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Interview Log

Interviewee: Robert Harrison

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Comments:

BEGIN SIDE A

K.F.: Okay.

R.H.: He was up in the bow of the boat, right up talking to them, you know. We finally got the boat off, and I heard one of them girls say my, that fellow's got a nice tan. He said shhhh, he's black. He told her. I got him ashore, I told him, I said you sucker, I'll get you, tell them women I'm black. Well, we used to have some good times. Yeah, we really had some good times. Had some bad times, but we had a lot of good times along with it. Especially dealing with the officers their selves, you know, the ones that I work with.

K.F.: Is Weldon (phonetic) still around?

R.H.: No, Weldon's been gone for quite a few years. He died. He retired, and he moved to St. Michaels. And he died after that, but Weldon Bridges was his name. He was quite a character. I don't know of anybody didn't like him, tell you the truth. Even working with him, I don't know anybody didn't like him. He was just a jokester. Anyway he could get one on you, he'd do it. He would do it.

K.F.: Well his comment brings up a question. Were there any black DNR marine police?

R.H.: Not when I was on there. To my knowledge, I don't think so. Not to my knowledge, it wasn't. It wasn't long after I left there, or it may have been before I left. I can't really remember. But they do have several black marine police now. Yeah. But I don't think it was. Not while I was there. If it was, I never saw one.

K.F.: Okay. And let's see, any other stories you want to share or information we should know?

R.H.: No, not really. I guess the DNR is the law enforcement outfit, they do the best they can. You get involved with a political outfit, and that's what it is. They try to claim they're not, but they are. They always were, and they always will be. When you're fooling with politics, which politics runs that outfit really, in my opinion, it is strictly my opinion. (Laughter.)

K.F.: Politics, do you mean the governor, or the delegates or -

R.H.: The whole outfit, yeah, yeah. But other than that, I guess they do the best they can. I don't agree with a lot of their regulations and stuff they've made lately. And I'm sure, I know the watermen don't because you hear about that all the time, you know. It seems like they're always, the one's gonna suffer is the watermen. They're trying to make things better, but I wonder if they really are. Talk about, you know, cutting December off crabbing. Well, number one, I don't see where that's going to hurt anybody around here. Number one, they don't crab in December. It's too cold. Maybe down the bay somewhere I don't know about. But they don't have crab pots in the water in December around here, no crabbing. Golly, they're all oystering then, you know. So if they cut it off, what's it going to hurt? That part I can agree with 'cause I don't think it's gonna hurt anybody to start with. I don't know right offhand. Can't think of some of the stuff they've come up with, but it don't make no difference. They're gonna do it. Don't make no difference. You can have all the hearings you want. If they've made up their mind they're going to do it, they're going to do it. They always did, they always will. And that's that. (Laughter.)

K.F.: Is there anybody else that we should talk to? Some of these folks that you mentioned. I don't know, is Herman George still around?

R.H.: No, Herman died, yeah. All these, all these officers are - I'm the only one left out of the whole bunch, other than Larrimore on Tilghman.

K.F.: So he's still there.

R.H.: Sergeant Larrimore, yeah, he's still there. Yeah, he's still there. He still lives down Bar Neck. Well, I mean I've worked with Jones for a while. But other than Soffin (phonetic) him and Larrimore would be the only three I know that I've worked with that are, I mean that are in the immediate area. I've worked with all the ones that are, you know, that are retired that live in other areas. But as far as this immediate area, that's about it.

K.F.: Okay.

R.H.: They used to have a pretty good turnover in that outfit. I don't know how they do nowadays. Of course, I'm sure the money's a lot better nowadays than it was then.

K.F.: Yeah, but I heard that they have a limit on - they're limiting folks on how much they can go out on the water, and it's one thing that some people -

R.H.: Well don't they have them restricted to eight-hour days now? Isn't that about the way they run?

K.F.: Yeah, eight-hour days and -

R.H.: That's an awful way to run a law-enforcement outfit. They started that before I ever left there. But see, there's three head of us at Tilghman at the time. It was Armand George, myself, well Weldon wasn't - well, Bud, he was there, and Weldon was over in Neavitt. We worked shifts to cover it from way before dawn until way after dark. Bud, he would usually come on around 4:30, 5:00, and he would go out with the dredgers and, you know, follow them out and make sure they were all settled and everything. And he'd work so many hours. Weldon, I think he come on at 8. He was on the shore until Bud got back, you know, 8 to 4. I came on at 10, and I stayed there until it was over with. We kept it covered. And we was only working our eight hours too, basically. So why can't they do that today? I **mean** they have enough officers around, looks like to me. Everywhere I look, I see them (laughter).

K.F.: Yup.

R.H.: You know. Of course, things has changed. I just think the whole routine; the way of doing things has changed completely evidently. It's not like it used to be. It's not like it used to be. They don't have the judges to fool with and the amount of congress that we used to years ago, you know. Excuse me a minute.

(OFF RECORD - TELEPHONE.)

K.F.: So you guys had a lot more watermen to cover.

R.H.: Oh, yeah, yeah. We had a lot more judge boats back in them days, you know, compared to what's left now. What's left now, I'm sure they - I don't even know, but I'm sure those captains can tell you how many judge boats there are.

K.F.: Fifteen.

