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Interview Log

Interviewee: Russell Dize

Tape #: OH 174

Interviewer: Kelly Feltault

of Tapes: 1

Date: June 05, 2001

of Sides: 2

Location:

Topic: Skipjack Project.

Corresponding Photography Log #:

Comments:

BEGIN SIDE A

K.F.: All right, let me have you say your name.

R.D.: Russell Dize.

K.F.: All right, and where were you born, Russell?

R.D.: I was born on Smith Island; Ewell, Maryland.

K.F.: Okay, all right. Been there. And what year were you born?

R.D.: I was born in 1941, March 25th.

K.F.: Okay. And what did your parents do on Smith Island?

R.D.: My father was a waterman, and my mother worked in the packinghouses, the oyster - she shucked oysters in the winter, and raised five children.

K.F.: Okay. Did she pick crabs in the summertime?

R.D.: No, no.

K.F.: Okay. And I guess, did your dad have a skipjack?

R.D.: Father had, yeah, he had five skipjacks in his lifetime. He had Fanny Doherty (phonetic), and he had the Annie Lee, he had the C.A. Parks, and he owned the Maggie Lee, and his last boat was the Martha Lewis.

K.F.: Okay. So your dad was Dan Dize then.

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

K.F.: Okay. All right, now part of what we're trying to do is figure out who owned what skipjack at what time and how it got passed on.

R.D.: Yeah.

K.F.: And when did you start going out on the water?

R.D.: When I was big enough to get aboard the boat, probably when I was five, six years old. I mean I would - I was always tagging after my father. So we came from a long line, I'm fourth generation, skipjack captain, sailing captain.

K.F.: Okay.

R.D.: My grandfather and all, they had pungeyes and bugeyes, and great-great grandfather had sailing vessels that sailed out of Sharptown, Maryland. All heritage of sailing people.

K.F.: Did they ever talk to you about those earlier days of sailing?

R.D.: My father, yes. My father started working with his father on the James G. Blaine, which was a Bugeye, and he started working with him when he was eight years old. They freighted lumber out of St. Jerome's, Maryland, to Baltimore. And the only thing my grandfather, only people my grandfather had was either his two boys or his oldest daughter who as 16, Alice, and his oldest son, which was Robbie. But when he, sometimes he just had the two boys, which was Rodney was 12 and dad was 8, and he sailed Blaine up and down the bay.

K.F.: That's a pretty young age to be out on the water.

R.D.: But they all do. That was, he said when they played tag, whenever the kids played tag at home, when they played tag, him and his brother, they would run up the running and cross the, stay between the two masts and down top - he said just they did it all the time.

K.F.: So how did you get on the water? Does your father, I'm trying to understand, does your father ask you to come on the boat or how do they decide -

R.D.: No, it evolves, it evolves. I mean that's what you do in the summertime. You go to school in the winter. But in the summertime, you help your father. That's what you do. You go crabbing with him, or you go - at that time, they were catching some of these puffertoads, blowtoads they call them. You work with your father. I mean just as soon as you were big enough to do something, you went to work with your father.

K.F.: What's the first thing you remember doing on the vessels?

R.D.: Crab pot. When it was in its infancy. When it first came out.

K.F.: Oh. Well what was it like then?

R.D.: Well watermen and crab pots, the most you would use would be 50 to 100. And it was new, because most of them had been trot lining and crab scraping. So it was new. It wasn't many. They used bottles, not the bleach bottles, but they were plastic. But the bottles that were glass, they put stoppers in them for their buoys. And then they found this cork, this synthetic cork that the government used for life rafts, and they started using those for buoys.

K.F.: Well where did you get your crab pots at that time?

R.D.: Actually, first crab pots came from around over on the northern neck of Virginia. That's where they were -

K.F.: Like up near Greenville, or down lower -

R.D.: Down - no. More like Coon (phonetic) and Kinsale, in that area. Excuse me.

K.F.: Sure.

(OFF RECORD.)

K.F.: The crab pots came from where?

R.D.: The crab pots came from the northern neck there in Virginia, around Coon, in that area, Reedville, Weems, in that area. They were invented over there. And actually, the guy was coming around collecting royalties from the patent on them, he had a patent.

K.F.: Oh.

R.D.: And it was a big problem trying to collect the money. The guy's major -they copied them, you know, made them. But that was one of my first, working on the water with my father.

K.F.: And when did you start going out in the wintertime then?

R.D.: Well as a kid, like it was like 17 skipjacks on Smith Island when I was a kid. And during, after Christmas, the boats would be working out of Solomon's, and they would load the boats in the hull, and they would come on Friday night, come to Smith Island. And the kids used to gather at the 4 **waiting** for their fathers to come in, you know, and the next day, they got up real early, and they went to Crisfield. So I would always go to Crisfield with him, and that was when they all sold their oysters at Crisfield to the packing houses, and they would bid on them. The packers would come look at your oysters and say I would give you X amount. And the captains would try to stay together as much as they could to get the highest price. So that was my first experience with sailing on a skipjack.

K.F.: That's interesting, because I haven't heard the bit about them bidding on the oysters that way.

R.D.: Yes.

K.F.: That's interesting. How long did that go on?

R.D.: Well when I first started, I was real small kid. Well, I moved to Tilghman when I was 13, so it had to have been when I was 8. I was in school down home, I guess - well that went on for years before that. That was the last of it. I remember the crew didn't shovel oysters out. They would hire shovelers. Because they didn't want to get on their knees in the hull shoveling oysters. So they would have 3 to 400 bushels of them. And I remember one of the places that we sold, that my father sold, had a mule to pull the oysters out. They would walk it ahead. They would pull it through a hull just like we have now, only the mule would pull it all. And it was pretty interesting. It's a part of the lore that not many people, I don't think, have seen.

K.F.: Yeah.

R.D.: That's what they did then. Every Friday they'd load, I mean when they come home from Solomon's, they'd be loading in the hull of the boat. They could get more money taking it to Crisfield.

K.F.: Right. There were a couple - I mean J.C. Wore (phonetic) was there.

R.D.: Yeah, but they never sold it there. They always sold it to Smith Island. They either sold it to the Smith Island buyers or Crisfield.

K.F.: And you said you moved to Tilghman when you were 13?

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

K.F.: What prompted to your family to up and move from Smith Island?

R.D.: Well my father wanted to, he always made a lot of money in the wintertime because he had two skipjacks. His brother dredged one. He had the Fanny Doherty he dredged, and my uncle dredged the Annie Lee, which he owned. And he did real well in the winter. But in the summertime, it was hard to do well at Smith Island at that time with crabs. They were sort of cheap. So we moved to Pascagoula, Mississippi, and we lived there for a year. He started a crabbing business, and that was the one year there were no crabs down there. So he had to come back and dredge his skipjack. And he had made up his mind he wasn't going to stay at Smith Island. There was plenty oysters in the Choptank River, so he moved up here to be able to work on the Choptank, so that's how we got here.

K.F.: Let me ask you a little bit about Pascagoula, Mississippi, because I just spent the last two years doing a big project on crab picking, on the Eastern Shore history and doing interviews like this. And we haven't been able to talk to anybody who, you know, went out of state, started a business.

R.D.: Oh, Preston Lowe left Crisfield and became a multi-millionaire in Pascagoula, Mississippi.

K.F.: Really?

