

Interview Log

Interviewee: Phillip L. Jones (P.J.) OH #:
2424

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Transcription by:

Trevy Thomas
400 Railroad Avenue
St. Michaels, MD 21663
410-310-5753

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Q.: On the 16th of March, 1996, and I hope he's going to have time to talk to me.

Somebody's going to ask him if he has a few minutes to talk to me, and that would be really neat.

(Off record.)

P.J.: -- good friend, Mr. Richardson.

Q.: Was he?

P.J.: And O'Neil Jones. He built boats for all his life, from 16 to -- he was 72 when he died.

Q.: And where did he have his boatyard?

P.J.: At Crocheron, that's just below Wingate. Have you been on that side?

Q.: Yeah, right, I've been there. I've been all around Dorchester County.

P.J.: Cut that thing off.

(Off record.)

P.J.: Just for reference, he lives over in Wingate.

Q.: In Wingate. And what is his name?

P.J.: O'Neil Jones.

Q.: O'Neil Jones. Is he related to you?

P.J.: As a matter of fact, they just done a little article on him on Salisbury News (indiscernible) Conner, he done an article on him.

Q.: Well I'll turn this off a minute.

(Off record.)

P.J.: He lives over there at Wingate. If you -- I'm sure he would be glad to talk to you.

Q.: Is he related to you?

P.J.: No, he's not related to us.

Q.: And you're Phil Jones, and your father was Paul Jones.

P.J.: Uh-huh (affirmative).

Q.: So you're Phil L. Jones, and your father was --

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P.J.: Paul L. Jones.

Q.: Paul L. Jones. Mainly what I want to know is are you building some fiberglass boats still for watermen?

P.J.: Oh, yeah.

Q.: They're buying them.

P.J.: Uh-huh (affirmative).

Q.: How many did you build like this year?

P.J.: Well I just build them in the winter months. I'm a commercial waterman myself.

Q.: Are you?

P.J.: And I do this in the wintertime. We generally build two a year, possibly three.

Q.: Do you mind telling me the approximate prices of them compared to what they used to --

P.J.: They vary. Most of them get their own hulls brought in. They buy them from people, and I just finish the tops.

Q.: I see.

P.J.: They vary from, they're like cars.

Q.: They're like what?

P.J.: They're like automobiles. You can put any price in them you want. They vary from 35,000, some 20,000, some 100,000.

Q.: Do you know Randy Murphy down at Tilghman? Randolph Murphy?

P.J.: Uh-huh (affirmative).

Q.: When he bought his boat about eight years ago, his parents had me go out with them on their boat, take pictures of his boat for his Christmas present, so I know these people. There was something else I wanted to ask you. You buy the hull. I noticed Meekins, is it Robert Meekins?

P.J.: Uh-huh (affirmative).

Q.: Makes hulls. He makes the fiberglass hulls. So you will take the hull, and you will fit it out.

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P.J.: Yeah. Put the top structure on and do all the alignment, installment on the engine and rudder, whatever.

Q.: And so do you build other than for orders? Do you go ahead and build a couple a year and know that you're going to sell them?

P.J.: Oh, no. I just build one for orders.

Q.: Just for orders. You have to have your order, your market first before you build it.

P.J.: Uh-huh (affirmative).

Q.: You said that you work on the water. You go out oystering?

P.J.: No. Crab pot.

Q.: Crab potting.

P.J.: Uh-huh (affirmative).

Q.: And there's a load of crab pots here. Just absolutely amazing how many, compared to -- I'm used to Tilghman Island, and they don't do the crab potting as much as you do.

P.J.: This is more of a crab potting community right around this way. It's not many trot liners in the area.

Q.: They do trot lining down there because I've gone out with -- I'm going to throw out some more words, Wadey Murphy. Do you know Wadey?

P.J.: Yeah. Uh-huh (affirmative).

Q.: Who doesn't know Wadey (phonetic). I've been doing some work with him. I've written a lot about Wadey.

P.J.: On the skipjack.

Q.: Yeah. In fact, I've been doing some oral history for the Maritime Museum, and got him lined up for that. How long does it take you to -- do you call it outfit a boat once you get the hull? What do you call it?

P.J.: It generally takes, well it all depends on what kind of design they'd like to have.

Q.: Right.

P.J.: Anywhere between 800 to 1,500 hours, you know, on finishing it all.

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Q.: What size do they generally order approximately?

P.J.: They vary. They vary from, like I say, 20 foot to 50 foot.

Q.: Uh-huh (affirmative). So evidently, the crabbing is still going okay. Have you been building boats most of your life?

P.J.: Oh, yeah. I've been building them ever since I can drive a nail.

Q.: And you find it more profitable to go out crabbing in the summer than to build, or do you do both?

P.J.: I do it more or less as a break, to break things up.

Q.: Do you have a family here on Hooper's Island?

