

Interview Log

Interviewee: Walt Benton

Tape #: OH175.1&2

Interviewer: Kelly Feltault

of Tapes: 2

Date: June 7, 2001

of Sides: 3

Location:

Topic: Skipjack Project

Corresponding Photography Log #:

Comments: Speech patterns of the interviewee are often difficult to discern.

BEGIN SIDE A

K.F.: Okay, let me have you go ahead and say your name.

W.B.: Walton Benton.

K.F.: Okay. And where were you born?

W.B.: I was born and raised in Wenona.

K.F.: In Wenona. All right. What day and year?

W.B.: 4/6/48.

K.F.: Okay. And how many people were in your family?

W.B.: I have two brothers and two sisters.

K.F.: Okay. And what did your dad do?

W.B.: He's been a waterman all his life.

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

W.B.: I mean, is it anything you want me to add?

K.F.: Add as much as you can.

W.B.: Well daddy taught us about the water. I mean he's done it all. I mean he's hand tonged, patent tonged, dredged. And we went with him doing it all, and even crabbing, trot lining, scraping. We started with daddy, the boys, when we were about five year old. Every summer, you know, you went with him. And then in winter, when he hand tonged or patent tonged, something like that, got off for Thanksgiving or Christmas or Saturday. I mean you went with him, even though you're young. I remember when my brother and myself, we were so little, I used to have to stand on a bushel basket, and he'd stand on – so we'd see over the culling board, culling for daddy when he's tonging. And he's first one I went dredging with was my father. So I guess he's the one that taught us.

K.F.: Uh-huh (Affirmative). Do you remember what that first time was like when you went dredging with him?

W.B.: Well it was a sail day, and that's when they had unlimited – we were down Broad Creek by the Bay Bridge. And we had, I think, about 258 bushel that day, we got the sails. That's when we had oysters. So I mean it was pretty. Pretty. Hard, but pretty.

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

W.B.: But it was the first time I went with him.

K.F.: What was it like being a young man, and going that far away from home, and staying on the boat probably?

W.B.: Well I don't know. I guess it was different. I mean then, I slept in the forepeak. I mean daddy had a good forepeak. I'll give him that. I mean long as the gas didn't run out, propane, I mean when that run out, then it was ice and everything. I mean that didn't happen over twice a year. But I mean he had – most of them boats were fed up and had good cooks. And we had to leave home 'cause it was no oysters. We had like a little village. I mean we were tied up probably 20 boats from down home, you know, together. And you got up mornings. If your cook had something you didn't like, I mean you went from boat to boat till you found one that you liked. Same thing with supper, you know. They all would invite you down to eat. I mean like I say, we were – that was home away from home. So it was – I miss them old days. I mean the cooks we got now, very few of the boats got anybody that you could call a cook. All the old cooks are gone, and we don't stay aboard them no more. So I don't know.

K.F.: What was your favorite thing to – what was your favorite thing the cook would make?

W.B.: I don't now. Back there then, I mean I really – you really couldn't enjoy a meal. I never could enjoy a meal aboard a boat. I mean to me, it was just bite, swallow, get it over with. The cooks daddy had back there then, I mean he could cook when he wanted to, but a lot of times, I never seen a man could take an egg and turn it into rubber, you know. He'd cook them, I think, 12:00 at night, and then he'd try to serve them to you 4:00 next morning, and that just – you know, most times, we slept through breakfast 'cause he'd come forepeak. You don't want nothing to eat, you know. But I mean when he wanted to cook, he could cook. But he could butcher a meal too when he wanted to. I don't think I had nothing really favorite, and I really never took time out enjoy none of it. I mean we didn't have the best facilities in the world.

K.F.: Well what were those facilities like then?

W.B.: Well I mean you could almost imagine, you know, living on a boat with six other men, I mean, you know, it was probably like the ghettos, you know. You just don't, you just didn't have, you know, you done the best you could do, and that was it, till you get home. I mean I don't know. I don't miss that part. But we did have oysters back there then. I mean far as dredging, it was pretty work. We did have oysters. Like I say, I don't miss that part. Now we come home. I mean vehicles are better, roads are better. When we're away from home, we still have to go away from home, but we'll stay in a motel. Things are different.

K.F.: Well I've been asking people, especially guys who crewed or they were captains, what was your job on the crew, and describe what that job is, what it was like to do that job.

W.B.: Well with daddy, I started with daddy. So I don't know. It's something about your father being a captain, seems like you work harder than anybody else, you know. If it's anything extra to do, lugging batteries, hauling gas, I mean we didn't – no pumps, you'd have to go up and get it and walk aboard the gas with five-gallon cans. I mean if you needed 40 gallon, I mean you had 10 gallon at a crack. I mean seem like you done a lot of extra work that people that been with him didn't have to do. All you could hope was next year he'd hire somebody else new so you graduate, let him do it. But it just seem like, you know, he could always – I guess he could depend on you doing it. But I mean I know daddy, you done a lot of extra work aboard there because you were his son. And I mean if anything had to be done, you done it. And that's another reason I wanted to get off of there. Daddy was from the old school. I mean he believed in getting all he could get in his dredges, and had the old man, Carl Hoffman, lay some bags in, I mean it felt like he was killing you when you were not doing dredges. I mean it ain't like it is now. I mean most of us don't carry all that bag weight like there then. I mean we only carry what we can handle. But then, we was out there spatting instead of dredging. But that's about it. You ask them and I'll answer them if I can.

K.F.: Okay. So onboard, what was your job?

W.B.: Well like anybody else, culling the oysters, you know. It come time to reef the sales and stuff, we sail dredged too back there then, if we had something to work on. But that was my job. I always, you know, everybody done primary thing – you had like a yawl boat. My brother was yawl boat man, you know, he took care of the yawl boat.

You'd have to let the water off at nights 'cause you didn't have a – and check the yawl everyday. I mean the yawl boat man, that was his concern. And rest of us, I mean, was just a deck – that's all it was, just checking the water in her. And washing down the boats every evening, you know, throwing some water on them, and just culling the oysters. I mean we all were – then you had the cook, so he'd make sure you had the meals. So everybody had their own little jobs. But I guess I was just, my job was to do what nobody else wanted to do. You know, we all culled the oysters, but then you had the other little jobs you had to do. So I guess that's about it. I mean my brother used to be jib man, I used to stay on the mainsail. You always had two. The forward men were jib, they're closer to it, and the after men done the sails, the mainsail on sail days. Power days, we didn't have to fool with them. I don't know, being a cook wasn't a bad job if you could cook because you, first thing in the morning, see you had to get earlier than everybody else, but you didn't have to fool with getting the boat down, getting the boat up, you know, when you got to the rock if you're sailing, you didn't have untie the lines, you didn't have to be on deck. So it was good to be a good cook, but you put in – I mean we were on so many oyster – a couple times, by the time the cook come out the cabin, we'd be back in with our limit of oysters, you know, when they open up a seed area or something like that. But like I say, the cook, he put in – if you got a good cook, you didn't mind it. You know, if you had a good cook, you didn't mind it too much. But I mean if you had somebody that couldn't cook a lick, you know, we all had our own little jobs to do and, you know, you just blended in. Like I say, the crew – daddy's crew was half black, half white. I mean it wasn't no problem.

K.F.: Do you remember the names of some of the guys that were –

W.B.: Matter of fact, I got one with me now that dredges with me, Clarence Bivens.

K.F.: Clarence?

W.B.: Bivens.

K.F.: Bivens.

W.B.: Yeah. He was aboard daddy when I started. Now he dredges for me. Chauncey Wallace. He's deceased now. And the cook was Levin White. He was the black guy aboard there.

K.F.: Wallace, was that part of the Wallace family that drown that time?

W.B.: Right. Well he didn't drown, but it was his brother that was captain of the boat. I think it was 20 some of them kids. So that was a big family. And like I say, Levin White, he was the cook back there then.

K.F.: And how would your dad pay people?

W.B.: Well he'd take out, he'd take out 30 cents for the boat, the boat's part, and then the rest of it would be washed up, you know. We pay expenses for everybody, gas, be aboard the boat for food, and we'd all pay expenses. We get paid equally. So I mean he had a lot of expense, you know, a whole boat, you got a lot of expense one of them, so you got to get something back out of her.

K.F.: Right.

W.B.: And it never change. I mean we still take 30 cents out for the boat.

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

W.B.: But now the way the oyster condition is, most time, the captain will pay for most of the expense. I mean the crew can't really afford it. So you usually take care of all

expense now 'cause – it ain't much as it was back there then, because then we were living on the boat. You're eating three meals a day. I mean you're up there, you're burning propane both in the cabin and in the forepeak. So we don't have all that expense no more that we used to have. I mean gas is higher now, but oyster price is higher too. So I mean if it ever come back, we could do right good. If they ever come back.

K.F.: Well now what made you decide to go on your own?

W.B.: Well daddy was damn near killing me. (Laughter.) I'm telling you. I figure I'm better off back that wheel steering than I am up here dumping these dredges all day. It's breaking my body up. So I figure the first chance I got, I was going to graduate from this. And I always swore I'll never carry the bag that he carried. I mean most of them dredges, I mean if you know anything about dredging, when a dredge comes in, if she's got, you know, what she can hold in her bag and that flops down to he deck, I mean you've got – you can handler her. But when that net rares up, you've got to have three head pulling on he to get her back down. And on the lower side, you've got to just about put your hand overboard, get a hold of that dump ring. I mean that is too much bag. And daddy believed in too much bag. And daddy believed in too much bag. That's how the old timers were, though. That's how he dredged, and that way he thought it belonged to me. But the newer ones not quite as bad no more. I mean they don't put all that – the crews couldn't stand it either. I mean our crews are old. Then you had a lot of youngsters on the boat. You know, you always had enough youngsters to offset. You had experienced men, but you had enough youngsters too who could jump in. You don't get them no more. If they're a good young man, most times, they're aboard these other boats. All you got is – well a lot of times, a lot of my crew is older than I am, and I'm 53.

K.F.: Really?

W.B.: Yeah. It's hard job to get young people that want to stay with the boat, and I can't much blame them. It's a hard job. But you do what you can do and that's it. But like I say, if oysters would ever come back like it used to be, you could get some of these young boys, but you can't blame them now.

K.F.: So when did you purchase the Somerset? Was that your first boat, first skipjack?

W.B.: No – first skipjack, only skipjack. Whatever that says, '77, 1977. I think that's the year I got her was in that bad freeze. I believe it was the year of the bad freeze.