R.D.: Yes. He owned at onetime like 30-some shrimp trollers. He started a crab business therewith Glenwood Evans. Not -that's his son down in Crisfield. His father was in partners with - matter of fact, he set Preston Lowe up with the money. Preston did the, he was the brains down there, and he set up, and they just made a fortune. They bought, right on where the shipyard is in Pascagoula, they bought all that, they owned all that land on one side they just bought real cheap. And where we lived there, there was cattle used to roam all over. You'd be going up the street, you'd have to stop, let the cattle go by. They never had seen crab pots. They were all shrimpers and fishermen. And they introduced them to crab pots, Preston did. And my father was good friends with

Preston Lowe. So Preston told dad, come on down, get yourself set up, there's money to be made here. But what he did was we stayed there until we found a place. We found a place called Bayou Cassat in Coden, Alabama, about 30 miles from Mobile, close to Bayou La Batre. And they bought a place there, lease to buy, and there was no crabs that summer, absolutely none. They couldn't make anything. So he had to come back and dredge the skipjack, 'cause he always made a lot of money with the skipjacks. And he came home, my brother, my brother-in-law came home with him because they worked the skipjacks. My brother got drafted into the Army, and my uncle got cold feet and left, he didn't want to stay there. So they lost the place there. That was the end of that. He still always wished he could've made it there because Press became so successful.

K.F.: Did you go out with him that summer?

R.D.: Where, in -

K.F.: Crabbing.

R.D.: No. Actually, my brother and brother-in-law did most of that. I didn't, I stayed with my father. He ran the plan.

K.F.: Okay.

R.D.: It was a great experience.

K.F.: Yeah. That's true. So when you guys moved up here to Tilghman Island, what was - how was Tilghman different from Smith at that time?

R.D.: One big word. Abridge.

(Laughter.)

R.D.: On Smith Island, you had to go 10 to 12 miles to get to mainland, which you didn't do very often. That's why it was so exciting to meet my father and go across on the Skipjack because I'd get to go up to the store and buy a model plane or a model boat. You didn't get that on Smith Island. Here, the most immediate impact was that you could do anything you wanted. You could get in a car and go anywhere you wanted. That was not possible. You get all the stores and stuff. And when I was a kid we didn't have running water, we didn't have electricity. Smith Island had none of that. I, just before I left, probably about five years before I left Smith Island, we got electricity and put a plan in Tangier to service Tangier in Smith Island. So we have electricity. But just before that, my father and other families put in an Artesian Well that just flowed free to the house. I no longer had to go to the well with a bucket and get water, so that was pretty, that was pretty - I remember two things in my life: turning a spigot to watch the water run out, which I thought was unbelievable; and then coming home from a ballgame on Saturday evening when they turned electricity on and flipped a switch and seen a light, that was unbelievable. Had to do homework by an Aladdin lamp all my life. But looking back on it, it was the greatest place to raise a child. You turned them loose on the island. Everybody was the parents. You did something wrong in someone's yard, the person would spank your tail and send you home, and you didn't tell your father, 'cause you would get another one, 'cause the adult was never wrong. So like I say, that was a great place to raise kids.

K.F.: So when did you start going out on the water full time?

R.D.: I graduated from high school in St. Michaels in 1959, and I already owned a boat when I graduated. So I, within less than week, I was working, I was clamming. Very successful clamming.

K.F.: Oh, you were. Okay.

R.D.: I owned my own clam company, Tidewater Clam Company. And my partner, Roy Rowe (phonetic), and myself, and Freddy Saddler, we had seven boats, and we employed many as 100 people shucking clams and oysters.

K.F.: Well the clam industry is something that nobody's really worked on down here as far as -

R.D.: Well it was fantastic when we were in it. We could catch 100 bushels a day. We had, we shucked day and night. We had, we could shuck 400 bushel in a day, and 200 at night up there clamming.

K.F.: How many shuckers did you have?

R.D.: We had 75 clam shuckers, sometimes 80. At night, we'd have, you know, 30 to 40, some of the people might come in at night.

K.F.: Now clams were not always a traditional seafood industry down here. So how did people realize, A, we can make money on these things; and how do we shuck these things?

R.D.: Two words: Fletcher Hanks. Fletcher Hanks invented the hydraulic clam dredge, and I'd say he was probably one of the smartest men for inventive minds around. And when Fletcher invented a hydraulic clam rig or clam dredge, he also put a shucking plant up first in Oxford and then in Easton on Port Street. And he employed a lot of people, and he built the clam industry.

K.F.: Did you guys learn from him? I mean, how did you -

R.D.: Oh, yeah. No doubt about it. Actually, he built the rigs, and then they started building them in Kent Island and some at Tilghman. And he had the patent on it. He tried to collect the patent rights on it, but all you had to do was change a few things on the patent and the whole - so that's, you know, that was a variation of what he invented. That's how the clam industry developed in Maryland. Fletcher Hanks was the man.

K.F.: Now who were the shuckers? Were they, again, all women or -

R.D.: Local people. All women, local people.

K.F.: Okay. Sort of like the crab-picking industry is all women.

R.D.: Yes.

K.F.: Okay.

R.D.: We probably had half, half our shuckers were from down this way that were, Tilghman Island were white shuckers, and the other half were black shuckers from up the road.

K.F.: Hinsontown?

R.D.: Uh-huh (affirmative). Hinsontown, Wittman. And we got to know, I mean we knew, I mean we knew most of the - most of the people we worked very closely with because two of our captains were black, and we built, we built a clam place right in the black community. And our main mechanic was from Wittman was black. So we were very close with the black community.

K.F.: Who were the captains?

R.D.: A guy by the name of John, John Albert - what was his last name? John Palmer, and a fellow by the name of Press Copper. Very good captain.

K.F.: Don't suppose they're still alive, are they?

R.D.: Yeah, Press is still alive, John's dead. No, no, I'm wrong. Press died. They're both dead.

K.F.: Okay.

R.D.: Press was really a good captain. Really, I mean one of the best captains around. So we had, at one time, like I say, we had seven boats of our own that we had.

K.F.: Did you guys own the boats and then the captains would run them for you?

R.D.: Yeah, we paid them per bushel.

K.F.: Okay. How is that different than say this set up with crabs? I mean -

R.D.: All crabbers own their own boats. They're independent and do what they want. At that time, we pretty well had a monopoly. The people that owned clam houses had a monopoly. We would take our clams, and if we needed others, we would buy from outside. And we had like my father-in-law worked for us, and we had a couple other people that sold clams to us, but we supplied our needs - so did Chesapeake Shellfish up at Lowe's Wharf. Vernon Cummins, Clarence Marshall and Victor Harrison owned that, and they had like six boats of their own, and they supplied most of their own clams. That sounds funny now, supply most of their own clams, but they could catch 100 bushel, 80 bushel, you know, it was all the clams that you could ever want.

K.F.: Right. Why did it evolve so differently where clam companies own the boats and the captains ran them for them, whereas with crabbing and, I guess up here with skipjacks too, I mean skipjack captains generally own their own boats.

R.D.: Well how it evolved was the reason we got into the clam business, we couldn't sell our clams, but we found out, we called United Shellfish and we said yeah, we'd be interested. So what we did, we asked them to come in as a partner. So United Shellfish came in as a partner, as one-quarter partner, and they took all the clams we could shuck. So then we had a rented, we had our boats that could work full time. All the clams we could get, they would take them shucked, by not in the shell. So that's why, that's how it evolved.

K.F.: Okay. All right. Clamming's another one of our future projects for the seafood industry.

R.D.: Yeah. It's really a bad industry now. We don't have any clams. We can't understand why. We got all razor clams, and no softshell clams. When I was, when I started, they were all softshell clams, and the only time you ever saw a razor clam was right in the Miles River. Long Point was a great place for razor clams, but there weren't many at all.

K.F.: Nobody wants to eat those razor clams, I guess.

R.D.: No, they're not like that, they never developed a following like softshell clams.

K.F.: Or those green-lipped ones now that people eat. Okay. Well we still haven't gotten to how you got on a skipjack.