R.H.: About 15. You're talking back in the 60's, I suspect it was 50, easy. Maybe more than that, you know. But I know we dealt with quite a few of them wintertime, down on the bay from up Cambridge, you know. And had a lot more watermen 'cause we had more oysters here, there, Tilghman than they did other places, you know. They all flocked

in there from up the bay, you know. And we just had a lot more people to deal with than they do today. Now they might be dealing with them in a wider area today. I don't know how their assignments are, you know. Wasn't -- many officers they have in certain areas or what they do. But I guess in the long run, they probably, you know, the sport business has built up 10 times, maybe 100 times what it used to be, and the boating has built up 100 times, 1000 times what it used to be back in the 60's. And I guess that's what they have to contend with mostly in the summertime, more so than the crabber or the, you know - or the crabber, summertime. `Cause clamming, it's almost a thing of the past. I imagine it takes a lot of their times, sporting things. Just things started -

K.F.: What do you think of the charter fishing and sport fishing?

R.H.: Yeah, yeah. That's a big business. And it's not only a big business, a lot of people involved in it. A lot of people involved in that. Yeah. So I'm sure they got their hands full. We had our hands full we thought when, you know, dealing with one particular group. They got their hands full dealing with another particular group. Plus, they still have the watermen to work with too. When I was on there, and even in '77, I mean we had the sport to take care of and the boats, but it wasn't nowhere near what it is now, not the volume.

K.F.: Right.

R.H.: Volume of boats is -

K.F.: How do you check the recreational fishermen? I mean what do you have to do for them?

R.H.: We do basically the same thing. When I was on there, we just went alongside of them, checked what they had in their cool boxes. Of course, they didn't have all them regulations they got now either. Makes a lot of difference, you know. We really, other than size limit, that was about it for us. That's all we fooled with. We didn't care if they had 1 or 100, `cause it wasn't no law saying they couldn't have them, you know as long as they were legal size. And they was only 12 inches back in them days, the rockfish, you know. Now they got to be a certain length and all this. I mean way up there, what, 18 inches, 28 inches, something like that.

K.F.: Yeah, 18 inches up until a week ago. They had to be at least 18 inches. Now you can catch them smaller, but you're only allowed to catch so many.

R.H.: Yeah, two, something like that.

K.F.: Two.

R.H.: Yeah, yeah. I don't know. I don't even fool with it anymore. I have a commercial license, oyster license, but - or crabbing license I mean, sorry, but I lease that out or - don't lease it, I sign it over to Al's son. He signs a paper every three months where I let him use it, `cause he likes to do a lot of crabbing. He's a baker for Giant Food in this area in Salisbury, but he has a lot of leisure time too. He's been there a long time. And he was on the waiting list to get a license, never could get one. And when I moved over here and he found out I wasn't using it, he said how about sign that thing over to me? I do a lot of crabbing. Sure, why not. He has to fill the papers out, he has to fill his catch out, you know, just like it was me.

K.F.: Well what did you do after you left the marine police?

R.H.: I got into radio and TV repair. It was just on the island. It wasn't really that big a deal. It was more or less for extra cash. I bought a little boat, and I went crabbing, trot

lining. Then I bought a bigger boat, and just to do a little tonging for two or three years. And then I got working with a painter, and we worked for him for a couple years, Whitey and myself, and Whitey said, you know, we'd do better if we could get a license. I said, Whitey, God darn, it's been since 1949 since - I'm not used to reading and trying to remember all this mess of stuff, you know. I said what - you know, if you think you can get us jobs, I'll go get a contractor's license or at least I'll take the test for it and see if I can get one. So I went and got all the books and I read up on all of it and I went and took the test and I passed it and got the contractor's license. So we went into business doing that for about seven years, I guess. And then when I got old enough to draw social security, I started drawing social security, so I had to get out of the painting business 'cause we did some drywall, not too much of it, but every time I would sand it, I would get terrible nosebleeds, and you know, I would have a time getting them stopped. And I told Whitey; I said I just can't do this. I'm not going to do it. I said now if you want to stay in the drywall business, you do it, but I'm getting out of it. And I think he was tired of painting too, so we just dropped it, just got rid of it. So since I been over here, I just work part time, help my daughter in the restaurant. They bought a home, completely gutted it, inside and out. Weren't nothing left by the two by fours and the siding on some sides, you know. And we've been working on that for about two years. But they'll probably move in in September.

K.F.: Well, that's good.

R.H.: He's doing - got another fellow helping him now doing the drywall. I don't go out there. I stay away from it. I told him, I said now I can go out there and help you mud it, you know, put the mud on and stuff I said, but when it comes to sanding, I'm gone. Well, I don't think he was too particular about the way I done it. I was a very particular person. Very funny. So it didn't hurt my feelings one bit. Tickled me to death. It just give me a little bit more spare time, you know. (Laughter). But soon as they get that done, then we'll go out there and we'll paint it, put the kitchen cabinets in, get it ready. Going to have a nice little place there. Yeah.

K.F.: Okay.

R.H.: So I work Friday and Saturday nights, I'm scheduled to work that, dinners. And I go out there for lunches and stuff. If they're a little busy, help them, you know, help them out some. Little extra spending change. Of course, my wife, she manages it too, she does pretty good.

K.F.: Right.

R.H.: We get along pretty good.

K.F.: Okay. Well that's all I can think of to ask now. I'll probably think of 10 questions to ask on the drive back, but -

(END OF INTERVIEW.)