

Interview Log

Interviewee: Roger Schwendeman **Tape #:** MAAF/KF/VA/FT/3.4.305

Interviewer: Kelly Feltault **# of Tapes:** 1 of 2

Date: 3/4/98 **# of Sides:** 1,2 of 4

Location: begins in Roger's home on Hack's Neck Creek, moves to his dock, then the town dock

Topic: pound netting, carving, living on the shore

Corresponding Photography Log #:

Comments: File name: vaft305.doc; see vaft306.doc for part two of this interview. *Italics* indicate song title or emphasis; "quotations" indicate direct transcription; [brackets indicate additional information not on tape or commentary by fieldworker].

Roger was great fun to talk with, very open and frank. He had intended on taking me fishing that day but the weather was not so good and his mates didn't show up. We started in his home talking about pound netting then he showed me some carvings he had done. He had even made me a fishing needle with my name carved into one side and "Delmarva Folklife Project" carved into the other. We headed for his carving workshop across the street on his father's property, then his dock and then the town dock that he built on Hack's Neck Creek. Parts of this interview may be loud due to the truck we rode around in and its condition. See FN3/4/98 for more info.

BEGIN SIDE A

[general setting up noises; we begin in the middle of a conversation; bird chirping noises from parakeet]

Story of weather and fishing: Rock season out on New Year's eve in VA, predicting a blow on that Wed. Fished on Monday, but if take nets up on Jan. 1st then can't sell fish, so had to fish nets by 31st, decided to fish the nets even though blowing

Crab potters ask Capt. Rogers not to put nets out in Spring on certain days because every time he does it blows a gale; Roger explains that he learned from older pound netters on VA's E. Shore, and they told him that if you get up before 1st light and you hear that rustle from the pine tops it's too rough to fish a trap; that's about 15 knots

Run risk of boat disasters; waves bang you against pilings, empty buck boat gets it rough;

how you get poles: need a stand of spruce pine, but has to use loblolly pine of eastern shore no spruce; uses stand in dad's tree farm across street; got tired of farming it in

soybeans so put 7,000 trees in; wild trees are better though, grow stronger thicker and straighter; still skins them with a draw knife on 2 diagonal timbers lashed to trees, lay poles into them like a cradle; get full of sap and dust but usually done in winter when sap is down; sap will make trees rot out in bay; some guys use gum trees now don't need skinning;

Floating leader now with crab pot cork; chain on bottom try to keep from sliding with tide and getting nettles etc.; feels he fishes the roughest part of the bay; gets tore up every blow; anchors work fine on bottom line but get pulled up during blows, still turns fish but looks like hell

poured 13 anchors this year 3'x3'x14" thick of concrete; space every 60' on leader on one side and run chain; beauty is that you don't have to mend it; usually for fall and winter fishing space 12' apart; summer get by 13-15' but if have a southwester and a flood tide with trash the wave action will make a hole where the anchor is, so patch up every 13 feet; patches on patches;

words for different parts of the pound net; runs leader (hedge) up to dry sand off shore; fishes a 6" mesh which will let nettles go through, but will turn an eel; ordering webbing (netting) don't call it mesh, call it marshes; so 6" marsh x amount marshes deep;

Making nets for Purdue: living on eastern shore 23 years, fishing 22 years; wife with Purdue 22 years; hanging nets now for Purdue; wife Kathy runs payroll at Purdue and came home one night said live-haul supervisor needed a petty cash check for Memphis Net and Twine; asked why chicken plant needed fishing net; use it to catch the live chix; didn't know that Roger made his own nets, so Roger and supervisor experimented on mesh size to coral chix without getting them hung up; Roger uses 2" stretch for bays and tried that on a 6' length; worked great; they take 4 per month and he can hang 2 in a day; made up like fish nets; hung on 3rd; gill nets hung on slack 3rd sort of like a half;

Toad potting: Roger can do just about anything on water; how you have to be flexible; if one falls off take up another; fishes for swelling toads "toad potting" these are blow fish; take a regular crab pot; closes up the call rings and bait differently not using menhaden or bunker; go to crab house and take scrap from pickers, mash with 2x4 board in a bucket and put handfuls into bait box; blow fish come a running, can see them cause only fishing in 6' of water; swell when hit air and so heavy that you have to get 2 people to haul in pot; can burst pot if not careful; don't pluck roughly, ease on board; gotta have an ice pick to pop them so you can get them out; highest price fish in the bay for the meat \$3.50-\$4.00 lb.; running large 2 years ago, getting .25 or more lb. on a toad which is huge; fishes hard crab pots because more efficient; marketed as sea chicks or chicken of the sea; NY big market and some folks on shore love them and he can't get them out of the boat, sells right from the docks mostly;