K.F.: What was that like?

W.B.: The first year?

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

W.B.: I didn't – well that wasn't the boat that I went to buy. My wife worked at the bank at the time, Peninsula. So I got a loan. I had to go through the board of directors because she worked at the bank. And I went to buy the Ida May. And the man that was going to sell her to me, I went to him, Mr. Edward, and yeah, he was going to sell her, I think he set the price. I believe the price was 15,000, what he wanted for it. I believe. I'm not sure, but I think that's what I borrowed that year. Whatever it was cost, you know. And I explained to him what I had to do to get the money, you know, go through the board of director and all that. And it would take a while, you know, till they meet again the following month. And everything was okay, and I got the money, and I went down to give it to him, he changed his mind, I mean didn't tell me nothing. And that did make me a little bit hot. Here I had 15,000, and I wasn't about to turn it into them, so I

come home, and I thought about it. And the guy down here had the Somerset that had been on the railway for two years. And I think that's what he wanted for it, it was either 15 or 12,000, I'm not sure. But she was – but she was still up on the railway. So I went there, and I could see that a lot of work had to be done. I mean the mast was rotten, and I couldn't find the center board, out there in the weeds somewhere, same thing with the winders. I mean the yawl boat was out in the weeds, you know. And I knew there was no way I was going to go dredging giving him 15,000, nothing to play with. So I offered him 10. And so he said okay, because I told him it was going to take 5,000 put her back dredging.

K.F.: Right.

W.B.: And I worked on her just about every – well when I got her right on up to dredging, to get that boat ready to go dredging, I still didn't have all of her, you know. I mean she had old canvas sails, had an old – was on her that wasn't hit on but three summers before. But thank the Lord, there was a plenty of oysters that year. And it seemed like every day, I dredged up the island a lot – and I'd have to go up and make a trip into the railway at least once a day to get something fixed, get back out. I was always two or three hours later than everybody else, but it was so many oysters, that I still get my limit that year. And like I say, dredging was plenty oysters to it. I mean you get your limit, and last week of dredging, I ripped them sails all to pieces. I said good, I got to get me sails. So I did put a new mast in her. I was lucky that year 'cause Jessie Thomas had the Seagull. And he had a mast laying in his yard. It was a telephone pole, salt-treated telephone pole her son got up J.I. Wells. And my mast was just rotten as it could be. And I asked him what he was going to do with that telephone pole, if he was going to plan on putting it in the Seagull. I said well if you don't, I'd like to buy it. He said well I'm going to sell it to you. I think I paid \$250 for that telephone pole. I dragged it down, and I put it in her, it's been in her ever since. So I made out like a champ on that one. And my sails, I got the sails, and the aircools (phonetic) like I say, I didn't know whether I was going to make the year with her or not. The guy I had working, it was not too many people that knew too much about aircools. And I think the guy that I had probably didn't know as much as they did. He wanted to be the expert. And I'm not going to mention his name, but every time he come down he'd have a beer in his pocket, you know, that's how he brought his beer down. And when he run out of beer, he'd walk off. That's how he worked. Finally, we got her to three cylinders. And he told me to some – in the gas, she'll pick up the other one. She never did pick it up. And around about way, I asked the Lord, I said, Lord, if you'll just let me get through the year with this old motor, 'cause I really didn't have no money to get another motor, I said let me get through the year with this old motor. I will replace her. And I got through the year, but the funny thing was, I went spatting that year up Cambridge. And the first day that I went up there, I got a piece of a trip, maybe a third loaded, and she blowed all to pieces. I said I should've asked the Lord for spatting too, I guess. But first day. So I had – didn't have no choice but to replace her. It was – I mean if it hadn't been no oysters, I would've pulled my hair out. But, you know, everything worked out for the best on her. Oystering was good for about, I don't know, probably seven, eight, nine years, and I could get her – a lot of stuff I could get fixed up on her when it was good. Then all the sudden, the bottom dropped out of it again.

K.F.: And how did you rip your sails apart that first year?

W.B.: It was rotten, no count. I mean canvas. I probably had the only set of canvas at the time that was dredging. It just – the jib was halfway new, and I put a jib on it, tore that up. And I give all that away, the jib. I give that to another boat after I got my Dacrons. Had a good jib, and I just give that – I think it went to the Bernice Jay (phonetic). The guy down in Crisfield bought the Bernice Jay, he had a railway, and I gave him the jib. And he told me I had a free railway coming to me. Well he's not in the business now. And when I went to get the free railway for my brother, didn't have time. (Laughter.) So that's how that worked. But I, you know, didn't make no difference. I didn't give it to him for a free railway to start with. I mean I didn't need the jib. I was never going to plan to put it on anymore.

K.F.: Well what was that year like with the freeze? 'Cause I have read that that was a pretty bad –

W.B.: Yeah, we were in Tilghman Island in that freeze. I think it was January 3rd, last time we were out or when it started. Seven weeks. I mean a seven-week freeze. And we didn't get out, we would ride up. Every darn day thought it was something, you know. We'd go up, look at it and everything froze over, come on back home again for a couple weeks. But Marvin Mandell was the governor then, and he looked out for the watermen. One of the very few governors that we've ever had that really, you know – so he eased the pain somewhat. You know, we all got a, like a check, but it was better than, you know, the only time I've ever been on the water in my life ever got anything, and he was the governor. So I've always had good memories of Marvin Mandell as governor. So if it hadn't been for that, it would have been really rough, but he eased the pain on a lot of that. So it wasn't, to me it wasn't all that bad beings it could've been worse if it hadn't been for that. Usually the first of the year, you don't get many days anyway 'cause you can run into that bad weather. So, next?

K.F.: Well how did you get your first crew?

W.B.: Well the first crew I had, I guess I was lucky 'cause you don't know whether you're going to get anybody. And I got – well it was a put-together, more or less. A lot of them were, who nobody else wanted, you know. Like I had a father, and I had to take his son. He didn't know nothing. And I had his brother. He'd been on every boat. Nobody wanted him 'cause he couldn't cull many. You had to take a lot of first timers, old timers. You take them, then you take their sons so you can get them. I mean you got to have some experience. But if you prove you can catch oysters, then it starts getting better. You know, once people realize that you know what you're doing, then you start getting a lot better crews. If it hadn't have been for good oysters, I probably never got, I mean it would've been really hard 'cause we had a lot of skipjacks back there then. But I mean I wound up after a couple of years, had one of the best crews on the bay.

K.F.: Really?

W.B.: Had an excellent crew. Excellent. I mean they could just flat out cull an oyster.

K.F.: And who was in that crew?

W.B.: I had a guy by the name of Peton (phonetic). I think his name – Peton. Everybody knew him, you know, on the bay everybody knew him Peton. One of the fastest cullers ever culled oysters. I mean he just could flat out cull 'em. He was a black

guy. But, you know, he had a reputation being one of the fastest cullers. And he was there because the guy, Dude, that's Clarence Bivens. His name is Dude.

K.F.: Okay.

W.B.: Everybody knows him by the name of Dude. And they were buddies, he was a black guy. And Billie Waters, he was a black guy. Had him. Jimmy Cannon, he was a black guy. But I guess I mainly had a black crew. They were some of the best cullers, and they worked great together.

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

W.B.: Jimmy Cannon is working up Salisbury construction. I mean he hasn't dredged for years. Dude, he still dredges with me. He's living in Salisbury with his daughter. Now Peton, he died. Billy Waters died. But they're some of the first ones I had back there then, first good crew I had. And they just, you know, they just were all friends, they worked together. I mean we were pretty lucky. I can't remember who I had for cook. Like I say, cooking wasn't a thing then anyway because we're working around home. But I think I had six head, five or six head. I can't remember who the others were. But over the years, you just, you know, you don't have the same crew every year. I mean every year is different. Now part of my crew comes out of Crisfield. I mean you always got different ones.

K.F.: Some of the guys in Tilghman said they were getting their crews out of Crisfield too.

W.B.: Yeah. They're the only really young ones you can get. I mean the rest of them, if you get them around here, they're older people. And but I've actually got them out of prison, everywhere else before. You know, the warden out there, if he's got anything out there that's eligible for work release, he's a waterman, I usually get him. Which it ain't bad. I mean they're dependable. You know where to get them. (Laughter.) You know they're going to be there.

K.F.: Yup. (Laughter.) Well tell me how you learned how to go from being on crew to being a captain.

W.B.: Well when you're a crew member, you got to learn how to do it all with the sails, you got to know where the winders is and everything. I mean that's the trouble. A lot of the crew, they could do everything that had to be done on the boat, but there's a hard job I remember where you worked at because they're always on their knees with their head down. But when I was with Daddy, I always want to know where I was at so I'd always steer in and out for him. I'd always do a lot of steering. And that way, I learned a lot of the rocks, but being to the wheel, I tell him I'd take her to this point. After a while, you know, he'd just tell me where he wanted to go, and I could take her there for him. But you know, that's the reason – I knew I wasn't going to be on my knees all my days. So I had to learn something about the boat, and I'd always be back there with him so I'd see what was going on far as tying her up, how she was going to operate. It got to the point where Daddy would let me take her a lot of times, you know, bring her in and out. But like I say, if I wasn't planning on dredging, I wouldn't have done it neither. But I knew that some day I was going to own my own. And I didn't want it to be all dumb. You know, I wanted to have a working understanding of how the boat was going to operate. I mean every boat operates a little different. But I figure if I could get her down a little bit, then when I got my own, I'd know what's going on. 'Cause like I say, every boat's a little

bit different. Even the, you know, setting them up so the falls, I mean like my brother's boat where he shoved from the center, I shoved from the side. I mean our falls was all together different even readjusted for dredging, power dredging. You have to have your lines different.

K.F.: Well talk a little bit more about that, because I haven't had too many captains really talk about that. And so with your dad, you would have been steering the Fannie Dougherty, right?

W.B.: Yeah.

