

Interview Log

Interviewee: Laurena Collemer

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BEGIN SIDE A

K.F.: Let me get you to say your name so I can make sure everything's working. Okay, go ahead.

L.C.: My name is Laurena Collemer.

K.F.: And the date?

L.C.: April the 13th, 1998.

K.F.: And you work at J.M. Clayton, right?

L.C.: Yes, I do.

K.F.: Okay, how long have you worked there?

LC.: I would say 10 or 15, 10 or 12 years.

K.F.: Okay.

L.C.: Something like that.

K.F.: And how did you start working there?

L.C.: Well I worked picking crabs practically all my life, off and on, and I just like to do it. I mean I had my own time, I could go on my own time and come home when I wanted to.

K.F.: Right.

L.C.: Uh-huh (affirmative). They were nice to work for, nice people to work for.

K.F.: Yeah?

L.C.: Uh-huh (affirmative). Very nice. Uh-huh (affirmative). Enjoyed it.

K.F.: And has Mr. Brooks been there for the whole time you've been there?

L.C.: Oh, yes. He's been there all the time. They own the house. They've owned that for years, years and years. It was handed down to the younger generation. Now the older ones are dead and gone.

K.F.: Okay. Well how did you learn to pick crabs?

L.C.: My mother. My mother picked crabs. She was one of the fastest crab pickers on the island. We lived on an island.

K.F.: Oh, which one?

LC.: Hooper's Island.

K.F.: Oh, Hooper's. Okay.

L.C.: Uh-huh (affirmative). And she picked crabs there, and three sisters of US, and we all learned to pick crabs. And there wasn't

anything else to do. Of course, that little bit of money come in handy for us to do what we wanted to do when we were growing up.

K.F.: Right.

L.C.: So we learned to pick crabs, and do it the right way.

K.F.: And what's the right way?

L.C.: Well there's only one way to pick crabs, and that's the right way, (Laughter.)

K.F.: Can you describe it to me?

L.C.: Well you take the crab and you pull the shell off.

K.F.: From the top?

L.C.: From the top. Pull the shell off from the top. You don't break the crab in half. You pull the shell off on top, pull the claws off and then you cut the, we call it the mouth, it's where the front of the crab. Take the dead man's fingers out of it and the fat, and then cut the fins off and it's all ready to pick. Cut the two top pieces off. Pick the lump out, then pick the small, the smaller meat, and that is called the regular, we call that the regular, just regular meat and the lump meat.

K.F.: Okay. And then you pick the claws too?

L.C.: Uh-huh (affirmative). You pick the claws. We don't pick the claws. Jack, Mr. Brook has a picking machine that picks the claws.

K.F.: Oh, really?

L.C.: And then there are a few come in and pick them, you know, if he wants the special meat picked by hand.

K.F.: Okay. How long have those machines been there?

L.C.: Oh, they've been out for quite a while. I mean there aren't many in Cambridge or in Dorchester County, the claw picking machine, but he was lucky enough to get one of them. And he has a crab picking machine too. It's very interesting to go down there and see it all. Have you ever seen any of it?

K.F.: No, I haven't. I haven't seen —

L.C.: Well it's very interesting. You should come down sometime in summer when they're in Operation, you know.

K.F.: Okay.

L.C.: And see them, and just watch them. A lot of people come and look at — watch it. It's really interesting.

K.F.: Yeah.

L.C.: And that's where they get all their pasteurized meat, from the crab picking machine.

K.F.: Oh, okay. Okay.

L.C.: Has the claw and the crab both.

K.F.: Oh, okay. And are the people picking the crabs faster than the machine or, I mean what's the difference?

L.C.: Well the meat that we pick out of the crab is put into a plastic can — plastic cup, rather. Used to be a can, but now it's a plastic cup.

K.F.: Right.

L.C.: And matter of fact, we had a little crab picking, little house on the island, my mother and my brother, and we worked together, and my mother and father, and we were first little crab house ever was on Hooper's Island, and I still have three cans over there.

K.F.: Oh, wow.

L.C.: Uh-huh (affirmative). That were the regular, lump and claw.

K.F.: Oh, so you would separate them out in the cans?

LC.: You would put separate meat, the meat in all the different cans.

