

Interview Log

Interviewee: Art Daniels

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BEGIN SIDE A

K.F.: Let me have you go ahead and say your name.

A.D.: Ken Arthur Daniels.

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

A.D.: I was born just two blocks from here on the main highway there.

K.F.: Okay, in Winona?

A.D.: I lived here all my life. It was just one little excursion in Baltimore when I first got married, I stayed one summer, and I decided I was going home to stay. I got tired of that. So anyhow, I've been on the water ever since making a living. The time I was about 10 or 12 years old, I started right out here in front here, what we called the lower thoroughfare, and made my, just spending change then, but I made what I made off the water.

K.F.: What were you doing in Baltimore?

A.D.: In Washington.

K.F.: In Washington.

A.D.: In Washington, I went there and I took an apprenticeship in carpentry, you know. And I was on a construction job there is what I was doing, everything on that. You know, I wound up in hardware, putting on hardware, which was just the good part of the job, but I took a course, learned a little bit about carpentry and hunting, a little bit. Build a boat if I had to.

K.F.: Right, right. What year were you born?

A.D.: Way back there.

(Laughter.)

A.D.: 1921.

K.F.: 1921. All right.

A.D.: Yup. I've had good, all these years, I've never had – I've always had good health. Never had no major sickness, no operations. I can still read the paper with no glasses.

K.F.: Wow.

A.D.: And all my so-good work, I work a man and he gets tired before I do a lot of times so, a young boy. So I've been blessed, I'll put it that way. Water's been good to me.

K.F.: What was it like growing up here in Winona?

A.D.: Greatest time in life, growing up here. Greatest place in the world to grow up because you learn it all. Well when I was young, I got into baseball. Never went high up, but I – we had a team, a real good team, and I, that's what I majored on then. But outside the water, but growing up just with all the – had plenty of time, not like now. Every moment's taken up. Back there then, you had time to visit, and time to go and sit down and tell stories and all that stuff, you know. Good nights, everybody had fun. So it was great. I'll put it that way.

K.F.: Do you remember any –

A.D.: Everybody was everybody's friend. Never had no real, real battles between each other. No gangs, stuff like that. Everybody was, they were – it was a real friendly little town. Wonderful place to grow up.

K.F.: Do you remember any of those stories that people used to tell when you were little?

A.D.: Oh, just ghost story, you know, they tell you about if you go by a certain place up the road here, called Price's Gate, and the ghosts come out at night. And I thought maybe I saw, somebody said somebody was coming by a horse, has nothing, no head, but it was all my imagination. And listening to fellow, you know, I was in my early teens, 12, 14 maybe. But all these stories about the water, they tell about the battles, that didn't happen in my day. I don't know what they did somewhere else. We never did, we never did get along too good with the DNR, we still don't, because they take every law, they take our privileges away from us. And that, but I mean the people, we like the people on it, but just, just as a little island out there, you would grow up your own man. You're free, you know. And you don't like no restrictions. And you iron out all your problems together without any major things. And just a good place to grow up. Have a high school up here, I went there to the high school. All my children graduated from the high school here. Have five children, three boys, two girls. One of my sons is a minister in Crisfield. Robert Daniels. He's with the Westland (indiscernible). And the other ones, my oldest boy, Captain Stan, he runs a party boat, and he also in the wintertime, he'll work with me on the City of Crisfield, both of them. Even the preacher comes up and goes out and his grandson comes down. So we, I was lucky enough to have a big, large family, and grandchildren. I think I've got about 23 grandchildren. So I've got 17 grandchildren and 23 great-grandchildren. And somebody's around all the time, just like the boy just left here.

K.F.: Okay. Well when did you –

A.D.: I just enjoy life. I mean you couldn't grow up in a better place. You love everything around. Went down North Carolina one time and saw a mountain, you know. I hadn't seen a mountain outside of the hills, like you're going to Baltimore and Washington, little rolling hills in Calvert County. And I seen this big mountain out there, and it just made an impression, it was so majestic. But I soon got tired of that when I got back home. I'm not a traveler. I like to stay right around home. It's all right here. I got my little schedule, went out here and listen to the birds, the fish jumping out the water. I said I've got it all right here.

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

A.D.: I started out, I was captain, the first boat I ever captained, I was 26. But I went with my father out of high school at 17, and I stayed with him 9 years. And then I decided I wanted to be a captain my own self. It was a little boat, if you remember – it was a little boat, if you remember, her name was Ida May. The National Beer Company had it, used it to sail up and down the bay, that first boat. And I went in one of the old sloops, Molly Leonard (phonetic), and I went in her about two years. And then the man had the boat I have now, two years old, and he wanted to sell it, and I bought that. I've had it ever since. Fifty years I've had it sit in Crisfield.

K.F.: Well what did you learn as a crew member on a skipjack?