K.F.: Okay. So how does the Somerset and Fannie operate differently, besides –

W.B.: Well like I said, he has the plug rudder where it's underneath the boat. And so they put their center chock where the yawl boat shoves her is directly in the center of the Fannie. And he has about two or three, probably about three faults on her that adjust the bow, one pulls her up, one pulls her over, one keeps her in. I mean they got all kinds of lines on her so she'll pivot when they're power dredging. Now mine, off to the side, see I got the rudder on each side, so I can't put it on the center, I have to put it off to the side of her. And that's where my chock sits. The way I got the fault that goes here, but I put another one. Now most of them just got that one fault, and then they got a towline that they tie, keep her in there. But I usually make it easier for her to come around, I'll put another set of faults here to help hold her in the chock so she don't – see that's the reason the boats, like the Fannie and them, even though she's smaller than mine, a little more abler in rough days because it's the yawl boat. I'm liable to lose my yawl boat quicker than he will where I'm on the side. I mean if she ever pops through that chock, she shoots by the boat and you lose her, so you have to be careful of those power days with him, where his, he's directly in the center and the big boat protecting her, you know, protecting her better than it will protect mine. So I had to be a little more careful on them rough days. But pretty – I mean that's the only difference in, you know, the yawl boat, different type of boats. That's the only two types we got, either in the center or on the side, you know.

K.F.: How about the way they handle?

W.B.: Well I guess every boat handles a little different. I know daddy's used to root a lot, you know. Her bow would go down and she went – where I thought mine handles a whole lot better. I put her in deep water when I was going up the bay, and I could get my lines just about right. And I could go a mile without having to touch that wheel again, you know. She would just – a pretty day, she would stay right with it, get them falls just right on her. And I thought she handled a whole lot better. But far as tying up, I think they handle better than we do because we're on the side. I mean sometimes it's an adventure to tie them things up, you know, if it's blowing, you know. It ain't like, you know, it ain't the easiest thing to handle in close quarters. 'Cause when you turn the wheel, it's a while before they start tacking it. And when they start tacking it, you better start going back or she's going to turn right around in a circle. That's where a lot of people have mistake, you know, it's not like most boats. Most boats, turn the wheel, they do it. These it's so long before they start making their turn. So you get started in advance of where you want the turn, and you better start back. After she starts turning, you better start going the other way with her. But that's the reason I like my rudder to where I can see it too. I don't have – wonder where it's at sometimes or how far I turned her. But

like I say, it's an adventure. They're all right in open water, but when you start coming in close quarters, that's when it starts – they drift. I mean you can cut one of them off. It ain't like a regular boat. I mean if a box stern cuts off, she'll drift a little ways. These things, they never stop, you know. I mean sometimes when your motor is running bad, you coming in the harbor, you know your motor is not all that great, and it's going to be close. A lot of times, you'll put your dredge on the roller. Be right up there with the roller so you can use that for an anchor, and -- I mean we've had to do that quite a few times, even when it – if you had to sail into a harbor, sometimes you'll – if you don't have no power, you'll get that dredge up on the roller. You use that for your bricks, before you tear somebody up 'cause they are so heavy. If they run into something, you know, they're going to do some damage, or to their self or somebody when they're heavy. But they just don't stop. When them motors cut off, they don't stop. They just keep right on drifting. But outside of that, I don't know.

K.F.: Okay. I haven't heard anybody talk about that before. That's interesting. And what are some of the worst times you've seen out on the bay oystering?

W.B.: Well probably the worst time that I seen I wasn't out there I was with daddy. That's the time the Stanford White turned over. I mean luckily enough, that morning we were the only boat – see we hit some oysters down near Broad Creek, because we were dredging her at Love Point. And we hit some oysters down there, you know, where all the others were over Sand Point. And they didn't have quite a good day as we had. And that lit them up. I mean when they found out all them oysters we caught, well the next morning, they were gung-ho to get down there. It was bad, it was just a bad looking morning. I mean it was stormy. I mean you could tell that something was going to happen.

K.F.: Can you describe that weather, or what it looks like?

W.B.: Well it was before light, but you know, it wasn't no stars or nothing. I mean it was just black. You know, you could see some of the background. I mean it was just a bad looking morning. You knew, you know, wild looking, what we call wild looking, you know. My brother, and some of them went – Stanford, Johnny Boy, I mean they went out that morning. Well Johnny Boy was on the way to Tilghman's, but rest of them's on the way dredging. And just lucky enough, daddy stayed in the harbor. We told him, you know, he wanted to go, but then common sense told him, you know, let's just see what this storm does. And it hit them before they even got there. And that's probably the worst wind I've ever seen around the water 'cause I was worried about my brother. I was worried about my brother. And then they said one of them turned over. I mean but luckily, everybody was saved. Everybody was saved. A storm like that is usually over quick. If it hadn't been, they all would've been lost. I mean 'cause when you get one of them kind of storms, when it comes through, when it comes through, if you can just hold on for 5 or 10 minutes, but Stanford turned over, the whole sail up on her, it just flipped the boat right over. But she was a small boat, I mean in the fleet. But I think that wised some of them up down that things can happen. Things can happen. I know I've always remembered it, you know, when I seen them type of mornings, I don't go. I guess I've always been lucky on something like that. I've been caught in some, but when it gets, when you get dredging, I don't know, seem like I've always been, like I say, real lucky always. One morning, we'll get ready to go dredging in the straits, Hooper Straits down

home, and my brother, he was right reckless. He had the Susie May. I mean he was gung-ho all the time. And that morning, struck my rudder and knocked it off before he even went out. So then I had to go get my rudder, you know, get that fixed up, and a freak storm come out of there that day like a hurricane, blowed 80 mile an hour. Everyone of them were in the straits when it hit them, and I was still putting my rudder on. And they had to spend the night there in Hooper Straits there. Wasn't – I forget what the name of the place is where they all had to go in for the night. It just blowed all day long, and I think it clocked in the 80's, we had high tide, all – rained. I mean and I just, I was just lucky enough, I avoided all that. But I like to tore my whole boat up right there to the, to the southeaster. One of these southeaster winds, and it's blowing right into the dock, and she was banging. We had to put tires down. I popped – I had 11 lines out to her, and I popped 3 of them, they were all on three-quarter. And the only thing saved the boat that time 'cause the pole, she'd eat through my steel bend. You know, you put bend guards overtop the oak, and she'd already eat through that, then she started through the oak. And only thing that saved me, we went out there and got a big tractor tire, one of them old big tires, and we got that down between the pole and her, and that saved her. They got that down, I don't know, I believe it would've eat right straight through her. But I was lucky on that one.

K.F.: Now is this Delmas that banged your rudder off?

W.B.: No, Clifton, my older brother.

K.F.: Older brother.

W.B.: Yeah. He had the Susie May. And, yeah, he's the one. (Laughter.) So he done me a favor that morning, knock my rudder off. But another time, I was – I think I was with Clifton, dredging with my brother, my older brother. We're in Choptank, and a storm hit us off Cook's Point. And that's the day we had the sail in, scud in. I mean that was blowing that day. I mean everybody. I mean all you had every one of them running with the wind. But it was a straight scud, so it wasn't too bad. And another time it his us we were at Cooper's Holler. Came out of nowhere. I mean but we were lucky. The wind was offshore where it didn't make a big say. If it come the opposite direction, we would've been in a lot of trouble. So I've always been lucky, I guess, knock on wood. I've always been lucky. I mean I've seen enough of them, been in enough of them, but I've always been – got the best of them, you know. When it happens, it's always, you know – I don't know. Just always been pretty lucky on that. Even when the guy Wadey the other year, we were up the same place with him. But we went in 1:00, you know, you could see what was happening. And the main was going off anyway. And I was, when it first hit, I had just got my oysters up getting tide up when it first hit. But I was in protected waters too. At least I've always been pretty lucky on that. And it don't take much for me to run, you know. If I see one coming, I don't wait and see what's going to happen. I get close enough where I can get somewhere, you know. I figure tomorrow's another day.

K.F.: Now have you seen any high seas, or ice, or anything like that?

W.B.: Well if you're dredging, you'll see ice, you know. When it freezes up, I mean been two or three times when we worked in the Tangier Sound that most the time, a freeze up is preceded by a snowstorm. You know, seems like it always – that's the last thing it takes to have a freeze. That gets the water colder than anything else. But it's

amazing, you know. People wouldn't really believe it. But you go in there and like dredge, and it will be – she starts freezing over, the whole bay. You know, when she starts freezing over, you start her in the water, then you get that thin ice. And by the end of the day, it gets so it's holding up your shells, you can see what your – you know, when it come off, you're busting through ice to dredge, and you can look down by the side of the boat on the cut-off, where that thaw is – if they're raking the oysters back. It's amazing how that is, but you know that's going to be the last day for a while 'cause you can, you know, it's happened two or three times where you really, you're really doing the last day of the freeze up. You're just cutting – you've got metal on them boats. I don't think it's for breaking ice. It's just to keep them from getting tore up in that thin sheet of ice. But we come down the bay one time and left her out to Cambridge. Stan and Art, and they left, well they left a day ahead of time. And a storm hit, and it made so much ice that their whole bow was freezing up. They had to go in Tilghman Island. Just one just mass of ice. Well I was going to leave, but it was so cold. The man was culling off I wasn't about to try to do it. So I went back the next day, bring the boat down 'cause you knew it was going to be a freeze up. I mean Cambridge already started. You had to bust ice to get out of there. But I didn't realize the whole bay was freezing up at the same time too, you know. I left out of Cambridge the next day. Well Art and them left out of Tilghman Island next day, and I stayed in ice the whole way down the bay. I said, Lord, I think I made a mistake here. You know, the whole way down the bay was just a sheet of ice. And I don't care where you went – the only thing, when I got down through the straights, I said if I could get in here, I knew the sound was going to be thicker. And I started to go in Deal Island, and I could see where that was – we had to go up around the lighthouse. Most the time we could cut across, but it wasn't no path there. I had to stay where the traffic had been. And I said well, I'll get her home. You know, go to Wenona instead of Deal Island. That's where I dredge her. And when I got in there that evening, Art and Stan was hung up between two beacons. They couldn't go no farther. They didn't have enough power to even crush the ice. So that's one time, well you tear your old boat up, but I could crush the ice. I could crush the ice that they couldn't get through. And we got in that night, and we were froze up for quite a while. But that was – I don't know, one time I bust the sides of that boat crushing ice too. I liked to sunk.

K.F.: Tell me about that one.

