Cause they've been over fishing at times, you know, and they've heard about people talk about them. So, you know, we got talking back to one another, and I – and all at once, and they were a lot older than I am. They more or less took me under their wing out in the bay and showed me all the spots, the real good spots. And that's – if you have somebody to do that for you, then you've got an edge on everybody.

K.F.: Have those spots remained, or have they always been good spots?

H.G.: As a rule, yes. Basically, you take like – you can almost by a week, anyway, the different areas that we used to fish, we always go back, like if we haven't caught a Rockfish and we weren't doing nothing else, we'd check a couple spots coming back in. And what you look for, you look like – you look for stone piles, real hard sandy bottom, oyster shell or oyster bottom. That's where a lot of your hardheads like to hang around because they get them little worms coming up out of the oyster shells. Your trout, they love to get on them stone piles where that grass grows off the stones about that high. They get in there and they get all the grass shrimp and stuff like that. So, you know, I

mean that's what you look for. Now you take early spring, you know, more or less them fish are looking for them small Manhates. You know, it's a lot of them in the spring. And then the fall of the year, you've got a lot of these, we always call them silversides. They were little fish about that long and had a streak of silver down each side of them. But that's, you know, and you take like what they call Hooper Straits, and they call that Straits rock. That's all hard sand in there. And the tide moves very fast, probably around five miles an hour probably, or more at times, and it's a good drifting bottom, you know, you don't drop the anchor or anything, you just drop your line to 'em, just along with the tide. And you're liable to catch anything there. You can catch a Drum, you can catch Hardheads, you can catch Spot. You know, it all depends. It's where the Chesapeake Bay, the Honga River and Fishing Bay and Tangier Sounds all converge in that one area there off of Fishing's Head Point. And that's where them fish come up there and it makes a nice, it really is a good spot.

K.F.: What are Drum like to catch on rod and reel?

H.G.: Black Drum is – they'll really pull real hard for the first 30 seconds, and then they more or less give up. You know, I mean they still get to fighting, you still got to pull them in, but it's like after they made that big run, it's like maybe you got a bag on there, you pull it up, then you pull it in, pull it up, you know, whatever. But now a Red Drum or a lot of people call them Spotted Tail, are – he don't never give up. He hits where he's just same as a freight train. He don't even – you better have plenty line on your rod, or it better be good line too, or he's going to, zoom, he's gone with it. But they fight all the way. They fight all the way. It's almost like catching a Skate if you ever had a Skate on. You ever caught a –

K.F.: No.

H.G.: They fight all the way. But they're no good after you get them in. You know, we just cut them off, let them go.

K.F.: No, I've only caught Drum going with the guys who do pound netting.

H.G.: Oh, okay, right.

H.G.: Flop them in the boat. So that's –

H.G.: Yeah, but boy, you get them on line, you got to tussle. I mean he takes off with it.

C.B.: Do you have any funny stories or – you have told us a really scary storm story.

Seems to me I know the first time I got something that was biting, I –

(END SIDE A)

(BEGIN SIDE B)

H.G.: Well, you know, we have a couple. We had, we always had a guy on the boat. In fact, he just died a couple years ago on us. He got the part – you always have someone, unless it's company trips, you get more or less the guy that books the parties and takes care of getting the money together and all that kind of stuff. And I always call them a fishing party leader myself. I mean he's the lead guy. He gets them together, he gets their money, he sends it to you, he tells you where they want to go fishing and all that. And we had, this guy, he fished with me probably six or seven times a year. And we kept a rubber chicken on the boat, you know, a rubber chicken. And we put two twenty ounce sinkers into it. Them old big sinkers. Every new guy that come on the boat got the chicken. When we were fishing, when he went to the head, or he went to get a sandwich or something like that, when his back was turned, the chicken went on and went to the bottom. And boy, and then we would crank it down until the rod would bend like that

and everybody would holler, you got one on, you got one on. Well man, this guy's never been fishing before. So he runs out there and grabs his rod, and he's pulling. He says boy, he's really a big one, he's pulling, kept pulling. When it pops up, when the chicken comes out of the water, everybody just dies laughing. Just dies laughing. That's probably about the funniest, you know, one that we had on the boat.