A.D.: I learned all this. Every little thing about handling the sails, and how to sail a boat in the wind, and how to dredge. My father was an expert. I guess he was one of the greatest, I thought at least, I think even in the neighborhood then. And all I learned, I watched what he was doing. And I learned how – the little places oysters are. Instead of having the modern things like we got now, we'd have our hand, you know, and watch the

water, and we could tell by feeling that fine line when the dredge would come on oysters. That's how we would find them.

K.F.: And what does that feel like?

A.D.: It feels like we're grinding over glass like. That's what it was. You hit a place of oysters, that's what it'll feel like. So there's a sensation like you're grinding glass is what it'll feel like. Teeth hitting those oysters. That's about it – send that back to you. Caught a many bushel of oysters.

K.F.: Well tell me about those days.

A.D.: Well the first day I ever went out on a boat, the Molly Leonard, I caught 207 bushels right here in Tangier Sound with sails. That was with sails. And the sound was in bloom then. Had oysters everywhere in here. And the only way we could catch them too was with the dredge, with the sailboat. So that was another thing that made them, I think some of these modern rigs might be hurting the bottom because they're breaking the edges off and things like that. And a dredge cultivates. It don't, it don't dig them holes. That would be my opinion. The man doing that would say no, that's not right. But that's the way I see it. I know as soon as they started these modern operations, the oyster business started, the oysters started to die off. But right now, we have plenty of little oysters right here in Tangier Sound, if they continue to mature like they're doing.

K.F.: Yeah, well –

A.D.: If nothing happens this summer, it'll be a good oyster catch right here in Tangier Sound.

K.F.: Tell me about what it was like on board as a crew member then, 'cause you work in the winter and –

A.D.: Oh, when I started myself when we would go away for the week, we'd come home Friday night. Went with my father, sometimes we stayed two, three weeks, you know, before we come home. Of course, I didn't mind. I was a youngster, you know. At nights, we'd go looking for the girls up around these little towns. We used to go in Baltimore and long dock, we'd tie up in there when I first started.

K.F.: Well what was that like, tying up in Baltimore?

A.D.: I didn't like that pier there, then all them people, strange people would come down, and you had to be careful. But we just, what we'd do is just, you could go in a movie and see a movie on till midnight if you wanted to, for 10 or 15 cents. Hot dog and a cold soda for two bits. So you didn't have to have much money like you do now. But I didn't like it away from home. I never did. Even when we would go and stay like that. But then when I got the boat, I would go and stay all night, I would stay away, but we wouldn't, I would go up to this little store and get our supplies and stuff like that, get the gas. But I'd stay aboard. Either the next boat alongside of it, play checkers or something like that. And then I'd listen to the radio. And from the time you worked from sun to sun, you'd be tired enough, you'd go to sleep early enough.

K.F.: Ho cold would it get onboard?

A.D.: I longed for home them, and I – I wanted to be home. When I could work here, it was great. What did you say now?

K.F.: Well I was wondering if you can describe what it was like being that cold in the wintertime and working.

A.D.: Oh, that didn't bother us. We had what were called two boys, we call 'em, felt boots. Had the boots with felt in them. And the oil skin, like you see, and we'd put those on. And hoods. We didn't get cold. The only problem sometimes if you would, you'd have to keep moving around, your feet would get cold. But your hands would never get cold. Had the rubber gloves when I started. Now before me when they had to use cotton gloves, they'd wear out two or three pair a day, it was bad on their hands and everything. I remember one year, I would go with my father on Saturdays, you know, come in and worked on Saturdays then. And the men with those gloves, they'd wear out. And one year, the red (indiscernible), had some kind of acid and got in those, on their hands like that, and it broke their hands up. I don't know what was into it. But I know this, that's what we used to clean the boat up with. We'd take that and wash with that, and that would make it clean the paint, clean it. Some kind of acid.

K.F.: What about food onboard?

A.D.: Oh, yeah. I was lucky enough, had a good cook.

K.F.: Yeah? Who was that?

A.D.: He just loved to cook. His name was Clarence Harris (phonetic), he's dead now. He was a couple years older than me. But he went with me about 20, 30 years. In fact, when I started, just a little while after I started the boat, he came aboard with me, and he stayed there until he – he was getting older, but I noticed one Saturday that he was a little disoriented, you know. And I didn't know it, and he didn't know it either. He had sugar, and that affected his kidneys. So he had to quit. But he lived four or five years, that dialysis. But he's a great cook. Everybody talks to me now says well we'd like to have some of them meals that Little, they called him Little. He wasn't little. He was short and heavy, short and fat. Nice colored fellow. Nice man. Clarence Harris.

K.F.: What was your favorite –

A.D.: And he loved to cook. He'd cook, and then the boats you were tying up, they'd be coming aboard for bread pudding and that kind of stuff in the evenings, you know.

K.F.: So you guys would share food sometimes?

A.D.: Huh?

K.F.: You guys would share food?

A.D.: Yeah, yeah. Yeah.

K.F.: Folks that had the good cook got extra visitors?