R.D.: Well we were in the clam business, and clams -we had Hurricane Agnes in '72. That killed off everything, all the clams in the upper bay and polluted the bay for a while. And then clams got really scarce. And at the time, the only way - I mean you could dig all day like I was digging over on Long Point, that's this point right across here, and I could catch six or eight bushel all day dredging legal. But everybody around me was dredging illegal and they could catch their limit in a couple hours. It was working on my nerves so bad, I told my wife, I can't, you know, no watermen likes being beat, and I'm no different.

So I couldn't stand being beat every day. So I either had to join them or find another job. I swore I'd never, never work on a skipjack because as a kid, I had to get, in Tilghman Island, I had to get two skipjacks ready, a high school kid, get two skipjacks ready every year, get them on the railway, get them off the railway, get the repairs done, as a kid, 'cause my father at that time had bought a big slag, a cargo boat, 169 foot steel boat. He was freighting on the boat. He was freighting, slag and fertilizer, and wheat and corn and all. So I was left here to get these boats, me and my brother-in-law.

K.F.: Let me just ask you, what does it take to get two skipjacks ready?

R.D.: Well you have, you start painting, standing and painting. Time you get all the painting work done, then you got to get them on the railway. You got to get them clean, you got to take the centerboard out so that when you put them on the railway, you can mop the well out. Then you have, you got to paint the bottoms, get them back overboard, get the sheeting down, get the sails on, get the boats ready to go dredging, all the dredges also. I hated it with a passion.

K.F.: When would you start this process, like July, August?

R.D.: No. Late August, we'd start on them, you know. July, September we'd start on them. And I just didn't like it. Of course, I didn't like working on the cargo boat either 'cause you were gone all the time, all in one year. I mean we freighted corn out of Elizabeth City, North Carolina, to Norfolk. And we - you just loaded, and you went to Norfolk, they unloaded when you got there. You turn right around, went back to Elizabeth City. You had to - if you got there in the night, you'd have to wait till 7:00 the next morning. They'd load you. You do that three or four times a week, and we never stopped for like six weeks. And I was away from home, and hated every minute of it. I was playing baseball, pretty good baseball player. I was dating my wife, and I really - that time, she was still in school, and I really didn't want to be away from home. So when he sent me home, the only time when he sent me home to fix the skipjacks up, I was happy. He said you got to go home to get the skipjacks ready. But I was never going to have a skipjack or work on a skipjack.

K.F.: What changed your mind?

R.D.: I had to do some -

(OFF RECORD. TELEPHONE.)

R.D.: A guy up in Baltimore asked him, said I ant to ask you something. And he said what? He said is your boss black, and Kenny said no. He said well I never see anybody drive for him but black drivers. He said I just figured he was black. And Kenny said no, he's white.

(Laughter.)

R.D.: My drivers were him and another guy from St. Michaels that worked for me for a long time. Good driver. He's excellent. He's a good man - yes.

K.F.: So you were talking about getting those two skipjacks ready and what a horrible time that was.

R.D.: Yeah. I said I'm never going to get a skipjack. I didn't want to work on a skipjack. And that's what my brother, when he got out of the service went back to live in Mississippi because he hated working on a skipjack so much. 'Cause he wasn't captain. He worked middle deck. When he quit school, my father said oh, yeah, you can quit. When you're 16, you can quit, but you're going to work aboard this boat, and my father

was tough, I mean a hard worker. So he cured my brother of ever wanting to work on a skipjack. But anyway, the clamming business had gone, you know, had petered out. It was working on my nerves real bad, and it got time, a friend of mine, Robbie Wilson, had the Eldrith (phonetic) skipjack, Eldrith. And he said there's money to be made in this, Russell. He said we're really making money. I said - I don't know. So I started looking for a skipjack. I couldn't find one. My father told me, said buy the Catherine. It's the best skipjack that's ever been built. Now he owned Martha Lewis at that time. And I said but she's not for sale. So I went to - I went to Nantucket, Cape Cod, then across from Nantucket, because a guy by the name of Brian Coffin (phonetic), had the Sally Bramble, and he wanted to sell it. And a friend of mine lived up there, Glenny Edwards, who was friends with Larry Simms, president of the Maryland Watermen's Association. Larry and I were close, so I was introduced to Glenny. So Glenny had settled up there, and he had met a girl, was living up there, and he was (indiscernible) and stuff like that, great big waterman. So I went up, and I looked at the boat. When I looked at it, it was all housed over, had no winders, no - I'd had to change the sails, no yawl boat. And I could look at just a load of money to fix it up. So I came home, and I picked up the phone, and I dialed the guy that owned the Catherine. And I said are you interested in selling the Catherine at all, because the rumor was around that he was. And he said I don't know. No one's offered me anything for it. I said I'll give you \$40,000 cash. He said she's your boat. I fell out. So I said I'll be right down there now. He said no, you don't have to come now. And I was thinking do this before he changes his mind. I said look, I'll bring you the money right now tonight. And he said look, son, you don't have to do that. He said my word, when I give you my word, it's your boat. So next day, I went down there and gave him the money for the boat and bought it -

(OFF RECORD.)

K.F.: All right. You said you'd just paid \$40,000 for the Catherine.

R.D.: Yeah. Captain Johnny Parks had owned her at that time. And I went down, his wife was not at home, and I had heard, now this is just hearsay, that his wife was unhappy that he'd sold the boat. But she had gone for the weekend. A lot of people told me if she'd have been home, he probably wouldn't have sold it. But he had never been on her - the skipjack, it was like 30,000. So I'd offered him actually above what the going price was. But I wanted that skipjack, or my father told me I did.

K.F.: Well why was it such a good skipjack, according to your dad?

R.D.: She was just a great working boat. She was good for everything. Good in heavy weather, good in light weather. That was, we're talking about sailing now. Any dredge boat's a good power dredge boat 'cause you're just using the motor. But I'm talking about sails. It's like the boats you have up at the museum, the E.C. Collier (phonetic), one of the best working skipjacks that there ever was built. Not pretty, but she was a great working skipjack. But so I bought her, and went to work. My father went with me two weeks. I had never captained one. I had worked aboard of them, been aboard of them - I knew all the rigging and stuff like that, but I hadn't captained one of them. And he went with me two weeks. He said I can't show you anything else. Go ahead. You can do it.

K.F.: That's interesting. So you actually learned from your dad. He took some time out and went with you whereas most of the other captains that I talked to crewed with their dad, but dad did not go with them on their first maiden voyage as a captain.

R.D.: Well I'd never crewed with my father.

K.F.: Oh, you didn't.

R.D.: No. I had gone out with him on Saturdays, and I had, you know, worked aboard skipjacks and all. But see, when I came out of high school, I went right in my own business. At 19, I had a clam business. I was part owner in a shucking, packing house. And I didn't have time to fool with it then. So I really, I didn't have anything, I was so busy, and I had to keep six boats going. At the young age, I didn't have much time to fool with skipjacks. But I knew how to sail, and I knew all the working parts, but you got to learn how to catch oysters sail dredging. But I was always a pretty good waterman, so it came - I guess it comes natural. I guess it's in your genes, I don't know. But it just came natural 'cause I could do it. I was very successful at doing it.

K.F.: Now how did you get your crew your first year as a new -

R.D.: My first crew came from Tilghman. They were all Tilghman boys, all except one boy from Canada had moved here and had a real good crew, real good crew. They were all watermen. So, you know, to teach them to do what I wanted to do, how I wanted it done, I had a good crew, could cull oysters, and we caught a lot of oysters.

K.F.: Well how do you like things done on the Catherine?

R.D.: Well everybody has their own way of doing things, you know, and there's the right way and the wrong way, and there's my way. That's what they say about the government, and that's the way it is on everybody that's captain of a skipjack. They want it done their way. But I never had any trouble getting along with crew. I believe I had to yell at two people since I've had the skipjack. Very easy to work with. And I've always had a pretty decent crew. Now lately, all my crews come from Crisfield.