C.B.: The initiation.

H.G.: Yeah.

C.B.: Well now I was interesting too when you're talking about women loving to fish. You know, I, as a woman, found that as a surprise, although my grandmother was a great surf fisher person, and I was just wondering what your introduction to fishing with women was like. You were a young man, I'm assuming, and –

H.G.: That's right. Well I guess the first thing, and no offense to you ladies, but I was wondering why the guys ever wanted to bring these girls, these women on the boat to go fishing.

(Laughter).

H.G.: Really, really. You know. And so, you know, but what I soon found out, a lot of these women were – could really fish. And I mean somebody that's really into it, they are most of the time better fishermen than the guys. 'Cause most the guys come down and, you know, they put their line over, they catch a couple, you know, blah, blah, blah. But, you know, a lot of the girls or ladies come down, they put a rod, and they stay right with her all day long, you know, if they're into that fishing. They come down, you know, they're just out for the day on the bay with their family or whatever, you know. They could care less if they caught a fish or whatever. But, you know, if you really get the ones that like to fish, they can fish with the best of them.

C.B.: What makes a good fisher person?

H.G.: Huh?

C.B.: What makes a good fisher person?

H.G.: Well you got – well you've really got to be interested in catching the fish and, you know, being really attentive, keep your line good and tight if you're bottom fishing, you know, make sure it's on the bottom, not a loose line, you know. Always used to tell them talk to your line, make sure it's tight so you can feel them when they hit it and so you can hook them. Now with chumming, whatever, as a rule, we just, you know, we'll tell them if the fish are way behind the boat, you know, just feed the line out a little bit. And when it starts to go, just click the bail and give it a yank, and most times you got it. Or we just set them a certain way and they hold them, and something grabs the thing takes off with it, you know, when you're chumming. But that's, you know, basic ground rules on that.

C.B.: How many people can you take out?

H.G.: Well on my boat, she's 35 for 35 persons. But, you know, a good party's 8 to 10, maybe 12. Because now some of the company trips we take, we do take out 20, 25 people. But, you know, most of them people are out just to get away from the office to start with, or work, you know. So they're out there, they're eating, they're drinking beer or drinks, or laughing carrying on, some might be playing cards. I mean I've gone out there even though some be fishing, some come out to gab and play cards all day long. You know, I wonder why you don't stay on the shore and play cards. You know, what you out here taking up room for?

(Laughter).

H.G.: You know, seriously, that's it.

K.F.: What was it like the first time you took women out on your boat? Do you remember that?

H.G.: You know, I really can't remember to be honest with you. The only one that really comes in mind is – I can't remember the guy's name right now. I lost it. But he brought his wife down, and evidently, she had done a lot of fishing around. And every time I turn around, she had one right there to take off. You know, every time I'd look, there's another one, you can take this one off, you know. And bait the line. Here's another one.

C.B.: So what now – that also brings to mind, you're doing the baiting, you take care of the lines for everybody, or just the people that need it?

H.G.: If you got an experienced fisherman, most of the time, they don't want you to touch their line at all. They'll do all – they'll do it all. Then you got some people that want you to do it all. Now for years, I carried a mate. In fact, my son, he went with me from the time he was 10 years old until he got his boat. Then when he got his boat, then that left me with no one. And, you know, it's surprising, you know, down in our area, look like you'd find some youngsters would be, just love to go, you know. And I guess their mother and fathers give them enough money anymore they don't need to go out on the boat to make any money.

C.B.: So you've had a hard time finding a mate?

H.G.: Well actually, right now, I have more or less gotten my parties trimmed down to a point where I really don't need one. If I do, if I do have a big group, like a company trip or whatever, most the time it's a guy on there that I know, that he's done a lot of fishing, he just likes to do that job, you know, bait their lines up, fish off, do all that. If I don't have that, then their on their own.

(Laughter).