And they had little holes

in the bottom of them because they washed the meat off then, put a little bit of water on them and salt into it, and then the water came out of the holes in the bottom so then they could pack the meat.

K.F.: Oh, okay. Did you guys have a name for your little operation?

L.C.: Oh, yes. It was Crayton and Tyler, just Crayton and Tyler.

K.F.: Okay, all right. What's your maiden name, Laurena?

L.C.: My maiden name is Crayton.

K.F.: Oh, okay.

L.C.: Uh-huh (affirmative). Crayton and Tyler.

K.F.: How did your mom teach you how to pick the crabs? Did you just have to watch her or —

L.C.: We watched her. She was left handed. One of my sisters picks left handed. She started watching her. We started picking claws first. They let us — back in those days, in 19 — I would say 1926 and '27 is when we started, we were little girls, little children when we started picking. They let the children come into the crab house.

K.F.: And when was that?

L.C.: This was 1926. I was born in 1920.

K.F.: Okay.

L.C.: And they let us come in the crab house, even though if we didn't pick. Mom couldn't leave us home by ourself, so we would go there with her. Little places around we could play, little rooms they would let us to go in. And a lot of the women carried their children there. But we thought why should we go there? Mom says if you're going to go with me, you're going to learn to pick crabs and claws. We started with claws. We picked claws first. And then we were doing so well with claws, we thought well as we got older, we would learn to pick the crab. So she showed us how to pick the crab the way she picked it. And one of my sisters, she picked left hand, because my mother was left handed.

K.F.: Right.

L.C.: But my other two sisters – my other sister picks right handed and I do too.

K.F.: Okay.

L.C.: You pull the, just like I say, you pull the shell off, and then she showed us what to do. Sometimes if we weren't strong enough to cut those fins off, they were hard to cut off, she would cut them off for us and let us pick the crab.

K.F.: Oh, okay. And you just, as you got older, you got more of the crab to pick?

L.C.: You work more, just like everything else you do, you increase your speed as you go along. And, of course, the more you got, we didn't get much money for picking, and the more you get, much more money you make, the more faster you'll try to work, you know. You'll stick to it longer. You won't get up and play around and things like that.

K.F.: Right. Okay.

L.C.: So.

K.F.: Well I'm wondering if you can describe like – well let's start with the house, the crab house on Hooper's Island.

L.C.: Uh-huh (affirmative).

K.F.: What time would you have to arrive there?

L.C.: We started work at 4:00 in the morning, and then we picked all day, all day until the crabs were gone, most times, until the crabs were gone. It's according on how many crabs they had. And very good crabs because they didn't ship the crabs into the city. We picked all the crabs

that they caught, the real pretty crabs. There was a law against the size of a crab you could catch.

K.F.: Oh, do you remember what it was?

L.C.: I can't remember. I can't remember how large they were, five or six inches. Something like that. But we started in the morning at 4:00, we picked all day, stopped and get a bite to eat, and then keep on picking and picking until sometimes it would be 4 and 5:00 until we get home. And I've seen different times that we picked all night because they needed their meat, they had orders for the meat, crabmeat.

K.F.: Okay. So if they had a lot of orders in, you would continue picking?

L.C.: Uh-huh (affirmative). Yeah.

K.F.: All right. Isn't it today that pickers generally get out around 1 or 2:00 then?

L.C.: Well we pick seven hours now. We start at 600 in the morning and 3, around 3 and 4 when they get finished.

K.F.: Okay. And —

L.C.: 6:00 we start, yeah.

K.F.: Okay, so 6 to about 3 or 4:00?

L.C.: Uh-huh (affirmative). Yeah.

K.F.: Okay. That's a long day.

L.C.: Uh-huh (affirmative). It's a long day. Uh-huh (affirmative).

K.F.: Long day on your feet all day.

L.C.: But when you're working — no, you don't stand on your feet. You have chairs you sit into.

K.F.: Oh, you don't. Okay.

L.C.: Uh-huh (affirmative). It's really interesting. Sometime you come down, I'll take you down to Jack's.

K.F.: Okay. So I know like oysters you have to stand up to shuck them.

L.C.: Yes, oysters you stand up and shuck. Uh-huh (affirmative). Shuck oysters. You pick crabs sitting down. Uh-huh (affirmative).