A.D.: Yeah. I was just lucky to have that good cook aboard. He just gloried in that, in cooking food. And then he'd see the men enjoy it.

K.F.: Well what were some of your favorite things that he made?

A.D.: The bread pudding I was telling you a while ago. And he – I liked my stewed chicken more, and he'd fry it for supper sometimes. Fried oysters. We'd eat maybe once a week. He'd shuck them right there, then mix his batter and fry it for supper.

Sometimes we'd catch a rockfish – but he was a great cook. And then I had another guy, I had a, until my boys all started to go with me, I had a colored boy, wanted to go. And I had one named Elmer Young (phonetic). And he'd dredge with me. And just him and, those two, him and Clarence Harris and Druid Young (phonetic), those three, they'd dredge with me till they couldn't work no more. And Elmer was the type, you know, oh, my. I wish he was here now to tell you. You talk about stories. He would tell you all these stories. And when he'd tell you the stories, he'd put his, he'd be the character, you

know, and he could just, he could just – you'd start laughing just watching him. Yes, sir. And he made, by being so jovial like that, he made life aboard the boat was just, everybody was happy. Wasn't no grumblers aboard. Then when my boys started to get big enough, then after high school, they all went with me, dredged with me till they were married, then they got boats of their own.

K.F.: Do you remember any jokes or pranks that people used to play on each other?

A.D.: Oh, yeah. I'll tell you what we did one time. I'd go with my father here, and I had an uncle named Frank, Frank Daniels. And myself and another young boy about my age, Wilson Hobbins (phonetic), we were going away up around Annapolis and in that area to catch seed oysters for the state. Well Wilson had never been aboard the boat. So the first thing he done, he – you know where the center board is. Water in there all the time, you know. So he give him a – we used a draw bucket, you know, kept overboard, galvanized bucket. So we told him, said Arthur, that's my father's name is Arthur too, Arthur said he wants you to fill that well up while we're going up. And he left that boy bailing about an hour. And I did that to one of the – I don't know whether it's Eddie Farley (phonetic) or not. Eddie Farley came from Connecticut, and he was over Solomon's Island. I was working at Solomon's, and he wanted a job. So I took him aboard the boat that day, and he stayed with me until he bought a boat of his own, on his own. So anyhow, this boy, he did that to him. So that's why they come up to – I think you got it full enough now. And it don't move. You fill it, it maintains the same level. You throw that water in there, and it just goes right on out of the well. So anyhow, the next thing he did to him, he had his cap on, something like I got here, I'm going to tell you what I do now. I'm going to put a quarter on top your hat, and he put a funnel right in his belt there, you know. Put a funnel in his belt, and in the meantime, he had just a bucket of water there, and he said if you can drop that quarter in that funnel, that quarter is yours. I'll give it to you. And this boy, you know, he put that – he put this quarter on that, he took the bucket of water and he threw this bucket of water right in his funnel. He never will forget that, he never will forget that as long as he lives. (Laughter). But that was some of the kind of pranks they would play aboard the boat, especially when you're a rookie, a greenhorn they would call it, coming aboard. Storms too.

K.F.: Want to tell me about some of the storms?

A.D.: Well always made my way through them. I think I had, when I look back over now, I had somebody guiding it because I did some foolish things. Sometimes when you first start, you don't regard the wind, and the rain and weather and you get caught in a storm. First one I got caught into is right out here in the Sound on that old Molly Leonard. And instead of raising my sail down, you know, and trying to get the little boat down to push it on up, I had two reef on, and I started in the harbor trying to make it go down, and that northwest blowing again. I made it up there, but I never could – lost two or three of the men. Water come up to the top of the boots two or three times – got so rough, you know. But she was very able. I had two men there to the sheet, watching that, you know, when they floss it and slack that sheet off. So that was the first storm I got into. Then I got in another one up around Miller's Island (phonetic), and I got caught out in the middle of the bay, and I had to get that little boat down and try to get up under – Island, and then up in the mouth of that river up there, Bush River far up in the – forget what you call that river up there. Anyhow, there on Miller's Island. Back River, I believe

you call it, up there. And I was doing a lot of praying there, but the boat was doing good, long as I knew – had that little motor on it, and I had a little piece of sail up, had the storm sail up, and she was going the weather good. But the men started to get a little hysterical. So I had to put on a good front then. I couldn't be afraid, you know. They could read that. If I had lost my nerve, they could read that, see. Then everybody's lost. But I just – in the storm, come up around the – there, put her anchor overboard, stay there till it calms right down. So that's another storm. And I wrote a poem about the storms too.

K.F.: Do you remember it?

A.D.: I don't know whether you ever heard it.

K.F.: No.

A.D.: I know it.

K.F.: Let me hear it.