H.G.: I had, in fact, that makes me – I had a group of fellows that called, and he said he had just six people to go. When he showed up, he had 12 people. He said well it's no problem. He said – I said well I don't have no mate. He turned around to the rest of the people, he said the Captain does not have a mate. Any man that can't bait his own line, take his own fish off to stay on the dock. That's the way he told them.

(Laughter).

H.G.: He told them, that's really a true story. True story.

C.B.: So how many got on?

H.G.: Everybody got on. Everybody took – well, you know, when you get – if you're catching any amount of fish, you can't take them off, you know. Biggest job then is just to keep the bait cut up. Keep the bait cut up.

C.B.: Where do you get your bait?

H.G.: As a rule, we use, when we're hardhead fishing, we use squid. And what we usually do, we go to the grocery store and we put an order in for two or three cases, put it in the freezer, just take it out as you need it. By the time you get to where you want to go or fishing, it's thawed up enough that you can go ahead, cut it up and use it. We hardly ever use any peelers any more because as well as I'm sure you people know, the crabbing is not that good. So if you had to use crabs, it's, you know, the price would be so much, people wouldn't pay for them. When you're chumming, we just go right to the pound netter and get the fish and grind them. Or, as a lot – we've got a lot of pound netters in

our area, and one of the boys will come up and just drop you off a couple bushels, and you grind them up and do whatever you want with them. That's basically what it is.

K.F.: Seems charter captains don't really use regular tackle shops. You know, if you were going to stand on the shore and fish off the shore, you might get a tackle shop.

H.G.: Yeah, well see the thing about it is blood worms, you know, you can keep a long time in refrigeration. Peelers you can too. But I tell you, a lot of these tack shops now are starting to carry squid.

K.F.: Are they really?

H.G.: Yup. Yup, they're carrying that squid. Because, you know, if anybody they come in they say well, bloodworms, peelers, nope, we got squid. Oh, yeah, give me a box of that. You know, I mean that's something that has been picked up in the last, I'd say since the Hardheads really come on big time in the last three years anyway, squid really has come on as one of the primary baits.

K.F.: As part of the exhibit, we want to put like a tackle shop. And so we were going to ask you if you knew of any good tackle shops that might be a little older down in –

H.G.: All the old ones are gone out from Wal-marts and all them put them out of business. The first one that comes in mind for being around a long time is Angler's up the Bay Bridge.

C.B.: You're the second person to mention that. How –

H.G.: They've been there ever since I can remember.

C.B.: Now that's a big, that looks like a big operation.

H.G.: Well I can remember when they had a small store. But I mean, you know, they've really come on big time. But that's the only one that I know of that's still around. Now it's another one in Baltimore called Clyde's, I think, that's been around a long time. But that's changed hands a couple times, I think. I've never been there. But everybody talks about going there and getting stuff, say you can get anything if you go there.

Freshwater, saltwater to ocean fishing. And I'm sure you can do the same thing at Angler's. But you know, you're talking about local, you know, it's well it's not there.

Tommy Hooper's in Cambridge. But the one that started, Tommy Hooper himself, he would've been a real good guy to talk to, but he is no longer into the store whatsoever. Now it's one down to in the Wicomico area, or Wicomico County, and that's Dave's Sports Shop. But I don't know if he's that much into fishing as he is into hunting.

K.F.: Right. I think I've heard about that, but from hunters.

H.G.: That's what I'm saying. I think he's more of a hunting – but I mean that's the ones I know been around a while. You know, I mean what happens is, you know, you'll have a guy open up and he'll stay there a couple years and look like he's going to burn up the world and he's gone. It's just not the money into it. You got to be able to hit all angles. You've got to be, you know, fishing. You got to be a freshwater guy, you got to be a saltwater guy, you got to be a hunter, you know. I mean you got to carry the whole 365 days a year, more or less. If you don't, you're not going to stay there. The profit's not there is what I'm saying.

K.F.: Yeah.

H.G.: That's about all I know, ladies, unless you got some more questions or whatever.

K.F.: Let me check.

C.B.: I'd be interested in your family a little bit, just a quick run-through, since you mentioned they've been here forever.