K.F.: Really? Now why is that?

R.D.: Well I started, when the boys up here, they went back to tonging and tonging was pretty good, and they could be independent, and a couple of them got other jobs. One wanted to be a carpenter, one a mechanic. And when they did, then I had to have crew, and I didn't want to get local watermen that were going to quit and go tonging. In Crisfield, there was a group of guys that didn't have their TSL license to oyster, but they still wanted work on the water. And I tapped into that, and I was able to put a really good crew together. I knew some people down there. Some of the guys I knew, I knew their fathers and all. And so I put the crew together from down there, and I had one - I believe my crew this year only worked four days because of my heart. I had bypass surgery in November. So I worked for two weeks, and then I was done for the year. But my crew was mainly from Crisfield.

K.F.: Is there any difference between a crew from Crisfield and a crew from up here?

R.D.: Well not actually. It's hard to get a crew here. They don't have as many options down there to what they can do in the wintertime, so you're able to hold a crew all year. And if you make them money, you can hold them. But up here, most of the guys that grew up on the water, they tong or fish. And so, you know, you can't hold a crew. So that's why, that's why I went to Crisfield. Robbie Wilson and my son, we went to Crisfield and got crews. Got good crews, you know, break them in the way you want.

K.F.: So they come up here for the four days they're out on the Catherine, those four days?

R.D.: Yeah, they stay aboard the boat. My crew sleeps aboard the boat. I got very good quarters aboard the boat, so they all sleep aboard.

K.F.: Okay. Now are you one of the last boats where the crew is still sleeping?

R.D.: Probably the last - well, no, no, no. That's not true. I forget about the (indiscernible) boats. I don't know whether they stay aboard or not. But we, my crew stays aboard. Now the last year I dredged, 1996 or so when I dredged in Tangier Sound, I stayed aboard and they went home 'cause they could go to Crisfield.

K.F.: So what's it like staying aboard the boat these days? I mean do you cook still?

R.D.: Oh, yeah. Got a cook. I have a cook and an engineer. The cook's bunk's on the left, the captain's bunk's on the right looking forward. And my engineer normally would sleep under the stem in that bunk, but he stays up the forepeak. I got a real nice forepeak on her with three people can sleep up there.

K.F.: Okay.

R.D.: You know the Catherine's up the museum.

K.F.: Yeah, I noticed she wasn't here, and so I'll go take a peek.

R.D.: I took her up Sunday. We sailed up Sunday.

K.F.: Okay. Okay. Yeah, I'll look at her.

R.D.: She's a peach. She's a nice boat. She's been lucky. She's in existence, in my opinion, because Captain Mack Wheatley, who owned her for 30 years, completely rebuilt her in 1954 at Harry Hogan, Virginia, Herman Krantz Railway (phonetic).

K.F.: Okay.

R.D.: And I believe that's why she's alive today. She's been lucky. She's had some people took care of her. But I believe Mack rebuilt her, put all new sides, bottom, stem, stem, deck, everything, and new beams, all new timbers in her, and they did it at a place that had good lumber and good craftsman, because Herman Krantz was, he did all my father's work also in Harry Hogan, Virginia. And that's why the boat's alive today, I think, because of Mack. And because you got to keep spending money on it. I mean five years ago, I had John Swaine to pull all the rails off and the log aft and he put new waterway and bends and rails, it's every year. Last year, I put a new bow spread in her. And I got a new mast for her sitting up in the shed. It's going to be put in her probably this winter sometime. I'm getting ready to try to get her certified for carrying passengers.

K.F.: Okay. Like a summer tour -

R.D.: That's what all this is about from the Coast Guard.

K.F.: Oh, okay.

R.D.: All I have to do.

K.F.: Now have you taken your Coast Guard license yet or -

R.D.: Yeah, I have my license. I did that last year. I got my license last spring. Went to school over at Conklin and hit the books. Finished.

SPEAKER: All done. I'm going to lock up everything.

R.D.: Okay. Covered?

SPEAKER: Yeah. You want it early - I'll see you then.

R.D.: I don't know, where were we?

K.F.: The Coast Guard test, which I've heard is pretty tough.

R.D.: It is. The hardest thing I've done in quite a while, 'cause I haven't studied out of a book for a long time since I got out of school, and it takes a while to get back into studying when you have to study yourself. Somebody is - someone's teaching you verbally, it's much easier, I think, as you get older. But I stayed with it, and got them. Had to go to Baltimore and take the test. I think out of my class, only two of us got our license, and we have about 12 head in it. People get disillusioned and quit. If that's not your priority, but I made up my mind I was going to get it something. Got those, and I've been thinking about this 'cause I'm 60 years old, and a couple, three more years, I might not want this rat race of being on this phone all day, and at night, and trucks all over the place. I thought that might be interesting. I like to talk. Might be interested in talking to people, tours.

K.F.: Well now what kind of experience -

R.D.: I still like to dredge though. You know. Probably the most fun working that I ever have done was the first 10 years I had her sail dredging in Choptank River. You could sail dredge every day. We very seldom ever missed a day. Had lots of oysters up in the Choptank. And I just like sail dredging. That's fun, when you have oysters.

K.F.: Well what were some of those days like in Choptank? 'Cause I've heard a couple people talk about that as sort of the golden years.

R.D.: Oh, yeah.

K.F.: Seventies, '80s.

R.D.: Oh, yeah. We could power dredge in the bay down to mouth of the river here. But on sail days, we'd go up to Highland's Point, which is a sail bar. You can't do anything but sail. You can't power dredge on it. And you just catch your limit there. I mean it was no problem at all to catch your limit anywhere. We'd catch our limit the two power days, and we'd catch our limit sailing too. Now just before I got the Catherine in '80, my brother-in-law had the Martha Lewis, Stan Larrimore (phonetic) had the Lady Katy and John Larrimore had the E.C. Collier, those guys would be in here 1:00 with 150 bushel every day. And that was the heydays in the 70's, I guess from the like '74 to right through middle 80's, we had oysters, just oysters. That's when I got into it. The first day I went out with the captain - Catherine and skippered her was on the first Saturday I went out, the first - I had her one week, and we caught, we caught - we caught 172 bushel on Todd's Point by - sail dredging on Saturday. There was oysters everywhere in the Choptank. Sharp's Island, Poplar Island, Cooper's Island. We had oysters. It was fun. It was a big game.

K.F.: A big game? In what way?

R.D.: Just playing, that's all it was. I loved to do it, and I had all the guys that were doing it, it's changed now, the guys -- had my brother-in-law, Gene Tyler; I had Stan Larrimore, Captain John Larrimore, Robbie Wilson was my best friend. He and I went everywhere and did everything together on the skipjacks. And Johnny Goodlack (phonetic) was a good friend of ours, and Billy Bradshaw. We all worked together, it was just a great group of people to work with. I really enjoyed that.

K.F.: You really saw the captains working together then.

R.D.: Yeah. But Robbie and I worked very close. We did everything together. One of us had oysters, we'd call the other one. So we always never had a day where we didn't catch oysters because one or the other was going to catch some oysters. Had a place of

oysters, we worked - we went down to Solomon's, and we worked out at Solomon's on a Monday, and we caught our limit. But we don't sell at Solomon's. What we always did was call the marine police up here and say Captain Joe Jones was up here, we'd say. Or we'd call Willie who bought oysters here, my partner who I sold to. We'd say call Joe and tell him we got 150 off of the day, we'll work tomorrow and we'll be in tomorrow night, we'll put oysters out Wednesday morning so he can be there so there's no worry about law breaking. So we got in Solomon's Monday night, and we didn't sell oysters aboard the board, we all slept aboard the boat. And we heard this noise out on deck, and it was two inspectors, two marine police. And poked my head up, and they said you captain of this boat? I said that's right. He said you know you can't dredge tomorrow with these oysters on your deck don't you? I said how come? He said well you can't have two days' catch on. I said you can have two days' catch on if you call and report it, cant' you? He said not in Solomon's, you can't. I said we've always done this. I said Joe Jones will know that I have oysters on. He said you come in Solomon's tomorrow, you've got over 150, we're going to arrest you. So we got thinking about it, and Robbie and I -

(OFF RECORD.)