W.B.: Well my own dumbness. Well that boat, the chime wasn't all that good to start with, the chime boards. And we been froze in I guess about three weeks. And I was up Deal Island harbor. And the boats down Wenona, somebody had broke it out from. We didn't have it broke out. So I decide to break it out myself. I could see them out there dredging, and I couldn't get there, you know, and I had a crew wanted to get there. And I knew better but, you know, they wanted work and couldn't much blame them, hadn't made nothing for three weeks. So I started breaking it. And when you break it, you know, you have to back up and drive into it, back up and drive into it. And I got, I swear, I think – I didn't get no – I don't believe I go farther from here to the house next door, get through the front, that's the hardest part, where I could get out, be in open water with them. And – I got water over – and Lord, and the pump weren't freeing her. So I had to back up the whole way back where I started from all through that track. Get what you can, then we had to get a force pump to her. It was knee deep by the time we got back

there. I had busted both sides of her chine. Like I said, they were bad to start with. But that ice finished it off. Then I had to take off one of the – at that boat, that ice was over with, and go to Crisfield, and I think it took about three weeks to take sides out of her and put them new chimes, both sides.

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

W.B.: And that was an ordeal. But trying to get up there for one day, wind up missing three weeks, and cost several thousand dollars. But I mean the chimes had to be eventually replaced, but I split sides and everything on her. Had to take all that – that was a lot of work. But like I say, you learn. I don't do that no more. Don't do it no more. No ice breaker no more. I'll break to get in, but I ain't breaking to get out.

K.F.: Well now where can you take these boats to have them fixed? I mean I know they're very large and heavy because they're wood, and travel lifts are not the best –

W.B.: Well that's what we have to go, to travel lifts. And our closest place is Crisfield. We go down there to Goody's Shipyard. We used to go to Crockett's. Now we go to Goody's. But, no, you're right. I mean a travel lift is not the best.

K.F.: So there's no place with a proper railway really to –

W.B.: Yeah, I think – well St. Michaels has a regular railway. But some of the boats up the bay uses that. But in our area, we don't have one. But I mean if the travel lift will use enough belts, it wouldn't be that bad. But most of them's only got three. But if they had it so they had one extra belt would be a big help, you know, get underneath your mast and spread it out some. I mean they use three belts. Really not enough. I mean they're catering – they don't get much bigger, and they don't get that much skipjack to start with.

K.F.: Right. Mostly fiberglass boats.

W.B.: Yeah.

K.F.: And what about repairs? How do you repair these boats? I know it's hard to –

W.B.: Well when we go down Crisfield, usually we'll carry our own carpenter with us. I mean you couldn't really – you can't afford to pay them the \$35 they want for to use their people, and they're good about it. They let us bring our own carpenters and stuff. And we, if you can't find one, if it's a small job, we do it our self. I mean most captains have learned to put back some wood or do most of your work, your caulking and stuff you do yourself, and a lot of your carpentry work. I mean you do all of your sanding and painting, not unless you got somebody there with you help you, you know, pay somebody to help you because you're trying to work and get down there too, and every day it's costing you, you know, you get down there every day cost you \$25 a day while you're there. So you try to get off as quick as possible. So we're pretty good on that. I mean – (END SIDE A.)

(BEGIN SIDE B.)

W.B.: -- most years. If I got a hard job I can't do, you know, it's – well it takes a carpenter. I'm a wood butcher, but I can get by, you know. With a 5200 West System, I can usually cover my mistakes up. But like I say, you didn't – my wife, she always goes down, she'll take off from work, get her vacation, she always paints the deck of the boat for me. I mean that's a lot of work. So and my son, sometimes he'll come down, you know, take a day and give me a day. Or a friend might say – come down, you got, you know, just really too much for one person to try to do. And I mean if it weren't for people jumping in and helping you, I mean – so I've been pretty luck there, I guess. So

like I say, you only pay what you have to, because you're not going to cost you enough to start with when you start, and you ain't going to make nothing with them to start, you know, way it is now. All you can do is try and hold on for another year, hope next year's better. You wouldn't do this if you didn't love doing it. I mean you've got to have a love for dredging. Ain't nobody in the world would work for nothing (laughter) but a dredger.

K.F.: What about stuff like the trail boards and, I mean a blacksmith? I mean those are pretty specialty –

W.B.: Yeah, well the guy used to be the blacksmith, Mr. McCado (phonetic), made the best dredges. Now dredges ain't as good as they used to be because you can't get nobody to, you know, knows how to do it. When they first started, Mr. McCado, he made the best set of dredges. He made a set, and you know, I dredged it. He put a set on, they would catch. And we used to go up there twice a year get bars changed in them when we had oysters. You miss somebody like that. Now you just, you'll go somewhere, it's a hit or a miss with the dredges. I mean and you just set them yourself most the time. You know, just try to do the best you can because except for Cado, I have never had a matching set of dredges. Used to be I could take his dredges, when I put them overboard, they would catch the same. Now you always have one beating the other one real bad, you know. You just could not get two dredges that set the same. It's impossible.

K.F.: What does that do to your steering the boat?

W.B.: Well they – I mean one dredge a day can catch shells. The other one catch oysters. That's the way it is. And one of them you have to put out there a little more line than the other. Then you have to adjust your crew a little bit. I mean if one's getting the oysters, you better get a man to cull over on that side, and you try to get the trash cullers to the trash side. I mean it ain't like it used to be. But I mean with McCado, I miss him, I really do. And then there was Alfred Mays in Princess Anne, he took care of the winders. I mean I take my winders in there probably about every eight year, and he'd redo everything. And between those eight years, he would come down and check them out for me. And I didn't have no winder trouble. But then he's gone, and Lord, you have, you know, you have trouble. And sailmaker, my step-grandfather. I mean any time I done something to my sails – brought down the sail loft for years. And anything happened to my sails, I could take them up there to my step-grandfather, he'd fix them up for me same day. I'd be ready to go back tomorrow. And he's professional. But his son does it now, but the equipment's wore out. I mean don't really have the equipment that his father, because you got the same old machine, but it just about wore out. I mean that's the best he can do. And that's who we get now, Tommy. Tommy Daniels.

K.F.: Tommy Daniels?

W.B.: Yeah. He's the one that patches our sails and everything. Like I say, I wish he had a nice sewing machine, but the old sewing machine is the one come out the old sail loft down there, and she's wore out. He does the best he can do with her. But I wish he'd find one 'cause I know he could – you know, if he had something to work with. And he's the one goes down the railway with us does carpentry work. He's helped rebuild a lot of these old boats and stuff. He probably worked on every one of them there is down home. But I mean you miss those people. Before, it wasn't no problem. You take it, leave it, you come back and get it. Now if it weren't for Brian Percy and Tommy and Jack

Whalen, I don't think we'd be afloat because we can't get nothing done no more. I mean between those three, they keep you going. You know, you've got have one of those three or all three of them sometime during that year work on you. Most time it's all three of them. Brian with his welding, and like last year he made my winders, you know, the frames. And Jack is always, you always got to get something done on the motors, and Tommy always with the wood. So you always got, you know, I can't remember a year I ain't had all three of them working on me one time or another, and everybody else the same. I mean I don't know what we're going to do if something happened to them three. I mean we'd have nobody to take their place. I mean we're bad enough shape now, but I mean just – it's a dying thing, I guess. Nobody's getting into it.

K.F.: Well do you see any younger captains coming along?

W.B.: Well we really don't encourage them. I mean my son, he's – he went to college and graduated, working up here to Delaware now. I don't think he wants nothing to do with it. He dredged with me for a few years. But then there's Delmas's son works down Wallop's, I don't think he'll be doing it. So no, I don't. I really don't because I mean it's not – I guess if they're rich, it's a good way to lose your money, but who in the world's going to jump into a job, you know, you don't make nothing doing it. So, you know, not unless something changes. If something changes, yeah. But it's got to be different when it's men. It really has. Like I say, you got to love to do it, and they've never, most of them never got their feet wet to do it. So, no, I don't see a younger generation doing this, not unless things got changed. You know, you've got to have something to work on. You've got to be able to make a, you know, you've got to make a living.

K.F.: Well let's talk about economics then. How much does it usually cost you to fix up the boat for the season to get her ready to go out?

W.B.: Well the way it's been, you do the bare minimum, you know. You try to go about as cheap as you could possibly go, but I mean you ain't going to let her go if she's got a bad plank. Blow bottom, you got to fix it. Ain't no ifs, ands or buts about it. I mean that's got to be done. Now she's got a bad one on her deck, you might plywood it over till you get to it. (Laughter.) But I guess every boat's a little different. But I mean you can take and get your dredges fixed. I mean you can take a pair of dredges right now, and it costs you \$500 to get them fixed. And most years, you've got to get a pair of dredges fixed or you ain't going to catch no oysters. You've got to, that's a must. And the same thing with motors. I mean most years, you've got to do something on them motors. You've got two motors, you better do something with them. And the old sails like down home, I mean we have old sails, and every year we've got to be patching. We've got to go up there and buy cloth, and you've got to get them re-stitched, and don't use them only for the race. But I mean but you have them aboard the boat. If a storm hits you, you've got to have them, you know. So that's the only – outside of that, I wouldn't even put them on. Why waste money every year getting them patched up for one race that you're not going to win? (Laughter.) You know, but you've got to have them for when you're dredging, if a – you know, a freak storm hits you, you've got to have them sails to help get you in, you know. You never know when you've got scud. But like I say, you take that. And the woodwork, always wood got to be put back. Always. I mean when they're decked over, see, the air don't circulate and then like they do a box stern. You take them old boats where – I mean you take a box stern, you don't get the rot because the air

circulates. But then they're all closed in. And I took, I took all the berths and everything out of her. I'm hoping it will circulate and cut down on some of the rot, but you're still going to have a certain amount every year. I mean it's amazing. You go down the railway, you know what you got to do, and when you start sanding, it always hits you. Where did this come from? You know. What you know you got to do, you always put what's the most important in front, so some things have to be left undone because you can't be spending all the money on just less important things. If you can get to it, you get to it. If you don't – you do what's important. And bottom first, and you work your way up your sides. And you've got to have your winders, you know, you've got to have your dredges. You got wire cable. I mean that stuff cost 500 and some dollars. You got to have that every couple years. I mean it's – I don't know, I'd say probably at least \$5,000 the minimum to get by, I mean at the minimum. You know, that – if you don't spend that, you – but we could probably spend 15 or 20 some years to really do it right. But the bare minimum, 'cause railway, just as soon as you hit that, that can be at least 2,000, you know, just getting up there and just doing minor things and getting it out the way but with all the other iron and stuff – it's unbelievable.

K.F.: And then what does, what does the boat usually bring in these days in the way of oysters for cash value?