K.F.: Okay. Well maybe if you could describe to me the setup in the picking house. I mean the crabs come in and then what happens to them?

L.C.: We all have tables. Everybody has — a lot of, three rows of tables. One, two, three. And people come in, put the crabs on the table.

You pick the crab until they're all gone, and then they'll bring you some more crabs. You don't try to keep too many crabs on there because of bacteria, you know. Too many to pile up in summertime. We have it all air-conditioned. Very nice lighting all over the crab house. There's restrictions to that too. And everything is kept very clean. And we have the fellows come and take all the trash out. We don't have — we don't have to get up any more only to wash our hands and weigh our meat. And we go sit — weigh our meat, and then we sit down and start picking again. And it's not really that hard as what it used to be. We used to have — when we got a basket of trash from the crab, we'd have to get up and empty it and come back, and get more cans.

K.F.: Do it all yourself.

L.C.: It was so much harder. Now we have it all done for us. We don't have to do anything, only weigh our meat. And then wash our hands and sterilize our hands, and then go sit down again and eat. Then it's lunchtime. When you feel like you get hungry, you can stop any time you want and eat.

K.F.: Okay.

L.C.: It's on restrictions on the time you have to stop.

K.F.: Yeah. Okay. And what does it sound like in the picking house?

L.C.: Everybody talking about everything with everybody.

(Laughter.)

L.C.: In summer, it's noisy because we have the air conditioners going.

K.F.: Right.

L.C.: And, of course, winter it's a little bit noisy because we have the heating system going.

K.F.: Okay.

L.C.: Very nice and warm and cool. Nice atmosphere in there. No fussing, no arguing. And there's a lot of black people in there. Not as many white as there are black because a lot of the white, a lot of the white children, as they grew up, they didn't want to stay here and pick crabs. They wanted to go away college or do something, do something else. I had three daughters, and they didn't pick any more after they grew up. They graduated, they went to college, and they're all teachers, teaching school.

K.F.: Okay.

L.C.: So just like it is now, there are very few young people that work. And we have the Mexicans now. I taught them last year.

K.F.: Right.

L.C.: I taught them to pick. And they're very good. Jack praises me for that because they were really good pickers, very fast, and very neat in their work. Their meat was pretty, beautiful meat. And they were just lovely little girls.

K.F.: And is it all women that come in and pick?

L.C.: All girls. Uh-huh (affirmative). Young girls. They're all young, very young. And, of course, they're old enough to work, but I mean they're young. Then we had the Cambodians came too. I taught them too.

K.F.: Oh, really?

L.C.: Uh-huh (affirmative).

K.F.: Now when did they come?

L.C.: They came a little bit later. And I taught them too.

K.F.: Later last summer?

L.C.: Uh-huh(affirmative).

K.F.: Will they come back again this year?

L.C.: July, I think they came sometimes in July or August. Something like that. Oh, yeah. Sure, they'll all be back. Someone said Jack is going to have 19 this year of the Mexicans.

K.F.: How many did he have last year?

L.C.: He had 10 came, and then he had 7, I think it was, came of the Cambodians.

K.F.: Okay.

L.C.: And they're the nicest little girls you've ever seen. They're just so happy, and just speaking to you. They speak in their language in Spanish. I learned a few words.

K.F.: Yeah?

L.C.: Sometimes I say it right, and sometimes it would be wrong.

(Laughter.)

L.C.: But they understood what I meant. There was one that could speak a little English. And I would always relate to her what I wanted them to do. And if I see them do something wrong, I was very strict with them. That's the only way you could teach them.

K.F.: Right.

L.C.: And I see them do something wrong, the way that I taught them, I would go back to them and tell them, I'd show them again. Show them again. And in two days' time, I had those girls picking crabs.

K.F.: Wow.

L.C.: Very good listeners.

K.F.: Oh, really?

L.C.: Uh-huh (affirmative).

K.F.: Okay. Now how did you teach them how to pick crabs?

L.C.: Each step, I made them pick a crab up, each step, and I showed them what to do. First thing is take the shell off. Take the claws off first. Then take the shell off. Then cut the piece off front of it around, we call it the mouth. I guess it has a name for it, but I don't know what it is. Then pick the dead men's fingers off, their lungs they call it, but we call them the dead men's fingers, that's what they were always called back there. And then turn the crab over and cut the, I should've brought some crabs today and brought them down to show you so you would know how to do it. I could've taught you in 10 minutes how to pick a crab.