RD.: So Robbie came down the cabin, said what are we going to do? I said no problem, we're not going to come in here tomorrow night. I said we'll leave here in the morning, 2:00. We'll go over to Hooper Straits. Stan Larrimore was dredging over there. I said it's got to be some oysters in there somewhere. They're dredging in there, down the bay they're dredging. So out of bed 2:00, got the crew up, got us on our way, crew goes back to bed and we sail on across the bay to Hooper Straits. So we're coming in Hooper Straits, and we've got those video depth sounders that we can really read. We can tell what's oysters and what isn't. So we're going on and Bobby saw something. He said Russell, this looks pretty good, he said but it's a lump. I said you go ahead and try it, and I'll go ahead, I'm going to go right to that shore, never dredged in Hooper Straits in my life. So I'm going to go right in that shore. Oh, by the way, my brother-in-law came with us, the Martha Lewis, 'cause he had oysters on also. And he said - I said try that, and I'm going to run on this shore. When it comes up, I'm going to try it. So I went on in there. When it started coming up, I said let it go, told the boys to let it go. I made a circle. It was real hard bottom. When the dredge came up, it had over 100 oysters in it, and it had nothing in the dredge. Just what we call a little roll. That's all it was in there. I said huh. I said put the divers on the dredges. That makes the dredges go into the bottom a little more. So we put our divers on. Next lick we made was about twice that many. The first time I filled the dredge, they counted 578 out of each end of the dredge. So I called Rob. I said, Rob, what do you got? He said it's a few oysters here. I said can you pick 500 out of a lick, out of each side? He said I don't think so. I said well you better get right here. I got a buoy overboard, come on. So he came on. And then my brother-in-law, he was coming in, and I called him. We always had a secret channel we went over on. I said, Gene, don't stop, come right to me. He said why? I said 'cause it's all you want here. I haven't seen this many oysters in a long time. About 1:30, 2:00, Robbie and I had so many on that we had to leave. I mean I must've had, I forgot the exact count, but like 370 some bushel on. And Gene left. He left too. He had a right good jag. Robbie had a small boat, and we headed for Tilghman, that's about a six, seven hour run. So we never went

back in Solomon's, so they didn't get any oysters. We got in here and put out Wednesday morning, and got our oysters out, went to Hal's Point and caught our limit on Hal's Point sail dredging that day. We were some dead people, though. We were tired. But like I said, it's a big game. Enjoyed it. Thoroughly enjoyed it.

K.F.: What about some of the weather in the winter?

R.D.: We've seen some weather. We were working up, we were working up on Hal's Point, and it was the first day of- no, it weren't. The first two days of dredging season was on, yes, it was. First day of dredging season was on a Friday. And we went to Hal's Point, and we knew it was a lot of oysters, 'cause we planted them there. And we couldn't wait to get there. But when we got there, it was blowing 40 mile an hour out of southeast. Raining, just pouring. I left there at quarter after nine with my limit. Actually, had more than my limit, 'cause the first day, I couldn't judge the boat. I only had five men. And it blew; I mean it blew a gail. When we came in here, it blew 68 mile an hour. And when we got in here, I mean it was unbelievably rough. We got our oysters out. Next day was Saturday, went up there, I had another man, had six men, and we left a little bit earlier than we did the day before with our limit. Everybody was coming down the river, sailing early. But it was a rough time. But probably one of the worst times that I've been in is Robbie and I left here one day the first day of the season. We were going up the bay. And it's supposed to be Norwest wind, so we left here like 1 or 2:00 in the morning, early in the morning. We were going to push across the bay and then head up the bay, you know, for that northwester. Well that northwester hit us in the middle of the bay, right in the shipping channel. I had three different mainsail and no jib. And it was all I could carry. It was -

(OFF RECORD - TELEPHONE.)

(END SIDE A. BEGIN SIDE B.)

RD.: Finally got under Chesapeake Beach. I said there's no way we're going to be able to go up the bay, you know, we left some oysters down the bay on the - side of Solomon's. He said let's go down. We're not going to work anywhere at home. I said all right, so we started for, wind in the sails, started down the bay for Solomon's. But for that half an hour it took us or more to get from the ship channel, we had all you wanted, I mean all you wanted. It was blowing just a gail. I mean it just struck a gait. It blew 30, 40 mile all day that day, and we worked under the cliffs. Wasn't too many oysters. We caught a little over 100 bushel apiece, but for those days, wasn't many oysters, and came home that night. Worked out in the Choptank the next day, 'cause we were going up the bay work 'cause it had some oysters out there. They were really rough that time. But we've been in some, as my father used to say, fuzz cods. I don't know what that is, but it was bad, I guess. Coming out of Tolchester going across, just some terrible times. But if you sail, and you're out there enough, you'll get caught in some gails.

K.F.: Have you had any of the big ice storms? I've heard a few of the older guys talk about some huge ice storms.

R.D.: We had, we were completely froze in in 1970 - in 1981. And we, Robbie and I, the ice breaker had broken a track out to where the clear water was. Right outside the dredge line was clear water. So we left out of here, had a big snowstorm one morning, blowing like 40 mile an hour northwest. And it was really odd, it was eerie. If you look back, if I look back at Robbie, I couldn't see his boat. The snow was blowing across the

ice, and you could only see the top of his mast or about half-way up because the rest of it was snow blowing. It was blowing off the ice. Once we got clear, of course, we were clear of the snow, and we dredged there, we dredged outside the ice all that day. We caught wind that came in that evening, put our oysters out. Next morning went out, caught our limit again power dredging, but we did that that week. Nobody else worked. And then we went out the next Monday and Tuesday and did it again. Nobody worked but us, and Pete Schweitzer came out in the H.M. Willy, and the next week, everybody got out, the ice started breaking up. And, of course, that's when it's dangerous when it starts breaking up. That's when it catches you. But yeah, ice, we had a lot of ice in the early ages. We were continually bad with ice.

K.F.: What does it sound like when the ice hits a wooden boat like the Catherine?

R.D.: Well, we got - I had copper sheeting on the Catherine, so it's a real crunchy noise because they don't break, a workboat breaks ice by riding up on it, falling, riding up and falling. Well a skipjack doesn't do that. You can only break what you can push through, enough power that you have to push through it. So Bert Murphy and I left here. He was in the Nellie Bird and I was in the Catherine, and we left here one morning to go up to Snake River. We were going to work up there that day and come home. They said the ice had cleared up. So we got up there, and we started working, and we were on a nice lick of oysters. We were catching oysters. We'd been there about an hour. Suddenly, it get foggy. This is in the middle of winter now, with ice. So all the sudden, all this ice started coming down the bay on us. So we had been there, I had about 80 bushel, about two hours. This ice started to get - well you can't dredge ice. It holds your dredge lines, get all the ice, pull the dredge out, and you've got to watch it, it'll get in your propeller. So we, and it's still thick, foggy. So we decide to leave and try to get down the bay. We left up there with it thick, foggy, and started down the bay, and I was in communication with a tugboat that was going down the bay, and I was asking, you know, what was coming. And I told him we were headed for the middle span of the Bay Bridge, and he said yeah, I think I see two of you. I said yes. And he said well keep on coming, you're all right. He said I got you on radar, and you're all right, but we got a ship coming from up the bay coming down, so you got to watch it. So I said when you get through the span, keep your eye on me with your radar and tell me if we've got enough time to get through because I had my Loran on. I knew where I was, but I couldn't see. So he did, and he said come on through, and we got through the Bay Bridge and held her over to the east side just a little bit before that ship went by. By that's kind of eerie when you're running from ice in a skipjack. It's not good at all. So that was kind of eerie. I told Bart, I said we'll wait till it clears up before we pull that again.