W.B.: I'd say if you're lucky, you'll break even that year. (Laughter.) You know, really. I mean you're not going to have no money to play with. You're not going to, you know, if you don't have a wife that works, you couldn't keep her, you know. You couldn't keep the old boat. You'd have to have a wife that works with you, you know. The bare minimum, 'cause like I say, I mean the crews, to hold onto a crew, you've got to pay all expenses. I mean if you take out for food and gas you burn and everything else, I mean they wouldn't have a whole lot coming to them. So I mean I've had weeks where I break even, and I give it all to them, you know. I've got just enough to get me across that bay bridge to get home. But you're hoping next week's better. You know, I've had weeks like that. But if you don't, if they're coming home with nothing, why should they go back? So you've had weeks like that, but you're just holding on till it gets better. But no, you know, you don't make no money with them boats. You just don't do it 'cause you don't have the oysters. You don't get the time. I mean two days a week. But I mean with flex time now has helped. But a lot of the oysters are caught up by the time we get there, I mean because you take all the other boats that got a month on you, I mean you put 1,000 boats on oystering, and I don't have a patent tonger as it is, probably ain't quite that many, but you put them all together, probably, you know, 2 or 300 anyway, and you just put them just on the oyster right before you get there, you know, it ain't a whole lot left when you get there. And that's one thing I was hoping that we could do is start same time they start so we get a crack at the oysters like them. But I mean that would be a help. Start when they start. I mean, I mean you can imagine – I don't know how to explain it, but you take a slice of bread there, and you let anything get at it for a whole month before you get at that slice of bread, and you ain't got nothing left but what they don't want. And that's what makes it hard on us. But you got some of the dredgers don't want it, and the reason they don't want it is because it don't benefit them. And just, we can't get together. Just plain and simple. If it don't help me, it don't help nobody. And I don't know whether it would help me. I don't even know whether I could even get a crew. But

I know it would help dredgers, the ones that could. But that's one thing that would definitely be needed. But like I say, some of them, I mean it's a hard job to get anything done when you got a lot of people. That's the reason the state don't trust the watermen, the watermen don't trust the state. Because the ones that they actually talk to only tell what's beneficial to them, not to the industry. And that's the reason you got one side pulling against the other. I mean the state don't want to give into the watermen, a lot of things, which again can't blame them, I mean 'cause you don't tell them the truth on a lot of things. And the watermen don't want to give into them 'cause if you lose it, you don't get it back. And the state only wants people on their committee that agrees with them. You know, I mean, yes person. They don't want nobody that's gonna disagree. And like I say, I mean whatever benefits me, don't make no difference about the industry. And that's the trouble we run into. Not only with oystering, but crabbing and everything else. K.F.: Well I've been asking folks what they thought, or what you think is the most useful regulation right now in dredging?

W.B.: The most useful regulation in dredging right now is the flex days.

K.F.: So that's the three days –

W.B.: Or the two days.

K.F.: Two.

W.B.: We get two days, pick our two days. And we just started that last year, I mean we just got that. So that's probably the most useful thing, yes, for dredging, because it does give us days to work that we normally wouldn't work. I mean 'cause Mondays and Tuesdays, a lot of times you lose both days, you lost a week. But now we can pick two days at the end of the week if we can. So, yes, that's the best thing.

K.F.: What's the most useless regulation? You can pick only one. (Laughter.)

W.B.: The most useless regulation. I don't know whether a regulation or what. But it would probably be your tidewater fishery. You know, it's all according to who you are and where you're at. I mean it's a waste, to me it's a waste of money like when we were tied up in Deep Creek, which Lord, I love to get myself in trouble, usually do by talking. (Laughter.) But we'd be tied Deep Creek. Be three of us skipjacks there, and normally be three tidewater fishers waiting for you. And that's every day routine. I mean why in the world pay them all this salary be there every day to check us, you know, just hoping to stumble in something everyday? I mean like I say, it's all according to who you are. You know, down the – down the bay boats, we are checked hard. And even down the bay we're checked hard. I mean we're checked everywhere we go. I don't now why, but that's the way it is, that's the way it's always been, that's the way it always will be. But common sense will tell them that really the buyer could take care of all that. If you sell that man trash, and that trash hits that oyster house, that guy tells him, I don't want no more of that. So you're out of a job. Really. You're not going to be able to sell a whole lot of trash to a man, because he'll take care of that. And I don't think they really figured that out. I realize some would abuse it, abuse it bad. But you don't need all them tidewater fisheries checking you every day. I mean some harbors liable to have 100 boats in it, not one over there. Then you got other harbors got three, and you got three in there. Now, you know, something's wrong with that setup. And we have to go where the harbor protects us the best. I mean that's the reason we go where we go. I mean if I got a harbor, no law, but it's no protection there for me, you know, if I got to work and I got to

cross that bay and everything, I'm not going to do it. I'll go where the protection is, you know, 'cause wintertime, you get a lot of northwesterners, or you got to get the northwesterners – I get on the western side of the bay when I work. So that's the reason. You know, say why don't you move. That's the reason I don't move. But I think that's probably, you know, they just, they're looking for something that's not there. And I think it's never dawned on them. Yes, we've been wrong at times. But I don't think it's ever dawned on them that when you're dealing with all the different people we deal with every year as crew that – the most useless law they got. That's what you asked. I'm gonna give you one. Is giving the captain the ticket. I mean that makes us – if they would do like me, of all the years that I've been on the water, ever since I can remember, myself, I've never had a ticket for something myself far as oystering and crabbing, you know. Keeping a small oyster or keeping a small crab. But dredging, I've got plenty of tickets. And I've never once culled one of them oysters. It's always somebody else. But it's me that has to get that ticket. And after you get a couple of them, you got to go to court. I mean that's, I mean they run you off the water. You're trying, you can do all you can do, and you got six people there, and one of them messes up that day. You know, it's unbelievable. And we get to court, the judge don't know nothing about the water to start with. So he don't know – you cannot explain to a man -- if you get a jury trial, first thing they get is bunch of old women. Now how much water business have they done? They don't understand. So we've asked them, the man that caught the oyster, give him the ticket. You straighten him up. I mean if this guy has got to – he's got to go to court, I mean you straighten him up or get him off the water. But all you're doing is getting the captain off that done nothing. That's like me owning a fleet of cabs. I send you out here to pick up people. You get stopped for a speeding ticket, they give it to me. And I don't want – after two of them, I can lose my license, which I have lost my license before dredging because of an oyster ticket that I never touched. You know, probably the most – it probably hurts us more than anything. I mean down home, most boats have got, that's been into it, like myself, has got a lot of oyster tickets. It's not because we wanted them. But the crews you get, I think out the bay they tell me that they used to could put them in the crew's name. We didn't have that luxury. Man, it was us. I mean they went right straight and made sure every ticket was us. And we look like violators when really, most of them, you know, just don't have those tickets. You can take any other time outside of November to the end of March that don't have a ticket all these years on the bay. But you take between them that don't touch the oysters, we're back there steering, and culling hammers with a measure on it, tell them you want it right. Who knows? You ain't got time to stay up the deck. You're working around other boats, you got to stay at that wheel. I mean no way of knowing. But that's probably the most useless law. If they want to give one, give it to the man, not the captain. Give it to the man that caught the oysters.

K.F.: What's it like when DNR boards your boat?

W.B.: Well some of them treat you with respect, and others are like Gestapo. I mean got no respect for you. I mean like I say, some of them's got respect, they treat you, you know, you don't mind them aboard. But you got others, they're awful.

(OFF RECORD. TELEPHONE.)

K.F.: So DNR boards your boat. What do they usually do?

W.B.: Well it ain't as bad now, I don't believe, as it used to be because we're not catching many oysters. I mean a man coming in there with 30 bushel and four different piles, I mean it's easy to see them all. You know. But like I say, they're not quite as bad because I mean they got enough sense, some of them, that you know, realizes that if that's all you got all day, you got six or seven people wracking them up, you know you ain't got nothing. And that's only two days a week. But some places you go, they'll dig, some officers will look just as hard as they can look, and I've actually had them stop and call me over finding one small oyster. I mean it's unbelievable. I mean they think they're saving the world. They ain't doing nothing but creating a, you know, a misery for you. I mean it's unbelievable that you have got some officers that got no business being around human beings. I mean they're that bad, some of them. And but you'll run into them. You work on this water, you'll find them, or they'll find you. Now some of them pretty good people. But the good – I'm going to talk myself in trouble today, I see that. (Laughter.) But the good thing about a common officer, most times he gets a lot of rank, he gets, you know, he gets off the water, he's working in buildings. So that's the only thing we got going for us. Seems like the bigger the prick, the higher the rank. And I mean, so that's the only thing we really got going for us. I don't know. Like I say, I talk myself in a lot of trouble most times. But that's the way it is.

K.F.: Well how about jokes that the crew would play on each other? Can you remember some of the things they used to –

W.B.: Well now we used to sometimes when we're sail dredging, we used to buy eggs and chuck eggs at other boats, you know, we'd have an egg war out there some days, you know. (Laughter.) Every time you went about, you had to, you know, you had to start ducking. And that's one of the things we used to do. And sometimes they're always throwing stuff. You know, if they get close to another boat, they throw stuff, try to splash them, or they'll hide their gloves, or put holes in their gloves. Anything, you know. They'll switch them gloves. But one time there we even tied a – man had a skipjack up there, and they used to use her for a party boat, go aboard there and drink their beer and everything. And they said if they ever caught anybody, they're going to be hurt. So one night, a man passed out drunk, so we tied him up in a chair and tied him in the cabin so man find him next morning, see what he would do. He didn't do nothing. And even throwed every beer can down the cabin, you know, so he wouldn't be mad. But he didn't do nothing. But I don't know. Every – most of it's just old harmless stuff, you know. I mean I don't know. Been some funny things that has happened on the bay.

K.F.: Like?

W.B.: Well like I say, I can't give you no names or nothing like that.

K.F.: No. Just stories. I don't need names. (Laughter.)