(Laughter.)

L.C.: Don't take that apron off the back. Don't ever take that off. That holds the crab together.

K.F.: On the underside of the crab?

L.C.: Yes, the under – under the crab, there's a little thing like this, like this, it's an apron they call it.

K.F.: Right, okay.

L.C.: And don't pick that off because that holds the crab together, keep from breaking in half. You're not supposed to break a crab in half. You hold it. And when you get finished with it, it's beautiful crab when you get finished with it. You know, take all the you strip us down, I don't know how we'd look.

(Laughter.)

L.C.: No arms nor legs on, whatever. So then you cut the little top pieces off of your crab and pick the meat out of it and pick the little top piece, and you turn the crab around and pick the meat off of that and pick the meat out. And you have clean crab left. You're not supposed to leave any meat in that crab.

K.F.: Right.

L.C.: Jack will get after you.

(Laughter.)

L.C.: But they learn in no time at all. And if I see them doing something wrong, sometime they would hold that crab like that and take the knife, you know, and pick the knife like that because it wasn't right, And I said no, you shouldn't scrape the meat out, you have to pick it out. Just like you would -

K.F.: And what's better about picking the meat out than scraping it out?

L.C.: Uh-huh (affirmative). Pick it out. Don't ever scrape the meat out.

K.F.: Why is that?

L.C.: Scrape it out, the bones will come with it. There's a little canal, little channels each one, you have little channels in there I call them. And you pick the meat out of it. And there's a different, certain way you cut that piece of lump and you'll get a piece of lump out of it, the backfin they call it.

K.F.: Okay.

L.C.: Lump meat, backfin.

K.F.: Now let's see. So I guess there's a lot of talk going on in the picking house in three languages at some point?

L.C.: Well they're talking, we don't know what they're saying, and like adios, you might learn a word like that. That's goodbye. You know, you know Spanish; you could work with them well.

K.F.: Well I know some.

L.C.: Most younger people, we didn't have it in school when we were in school. And it was my, I'll tell you a cute one. My son has a little restaurant downtown here. And they would come in there often and they would go just go on, and on, and on in Spanish. Well he had learned a few words, but he didn't let them know that he knew anything. He knew what they were saying, some things. So when they got ready to leave, he said two or three things to him, you know. They looked at each other, what did I say? Maybe I said something I shouldn't have said in here.

(Laughter.)

L.C.: He said it was cute the way they looked at each other, and their eyes opened up. But we didn't learn too much from them. I mean we just

let them do their little thing. And they would get up and eat at a certain time.

K.F.: Right. Okay.

L.C.: Very nice to work with, they were. Very nice. Jack liked a lot of them, and he'll probably bring the same ones back this year as he has last. And then some.

K.F.: Right. And they go back in November or so?

L.C.: Somewhere – well, last year they didn't go back till December because we had a Christmas party. They were to the Christmas part.

K.F.: Oh, okay.

L.C.: Yeah. And they had all seven attend. Well nine of them, I think – I think it's eight left or nine, I can't remember now because I was home here with my bad leg. And they had a Christmas party, and they all got up and sang in Spanish. They were so cute. And I gave them each one an envelope with some money in it 'cause I got close to them, you know.

K.F.: Yeah.

L.C.: I was so glad that they did, 'cause Jack paid me, you know, for teaching them. I enjoyed working with them. And he said well, told me the other week, Billy said better get that leg well because we're going to have some more Mexicans. And I went up to Queens – I went up to, I think, was it Queenstown – I went up to Harris Crab House?

K.F.: Harris Crab House?

L.C.: Yeah.

K.F.: Up on Kent Island.

L.C.: I went up there last year. Kent Island, yes. Uh-huh (affirmative). I went up there with Jack and showed the people up there. I got a real nice letter from Annapolis.

K.F.: Oh, really?

L.C.: Yes. And they were pleased with me. I showed them how to pick crabs, and everyone that came along – the crabs belong to Harris, I have to remember to put this in there, I was going to show it to you. It was a nice letter they wrote me, and a lot of people were there. I think that's it.