K.F.: Well what about life onboard the boat?

R.D.: Now it's easy. When I was a kid, I used to have, used to have a job, the crew hired me, and another kid that his father had a skipjack. And we would get water in these big tubs, and then dip it out and put it in the water barrel of the boat. And then we'd have to get all the wood aboard that they were going to bum the next week and stow it down the hole, 'cause it had to stay dry. And they had it rough, 'cause the cook had to get up before the men and build a fire, get it warm in there and start breakfast. Now we just turn the gas on and we've got instant fire. And, of course, we used the jugs for the water. I think they're 35-gallon jugs you get water in.

K.F.: And no more breaking the ice off the top of the water barrel and -

R.D.: Huh-uh (negative). Actually, hadn't been cold lately. In the 90's, it's never been really, really cold. I mean enough to make a lot of ice, not down here at Tilghman. Tilghman is one of the last places it freezes over. Solomon's is probably the best place, but next to that, Tilghman is very good.

K.F.: They call that global warming.

RD.: Oh, you mean for the warmth, yes. But the reason why we don't get frozen up here because when it blows Norwest, we can get out of the east side. If it blows east, it'll blow it off of here, we can get out the west side. So it's really, I guess, because it sure isn't as cold as it used to be. I've had it so cold that the shifting cables wouldn't shift, it would be frozen. They run back to the yawl boat. The gear shift. It hasn't been that cold lately.

K.F.: So what about jokes onboard? I mean you guys have to do entertainment somehow.

RD.: I had the greatest joker with me when I had Edward Gall. Edward Gall was the great prankster player. Every morning we'd leave here, first year I had the boat, we'd leave here and he would go up the river. And he'd take a box. We got our groceries from the store locally in boxes. Take a box and put all the paper in there, and he'd set it on fire. And we were always one of the first ones to leave, so we'd be up the river. And he would set it out overboard, it would go drifting away on fire. And all the skipjack captains say what's that on fire up there? Something on fire? Well he kept doing this day in and day out. So one morning, he set the thing on fire and puts it overboard, and Joe Jones, the marine policeman, sat up on me about 15 minutes after he set it on fire. He said did you see a boat on fire out here anywhere? And I said no, I didn't see a boat. Well, finally, I couldn't keep a straight face and I started laughing. He said what in the H are you doing? I said - I told him what went on. He said damn it, I'll write you up, I'll write a ticket. I said Joe, I didn't do it. Go get Edward. He's down the - of course, he knew everybody. And he said, Edward, did you do that? Edward says yeah. He said don't do that anymore. I've been chasing that fire now for a week. (Laughter.) And they used to catch - I had my nephew - the girl that was her, her husband, my nephew, I had him with me dredging. And he very - he gets anything in his mouth isn't supposed to be there, he gets froze up. I mean he can't stand it. And Edward took these little fish, and when he wasn't looking, he put them in his coat. Give it - took it up like that. Got that fish halfway down, felt it, got sick, started throwing it up. Well that day, he caught a little L-Y, little fish, and he slipped it down there with his boot, down - he waited for it to die, and it went down in his boot. All day, Edward worked on that. And we kept waiting and waiting for him to pull his boot off. Finally when he pulled his boot off, that fish had ground up into his socks and everything, and you can imagine the way it must've smelled. At least coming home that night anyway. And he'd just laugh at it. They were pranksters, that bunch I had. They took his gloves, they took Edward's gloves one day, and they took the bacon grease out of the - after it got hard, you know, and they put it inside of his gloves, his working gloves. And then one of the boys went out and said oh, I've got to go to the bathroom. That's all he said, came back. When Edward got on deck and he put his hand in that glove, he stopped. Well we were all just dying. We couldn't stop from laughing, and he knew that - you knew that they knew what he had done. And he started flinging

that glove like that of~ and it was just bacon grease that got hard. He just laughed. He had a great sense of humor. He had to break out another pair of gloves. These brand new gloves had bacon grease all in it.

And they loved to steal each other's stuff and hide it. And I had the two Crow boys with me, had David and his brother with me. I had three Crow boys with me. But I had David, and David liked to play tricks. So one day his brother, Kenny, had brought all this candy on the boat, and he - Kenny was funny anyway, and he put it all up on the winder box while he was culling. I snuck up there, took the candy and hid it. Well he thought the crew had done it. Well he actually threw a seven. I mean he went ballistic. You've - well his brothers were dying laughing, and finally I couldn't stand it any longer, and I just, I just broke down laughing. He said you're not supposed to do that, you're the captain. You shouldn't be in with those guys. I said hey, I don't - I can't help it the way you're reacting, the way they're reacting. So about an hour later, caught him, he was really working hard, and I put it back on there and he didn't see me. When he looked up and saw that candy, he was really livid then 'cause he don't know who did it. They wouldn't tell him who did it. Fun things. We were always doing something like that.

K.F.: Well let me ask you the names of your crew.

R.D.: Well then, now -

(OFF RECORD. TELEPHONE.)

R.D.: The crew I had, the crews I had then were local boys. And the crews I have now are from, I've had one guy with me for right good while, Rich Purson (phonetic), and he's from Crisfield. He's my cook. And he's been with me, matter of fact, he went with me this year. And another crew member is Matt -

K.F.: If you've got the phone numbers, that would be great, because we're going to try to

R.D.: Matter of fact, I've only got one phone number, and that's Rich. He was my contact, he's always my contact person.

K.F.: Let me go ahead and get his phone number.

R.D.: I don't have it here. Let me see if I put it anywhere else. I know I've got it home.

K.F.: Okay.

R.D.: Matt Barton. Steve Pilburton (phonetic). One of the best men I've ever had for culling oysters. Timmy Howard.

K.F.: Is he related to the family that used to own Maryland Crabmeat Company?

R.D.: No. No. I know I've got, I know I've got Matt's number, and I know I've got Rich Purson's number, but that's the only two I would have. I'm trying to think who else crewed. Had Rich, Timmy, Steve, Matt. Last year, I had two other guys, but they're not normally with me. They only work with me four days.

K.F.: Well how about the old crew with Ed -

RD.: I had Edward Gall, I had David Crow, Robert Crow, Kenny Crow. I had a guy, Willie Savage. I think Willie's dead, though, he was a black guy that was with me. And I had Timmy Richardson, he was from Canada, boy from Canada. And I don't know where he is now. He was born in California.

K.F.: Any of those guys still around?

RD.: All the Crow boys are here.

K.F.: Okay.

R.D.: Robert, Kenny and David. And Edward Gowe is here. You could get in touch with, probably Edward, Kenny and David 'cause Robert only went with me about a month. His back wouldn't take it so *he* had to quit.

K.F.: Okay.

R.D.: That was my first crew. Oh, and I know, somebody else. Chip Fluharty.

K.F.: Chip?

R.D.: On that boat, it was Chip Fluharty.

K.F.: Is he still around?

R.D.: Yeah, but he's a carpenter. He don't live on Tilghman anymore. He lives somewhere, I don't know *whether* it's Easton or where he lives. I haven't seen Chip in a long time. They're all good boys, and I got along really well. They were just fun-loving. I knew them all my life, so -

K.F.: Okay. Yeah, we're going to try to interview crew members that are still around.