KF: mentions that African American woman told me she loved them

Roger: introduced black community to toads; one lady always calls him in the spring; will buy 18 lbs of meat at \$3.50; husband learned to love them and will stop Roger on road for some; season is May-June; market for roe in July; \$1.00 lb. for roe; Roger good toad skinner; can skin 100 lbs in hour and roe will stay with meat if done right; then roe pulled off by mate

Fresh fish: Would rather fish trap them; don't need bait; bail out of trap; leaves dock and at trap in 45 minutes; work trap bailing fish in 15-20 minutes; reset trap and head for fish market by 9 a.m.; fish trappers never ice fish because so fresh; still flipping when being weighed; drift nets need ice; anchored nets if in cold water won't spoil; getting ready to do anchored nets; crabs won't eat fish in nets in winter but in summer got to fish nets quick to prevent crabs from getting them; last rig you fish will have croakers with 1/2 eaten tails from crabs; can't sell fish if crabs have opened body cavity; wife likes catfish but doesn't catch catfish; eat lots of croakers and drum; but can't set for drum commercially, law limitations are 5 per day so don't set for them;

e1 nino: slow year last year; cycles offish; depends on wind, need NW winds in fall to blow fish to eastern shore; NE just push tide up allowing fish to go around trap, rock and flounder run in 2' of water and like the surf so not catching anything; biggest hit he's ever had, even when fishing with older guys, and not a big trap like see on some places in bay with double heads or hearts,

NC influences: leader line idea came from NC, guy went down there and saw it and brought it back; how old guys fought it; but Roger liked it, didn't spend winter mending net; copper prices going up, \$900 a barrel; only coppers them in summer for antifouling; does it in big vat, older folks have cast iron kettles and used tar then had to change nets 2-3 wks; copper easier; basics hasn't changed in 100 yrs; idea of tringles (thimbles on w.shore) pulley at bottom of set stake; down haulers go through; so antiquated;

History of pound netting on Eastern Shore: Man from NJ brought this trap to W. Shore of VA; they were haul seining and jealous because this NJ guy catching more; burned net to water line and sawed off poles; guy moved to eastern shore; Hack's Neck held worlds' record speckled trout catch; still hold the US record; Roger there that day; individual fish caught off beach; Roger and others selling rang peelers to sports fishermen telling them you can't catch them on anything else; guy from NJ comes down and uses squid and blue fish to catch world record: 16 3/4 lb. with 37" girth full of roe; grotesque fish;

Rockfish revival: sport fishermen want credit for that but it's a cycle; hatcheries in MD pumped out so many, never catch a native rock anymore; some have tags on them most though have broken bars on them; send in tags and get a mesh hat, not very useful because fishing for rock in winter and need a real hat not mesh; He cuts out the emblem and sews them on his hooded sweatshirt; other watermen see them and say, "Geez I only got a hat, I didn't get a sweatshirt." "Well you didn't catch the right kind of fish." [Shows me emblems]; gives them to the mates;

Mate: 2 young guys last fall, but drugs got the better of them; didn't show up on paydays; now has a Vietnam vet that doesn't know anything about the water but is willing;

Also bulk head and dock builds, does bulk heading before fishing starts; the bait is here already, wait for fish hawks to get here and then get bait, saw a few already; fish hawks are Ospreys; watching Osprey; resident goose problems

Driving the piles: has a monitor (decked over scow); used to drive piles but now jets them in; old man who taught him, he has his last pound net license, Capt. Fred Harrison;

Carving: made carving to raise money for waterman's assoc.; started out with boot and glove, evolved into sculpture of spool

Capt. Fred Harrison: nickname "Baby" brother named Forest; did skinning down at his place; used to smoke a cigar; drank bourbon like it was water, but never saw him drunk; died from colon cancer; most of the stories Roger has are from Capt. Baby; W.W.I vet; story of army boots Capt. Baby had; arrived in Keller with boots, took them off to walk in the snow from Keller to Hack's Neck [5-6 miles]; didn't want to get army boots wet; Capt. Fred used to go to W. Shore eeling with a gig; carried a small boat always; story of Capt. Baby and Potter Martin, Potter had a line of trees separating property that were just right for the keel of Capt. Baby's boat; boat still on water, called the Capt. Fred; keel of bull ass pine,