A.D.: Well I kind of, my whole experience on the water, you know – I call the poem, The Sea. Here's how it goes. The sea, it's so great; the sea, it's so strong; a man seeks its treasure all the day long. There are men with a net, men with a dredge, traps, tongs and mechanical do-dads, but the sea still provides with its bounties unknown; and it seems its mission is always give to the strong. Ah, by the sea has a side. Its voice filled with rage and has provided for men (indiscernible), Davie Jones Locker is what they say has taken another duress today. And I am a sailor. One thing I know, the sea is so great and I am so small. I learned to respect her. Long years ago, then a very young captain, I experienced my first blow. The fierce winds blew from a black northern sky. My little boat was so helpless and shy, and it tossed and it pitched and it wouldn't take sail. Soon, all of my crew was ready to wail. But I was a captain, and I couldn't be afraid. So I heaved to the helm and I went with those waves. It was like riding a bobsled down a steep grade, and each wave seemed my boat to crave, but I knew the harbor was over the rise, and behind those black clouds was a clear blue sky. So I held the helm tight and I breathed a small prayer, for I knew one was listening who controlled the land, sea and air. And I made safe the harbor, but I learned that day, the sea demands respect, and with it, we can't play. So my friends, listen, and learn this from me. Man without God cannot conquer thy sea. That's my poem.

K.F.: That is a beautiful poem.

A.D.: But I do remember one real bad storm I got into out on the Potomac River. We're up there in the mouth of St. Mary's, and we just got in with our lines around the power boat, we were putting (indiscernible) on the power boat. And I looked out on the water there, and it looked like a little fog coming, you know, but instead of fog, it was kind of a tornado making. And that struck into the boat, woooooo (indicating). That's the way it sound when it's coming, you know. And but I – in the meantime, my father-in-law, my wife's father, and my brother went down the river there. And they were lucky too. When it hit them, they were in shallow enough water, that the boat just blew on its side like, and it didn't last over 10 or 15 minutes, but when it lasted, two or three broke – they broke, one of the boats broke the mast out and pulled the pilings up to the wharf there in St. Mary's. You been to St. Mary's?

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

A.D.: And that, we were tying up at the school there, where they were letting us tie up. But that was a bad storm. In the same time, two of our boys on a tug boat right there in the mouth of the St. Mary's River, and it blew that tug over there and both of them didn't get out of the tug. They both were drowned. One of the boys lived right over here this way. Swimming's no good to you then. That boy, he could swim, he could walk right up the channel about. With this much of his body out, he could go right out the channel, swim like that, you'd think he was walking. That's the way he could do the water. But when that storm hit, he didn't make it. So I guess that's one of the worst storms I ever got into. Bad storm, I've come down to see my boat sank this year. That was a bad one. Reason the boat sank, when I worked and it was rough and the yawl boat was beating against the stern, and I didn't know it. I looked at it later, it broke, it smashed like one of the top board there, the water was coming into it.

K.F.: Let me ask you about your –

A.D.: I come the next morning –

K.F.: Sorry.

A.D.: Go ahead, go ahead. I come the next morning, saw that. One of the most distressful things that I saw. Yeah, go ahead.

K.F.: I was going to ask you about that first year as a captain. I've been asking all of the captains this, and –

A.D.: Oh, my. That was just an adventure to me. That was like going out on your first date. Yeah. My goodness. I was wild. Like I said, but I could catch a (indiscernible). I learned how to handle the boat. The old Molly T Leonard, when you put that sail up on her, a little breath of wind, she come to life. She could handle those dredges, though. A good captain catching oysters with sail depends a lot on the boat, 'cause some boats, you do what you want to them, they're just no good. They're not rigged right. And I knew how to rig it, and I knew how to carry my sail. And then when I got this boat, I had, she wasn't nothing. Molly Leonard, used to dredge all around it. But when I got it, first thing I done, I changed the rig on it all together. And the centerboard, I made that four feet longer and a little deeper. And I changed the front end of it where the pin goes in so it dropped a little forward, and that made her different, new boat out of her. She was as good as any.

K.F.: She handled better?

A.D.: She handled like a top then. Only had to breathe on that sail, and she'd start right up.

K.F.: Well your first year, how do you get a crew as a first-year captain?

A.D.: Well it was a hard job. Work wasn't like it is now. In the 1940's, it was just starting back. But I did colored folks and family like that. But all these colored boys wanted to work, and I started work. And so we all broke in together there, 'cause they're all right around my age. Clarence and Elmer, those two started with me. They were a couple years older than me. But they had experience on the water, those two did. But all them other boys, I had that young crew, first time aboard, I had to learn them everything.

K.F.: Well how do you teach them then? How do you deal with a greenhorn crew?