K.F.: Yeah.

Jib-huh (affirmative).

K.F.: Oh, that is really nice.

L.C.: Real friendly. They called me Ren, like everybody else. And come to find out, everyone would come by, I would pick a piece of this lump. The funny thing of it was, we always pick – we don't get the best crabs to pick. The bigger crab, the jumbo crab is being shipped to the city. We just get the leftovers, you know, just ordinary crab, just small crab. Not small, but – the size.

K.F.: Right.

L.C.: And what he did when I went up there, he had baskets of crabs in his ice house, and he went and got me this basket of crabs. Oh, they were beautiful, They were that big.

(Laughter.)

L.C.: It was – oh, I said Jack, I'm telling you, I've just never picked nothing like this in my life, they're so pretty. And I was tickled to death when I got three-quarters of them picked. And everybody came along. I was picking the meat, and of course, they were going to use it for their crab cakes, you know, the restaurant. So then different ones were coming along, these big dignitaries were coming along, and I would say oh, want a piece of this crab? And they would take this big piece of lump out of that crab like that, you know. And they would stand there and they wanted the other piece. I'd crack them a claw, and I was giving all the meat away.

(Laughter.)

L.C.: They were enjoying it, I'm telling you. They said the first time they ever knew where a piece of the lump came from.

K.F.: Oh, really?

L.C.: They didn't know where the piece of backfin came from. Huh-uh (negative). They didn't know how people got that out, because they beat it to pieces.

K.F.: Oh, right.

L.C.: They beat them with the mallets.

K.F.: They do give you a mallet. Right.

L.C.: I was enjoying that. But I did pick them out, I think around five or six pounds, something like that it was. Before I got finished with the basket of crabs, they come and took them away from me and give me these old tiny old things.

(Laughter.)

L.C.: I had to make up on that. But I didn't give them any more. I didn't give any more away. They didn't say anything to me about it. But I enjoy doing that, you know. I enjoy it. We had a nice time that day. Took the day off.

K.F.: Now what are —

L.C.: I don't know whether Jack will have me this year, if I get this knee better.

(Laughter.)

K.F.: What are some of your fondest memories of picking, either on Hooper's Island or —

L.C.: Just being with my classmates and friends and things like that. When we have our class reunion now, we have one now, just started having them every two years because the people are getting older, and a lot of people dead and gone, you know. They really come down to hardly nothing now. And we did have the largest class that ever graduated from Cambridge High School.

K.F.: Oh, okay.

L.C.: Don't ask me how many. Nineteen was the largest class that ever graduated from Cambridge.

K.F.: Really?

L.C.: From Hooper's Island High School. And we were the last class. So a lot of the people are really — and then when we have the class reunion, we tried to get a lot of the classes in that people did graduate from down there. There's only a few left from some of the years, you know, that graduated from down there. But my fond memories were living on the island. It was peaceful, very peaceful. No killing, or robbing, or anything. You could sleep nice with your doors open, your windows up. No screens in half the time. We lived on the water.

K.F.: Okay.

L.C.: All of our life, we lived on the water.

K.F.: Was your father a waterman?

L.C.: My father was a waterman, uh-huh (affirmative). And we had the house built when I was nine years old. And I remember mom moved over there, we moved over across, we lived in a little area across from the house where we had one built. And we stayed there until I left. And

then I lived on the island, married on the island and had four children. And then later on, I came to Cambridge, and this is where I've ended, ended up remarried again.

K.F.: Okay. Now you said that there were a lot of African Americans picking?

L.C.: Uh-huh (affirmative). They're all, a lot of the plants down there – it's two islands, Hoopersville and Hooper's Island. And there's a lot of them down there, and Hooper's Island, there's a lot of crab houses on Hooper's Island.

K.F.: Right. Now are they still singing and stuff when they pick, or are they just talking?

L.C.: They talk. They talk their language. They don't talk to anyone else, but they – they're working all in one group together.

K.F.: Okay.

L.C.: They don't, they're not separated all through the plant.

K.F.: Okay. 'Cause I know –

L.C.: Jack tried to get them all together.

K.F.: Oh, okay. I know a couple people had told me that they used to sing when they would pick crabs, the African Americans.

L.C.: Sing, I haven't heard them sing.