Family things/memory objects: Kathy's (his wife) sister Patty who is retarded lives with them; building house; scrounging and proguing for things; collects oars; never find wooden netting needle because they all throw them away when broken; grand father commercial fished for bait for shop and also ran a taxidermy shop; has a small wooden needle that was his grand father's;

[we head outside, I gather up equipment while Roger talks about his family]

Father lives in FI in winter, summers in Hack's Neck; call him Alpha crab; has a big crab feast every Sunday in the summer;

carvings: gives away carvings because they are gifts, not made to sell; [really more emotional objects than decoys; Roger shows me some of his carvings in the house]; friends getting into aquaculture on shore and raising red crawdads; made carving called Jibby Point on Butchers creek; couple moved down from NJ; [it's a plaque for the front of the property and reads Jibby Point Mudbuggers]; old 12' crab float washed up after NE, made from cedar so he decided to make something out of it; making something for Capt. Chance's wife who's sick but it is also his old crab float; Capt. Chance was a tug boat Capt. and crab potted on weekends; doing one piece for all the old timers; uses same pattern for lots of gift projects; slatted goose decoy; would make one for anybody who ordered a bulk head over \$6000 then would burn their name into it; shows me some of his

fish carving; clams that he carves, one done for sister-in-law, story of that; story of some family members;

END SIDE A

BEGIN SIDE B

[we are now outside, headed for the truck, but Roger is talking about his shed]

like all sheds became a catch-all; was going to use it to carve but put a bait freezer in there; dip net they use, weights 261b without fish; lever against side of buck boat; sews scraps of net together to make a new one

description of gas tank that he has jimmy-rigged for truck; gas tank rusted out so put a 12 gallon barrel in back; [Roger decides to take Baygirl, his chessie, she gets in the back of the truck; it smells of cigarettes and gasoline]

[I turn the tape off as we drive over to Roger's carving shop]

Roger describes a Jimmy crab that he is carving; it includes a crab pot with menhaden in the bait box; next carving project is for a friend that is a circuit court judge who duck hunts on E. Shore but lives on w. Shore; guy is a marine and roger is carving the marine corps emblem; carving in Jaluton [2nd growth rubber tree]; bought at art show in FL.; favorite wood; but will make marine corps emblem in butternut;

How he got into carving: been doing it forever; still has some of his first carvings; mother has saved them;

story of gouging hand with tools;

story of cutting finger off while crab dredging one winter;

Dad did similar carving for friend pinned down on Iwo Jima for 3 days who survived; touching to give them these things;

shows me photo of waterman's carving that they auctioned off, [see files for photo taken by professional photographer at Turner studios]; description of what is on the sculpture; many things came from Capt. Fred (Baby) scow when he died so really a memorial to him; put together a little story based on some Joseph Conrad work; sculpture went to all the little festivals they could take it to and sold raffle tickets;

story of how Chincoteague Seafood Festival wouldn't let them sell raffle tickets; sold very little tickets at Shrimp Fest on Chinco; to satisfy all watermen got all fish that they catch: pound netters, gill netters, crabbers, oystermen, clammers etc.; started out with white boots and blackjack gloves; description of building the base of sculpture and where some of the parts came from; memory objects and what they invoke; description of tools depicted on the sculpture: scoop found while muskrating, used for Haik fish which

are salted & soaked overnight then boiled in morning for breakfast; it's use now in their home;

patent tonging for clams in winter now; [we head out of the workshop toward the dock]

Roger is nervous: explains that he was nervous about being interviewed but once he met me and saw my red hair he decided everything was OK; [dog in microphone]

Potato canon: sometimes called a goose cannon; made from PVC, stuff with potato and ignite with lighter fluid & gas grill igniter; makes lots of noise, shoots a potato 100 yds, calls it Capt. Art's goose cannon [opens door to go inside dad's house and dog bangs head on door]

gives me fig jelly; [we begin a tour of his carvings that are in his parents house. These are really memory objects, souvenirs, and memorial objects. Please see Feltault, 1997 and/or consult fieldworker, fieldnotes for more theoretical considerations]

Decoys that he carved as presents; return of Ruddy Ducks to creek; conversation of decoys moves into conversation of movement of birds outside on their property;