A.D.: Oh, you have to have great patience. You have to have patience, and you have to know how to get your message over to him, because I mean one man can drown the whole crew if he don't do his work. And a lot of time in spare time, I'd show them how

to tie the knots, you know, and like reefing the sails, and going out on the bow reefing that jib. They're the main thing. If you got a crew that you can get that sail reefed down quick, even if a storm come, you get your storm sail on and it's got to be a terrible storm. You can't go with it anyhow. So I learned them all, I knew it all myself, learned it eight years for my father. And I learned those boys. Have to even learn them how to cull the oysters and all that stuff. That's one, it was one bad thing in the law about with a dredge boat. With a dredge boat, you're the captain and you're responsible for everything goes on that boat, you know. You got six men, and a lot of them be trying to learn and show them which oysters to pick up and which should go back. And a lot of them get a little rambunctious, and you go over the pile going in, you try to get it all straightened out, but sometimes you have to – I've been rested several times just on that. I haven't been rested on one of them. Lucky in this business because I'm on my own and I know what to do. I've got a man works for me, but you can watch one man. You can't watch six. Not always. You've always got one. The way I learned how to, when they were first learning, you know, like Elmer Jones, he had children too, and they come aboard. When they start working, I'd give them a half a gallon bucket like that, a half a bushel bucket, or a crate like that, and I make them cull their oysters in that. And then I say when you get that full, you bring them back or let me know, and I'll come up here. And then I'd inspect them and just threw them back in the pile.

K.F.: So what was it like then when DNR came on with their 5 percent cup?

A.D.: That's a little cup. I never did believe it was no 5 percent. They, some of them were, especially when you were left home, some of them had the idea you didn't belong up here working anyhow. And they would be – other words, they would be disrespectful, had some – especially out of Annapolis, we'd have a couple people in the area. They would put big oysters in a cup on you. Things like that. I had one man, great big oysters like that. And when I went down – while those boys were putting the oysters in, I would eat my supper, we called it dinner, but you call it – we were eating supper, and one of the boys says you better come out here. He's not even culling. He's just throwing the oysters in the cup. So sure enough, he had his cup full. It wasn't – I looked at the oysters, I looked at them, and every one was big enough, and I said all these oysters are big enough. So I said who's the boss there? Well I called him over, and the one was head of the man that was doing it, I'm not going to mention no names because you might ring a bell with it. But anyhow, he said, he called the boss over there, and I said this man's arresting me, and look at these big oysters. I said everyone's big enough. I haven't hardly found a little, a small oyster in the whole thing. And he was from the same town, say well he's, the boy's arresting you and I can't do nothing about it. So that was one ticket I paid. And it wasn't doing anything. So that was that. You have that. It's just when you go, when we'd go in Annapolis, it's like going in a foreign country because you're Eastern Shore, see, and this was – they looked at things different. And that has to do with everything. It's how you look at the situation.

K.F.: Was that the same when you went to like St. Mary's and –

A.D.: St. Mary's wasn't that. No, that wasn't that bad because it as a different setup. We were working for the state, see, and it was different in there. And around that college, it was nice there because those head guys would come down and they'd want to know about the boats and stuff. And they were fascinated with the sailboat. But then the boys

got so the youngsters and the crew go up to the college there. And they're all girls there then. And so that, first thing I know, we're not going to be able to tie up there anymore. The boy's going up there taking over. So I could see why. I said I'm glad, in a way, I'm glad. Then we went over there to, just across the river there. They made a place for us over there to tie up. Well –

K.F.: Well now one question we've been asking people is about how much the boat cost when you bought it, and how do you figure the price of a skipjack?

A.D.: Well I don't know just what it cost to have it built. I imagine it cost 10 to 12,000 when they built it.

K.F.: And when you bought it, how much did you pay for it?

A.D.: Well I ain't going to tell you how much I paid for it. But I'll give you the truth about what it cost for to build it, about 12,000. The man in Crisfield build it. Gus Ferboy (phonetic), he's dead now. And he let me have it for real reasonable. I'll put it that way, 'cause I was working for him. I had worked for him for two or three years with the other boat. That's a little secret, what I paid for it. I don't know what everybody paid for that.

K.F.: Okay.

A.D.: Secret between me and him. He's gone so –

K.F.: Well how do you determine the price of a skipjack? I looked at the different –

A.D.: Well if you're going to determine now, you go to work and look what it cost to rebuild them and just try to fix up every year. You go, you go pay a man 30, \$40 an hour working on a skipjack, you can work a day and put one board in. I'll put it that way. Especially if you got tired out and put it back and things like that. It'll cost a fortune. I don't know what one would cost. They're supposed to spend 50,000 on the city fishery. You knew that?

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

A.D.: I don't know what he's going to be able to do. He said he's going to put a bottom. I don't know exactly. Two planks up her side or something like that. Is that what you heard? Something like that?

K.F.: Well I haven't –

A.D.: A stern and –

K.F.: Yeah, I haven't been involved in those conversations. That's, the guy who –

A.D.: I think I could think the boy that's doing it is charging too much money. I'll put it that way. I mean when you go to rebuild a boat, you should contract and you wouldn't have to worry about wages, or hours, things like that. I think he has contracted to do that much work for \$50,000 which is a lot of money, far as I'm concerned. You can do a lot with \$50,000. I know one thing. I could have the lumber to build a brand new boat for less than that. Hire one or – maybe a couple carpenters working with me, or one carpenter and a helper. I could build her in six months, new boat. What do you think about that price?