R.D.: Well crew members, you could talk with Rich Purson and Matt Barton. I don't think you'll find Steve. Timmy wouldn't be a very good interview, but he's hard to find for *_one* thing.

K.F.: Okay.

R.D.: And I mean David Crockett worked for me out of Crisfield, and Jim Bob, Jim Bob, Jimmy Arnold, Jim Bob Arnold worked for me. He worked for me a long time, too, but he got on drugs so bad that I had to cut him loose. He's still a good man, he was when he was there.

K.F.: Well why do you think people are so interested in skipjacks these days?

R.D.: Because there aren't any. There's only 10 of us that worked this year. It will be less this year. They're expensive to keep up, and if it isn't in your genes, and you haven't been a part of the lore and a part of the whole thing with skipjacks, you won't want it. It's too much work. I mean why would you want to do that much work when you can make a living doing anything else on the water? It's easier. 'Cause there's not much profit in skipjacks now. There was. But right now with the scarcity of oysters, you can't even sail dredge hardly. You can maybe for a while, first of the year, but then they're so scarce, you can't find a crew that wants to do it.

K.F.: So you think you'll go out again this year?

R.D.: Yeah, oh yeah. That's my hobby, my wife said. I have two things that bothers me about dredging. Being in business all my life, I have insurance on everything. I can't get insurance, liability, on that boat when I'm working in the winter. I can if I want to pay more than I could ever make.

K.F.: How much is it, I mean just -

R.D.: Well they won't even quote me. They won't even quote me. We tried to get it through the state under Workman's Comp, and geez, they were so - they wanted 50 cents on the dollar, payroll. You can't do that. I mean it's no use to work. So they were working on it all for the last two years, or last year and this year on celebration 2000 people, they've never come up with anything.

K.F.: So all these skipjacks are working without any kind of insurance on them.

R.D.: Exactly, exactly. Liability.

K.F.: Liability insurance.

R.D.: 'That's the only problem I have with doing the job. I can't do it like I want to do it 'cause I'm afraid of the liability. I don't let people go out on my bow spread in the morning when I'm going out. I want to know where they are at all times. And it's dangerous, you know. And **some** of the crew you get now isn't the best. So that's one thing that bothers me. But I still like to do the job, especially sail dredging when there's oysters. Nothing's fun if you can't catch anything. But -

K.F.: Well I've been asking people what they think the most useful regulation is surrounding dredging.

RD.: Probably the thing that - the regulation that helped save the skipjack was the two power days. That saved the skipjack from extinction, because it assured the crew that they would have a week's work if they could work two days. They knew they could make something. Where in the past, you could lay out there for a week and it would be calm, or blow a week, gail, that you couldn't work. But with that regulation, allowing the work two days, that saved the skipjacks to where they are now. Nothing will ultimately save them.

K.F.: So you think at some point, they'll be -

R.D.: Yes, I think at some -

K.F.: None in the winter anyway.

RD.: Yes. I think there will always be skipjacks that they'll carry charters in. But as the oysters get scarcer, and the people that carry charters tend to do better, and they extend the seasons longer from March into November, you'll find them more reluctant to break up to go dredging because it messes the boat up and you got to straighten it all back out again to go chartering. So, yes, I mean there will always be skipjacks, I think, but I'm not so sure you'll have a viable group that sails and harvests oysters. But I hate to see it because I mean coming from a family that always had sailing captains in the family, it's hard, and having so many skipjacks and working on so many, it's tough to see them go, but I think they will go by the wayside, they're so expensive to keep up. You got to be willing to spend money on them. And if I just made my living out of dredging oysters in the wintertime, I couldn't keep her the way I keep her up. And if you go aboard them, you'll see what I mean. She's in excellent condition. But we work at it all the time. I mean when I see something wrong, see that, 18 by 10 by 12?

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

R.D.: That's a piece of wood that I've ordered to go across her stem because she's got a bad place on one side of it. So I'm going to take the whole thing out of it. But that, and there's things you have to work, you know what's wrong, and you have to be willing to fix them. Where a lot of people just let it go, can't afford to. But I've been lucky. We've made money. I've always been able to catch a lot of oysters if they're there. But at a time, worst thing happened for me was when Robbie quit. It because such a hassle to get a crew. And oysters, when they died in '85 in here for the third time, he said I've had it, I'm done. So and all -

K.F.: Did that take **some** of the fun out of it for you?

R.D.: Yeah. Well when Stanley retired, and Billy quit, and John M, John (indiscernible) quit, and Robbie quit, all the guys that, you know, just about that I work with are gone. They quit, they got out of it. So and I wouldn't want to just sell the boat because I'm afraid somebody wouldn't keep her up.

K.F.: Well where can you haul her out? I mean -

R.D.: I haul her out right here. I can get out the -

K.F.: Oh, right here.

RD.: Not right here, but across the bridge to the Knapps Narrows Marina, they can just get me out.

K.F.: Okay. Do they have a Travel Lift that they're using?

RD.: Travel Lift. Has four, four strap for Travel Lift. I have to pull there because I have to be able to work on it in the morning and be down here in the afternoon to run the crab business. I have to have a cell phone that I can keep there with me.

K.F.: Right. Well I'll probably give you a call to see if you've got phone numbers for any of these guys.

R.D.: Okay. I have got for two, I'm sure.

K.F.: Okay.

RD.: Robert Crow, David Crow, Kenny Crow, be in the phone book. We can find those too.

K.F.: Okay. How do you spell Gowe, or Gowe?

RD.: G-O-W-E.

K.F.: G-O-W-E.

R.D.: Let me get my cheaters.

K.F.: What about stuff like the trail boards and the dredges? How do you get those repairs these days, or made new?

R.D.: Well when Robbie worked, he and I fixed all of our own dredges. We did all of our own welding and all. But now I get Alan Lednum does it here on Tilghman. Trail boards, the museum down at - a friend of mine, Ralph Esherwood, I don't know whether you know Ralph Esherwood.

K.F.: Oh, yeah. Uh-huh (affirmative).

R.D.: He was with the Solomon's Museum, and we were talking, and he was doing some work with skipjacks. And I was telling him my trailboards on the Catherine, when I first got her, were getting kind of soft on the back. And he said would you consider donating them to the museum down here? I said no, I need a set of trailboards. Of course, he said, I know that, but I will make you a new set - Langley. Edward Gowe, 886-2682. And I said yeah, I guess so. So I said let me talk to Pepper. So I talked to Pepper, and Pepper said yeah, I can make a set just like it. So they called me back and they said yeah, we'll make you a set just like it, and we'll put, we'll paint gold in there where's it's gold - I said oh, no. No, no. This trailboard has gold leaf in it, and that's what I'd have to have. I said they would have to be exact. I said Pepper would have to take them and they'd have to be carved exact, like the original set. Every piece has to be exact. And he said oh, okay. So he made it. And then I got Pepper to make the eagle. She didn't have the eagle. And I took the ball off the mast and got Pepper to gold leaf it, and she's really nice.

K.F.: What's his last name, Pepper?

R.D.: Pepper Langley. I think Pepper died. I'm not sure. He was an older guy when he did that for me.

K.F.: So there's nobody really left to make the trailboards these days?

RD.: Oh, yeah. There's people that can do it. All these sign companies can do it. If you took them a trailboard, they can do it.

K.F.: Oh, okay.

R.D.: Pepper came up here, even measured everything. My father made, my father's a good carpenter, and he made the, where the eagle went into the trailboards, he made a blank and sent it down to Pepper so that when he made the eagle, he could put that, he could put that blank on it, it would go right in there. So she's got a very good-looking set of trailboards, and they're original color, made the same with leaf. See, the old ones, the old ones like that were made with a leaf design. The newer ones got the eagle with the flags and holding this. Yeah, they didn't have that in the old ones.