W.B.: Well the guy got drunk up there one night, and he called his wife, and she got so mad with him, told him don't ever call back here drunk again. So next night he got drunk, then mailed her a postcard. Another time a guy, his wife dared him up to the bar to drink because he drank too much going to the bar, and she wanted him to call her every night. So he went to the bar, made believe he was on one of these ship to shores radios talking to her and telling her when you speak, you know, had the girl make believe she was the operator and everything and said when you speak you got to say out, over, and here everyone's talking to her on a regular phone and saying over. She's talking, she'd

say over. Poor girl didn't realize she was talking on a phone to him. She thought he was aboard a boat. He was sitting up to a bar the whole time. But we've had a lot of funny things that really has happened on the bay. But like I say, back there then, a lot of them done a lot of drinking. I mean to stay aboard a boat, you did do a little more drinking than you normally would've. I mean that's the only way I believe you could survived them. But one time, we thought a crew member had drowned. It snowed that night, had to come aboard. Several inches of snow on deck. Got out, everybody look around between the boat and all of the sudden the dredged started wiggling. He'd passed out in the dredge and it snowed on him. You know, stuff like that. I mean, I don't know. Tom Thompson, the one that got drowned. It tickled me. Matter of fact, one of his boys goes dredging with me too, Bo Bo. And I never will forget that Friday, Thompson get ready to go dredging Tilghman Island. His crew was hiding from him 'cause it was blowing so hard. He was in a small boat. Everybody else was tying up to go home. Thompson getting ready to go out. And his crew hid. He didn't have no crew. I never will forget that one, that one big boy was hiding in the port-a-potty down on the dock, and one of the boys, one time crew's trying to get in there. Said find you another place. Ain't enough room in here. (Laughter.) Yeah, Thompson was ready to go out and those boys were hiding on him. (Laughter.) They had one captain up there used to search for their whiskey bottles, you know, the crews. And he'd pull these searches all in their bunks and al that. But the only thing is they used to hide their whiskey bottle in his bunk. He wouldn't search his own. (Laughter.) But I don't know. A lot of funny things used to happen. I was sitting up there one night, we were spitting. Probably the funniest thing I ever saw. You know, we were sitting there, and you only had one phone down to the dock, and you'd have to sit in a line waiting for it. And while I was sitting there, this one crew bothered this one black woman up there in Kent Island. I guess she had enough of it, them hooping and hollering and bothering her. And she, that crew come by, she was shooting, she was shooting, you know, pow, pow. I mean they went right on by us. Well what she didn't know is they had guns aboard the boat. When they got – they got their gun, the woman was going as hard as she could go and they were shooting. Boom, boom, with these shotguns. (Laughter.) Run her back up to Kent Island. But like I say, it was funny. Nobody got hurt, but it was funny just to see that happen like it did. Like I say, I can't mention no names or nothing. But it's a lot more stuff that's happened on the bay. But that's the only thing keep your sanity back there then though. Only thing keep your sanity.

K.F.: How would you guys pass the evenings when you would be staying onboard the boat?

W.B.: Well you'd play cards, you know, you'd play poker. Some of the guys play rook. Or you'd be up the pool hall shooting pool. Or you bring your beer aboard, drink your beer, sing. You know. I mean you just try to stay out of trouble if you could. But I mean that's most of it.

K.F.: What would you guys sing?

W.B.: Well most the time, Christmas time was the best time. Sing Christmas carols. I mean we'd have, we'd have what you call hoot nannies. (Laughter.)

K.F.: Really?

W.B.: Yeah. You know. Hell, if anybody could sing any. And it's always, you know, with the blacks, you know most of them can sing anyway. So if you get some of them to pitch in with you, I mean you'd have a hoot nanny. But Christmas time, you know, most of them could sing them Christmas carols. It didn't sound bad. Didn't sound bad. The more you drank, the better it sounded anyway, I guess. But I mean they don't do nothing like that no more. Matter of fact, one guy was funny. One guy brought back his camera there and used to – night he'd ice up the sail and show these smokers on the sail. So you sit there and look at the smokers on the sail. I mean they'd find things to entertain their self.

K.F.: So the whole fleet could watch those on the sails –

W.B.: Oh, yeah. The whole fleet. The whole island if they rolled by, you seen these smokers on the sail. (Laughter.) I mean you had to entertain yourself. And blow days, you know, blowing days we didn't always come home. I mean a lot of times, you were up there, you know, and you'd have some of them would shuck oysters, you know. And they'd have – they'd cook enough oyster stew for the whole fleet up there. I mean they'd come, you got to try this. This the way momma used to make it, you know. And that's how it was. It was like a small village, you know. You always – one took care of the other. I mean you're away from home. I mean if something happened, I mean you were together regardless. You might compete for the oysters the days, but you were together when you got in. I mean if something happened, one looked out for the other. You had to.

K.F.: Now somebody told me that hunting for the oysters was kind of like a game.

W.B.: Well to them. To me, it never was. To me, you know, to me it was a living. You know. I didn't make no game out of it. If I had oysters, I would call people to them. I didn't try to just – I don't guess, I guess that's my trouble. I never was a me person. I mean if I had oysters and it was a nice – I knew this man, he was within, you know, a distance of me, I'd call him over. Say look, I'm on a good lead. Come on. Now that don't happen. A lot of people wouldn't call you on them if you're starving to death. But that's always been a hang-up I've always had 'cause I thought that that's the reason I always could hit right smart oysters 'cause I always shared. It seemed like I was always lucky on that because I always hit oysters because I always shared. Where it seemed like some people dredged all their life, never had an oyster on – people call them on. It's just funny the way that works out. But like I say, some people I've actually called would never let you know they're on an oyster. I mean they would let you go in with neither one, and they go in with a deck full. They would never tell you even though you've called them before. But that's not – I guess it's a gene thing. It's not in their genes to do what's right. But no, to me, it wasn't a game. I mean I always – well, it wasn't the captain so much as the crew. You know, I would call them over because of the crew. I knew the crew needed to make money. Most of them poor. I've been there and I'm still there. So, you know, and God put them there for everybody. But some people think they just put them there for their self. So to them, it might've been a game, but that sounds like somebody that never called nobody there. They tried to hide them. I never did. That's the only time I would talk on the radio, 'cause – I'd say come on over, help me catch them. Sometimes, you know, I could've had a hell of a lot bigger day, but I can lay down sleep at night still. I mean that's a hard job to look at a man when you come in, you

got a deck load, and that man was only a half mile away from you, you didn't call him. And he ain't caught it. So that's the way I look at it. Everybody's different. You running out of questions?

K.F.: Well actually, I just had one in my head, and now it's gone.

W.B.: Must not've been important.

K.F.: I guess not. Well – oh, I know. A lot of the guys up at Tilghman are turning their skipjacks into sort of pleasure cruise boats in the summertime. Is anybody doing that down here?

W.B.: No, not yet. Now I did have an offer to do it a few years ago with a lady that was running Summer's Cove Marina wanted me to take sailing parties out of there. But our boats aren't fixed up like theirs either. I mean their boats are fixed up, and plus they've got St. Michaels, you know, a big tourist place to draw them people. I mean and plus, you know, somebody like Eddie got started anyway because the state was letting him carry these kids out and paying him so much, he got to meet a lot of people. I mean you start from scratch like we would. So we don't have state sending us a foundation or nothing like that that carries people out. I mean if you got to start from scratch, it's a big uphill job. But if you can, you know, if you got a contract to carry so many, you'll meet a lot of people and that's how that works. But eventually, I expect we'll probably have some, maybe. I don't know. I don't know who it would be. But look like to me it would work – it wouldn't work down home. You'd have to be in Summer's Cove down Crisfield 'cause they do get the tourist people. So I don't know how that would work out. But like I say, that's a different setup. I mean a lot of them are handed it where down home, we're not. We'd have to make it work. I mean so I don't know. Most of us, we just – we're either fishing, or crabbing or doing something, you know.

K.F.: So you do charter fishing in the summertime?

W.B.: Yeah.

K.F.: How did you get into that?

W.B.: Well because I like crabbing. You know, well actually, I used to oyster year round. I got my own beds, and when disease came and killed not only the public rocks, it killed the private rocks. So I got wiped out twice. You know. Then I didn't do nothing but just oyster. Didn't – and so when oysters died, I had to go to something else, I went back crabbing, you know. I grewed up doing it. So I went back crabbing. And crabbing up this area has been killed by bank traps. See when – this is the only – I think it's the only county now that lets you bank trap. And it has killed trot lining in this area. I mean we used to go out here and catch a lot of crabs, and then they started putting bank traps up here. And you could see where the end was coming. And before the end came, I went back to fishing 'cause I done that 30 years ago too. I got my license over 30 years ago and I was carrying fishing parties, so I said now's a good time to get back into it before this collapses. And it's just about collapsed down here far as crabbing. But like I say, the state, the state will help you kill yourself. You got politicians count votes. I mean they'll put in rules and regulations. Anything to kill you long as you'll vote for him next time. It's the damndest thing I ever seen. I mean you'll let three bank trappers kill 20 watermen that trot lines. I mean it don't even make good sense. But and that's the same thing as scraping. Scraping's a thing of the past. I remember when I was up northeast cove with daddy. Mornings you'd have several hundred crabbing boats, you know, and they'd all be

in there together from Smith Island, Crisfield, fair amount from down home. I mean boats there. You walk across the cove on them. Now crabbing is a thing of the past, scraping. No more scrapers 'cause they let, they let the crab pots get out of hand, really, and the state don't know what to do about it. You know, they're going to say it's over-harvesting. Of course, the watermen gonna tell them it's more crabs than they've ever seen in their life. Because, I mean, you got – one side's got to really lie harder than the other. That's what it amounts to. And all they got to do is enforce the regulations they got, the state believes in more regulations. All they got to do is enforce what they got. That'll take care of it. But they won't do it. I mean you got, right now, you got people with a license for 900 pots. They probably got 3,000. And they're overboard. If they'd enforce that, they'd find out, they'd be okay crabbing. But you can take one or two in a community that do that, that forces the other ones to do what he's got to do. They bust the market. So if you can get him down to his regulation, the others will follow suit, and crabbing will be perfect again. Don't worry about crabs. It would be unbelievable. But the state, you know like I say, the committees, they talk – like the white paper – committees and all that kind of stuff, they only put people on their like their self that agree with them. That's all. They don't want nobody controversial that don't see it like they see it. You know. I don't know, I get myself in a lot of trouble by talking. You know, I can't lie. The truth has got to come out, and I tell it just the way I see it, you know, just the way I see it is the way I tell it. That way if I tell it again, I could re-tell the same story. (Laughter.) If you lie, you got to remember which lie you told.

K.F.: True, true. Well tell me about having your own beds. I haven't heard about anybody having that. What is – how does that work?