P.J.: Yeah. Uh-huh (affirmative).

Q.: Children?

P.J.: One girl.

Q.: And what does your wife do?

P.J.: My wife, she owns a crab factory.

Q.: Where?

P.J.: It's called -- they call them Many Crab Plants. I don't know if you --

Q.: No.

P.J.: Instead of a big crab plant like employ anywhere from 20 to 30 head, we just have like a little family thing. It's health department approved, just for four members of the family. Kind of like a little family operation thing. But it's all health department approved.

Q.: What's her name? What's your wife's name?

P.J.: Pamela. Pam.

Q.: So she's got a mini. Do you know Patsy Higgs up in Rock Hall? She's a waterwoman. I went out with her netting fish, and she does -- I won't go on into that. Okay. How long have you had this yard?

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P.J.: I've had this yard for eight years. I used to build them into my father's garage over in Crocheron. And then I got married and moved over here, and I built some in my, as they call, your backyard.

Q.: Right, backyard boats.

P.J.: And I built this garage here for myself. Just been busy. I've been busy building boats ever since.

Q.: So it hasn't really diminished.

P.J.: Oh, no.

Q.: Do you build more for pleasure or no?

P.J.: No.

Q.: These are workboats, the ones that have the -- you're calling it radar, and I just thought they were fishing boats like they have down at Harrison's.

P.J.: Everyone around here mostly are workboats, and some commercial fishing party boats.

Q.: Tell me where you go to crab around here. You say the crabbing is good. Is this Fishing Creek here?

P.J.: Yeah, this is Fishing Creek. And right straight out is Barren Island Lighthouse.

Q.: Barn Island Lighthouse?

P.J.: Uh-huh (affirmative).

Q.: Okay.

P.J.: Barren Island is right up here off of Northwest Corner.

Q.: Northwest what?

P.J.: Corner. Right here off the island, you can see -- have you been over to Old Soloby's (phonetic) restaurant?

Q.: Yeah.

P.J.: Well when you look out there, that's Barren Island.

Q.: Oh, Barren Island. Okay. I should be used to this. I've been here 20 years.

P.J.: Yeah. And right straight across the bay is Patuxent River.

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Q.: Now where does this -- Hooper's Island is other than -
- I mean this is Hooper's Island.
The old Hooper's Straight Lighthouse was, I was looking at the map,
was different.

P.J.: That's -- well, it's right straight in line with the
lower island, Hoopersville. See, this is
three islands. You're on the upper island. This is Fishing Creek. The
second island with the bridge, did
you go over that?

Q.: The big bridge?

P.J.: Yeah. Down below here.

Q.: Yeah.

P.J.: All right. That's Hoopersville. And then it's another
island below that which has not been
lived on for a number of years. But right straight off that point,
lower island, that's where Hooper's
Straight Lighthouse used to be.

Q.: I just finished an article about Hooper's Straight
Lighthouse for Classic Boat magazine, a
British magazine. It's quite a history, and I got a few pictures. I
forgot to ask you what's your daughter's
name and how old is she?

P.J.: She's eight years old. Her name is Coty Lyn.

Q.: Coty Lyn? Spell that for me.

P.J.: C-O-T-Y.

Q.: Coty Lyn. I see Coty Lyn over there.

P.J.: Yeah, that's my boat.

Q.: Have you ever lived other than here, I mean on the
shore in Dorchester County?

P.J.: Just in Dorchester County.

Q.: Do you have any desire to leave?

P.J.: No. Not now especially.

Q.: Yeah. So business is fairly good.

P.J.: Uh-huh (affirmative).

Q.: So some of these boats are not pleasure, or do you do
pleasure craft also?

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P.J.: I do some pleasure, but it's not many. Most of them in the commercial line, either commercial fishing boats -- I say fishing boats, workboats. All of the commercial sports fishing boats, party boats, charter boats.

Q.: So you do some charter boats.

P.J.: Yeah.

Q.: Have you noticed people moving down here from other places like they are elsewhere?

P.J.: Yeah. Yeah. You see that more and more on the island.

Q.: I don't see a lot of houses for sale like I do up in Tilghman or other places. I saw maybe one or two.

P.J.: Well the last I counted on the island is right around about 35 to 40.

Q.: Really? Oh. So why are they selling?

P.J.: Well, just, you know, like -- well, you can't say -- most of them are old homes, older people that's dying off.

Q.: So it isn't that they're giving up on working on the water.

P.J.: Oh, no, no.

Q.: So it's good here. I'm glad to know that it's good. How about the oystering around here? Is that holding up at all?

P.J.: The winter around here, this winter, mostly worked in Fishing Bay and Little Choptank and Big Choptank. The oysters didn't come back in -- River, as they did in other parts of the bay.

Q.: I understand it wasn't as bad as it's been, but they went up to Betterton and up Tolchester. Tolchester, the skipjacks went. Okay, thank you very, very much.