K.F.: Well –

A.D.: Does that sound like a lot of money to you?

K.F.: Actually, it sounds like too little money.

A.D.: Too little?

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

A.D.: Well now I asked another man, and he said he would do the whole thing for \$83,000, so –

K.F.: I was thinking 80 to 90.

A.D.: Yeah, 83,000, he said he would start from the keel and do the whole boat for 83,000. But the man is supposed to call me when they pull the boat up. I supposed to go up there. I got a lot of stuff I got make sure that's secure.

K.F.: But I'm sure they'll start working on her soon. I know the guy who's supposed to do all that work is supposed to –

A.D.: What did you say?

K.F.: The guy who's supposed to do all that work –

A.D.: Oh, he's a nice man, he's a nice man. Yeah.

K.F.: He's supposed to be here soon.

A.D.: And he looks like he knows what he's doing.

K.F.: Yeah. He's restored a couple other skipjacks.

A.D.: Yeah, he did (indiscernible). But if I was going to build a skipjack, now I'd put all stainless steel. Screws and bolts, nails. She's got a – got 500 pounds of stainless steel in her now. But everything I done, that's what I did it with, stainless steel. See, when you, I could've had the boat in first class shape myself. But you just do a little bit, and then try to work in the crab business in the summer.

K.F.: Well how long do you think you're going to be able to go out on the skipjacks? I know they haven't been – oysters have not been a profitable business for the last couple of years.

A.D.: Last year looked like it was going to be good to me. I did good that 70 day's work. I caught 90 some, 80 something like that. The last day I went out, I think I caught 50 something. It looked like it was going to be real profitable on the – point there with their sails. That's what I had planned on sailing, you know, a lot. I had a real good boat for catching oysters, sails. But no, how long going to be able to use the boat. It's only a miracle now with modernization, everything hydraulic, everything else. Now if you're talking about rig them and making everything hydraulic on them like that, it would cost you a lot of money. Yeah, \$100,000 worth. Start that wench and push boat diesel, all that stuff, time you got all that.

K.F.: Well where do you –

A.D.: It's a profitable business. I mean if you can go catch 100 bushels of oysters, it be \$2,000 a day. If you can get away with \$2,000 a day, you can make some money.

K.F.: Yeah.

A.D.: If you can work five days a week.

K.F.: And where do you see this oyster business going with the skipjacks? I mean there's only 13 of them left.

A.D.: I think I, the ones that been doing it, I think they'll go on until – well we could have a real bad season and that would end it right now. But it's just – the last few years, it's always been a few oysters for to catch with a skipjack. The Choptank and up the head the bay. I did good in the Choptank last two years. Last year on the Choptank, the oyster, collect every –

K.F.: Really?

A.D.: Yeah. I caught my limit several days out there. Are you familiar with the river?

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

A.D.: The Oxford light?

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

A.D.: Out there. Caught my limit two or three, about 10:00 in the morning, I was ready to go in, 150 bushels. I did that two or three days in a row there. Two power days I did it. For two weeks.

K.F.: So are you still going out under sail?

A.D.: Oh, yeah. That's what I – I love going sail. That's the beauty of it.

K.F.: So few captains are going out under sail anymore.

A.D.: Yeah, just as quiet. I love it. I guess I got so I love to sail better than I do push. Little breeze like this, she do just what – she ain't like your wife. She'll do just what you tell her. She's obedient.

(Laughter.)

A.D.: Are you married?

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

A.D.: You know what I mean then. When I say go and turn, she does it. But when he says go and turn, she says huh, what I want done, I'll do it.

(Laughter.)

A.D.: My, my. Yeah, all it would take is just one bad winter. So, but it seemed like in the Choptank and up there, the oysters hold on there, they come back again. They catch her every two or three years. I'll bet you it's 5 million bushels of oysters in the Sound, but they're only that big.

K.F.: Yeah.

A.D.: And way they did the last two catches like that, they got up to three inches, got three inches. And when you're dredging on three-inch oysters, you can't save but a three and a half, you know, because stolen back, you'll lose a quarter for them, lot of times when they're growing oysters. And then working on them out here, you go back next year and all them oysters are gone. We've had that last two times they've caught up.

K.F.: Well what was it like around her when MSX and dermo hit in the season?

A.D.: They don't know – that's just two names. They don't know what's killing oysters. If they knew, they don't even know what – they ought to say GNW, goodness knows what, 'cause they don't know what's killing them. If they know it, they're not going to, they're not letting anybody know about it. I believe it's – I'll tell you what I believe. I believe all this erosion and stuff, I believe sediment from all this erosion of the land going away.