W.B.: Well when I came down here – see, when I came down Mount Vernon, you know, I'm originally from down home, but when I got married, she wanted me to go down there, so I had to come to her, and I've been here ever since. That's how I wound up here, which has been a great place, you know. I've never regretted ever coming here. Nice people, nice place, a quiet community, good place to raise kids. But to be a watermen, wasn't no watermen here. See, I was the only full-time waterman. We had one guy that done some hand tonging up here, you know, in the wintertime, but I was the only one really, I was patent tonging out here in the wintertime. And in the summertime, I'd go down Wenona, I'd crab and everything and take out fishing parties, whatever. But I want to stay in this harbor. And a lot of these people that had the farms and retired people had all this oyster ground. I mean watermen, but they had the oyster ground. So I went around and started rounding up what I could. But you're only allowed 30 acres, you know, your name – like a lot of the oyster houses, they own all the oyster ground, or they own most of it, both in Nanticoke and over here, but they put it in everybody's name 'cause you only have 30 acres in your name, but like they have it in their mother's name, their wife's name, children's name, dead people's name. Anybody's name. And that's how I accumulate a lot, just keep putting in different people's name. You know. And it was great. Then, boom. Bottom fell out. It's just one of them deals where I've got an oyster ground now that's just laying dormant every year. If it ever comes back, be great. I don't know whether I'll fish or not, 'cause I love oystering. But that's the reason, you know, on the water, if you're going to survive, you've got to adapt. You've got to change. And thank God daddy taught me everything I need to know on the water, you

know. I can change. I don't have to go into another business scared that I can't do it because I've done it. I grew up doing different things. So that's one thing that I'm tickled to death about daddy because, you know, scraping. I don't have no problem with that, or trot lining, or anything on this water, dredging, hand tonging, patent tonging. 'Cause I've been there with him, I know I can do it all and I've done it all. So I can change from one route to another overnight. But like I say, oyster bed, well I don't know, state, see it's a lot of pollution. That's what's killing the oysters. I mean they blame a lot MSX and dermo, but when you don't have no spats set, you ain't got nothing there to kill, really. I mean most of the problem is coming out of these rivers, you know. You take up here in Salisbury. They're polluting hard as they can pollute. And further down here – here it's closed because of pollution. Now the state will tell you it's because of muskrat. Hell, they don't even have no muskrat there 'cause they can't find enough of them. They want to pollute – you know, they tell you that the water quality is better now what it was 20 year ago. Twenty year ago, it was open, and it's been closed ever since. That water quality is not as good as it was 20 year ago. Now you got a different problem. I mean nothing, way back there when I first bought them grounds, I could go there the first day, and it was very easy for me to catch 50 bushels by myself, oysters. And I would do it, day after day different, every hill I went to, I could catch 50 bushel. And when I got around 20, I would quit working. Now I go there, you know how many I catch for a year? I went there this year and caught two bushel all day long. That's it. Last year, I caught a third of a bushel. Shoved them up, give them to the neighbors. But that's it. I got a boat down here that's just used for that. And every year, I'll railway her, and I'll bring her up here and try, then I tie her up for the rest of the year. One of these years, it's going to come back. I don't know. But it wasn't dermo and MSX killing that. It's no – I mean I go out there, you dump nothing but clean shells. Used to be it would – shells – spats, baby oysters. And we've got some good rocks up here that they just don't hit because it's chemicals, it's got to be chemicals. I mean why is it that used to have a set and all the sudden you don't have it? Something's killing them before they ever get out the larvae stage. And you can sit there and try to tell the state that's what's hurting the whole State of Maryland. I mean we do have dermo and MSX down home in the sound. I mean a lot of that will happen, but a lot of them dying because we do have a big set every year. But you take up the head of the bay, you never have no set. The oysters live. Only – the whole Somerset County, most years, is all that you'll get in the State of Maryland. They take this seed out of Somerset County, because we do have a set, and carry it up the head of the bay. And that is what the whole oyster industry is living off of most the time is what comes from out of here. And we do have a big set most years. But if they could ever have a set up there, but they had the same problem we had these rivers. It's so much chemicals being pumped in, they never have a set. Nice clean shells, don't ever have a set. That ought to be telling them something. Something wrong with that water quality. They'll live. If they could ever have a set, they'd be okay. But the state – well when that disease first hit last time, the state really was running most rivers. I mean that disease was limited to this bay and stuff. And most rivers was too free. We were free out here. This oyster ground out front here that I was working on, I could make a living off of it, but I couldn't in – because the disease had come but so far up. And that summer, they took all these oysters and run them in all these rivers, and all these oysters had MSX and

dermo in it. And they started the pollution from up the head of the river and worked their way down, and they destroyed most rivers in the State of Maryland, Maryland done it itself. But they've learned since then that you don't do it, but it's too late. 'Cause I knew they were going to do it here. Boy that was working with me, I said now these are going to die. I said they brought this mess of dermo and MSX up here, something we didn't have, but we got it now because they brought all this seed up here that kill everything. And they done it just about every river in the State of Maryland.

K.F.: Now what did you guys do when dermo and MSX really made the oysters –

W.B.: Keep –

K.F.: Was it worse than now?

W.B.: Well one year, well this year was a bad year, it really was. Because we didn't have nothing up the bay to catch. I don't know. They didn't plant nothing, and it was a bad year. Now one year I can remember in Cambridge, the worst year I ever saw, I can't remember what year it was 'cause they blend together, but I swear 20 bushels – and then we couldn't sell them. We were catching 20 bushels, and the man we're putting out to in Cambridge told us that he had to have nothing but Howe's Point. I mean Howe's Point's on the sail dredging rock. So we'd have to go on power days to wait for a little breeze to come so we could – you know, but you couldn't catch nothing with power anyway.

Power, if it's slick cam on a Monday, we're out of a job. So we had to work on Howe's Point every day, five days a week, waiting for a little puff of air to try to catch 20 bushels if we could 'cause the man wouldn't buy them nowhere else. I never will forget that.

K.F.: Now what does it mean when it's a sail rock?

W.B.: Means you can't use power. Can't power dredge it.

K.F.: Why not?

W.B.: They set it aside just for sails.

K.F.: Oh.

W.B.: Just for sails.

K.F.: So certain beds are –

(END TAPE 175.1)

(BEGIN TAPE 175.2 – SIDE A)

K.F.: -- and especially if there are some beds that used to be around and now just are no longer in existence.

W.B.: Yeah. Well that's like Love Point. See when I was with – that's before they let us in the Choptank, you know, when they changed the county lines?

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

W.B.: See the boats down home, they've always, they've always had an uphill battle, really, because the watermen down home, see when I was a boy, we've always had MSX ever since I've been little. People in the bay has not seen MSX till lately. I mean they didn't know what it was. I mean they had plenty of oysters. People down home didn't. And when I was a boy, like one time I took off from school, went up the Potomac with daddy. Your watermen worked fine – the county waters or the bay. Now the skipjacks were in the bay. And the hand tongs could go in the Potomac. See, that was co-owned by Maryland and Virginia. So most of the hand – all the people down home either were working on skipjacks in the bay, or working up Potomac River hand tonging. Didn't have nowhere else to go. And that's the reason a lot of these skipjacks really got

deteriorated. I mean you pound that bay day in and day out like they had to do down home where like Tilghman Island boats and Cambridge boats just sat right in the Choptank, protected waters, and had all the oysters they want. And people down home had to pound that bay. But when they got the county waters changed that you could go in all the counties, that made it better for people down home. You know, then they could start going where they could go in protected waters. And that's the reason they've had so many of these different stories that they could tell, chances are, and a lot of Tilghman Islanders couldn't tell. I mean that's like the bad ice that daddy and them got into trying to get from Love Point down to Rock Hall. They're confined to the bay where none of the Tilghman Island boats was ever in that or Cambridge boats because they had oysters. People down home didn't have them. They had, they were confined to that bay, always storms, always rough weather. And it just, it was just two different worlds, what it amounted to. But I don't even – what was the question now? (Laughter.)

K.F.: Beds that no longer exist.

W.B.: Oh, well I started off with Love Point. See, when I first started with daddy, that's where we were tied up, Love Point. And we worked there the whole year. You know, you go across Sandy Point some, which now we're not allowed, you know, where we used to dredge. That's taken away from us. And then we used to work all from the Bay Bridge all the way up there to Love Point. Now you get two days there. Then we worked a whole year. All them shells are gone. Now they blame it on manoars I don't know. You know, but they blame it on manoars, you know, chewing them up, but you know, I don't know. I didn't see it, I don't know. So I just go along with what they say. I can't dispute them, and I can't confirm it. So I don't know unless they can't shore and don't have the shells no more. Used to have you could always work there. You know, but like I say, I don't know what happened to the beds. I know if it's sand involved, sand will roll over things. And like I say, I don't know if the manoars did dig them up, or if they didn't, cover them up. I don't know. I wasn't there to see it. All I know is they disappeared. But I know by having my own beds what sand will do. I mean sand can, sand will move and roll over. If you don't work beds for a certain amount of time and they get a skim of mud on it, I mean you'll lose it that way. It's a lot of beds that's gone. But that's another thing the state could do, I think. You know, a lot of oystermen don't like manoars. They blame them for destroy – but I believe they could work to help the oystermen. There's a lot of places that we got oysters left that are sunk that these manoars could bring back on top. I mean 'cause they could dig underneath of them, get them back on top. They could make the money and just limit them. Let them work a certain place for three weeks or something like that, then move them, you know. Never let them dig again. But they could be making the money and bring the oyster rocks back. But I, you know, you've got to convince them oystermen that. I mean they're just dead up against of them. I've never manoared, but I could see where they could really help the oyster business somewhat, and I could see where they could destroy it also, you know, let them sneak in on your rocks. So I don't know. Like I say, Love Point was the place we always worked, and they're not there anymore. They're not there. And along Kent shore, they're just not there. So I don't know what's destroyed them. I know Sandy Point, we used to – see, we've lost a lot of rocks, dredgers have. I mean places that we used to work, we can't work no more. I mean it's –

K.F.: Is it always because the oysters are gone from that place, or are there other reasons?

W.B.: Well I don't know. They take it away from you, let somebody else work it. I mean so I don't know. I know it's not many of us, but you hate to lose anything. And you get groups working against you. I mean like down home. I mean they got a thing called power dredging now. A lot of patent tongs switch over to power dredging. And they're pretty strong. I mean they got their own representative here. He'll pass anything for them. He don't care what it destroys or who it hurts. And they'll go in there, and they're tight-lipped. I mean when they go to do something to you, you don't hear a word about it until it's over. It's a done deal. I mean they could be your friends you grew up with. I mean people you're related to. You don't hear a peep until it's too late. You know, the dredgers don't have nobody looking out for them now. And I guess if I didn't dredge, I'd be just like them. You know. You know, I ain't too sure that I would try to stop it. So, you know, I don't hold it against them. But I know if we lose the Tangier Sound, it ain't no need to have a skipjack. She's gone. And they tried to get that this year on us. I mean if we lose it, I mean that's it for us. But thank God, they didn't get the bill in soon enough, so they couldn't introduce it. But you know it's coming again this year that we got to have somebody out there to kill that bill before it ever gets to the floor. I don't know. I don't know what it is. I don't – I think oysters are going to be a thing of the past, really.