Early carving was relief; shows me one of his first; a black will fish; some are covered in copper scales individually nailed on or aluminum scales; approximately 3-4' in size; brothers carve too, been doing it forever; pulls out a carving that he thought his mom had gotten rid of;

story of object: had to give parents a gift for everything, no matter what holiday. So on thanksgiving when he was 7 gave them a plaque that he carved; Judy, sister, into toll painting;

[this is a very intimate look at his family, and how they maintain relationships]

Mom quilts and gives them away; old calendars hang on wall still because family members are on the photos; how he is not an artist just whittles;

air photo of home [every house that I have been in has these photos of their "3 acres"]; how he buried his dog at sea and same day the guy took the photo; only reason he bought photo was because it was the day he buried his Molly [the dog]; wrapped her in oil skins, weighted her down;

brother Art carves, also a tug boat Capt.; carves crooked neck swans; reads inscription on bottom of swan; for his parents; on a special occasion; father in coast guard auxiliary for 40 years; went into air corps and then retired from American Airlines, worked at Lagoon airport; born and raised in TN, but lived in NJ for dad's job; retired to VA's eastern shore;

Roger reads inscription for an older man that he was very close to who died recently; the inscription is for the sculpture that he made for Capt. Fred and relates to the anchor fast monail boat nails in the piece;

"There are 3 anchor fast boat nails used in this piece. One in the center of the compass, one in the center of the Eastern Shore Working Waterman's Association emblem on the front of the crate. The remaining nail is in the center of the spool on the bottom of the piece in the center of the turn table. There is a story behind these nails; they are very special to me.

"The nails were salvaged from the rotting transom of an old fish trap scow belonging to Captain. Fred T. "Baby" Harrison of Hack's Neck on the E. Shore of VA, 1898-1985, by Capt. Guy Vernell boat builder and myself shortly after the passing of Capt. Fred and his scow. I owe Capt. Fred a great deal of gratitude for teaching me how to fish and mend net, and for his great old stories. I've carried a bent anchor fast nail from Capt. Fred's scow in my change pocket these twelve years as a remembrance, he is fondly remembered and sorely missed. And his last coherent words were, 'It's been a long time between drinks.'"

How the house has poltergeists; spooky; stuff off the wall; things in the chimney; bats in the house; leaving plywood up on second story windows because of hurricanes;

[we go back outside, more dog noises]

Roger says he is color blind

[how does he paint his work?]

how all the sheds are nicknamed for their purposes either past or present; shows me his smoker: old refrigerator, gutted; uses for fish and eels; cast iron Dutch oven built in underneath; uses pecan wood to smoke; [we head toward the docks]

how he sunk one of his boats last year; story of sinking & buying a new Carolina skiff and old boat as buck boat; not seeing any buffalo heads this year [duck]; roundstern boat built in 1956 in White Stone VA by the Green Brothers; sister boat tied up in Onancock called the Miss Joanna; this is the Wilma C. Named after his mom; how they fiberglassed it; going to use it to patent tong for clams put cabin on the stem; beamy in the shoulders; used to tong oysters out of her;

oystering; buy them off watermen in Pocomoke sound resistant to Dermo; transplanting them to other areas; in Pungoteague creek on shell piles;

dock styles, tried a new one that used less lumber and was stronger but nobody would buy it; [wind blowing a bit]; now builds a different type of dock; [dog is jumping in and out of boat] eel float holds 700 lbs of eels; ships some to NY but have a tank truck that will take them mostly; live truck; in MD you must purge your eels for 3 days, won't eat

in captivity so when trapped full of mud and must get that out; like a clam or snail;
[engine starts]; people ignorant about how to cook all seafood only ethnic markets buy
eels; [engine stops]

END SIDE B

END TAPE

See MAAF/KFNA/FT.3.4.306 for part 2

Interview Log

Interviewee: Roger Schwendeman **Tape #:** MAAF/KF/VA/FT3.4.306

Interviewer: Kelly Feltault **# of Tapes:** 2 of 2

Date: 3/4/98# **of Sides:** 2

Location: Pungoteague Creek, Harborton, Hack's Neck Va; driving in Roger's truck

Topic: fishing, dock building; crabbing; disaster stories, carving; regulations

Corresponding Photography Log #:

Comments: File name: Vaft306.doc. See Fieldnotes: FN03.04.98. *Italics* indicate emphasis; [brackets indicate additional information not on the tape or asides by fieldworker]; "quotations indicate direct transcription."

This is a continuation of tape MAAF/KF/VA/FT3.4.305; Vaft305.doc.