And the – but doing that, I believe the – coming in up in these tributaries. And the salinity is not just right, 'cause I noticed up where the brackish water the last few years the oysters live there. The oysters they take from there, the same oysters they take here, take it up in that brackish water where it's another – fresh, and they live. Grow in a year, they grow big enough in a year, then we'd wait that third year around here for them.

K.F.: Well what was it like around here? I mean I know that was a difficult time when the oysters were dying off here? What happened to the –

A.D.: Well, see what people don't realize, that's been that way here all of my life. The whole time, sometimes they catch up in the last four or five years. And that's what we're hoping this time it'll do. And then boom, you go to next fall, and all of them, it's gone. Out here, they got where they catch and die like that, the oyster rocks are miles long. And

12, 14, 15 feet deep, nothing but shells. That's the way the oyster rock. And that'll start from Crisfield, go right straight on up to Nanticoke harbor there, for 15 or 16 miles. And rocks on both sides the channel out here. And when they catch, they all catch the whole way up there. And when they all die, they start dying till they get up Nanticoke, then they live better up there, that fresh water. But what do we do? We'd have to go away. The Choptank, that's reason I go to Choptank and come home every night, I can go up there and come home every night.

K.F.: So you don't tie up in Cambridge or anything?

A.D.: Yeah, tie right up there, but don't come – it takes all day long go to the Choptank.

(END SIDE A.)

(BEGIN SIDE B.)

A.D.: What time is it getting to be?

K.F.: Getting to be 5:43.

A.D.: Yes, I'm seven minutes fast. Might be a little better seat – now how about that?

K.F.: There you go.

A.D.: I had a place oysters one time up the bay, but we wasn't, we wasn't oysters. Put them on the market, we were up by what we call spatting (phonetic), we were catching seed oysters, but it wasn't seed oysters, they were just catching oysters. See that's the way the time is, here comes my daughter-in-law, and she's going to start cleaning crabs. So – well good evening.

K.F.: Hello.

SPEAKER: Am I interrupting?

K.F.: No. Hi, I'm Kelly. I'm with the Maritime Museum over in St. Michaels.

SPEAKER: I'm his daughter-in-law.

A.D.: This is the daughter-in-law, and she's coming down for to get her crabs and stuff ready for tomorrow.

SPEAKER: Just pretend like I'm not even here.

K.F.: Okay.

A.D.: No, we're going to –

SPEAKER: I'm here to clean crabs.

K.F.: Clean them. Oh.

A.D.: We're going, I got them all cleaned just about. I'll set those –

SPEAKER: That's all right, I don't want you in mine.

A.D.: No, my fingers are too heavy for them. Wraps them and freeze them.

K.F.: Uh-huh (affirmative). Now how long have you had this crab business here?

A.D.: This business? When did we build this business? Do you know, anyone? Ten years. I believe it's '91.

(Background discussion.)

A.D.: I think it was '91 we built that.

SPEAKER: No, we've been down here longer than that.

A.D.: Yeah, we were –

SPEAKER: Gosh.

A.D.: Yeah, I don't know. Oh, I bought this land 30 years ago.

SPEAKER: I expect it was 'cause I've been married 35.

A.D.: Did I have it then?

SPEAKER: Twenty-five.

A.D.: Twenty-five? Okay. Anyhow, we been here that long, but we just built this place 10 years. It might've been '81, tell you the truth. I've forgotten. We built this house.

K.F.: Yeah?

A.D.: Indeed. Grandchildren and – anybody could drive a nail. Put all this diking down our own selves just with punk, 500 some feet of that. We're hard workers, but we know how to relax when it comes time, enjoy life. The working man – what's his name, Sweet or Good? Anyhow –

K.F.: What is one of the scarier moments you've had on the –

A.D.: Scary?

K.F.: Uh-huh (affirmative). On the bay.

A.D.: I didn't have enough time to get scared, I guess. I had my little grandson. I was, I had him in – catching crabs then. We had a little boat, we had our floats off it in the water, and I was pushing it into the wharf. And I had told him, I said listen, if you fall overboard, if you fall overboard and daddy ain't looking at you, you paddle for the top of that water as fast as you can. All right. I – the boat, when I was coming in the wharf, he was sitting on the bow, then the boat hit the wharf and shook a little. But it wasn't but a minute, less than a minute, but it seemed like a lifetime. And by and by, I seen this little hand coming up there. That was a scary moment because I was already to jump that real quick. He said, first thing he said, granddaddy, I remember what you told me. Pull your hair ahead so she has plenty of room.

K.F.: Sure. Is that enough?

A.D.: You okay, B?

SPEAKER: Yeah, I'm going to work on –

A.D.: How about the fan, is that all right?

SPEAKER: That's fine.