K.F.: How long do you think it'll be before it is –

W.B.: Well see, the state, the state – they waste a lot of money. I know they're trying. It ain't that they ain't trying. But they're like a chicken with its head cut off. I mean they're running in circles. They got people out here that's ahead of things that should be taking orders instead of giving orders. And, you know, I think the woman that's the head of the Department of Natural Resources now, that Taylor woman is a very good woman. I think, you know, sometimes she might be ill-advised, but I think the woman tries to do what's right. I mean the first one I've ever – I've never met the woman, but what I've seen, I've got more respect for her than what we have had there. I mean some of them we used to have there, I swear, you know, they were nothing. But I think this woman, if she was, you know, she'll weigh the evidence. But she seemed like to me she's probably the best we've had there for a right good while. A lot of watermen don't like her, but I believe give her a chance if you could talk to her. Don't lie to her, don't bullshit her. Tell her the truth and let her – she'll sort it out, or she wouldn't have that job.

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

W.B.: But I'll tell you, it's some people that do things the old ways, you know. Just like I told one of the guys that's head of planting. I said every year, see every year, they'll plant a certain amount of rocks out the bay. Everything mostly goes up the bay now. And I told them. I said every year, I said you go with the same Loran marks. Like –

K.F.: You want this one?

W.B.: That's just to give you – all right, these are three different areas. And maybe the rocks are like this. They run like this, or run like this. You know, they have shells. I said every year, you're going to take your Loran marks, you go here, here, here, here, you put your seed. Every year. I said every year, you do the same thing. You put it the same exact place. I said now the hills run clean down here. I said everything that you plant

there in the spring covers up what was there left from last year, you know, 'cause oysters grow – they can tell you what they want, but oysters grow all year. I mean they say summertime. That's shit. Oysters always growing 'cause we can go to an oyster in say November. And he ain't big enough. But we can go back there in March, he's legal. So he's grewed that winter, you know. But I told him. I said every year, you do the same thing. You'll take a 20-acre piece, and you'll load her right up about a foot deep and put all the spats you can put on her. I said next year, you go back and do the same thing. I said them oysters just barely got time to make three inches. And a lot of these, you go back next year, you're covering up everything that would be about four or five inches. You do it every year. I said instead, you take these oysters and scattering them, instead of putting them a foot deep, scatter them. Take them and put them on maybe 100 acres. Instead of 10 acres, put them on 100 acres. I said every oyster's got a better chance of living. I've done it out here. You know, I can see for myself what it does. I said it'll grow faster. They won't die. I said what you put on top, the first couple inches will live. The next 10 inches die. I said so you're wasting all them. I said oysters ain't going to, they're not going to live to get any feed. I said but if you scatter them, but see, patent tongers want them that way. They want them so they can stay in one place and pound, you know. They don't have to move, where a dredger is moving all the time. I said but next year, if you plant here, if you're going to do it the way you're doing it, move your post over here the next time. Leave them there. What small ones there, I said they'll be real big oysters. You can start here – go in here. You know, I said just keep planting your shells, seed on different shells. I said, eventually, we can build this up. Every year, same damn thing. You plant right on top of each other. You kill what's already there. Nothing. And they do it. They – each year, they still do the same thing every year because that's the way it's always been done. You know, the beginning of the end, what it amounts to. I mean they're not going to change, but it's nothing you can tell them. Nothing you can tell them. They know it all. I mean they've got college degrees. We ain't nothing but poor old dumb watermen. We're out there every day. We see it. But you know, we see things that they couldn't possibly see sitting to a table.

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

W.B.: And like I say, where I've oystered year-round, I guess I've noticed a lot of things that a lot of people don't notice.

K.F.: Like what?

W.B.: Well like down home this year, a lot of them would probably notice it if they're oystering, if they do as much traveling. That's like Langfellow Shells down home. The only place that we could find a legal-size oyster this year was on Langfellow Shells. Everywhere you went Langfellow Shells, they're legal oysters. Plus toad eggs for – everything down home. About the only place the toad eggs haven't hit, Langfellow Shells. And I told them this year, I said now that might be something for you to check into. Why is it that these Langfellow Shells got the legal oysters, and all around it don't? Why Langfellow Shells toad eggs don't hit them but they'll hit everything else? It must be something. It's something different, that you need to find out why. Maybe you can solve the problem right there. If the whole sound was like the Langfellow Shells, we could've made a living down there without any trouble. I mean it might be something into it that they're – I don't know what's different about it. But it's there. So, you know,

you take your Lorans, you punch in every Langfellow Shell, and you know you'll make a day's work there. But all around it, great big hill. I mean it's unbelievable. You can take 10 acres –

K.F.: You can draw on that.

W.B.: You take 10 acres, and it can be just like this, a great big rock, right in the middle, it'll be 10 acres Langfellow Shells, and that'll be the only thing that's open. Everything else around it will be covered up with toad eggs. This is the only place that you can make a day's work, right where them Langfellow Shells. I said, you know, that's something that needs to be checked into. I don't know.

K.F.: And it's covered up with what?

W.B.: Blisters.

K.F.: Blisters.

W.B.: We call them toad eggs. State calls them blisters.

K.F.: Okay.

W.B.: I mean they can't be toad eggs. 'Cause Lord knows, you'd be swarmed with toads.

K.F.: Yeah. (Laughter.)

W.B.: But that's what we call them, toad eggs.

K.F.: Okay.

W.B.: But I don't know. You know, I think they need, you know, change their thinking a little bit. I still think it's a lot of chemicals got a lot of trouble. I ain't too sure, you know. You know, they come down here, just like one time I told them, I said if it was me, I honestly believe that I could figure out why certain places didn't catch. I said, you know, I said I can't see where that would be a big problem. If you've got a scientist that knows anything, I mean if he can mix anything together, I believe I could really find out why. I said but I mean if this place, say right here, produces oysters, to me, you know, like down home, it will produce an oyster. I think I would take a water sample, you know, I'd find out everything that is in that water. And then I'd go up the head of the bay. And there where they'll live, and I would take water samples there. And I'd find out everything that was in that water. And I'd find out what that was lacking up there because, you know, why oysters would produce, and I'd find out what this one's got that's killing them. You know. I mean, you know, look like to me that a scientist, I mean if they could walk on the moon, you can't figure out about an oyster? I mean something wrong. And they don't want to know. Just like right out here this pollution that we got, a lot of it's Salisbury, you know, and a lot of it's farmers. And I told a woman that was head of the EPA, I said, you know, wasn't like this – open – only place we got oysters. I think only reason we got fewer there is because of the farmers. The pollution that they're doing with the cows, I mean it's really feeding the oysters. And I mean if they do away with them, we wouldn't have any of the oyster. I know that. Because we don't have none nowhere else. This is the only place produce oysters right out front here, and it – they're feeding. They're not getting the feed everywhere else. Like I told her, I said if I couldn't figure it out, something would be wrong. I told a woman, she tried to say it's on muskrats. Tell you who the woman was. Brohan. You might know her. Do you know the Brohan woman?

K.F.: No. Huh-uh (negative).

W.B.: I've never met her, but they've always got an excuse up there for why things are the way they are.

K.F.: How would muskrats affect oysters? Eat them?

W.B.: No. The e-coli. So she says – I said, woman, I said it's cattle. I said we got several people up here that got their cattle right under water, and they got these ditches cut right into the water where they waded in there. Even low tide, they'll wade out in the river. I said that's what's polluting. I mean e-coli coming from there. I said the other part, the killing part is coming from Salisbury, from so many chemicals. She said well, we think it's muskrat. I said muskrat? I said people ain't eating muskrat anymore because they can't catch them. Ain't even enough muskrat to even justify going. I said how in the hell can it be a muskrat? She said well, it might be deer. I said we got more deer in Manai, and that don't have no seed problem. That's not polluted. I said that's just got chemicals killing it. It's more muskrats back here than it is over here. I said, I said if the farmers got all these cattle, I said 500 head of cattle walked along that beach, she called me up – her and her husband rode up here in a boat like I've never seen a cattle. I said you couldn't find one in Texas if you can't find one along this river. I said you ain't looking. I ain't talked to her since. I mean, you know, everybody knows but them. And you tell them. Well we used to have a joke down here that every time the EPA shows up to take water samples, it would be stormy and rainy. Every time. Why did they never take one, we thought that they would bring the rain and storm with them. Come to find out that they came down here to take the water samples because they couldn't get in Ocean City, you know. They had to save the pretty weather for them, and the nasty weather for these rivers. So how in the hell is the river ever going to show anything besides storm and rain?

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

W.B.: I mean that's – you can tell them, you know. Take your sample like you do everywhere else. Just don't wait for when no – everything's bad. But that's one thing we got to work out. See a lot of – they do things the same old way. They'll do something for 25, 30 years, be good enough to keep them in their job, good enough to keep them retired. The next person training them, they'll do it the same exact way. And you just don't have nobody doing it out there, and the people that's in charge are misinformed. I mean this is the way this man done it 20 years ago. I mean it's time to change. I mean you can see 20 years ago it didn't work. They need to change. I don't see a change in effect, you know. I really don't.

K.F.: So how many skipjacks do you think will go out this fall?

W.B.: Well it'll be the same three down home, 'cause Art – I don't know whether Art will make it off the railway this year or not. They're going to start rebuilding. But I think, knowing Art, Art's a survivor. I mean he's a survivor. They say he ain't going to be ready. If they don't tear his boat all to pieces, Art will be dredging coming this fall, believe me. Like I said, the man – he missed his calling. He should've been an inventor. Art don't care. He'll try anything once, you know. He tickles me. I mean he's the kind of person, he'll figure stuff out. It might not work, but he'll try it just to see if it does. Yup. He's an inventor. He just missed his calling, that's all. He became an oysterman when he should've been inventing. If he was born anywhere else but here, he'd be sitting into a lab. (Laughter.)

K.F.: Well is there anything you want to add on this?

W.B.: No. I've said enough.

K.F.: All right.

W.B.: I've said enough keep me in trouble.

(END OF INTERVIEW.)