K.F.: Oh, okay.

R.D.: David Crow, 886-2253. Howard R. Who is that? I don't know, that's not - I don't see Kenny.

K.F.: Well maybe David has his phone number.

R.D.: And you'll have to talk to me on the other ones from Crisfield. I can give you two of them.

K.F.: Okay, all right. So are you all ready for Thursday night? Are you coming?

R.D.: Yeah. I got to talk to John. I don't know how they're going to do it because I've got a presentation for the museum. I'm going to present them two carved decoys made out of the bow split of the Catherine for the museum.

K.F.: Wow.

R.D.: They're beautiful. I had them made up in Havre de Grace. Joey Joe (phonetic) made them.

K.F.: Oh, yeah, all right. I know Joey.

R.D.: So I'm going to present them. Jimmy's going to make decoys out of my mast when I take it out this winter, but I had just taken the bow spread out last year, and I had it here, and I said hey, maybe I ought to have that made up in a decoy, so I did. And I'm going to present those to the museum, a pair of canvasbacks. So I've got to talk to John. I've got to call him. I'll be up there, I'll probably be up there Thursday working on it. I'm going to strike a waterline around her, fresh paint so it looks good on the waterline. She shouldn't have much paint off her bottom because I didn't dredge her two weeks.

K.F.: Well they're expecting a big crowd.

R.D.: I hope so.

K.F.: Should be huge. Well is there anything you want to add to this?

R.D.: No, just that there's always a reason why a skipjack lives or dies, and it's always in the person who owns it. And the lucky ones had people that took care of them, and she couldn't have been here 100 years without having people that looked after her. And the same way with the Rebecca Ruark or the Nellie Bird. I saw the Nellie Bird so bad that she had not one piece of wood in her that wasn't rotten. And Darryl Larrimore rebuilt her by himself. And now she's in great shape. So it's according to who gets a hold of the boat. If you get a bunch of people that don't take care of them, then you get a boat that's run down. Or if circumstances doesn't let the captain be able to keep it up.

K.F.: Now I heard that the Nellie Bird was recently sold.

R.D.: Rick Haden (phonetic) bought it, yeah.

K.F.: Rick Haden. Okay.

R.D.: He's never dredged, but he said he's going to try it. He's going to - he's going to carry passengers, that's what he wants to do. Actually, that's probably the only way

they're going to survive, as a working boat, is to be able to carry charters and then be able to dredge in the water.

K.F.: Right. Now is he local or -

R.D.: Yeah, he's a local guy. Born and raised on Tilghman.

K.F.: Okay. All right. Well I'll probably be back to talk to you more about the clamming business when we start working on that.

R.D.: Okay. Well we were big in the clamming business for 20 years, 18 years as a matter of fact.

K.F.: That's amazing.

R.D.: Yeah. You want to talk to William Rowe, Junior (phonetic), too. He was my partner, and he ran the plant. It was quite a business back then. So young and so much, so much responsibility on your shoulders.

K.F.: Right, right.

RD.: But it's never bothered me, responsibility. I think that's what you have - know when you're captain of a boat or when you run your business or whatever, you have to be able to assume responsibility. It's like they say on the boat, when everything's done, no matter who did it, it's the captain's fault, or he gets the benefit for stuff that he didn't do at all because you had a good crew. It's like racing. When you're racing a skipjack, we used to race up to Sandy Point, and you'd get all the credit when your crew may have been probably a big part, 'cause I've had bad crews where you can't catch oysters. I had a crew one time from Crisfield. I had five men who'd never worked on a skipjack. And I told them, I said well now this will test you. I said I'll teach you to do it the way I want you to do it. Just take your time, don't worry about it. First day I went sail dredging up there, I'm used to being top boat or one of the top boats. We caught, first day sailing with this group, we caught 70 bushel, and some of the other boats had 100. Well not only that, they tied the jib wrong, and they tore a big gaping hole in the jib. And I thought to myself, I'll never - but you know, after about two weeks, I had those guys taught the way I want them, and they made a great crew before the year was over, or before the month was over, we could - they could cull as many as anybody, and they were good with sails 'cause I taught them to do it the way I want it. You're better off teaching yourself than you are getting someone from another skipjack that another captain has taught them because they, not that it's wrong, they just do things differently.

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

RD.: But crew was a big thing then, to get it, try to keep these boats working. People don't have to do it anymore.

K.F.: That could be what stops them all from going out in the wintertime, no crew.

R.D.: Yeah. After Christmas, after when the weather gets real bad, a lot of times it's the crew, they won't do it. Type of crew that you have to get, you can't say a whole lot about. Used to be you could raise a time, but you don't raise too much time now because they'll walk off. I've been lucky. I've always had a good crew. Always had a good crew.

K.F.: I was going to ask you -

RD.: But if you get a good name, you'll get a good crew, you know.

K.F.: Well and I've also heard if you have a good cook, you can get a pretty good crew too.

R.D.: Well that may have been in the old days, but I don't think that has anything to do with it now. I think you got to make them money. If you don't make them money, they won't be back. I mean that's just the way it is. If you make them money, they'll - I got a couple guys that do other jobs who work with me first part of the week, and they'll go on another job. Like last year when it was bad, you couldn't sail dredge much in the upper bay. They were carpenters, and they go on a carpenter job when they weren't working. But that was fast money and hard work, fast money.

K.F.: Well what about some of the older DNR guys that have been around the island and know everybody? Should we interview them?

R.D.: Sure. I think that would be a great interview.

K.F.: Who should we talk to?

R.D.: They're all gone. They've all died off. George is gone, Harry George is gone. Robert, I'll tell you there's one still alive. Robert Harrison. He lives in Caroline County. He, they called him Hot Dog. He was marine police down here his whole life. He retired from the marine police. Very good inspector, or marine police. We used to call them inspectors. Now they call them -

K.F.: Marine police.

R.D.: Marine police. Joe Jones is still - he'd be a great interview. Lives in Neavitt. He'd be a very colorful interview. Tell him I said that.

K.F.: Okay.

R.D.: He's a good guy. If we had more Joe Joneses, we'd be in better shape now than we are. The inspectors back then were good inspectors. They were born and raised. They knew who did right and who didn't do right. They knew where to look and where not to look, and they're just, they're so much over what we have now.

K.F.: Okay.

R.D.: You respected them. You didn't want to see them, but you respected them.

K.F.: These days, you don't want to see them and you don't sort of respect them?

R.D.: Not as much. It's according to where you are. Got some inspectors up the bay that I've known for years like Teddy Gable, you know. He's now in charge of Dorchester County, but I see him every once up at Torchester, and he's a good inspector. Very good. But most of your good ones, most of ones from Tilghman have retired, and they haven't replaced, see they started having to have so many women, so many blacks, so many, you know, it has to be diversified, and then they have to have a college education. You don't have to have a college education to be a good marine policeman.

K.F.: Yeah, we haven't done any interviews with DNR.

R.D.: I think it would be good. I think Joe Jones would be a great interview.

K.F.: Okay.

R.D.: 'Cause he's colorful. You might have to drag it out of Robert, I don't know. But Robert's seen it all.

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

R.D.: He came out of the service, went on and retired marine police.

K.F.: Oh, so since the end of World War II?

R.D.: He might, I don't know whether he came out of-

K.F.: Korea?

/~ R.D.: Korea maybe. I don't know. But he came out of the service, and went in the marine police and stayed in there his whole time and retired.

K.F.: Okay. Well we'll give them a call. All right. Well let me have you go ahead and fill this out and give it a read.

(END OF INTERVIEW.)