A.D.: Yeah, that's one of the scarier moments. When I got into the storm, I knew the boat depended on the captain, and I couldn't get afraid because it would cause panic on the boat. I just did everything was in my power, and done some praying too, but to get the boat and – as you go along, you learn to respect the storm and don't go out in the storm. You say home in the storm. Stay in the harbor. And then you watch your barometer. Our greatest thing was the weather barometer. And when we'd see those lows coming, that glass coming, then I would always try to pick a place where the oysters were where I had a leeward harbor. And then when I'd see any signs of a storm, I'd always – so most times when the storm would hit, I was either in the harbor or on my way in. When we first started out, like that storm I told you a while ago, I was a little more, I learned to respect the storm. And then I think I done a lot of praying too. The good Lord always told me when to go on home. I didn't know it until later, but I can look over life and see a lot of things happened. And I got out of it because of something greater than me.

K.F.: What do you think is the most important skill for a captain to have?

A.D.: The most important?

K.F.: The most important skill for a captain to have.

A.D.: Skill?

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

A.D.: Well, they need to know how to handle the boat, and they need – well he needs to have some education. I don't know. Some of the old timers didn't have a whole lot of education, but they had, they had intuition, they knew what to do and when to do it. And even though they didn't have schooling, they had schooling in the water business. So they, I guess experience is the greatest teacher. You learn as you go along, and you need to pay attention to every little things. So when it happens next time, you're ready. I had, like if I were to be out on the water and something broke, I knew how to fix that so I could get back on, even if a motor would break down on me, I could take a screwdriver and tar tape or something like that, and I'd fix that motor so she'd run till I got in the harbor. Several times, I've had to do that. Especially with these gasoline motors. I remember one time, are you familiar with a rotor cap?

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

A.D.: All right. I was out there, and the rotor cap cracked right in two, and the motor stopped. I didn't have neither aboard. A good skill, a captain has an extra of everything aboard. That would be the best thing, but I didn't. So anyhow, and I took, I had some tar tape aboard, and I took that tar tape and run it around that little top piece out to where it broke at and I fastened that up real good. And I started that motor up and come home with it. And let me tell you the real story. I was out crabbing one day, I had about a 38 foot round stern. You know what a round stern boat is?

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

A.D.: Old round stern. And we went out crabbing that morning, and they told us the storm, well the storm hit, but it wasn't enough wind, you know, we could still work a little bit. And the motor started slowing up, and I run out of gas. Right out here on the harbor when they, when they run out of gas, the boat started drifting toward the shoal, the sandbar. And I drifted on the sandbar, probably tore the boat up. I didn't know what to do. I had my son with me. I guess I prayed. But anyhow, you wouldn't believe this unless you were right aboard the boat. I have myself and my brother-in-laws with me, Jesse Thomas and Stan and myself. He might've had one of his boys with me too. I looked down the lure there where we were drifting at, and I seen this little something red, something showed up red. And I said I don't know what that is, but I drifted down alongside that, and what do you think that was? A 5-gallon can full of gasoline. And it was an outboard motor can, one of those red outboard motor cans full of gasoline. And she drifted right down alongside of that, and I took the boat hook and reached over and hooked that and one of the boys pulled that in, and I hooked the motor to that, took a little bit, threw it in the carburetor and started her up and we come, we missed the boat going on the shoals there because we got in the harbor. And I said the good Lord has certainly been with me a lot of times, many times. I'm not a deer hunter, and I had a little experience with a deer out here on the water too.

K.F.: Really?

A.D.: Well the boat, in the spring of the year, and they migrate, you know. So I was out here crabbing, and I looked and seen, I thought it was a shark, you know that fin like a shark? But a little closer observation, I found out it was a deer there, with those antlers, you know. Well he didn't have, just had those two points. So I had an old, something like a seatbelt only with long things, a parachute, I caught a parachute, old Navy things that turn loose, you know. And I had that and I made a lasso out of that. And I sailed

alongside that deer and lassoed him. And I pulled him in the boat. Man, I thought he was going to tear the boat up, and I had to jump down there and tie them, you know them sharp hooves? We had to hog tie him, I called it. We tied him down and tied him up so he couldn't do nothing else. The only reason that he was so tired when I got him in, he fell out, you know. But he woke up again. I had him tied up. So I said we got a deer, we'll take him home. Well when I took him home, he was trying to kick, and he couldn't do it. This is the reason I'm not a deer hunter. End of the story. I brought him right down there to the county dock where those boats were – and when I looked at that deer, those big eyes looked up at me, and I said I can't keep this deer, and I turned him loose. And he leaped out of that boat, and I can see him now, leaping – the last thing I see is a white picket fence up the road there, and he leaped over that, he was gone. And I told my boys, I said when that deer looked at me, he made a friend for life. And I don't go no deer hunting. So that's another part of my story.

K.F.: You got any other stories like that?

A.D.: No.

(Laughter.)

A.D.: Oh, I got a lot of them, but I mean that one come to me. But I got to go home in a couple minutes, my wife's going to –

K.F.: Well, okay. Then let me –

A.D.: My wife's not too good anyhow. I had to go get her. She went in town yesterday, and I had to go get her and bring her home. She couldn't drive the car home.

K.F.: Oh. Let me –

(END OF INTERVIEW.)