BEGIN SIDE A

[dog breathing hard in background; outside at Roger's dock on his parent's property looking at his boats]

DISASTER STORY: story of new guy on the water, fishing fish traps or pound nets; disaster wreck that day; had a big load of fish and boats capsized; webbing up and throwing back; blowing hard; lots of diff kinds of fish; spade fish, taste like drum; Norwest wind; big sea coming; told mates to easy of but they held on; strain and wave ripped net and fish began swimming out; dipping by hand, managed to catch 100 lbs of spade fish but easily had 5000 lbs of fish, does blind sets doesn't use radar etc; it was May; swamped boats, trying to get gear back, rip current; how they got rescued;

[getting dog out of boat]

[hear ruddy ducks leave creek in background]

boat named after new niece and nephew; TracyJoe; eel skinning stick; describes how its used; [Molly stuck on boat]; hand lining rock fish, kept them in live tank all winter;

firing mate; other boats he has; will patent tong this winter; changing gear types, hard to do now with licensing restrictions; limited entry; has had one fish trap license for 20 years for specific site, can't get another one; gone to fyke nets now; harder to fish fyke nets;

[getting gear & dog in truck, move into house to look at photos]

talks about carving; showing me photos of sculpture he carved for auction; types of wood; techniques; has to borrow things back for people to do any kind of shows, gives them all away as gifts or raffle items; marlin club tournament trophies he carves;

raising money with his sculptures; raffling off sculpture; irony of who won it; raising for family in need; Jason Taylor memorial raffle; how much love went into carving these types of objects, "if I had to do this commercially I wouldn't enjoy it"

carving oysters; cast in rosin; then chase and paint them; made as a wedding gift; family has taxidermy business and can get good glass eyes etc. for his carvings; [how is taxidermy a continuation of the carving tradition]

turtles, catching them and releasing loggerheads, 300 lbs; photos of fish he's caught;

how Roger learned to carve; from dad and guy from NJ; Charlie Miller

Marlin tournament; hates using bass wood on fish carving it fizzes; Art Carter won the tuna tournament one year and won Roger's trophy;

List of carvings and who they went to and for what occasion; also lists type of fish he carved for them; used to sell some of the small ones at a shop on Tangier;

Describing very complicated carvings he did of fish chasing and eel through grass; uses Jalutone wood;

END SIDE A

BEGIN SIDE B

[still in carving shop talking about carvings]

pricing carvings; what they get when auctioned off for fundraisers;

[in truck, driving to creek and dock he built]

gill netting; problems he has gill netting with his bad knee; knee ailments;

trapping and hunting the marsh; doesn't do it anymore; market gunning and duck trapping; they did it for selves and didn't make a profit on it; did feed them; game wardens; feds had sting operations; sitting at store listening; waiting on you at trap at middle of night; hunt club he belongs to is all drs. And lawyers

[air sound is his brakes on the truck]

rebuilding the dock; shanties on the dock; another capsized boat story;

[get out of truck as it's parked on the dock: 2" space left on side of dock after truck for me to get out of truck and slide along to the front of the truck]

carving he did on the dock after it was built; history of dock; poem carved into dock: "God Bless the boys who make the noise on the south side of Pungoteague creek"

all crab potters now on dock; Af/Am rod and reel off end of dock in summer; built other structures here: shanties, dock at country club;

local histories of watermen; [geese fly over head] resident geese problems, newcomers from up north feed them; small resident season in Sept. "well, who wants to shoot geese while swatting mosquitos"

when he lived on Pungoteague Creek; muskrating in bad winter here; how made more money muskrating than his wife who worked full-time at Perdue; rats now dying of disease; fur market hitting bottom;

[get back in truck]

story of old waterman he worked with to learn; had a bateau; was an Evans from Smith islands; white boots started by Tangierman; waterman backing off the dock real fast in their trucks and hitting the pilings;

descriptions of Harborton; who lived where;

end of the point new developments: county park, had shantie rights and now must leave because county bought it; building public boat ramp;

KF: what will that do for all the commercial fishermen here?

RS: "probably have a lot more pots cut off, lot more nets run over. Lot more people scowling at us. That's the only thing that hurts me personally. I have to work out there everyday. And I think there's a touch of jealousy because they're in an office all week. And it's not my fault if it rains on Saturday and they can't get to go fishing, but I'm out there fishing anyway rain or shine. That's what I do. They won't even wave at you if they see you're a commercial boat"

Eeling; used for bait; makes eel rigs; selling it to the marlin tournaments;

END TAPE

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