H.G.: Well actually, the story I got is from my dad, that it was two brothers that come from France, and they came into the Honga River area. And one stayed here and one went west. So, in fact, my father has got, still owns the old home place.

K.F.: Where's that located?

H.G.: It's just down from the marina, about a mile and a half from the marina. But now –

K.F.: Towards the –

H.G.: Towards Toddville – yeah. In fact, if you've been down, have you been down that way?

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

H.G.: Okay, all right. You see that big sign out to the road says landfill site number two.

K.F.: Yes.

H.G.: That's it.

K.F.: That's it?

H.G.: That's it.

K.F.: All right.

H.G.: And the old house is still there. In fact, he told me that that house had a dirt floor in it when it was first built. It was one big room. Yup. And then they put a floor into it, and then they put a second story on it later on, so dad says. In fact, he talks about one of his – and I don't know which one it was, said they come home, was drinking and drove the horse right on in the house.

(Laughter).

H.G.: Can you imagine that?

K.F.: I bet that happened a lot.

(Laughter).

H.G.: Drove the horse right on in the house. Yup. And then, you know, I mean actually, you know, how dad got – we were, actually the whole family were like mill people, you know, timber people, wintertime, they cut timber. Summertime, they farm, you know. And raise, you know, down our area most the time you raise what's going to take you through the winter. That's basically what you did really. And that's how, you know, they lived. You know, they would, I've heard my grandmother say well, you know, we sold one of the old cows off for to pay a bill or something like that. Or, you know, they had hogs, big cattle, chickens, the whole thing. I mean in fact, I think on my mother's side, I've heard her mother say, my grandmother say when they got ready for winter, the only thing they went and got was like flour, salt, pepper, sugar. They had everything else. And I can remember when they had like a bank where they bank potatoes for the winter so they wouldn't freeze.

K.F.: The big hill that you would –

H.G.: Yeah, that's right. Yeah, they'd bank them in that hill. When they get potatoes, they can get them all winter long. They'd have sweet potatoes, they'd have – and I can remember when I was very young and staying with her, she would – had a wood stove, and the fire never went out in it in summer or winter. And you had your hot water in it. One of them old big stoves, had like a five gallon or more hot water over here. And she'd take one of them old big sweet potatoes that big around, put it in there until the syrup started running, you know, cooked it with syrup. And she'd take that and cut it in

two, and you take a spoon and eat. It was just the same as – well that's all the treat you had then. That was your ice cream, I guess.

(Laughter).

H.G.: It was really good. I will say that. I can remember that part of it. Up until dad, you know, dad – really the war, second world war changed everything, I think. Changed everything up. And that's when people, you know, you started moving around, you had automobiles and stuff. Everybody started going, had better roads. And you could take, like in our area until the 1900's, most the time, everybody traveled by water, by water. You had the steamboat that come in, Emma Giles, I think, from Baltimore that went into Wingett's, and went into Hoopersville, and they had – I heard my dad say that they had a dock that probably was stretched out there for 200 yards out in the river. Where that boat would come in, and dad said, you know, you could go down there sell for livestock, sell wood, corn or you know, anything that you wanted to put it on the boat. The way I understand it, you know, I'm just going by what they've told me, put it on the boat, they'd take it up there and sell it, whatever when the boat come back, that's when you got your money. Most the time, what you did, you just traded that off for whatever they had on that boat. I mean that's, actually, you know, that's where they got all the supplies from, that was the way they did it.

C.B.: So how did your dad get into a marina?

H.G.: How did he start the marina?

C.B.: Yeah.