P.J.: You can take some pictures around here if you like.

Q.: Yeah, I'm going to go around. I'd like to wait till the sun goes -- well, actually, the sun's good now. Thank you very much.
(Off record.)

Q.: This is a workboat?

P.J.: No, that's just a sports boat there.

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Q.: Okay, well you tell me what else -- you told me when I looked at the top, and I thought it was a workboat, so its a pleasure craft for this family.

P.J.: Yeah. Uh-huh (affirmative).

Q.: And how long did it take you to build that?

P.J.: I guess got about 1,200 hours into her.

Q.: And did you get the hull from Meekins?

P.J.: No, not from Meekins. That one come from Crisfield, Eugene Evans. I've got a hull in here that come from Maine.

Q.: No kidding.

P.J.: Uh-huh (affirmative).

Q.: How did that come about?

P.J.: Just different designs. It's a lot of fiberglass hulls on the market today.

Q.: Uh-huh (affirmative).

P.J.: I mean -- yeah.

Q.: That's good to know that there's --

P.J.: I'd say it's 25 or 30 of them, maybe more.

Q.: You built --

SPEAKER: Hi.

Q.: Hi. I'm going to turn this off.

(Off record.)

P.J.: You know, liked the design.

Q.: You told me that you did build wooden boats. You have --

P.J.: I did when I was younger.

Q.: And tell me the difference between building a wooden boat and outfitting a --

P.J.: Well it's easier -- it's easier to build a wooden boat. Much easier, because once you get the layout, you just stand it off, and you paint it. But once you get it laid out, I do custom work. It's not molded. And if anybody wants a cabin extended longer, shorter, whatever, I do it. I do all custom work.

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And when you get this structure built, then you have to -- instead of painting it, that would be ready within a couple weeks, you got to start fiberglass. Once you fiberglass it, then you've got to sand it and fill it, and then gelcoat it or paint it or whatever, Imron or Awlgrip, and that's the steps you have to take. It's just like --

Q.: What's Imron?
P.J.: Paint.
Q.: Oh, that's a type of paint.
P.J.: Expensive. Yeah.
Q.: Can you spell it for me? I'll look it up.
P.J.: E-M-R-O-N.
Q.: Okay. That's the type of paint that would go on the fiberglass.
P.J.: Yeah. Or gelcoat.
Q.: Okay.
P.J.: But a fiberglass boat costs more than a standard wooden boat, you know.
Q.: Yeah. But do you think they last longer?
P.J.: Oh, definitely.
Q.: And, of course, they cost less to maintain.
P.J.: Maintain.
Q.: Practically nothing to maintain, I would say. Do you do hulls?
P.J.: Yeah.
Q.: Did you do a hull on this one?
P.J.: Huh-uh (negative).
Q.: No. But you will do the hull.
P.J.: Yeah.
Q.: Do you prefer to buy the hull or do the hull, or does it make a difference?
P.J.: It don't make no difference. Work's work.
Q.: (Laughter). Work's work. Okay, I'll title you work's work. Thank you.

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(Off record.)

Q.: The larger boat you would use in the fall because rougher weather?

P.J.: Well, that boat is a heavier boat, and she lays in the water. She's smoother. The smaller boat's lighter, and she works just as good, but when it's rough, you know, it's a difference. You take 50 foot versus 35, that's like being in a ship. Which one would you rather be in? You'd rather be in that one.

Q.: You're right on.

(Off record.)

P.J.: Three of them there. One on the end.

Q.: Joint Venture's wood.

P.J.: Wood. Maybe, Baby, that's glass. King Crab's glass. Dusty Girfs glass.

Q.: No Name?

P.J.: Ryan Scott --

Q.: What's his name?

P.J.: Calvert Cannon.

Q.: C-A-N-N-O-N, Calvert Cannon. And he lives where?

P.J.: C-O-N-N-O-N.

Q.: O-N, right.

P.J.: That house right there that, they say -- there's Old Salty's.

Q.: Right.

P.J.: One, two, three, third house up.

Q.: The third one, that's on the road.

P.J.: Uh-huh (affirmative). Right on the main road there.

Q.: Yeah. It's like -- yeah, with a dormer window up there.

P.J.: He's got some pictures of some old -- he used to own this piece of property. And they built -- he showed me some pictures. Every once in a while I'll stop by and talk to him. They built a whole ferry. I believe it went to Cape May. It was built right here.

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Q.: No kidding. Yeah, that's --

P.J.: He'd be a nice guy to talk to.

Q.: Yeah. You think I can just drop in on him? I'm not going to do it today, but I'm going to come back.

P.J.: Yeah.

Q.: Yeah. You think I can just knock on the door?

P.J.: Uh-huh (affirmative).

Q.: Okay.

P.J.: I'll tell him that you're expected.

Q.: Okay. This lady. Yeah, thanks.

(End of interview.)