H.G.: Be honest with you, I think that he did it this way. We had a real good friend of the family that dad was – well actually, he bought a lot of his auto repair parts from in the 40's, and he told dad, he said you know one thing that's coming on is the two-cycle outboards. And I think at that time, I think dad was fooling with power saws, they were coming on like in the 40's after the war, and they were all two-cycle. And that was just a spinoff for the outboards. And when they started the outboards, and then once he started that, then he started the marina. We really never really got into marine, really into marine business probably until, I'd say probably – well we had – dad dug the canal in there from the Wallace Creek into where the business is now. He did that in '59 and '60. So we could pull – boats could come right to the back door in the marina. He did that. And I remember one guy saying to dad, and I was a youngster then, said I don't know who you think is going to come here, and come all the way up here to deal with you this far up in land. But I tell you what, he was really wrong. He was really wrong. I'll tell you that. Because, I mean, that was, you know, the starting of it. I mean that's when we really started in that. And then, you know, we had – for to pull boats up with, we had nothing but – and you probably see some of them around now, especially if you've been down around Wingett's, the trailers that they put them workboats on?

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

H.G.: Yeah, that's all we had. Couple of them trailers, people wanted pulled up, we'd take the motors out, change the motors for them, pull them up, change props, that kind of stuff. And we were probably – we were the first travel lift in our area. Yup. In 1976, we got the first travel lift. And then that's when, you know, from then on, you know, things were just getting ready to take off, go from there.

C.B.: How many boats do you keep there now?

H.G.: Well we got 61 slips, I think. But most of it, actually – and I wouldn't want none of them, lot of the inboard guys hear me say this, but really and truly, we want the outboards because that's what we do, that's what we're big in. Now the thing about the outboard boats now, they've got so they're up in the, you know, like 31, 32 feet. And they got two big outboards on them which you can put 500 horsepower on the back of them, and you're looking at probably around \$28,000 worth of motors on the back of that boat. So that's, when you start counting all that up, that's pretty good. And I guess when I got out of school, I guess it was me, and my father, and my mother. And we had one other guy working with us. But now, we got I guess about 12, 13 head working there now. Thirteen people working there. Yeah.

C.B.: I'll bet they're missing you right now.

H.G.: I hope not.

(Laughter).

H.G.: When she called me, I said you don't want to do that down here. Remember me telling you?

K.F.: Yes.

H.G.: I said you don't want me to do that, you don't want to do that, you want me to come over there.

C.B.: Because they'd find you.

H.G.: Well they would never leave you alone. They would be knocking on the door. Hey, somebody through here wants to see you and all that kind of stuff. I've been through that a couple times when people come in, ask to tape you for some different things, you know.

K.F.: Yeah.

H.G.: It won't work that way. But I knew when you called, I said no, that ain't going to work. I knew to come to you.

C.B.: Well that's good. You know that now anyway.

H.G.: Yeah.

K.F.: Well then we should come down in the summer and go fishing.

C.B.: Oh, we're coming. I'm convinced. This guy will catch me the Rockfish.

H.G.: Now let me tell you a story on that. Let me tell you. That's another story within itself. If you're ever going to have a bad day fishing, it will always be with a new party. Always. I've never seen it fail. I'm telling you –

C.B.: Then he won't take us 'til the season's over.

H.G.: I'm just telling you it's always. No, you just call me, I'll take you girls fishing.

K.F.: Well what kind of bad things would happen then on the first party, the new party?

H.G.: No, it just seems you can't find, nothing works right, you can't find no fish, the weather's probably bad, you know, or something. You left home or something's broke. Always.

C.B.: Just can't impress them.

H.G.: Always. Always.

C.B.: Well that proves that your repeat customers come back because they have faith in you, you know, it's not because you impressed them with anything.

H.G.: Well believe me, believe me, and this is anyone that fishes and says they've never had a bad day, you want – I don't know if I'd go with him or not.

(Laughter).

H.G.: 'Cause I'm telling you, you will, you know, I don't care who he is. You'll have a bad day here and there. Yeah.

C.B.: Well thanks for the chuckles. I can't – you've exhausted my inventory of questions.

K.F.: Yeah, that's great.

H.G.: Well I'm sure them guys would probably like to see my face back there now.

C.B.: Okay, well thank you.

(Laughter).

H.G.: You know, I'm sure they're up there. You know what they're saying? Well we're going to take a break while that guy's gone.

K.F.: That's right.

C.B.: Nothing will be done.

K.F.: That's right.

(END OF INTERVIEW.)