K.F.: Hymns and stuff.

L.C.: These didn't, these didn't sing. We had a time get them up to sing that day at the party.

They all got up there in the line. They looked at each other and started giggling and laughing, you know, going on. And I got up, I didn't tell them to get up, I got up because I was the one teaching them anyway, and they would listen to me.

K.F.: Right.

L.C.: And I said come on now, let's go. And I put my hands up like that, and they looked at me. And whatever they sang, I'll never know 'cause it was in Spanish. But they started singing, and then I sat down.

K.F.: Okay.

L.C.: But they'd listen to me when I tell them to do something.

K.F.: Right.

L.C.: And they took pictures of me and my husband together, and with them with their arms around me. They're real nice.

X.F.: Now where do they stay when they come up here?

L.C.: Well, Jack – the Brooks people have two houses. And you can only have so many in each apartment. So we did have two apartments in the houses or three, whatever they have into the houses. And they stayed there, all together. They were mostly all together. Maybe one was on Maryland Avenue and the other was over on Henry Street or something like that. They were all in that area, Cambridge.

K.F.: Okay.

L.C.: It was nice, you know, working with them.

K.F.: Well now how has that changed? I mean how from when you were younger and picking crabs on Hooper's Island and now at Clayton?

L.C.: Oh, my goodness. It was a lot of changes. It's a lot of changes. I mean it's just so many

things now that we didn't do that you have to get prepared for. You have to get prepared for before you go in. The first thing you have to do is go in and wash your hands, you know. Well we did all that, we kept clean, everything was clean. Everything now is plastic. You couldn't wear a cloth apron. We had to wear a cloth apron back there when we picked when we were young. And we had a little white hat like a nurse's cap we put on our head. Now you have a hairnet. And little things, just small things like that, that's the only difference that I see. And, of course, we sat there and picked. And, yeah, they could have the wood – the tables were all wooden. You can't have anything like that now. Everything has to be stainless steel.

K.F.: Right, so you can just –

L.C.: No wood at all in the crab house whatsoever. And we have plastic trash cans were back there. They used to have baskets, just a bushel basket. And so little things like that have changed. When they first started, you could pick with an old Barlow knife (phonetic), you know, the kind that folds up or anything like that. Now everything has to be a stainless steel knife.

K.F.: How about – is the whole knife stainless steel?

L.C.: The whole knife, stainless steel, uh-huh (affirmative).

K.F.: And is it a short little blade or a longer blade?

L.C.: Well matter of fact, I have some right here.

K.F.: Oh, do you?

L.C.: Not this one -

K.F.: Oh, okay.

L.C.: We take and kind of- I take mine and kind of file it down some so it won't be big at the end of it like that.

K.F.: Right.

L.C.: Just wear it to your hand, and pick the meat up, pick the piece up like that, then turn the crab over, pick the top up.

K.F.: Right.

L.C.: I'm fast with my hands.

(Laughter.)

K.F.: You sure are,

L.C.: And Eddie had - my husband, here he comes, he's - bless his heart, he says here, let me help you. Two old cripples.

K.F.: Hello, sir.

E.C.: Hi, there.

L.C.: He's never learned how to pick that crab yet. I still have to clean that crab up for him.

(Laughter.)

L.C.: I don't think he wants to. This morning, there was a fellow to, where I had my therapy taken, and he says - she says he can go out and get on the lawn mower and cut the grass. He mows all the grass in the yard and everything. He can do that fine. But when he comes in and sits down, he doesn't do anything. He says WI did anything, then he said you wouldn't wait on me.

(Laughter.)

L.C.: He was cute when he said that. I wouldn't have you wait on me.

K.F.: Well you were talking about pretty meat and a pretty crab. Can you describe to me what that is just so I can be -

L.C.: Well some people, some people will pick their crab, and they'll pick all over it, you know, pick all over it. Well if you pick that crab right, you won't have all those bones and shells into it. And then when you put the meat into the can, I pick mine right into the can. The way I pick the meat is it goes - the cup is put on it. Most people come in after my meat.

K.F.: Right, okay.

L.C.: And so the backfin is put in one cup, the special or regular, the special, whatever you call it, is put into another one. And then you just top it off. I lay ever little piece of lump and fix it all over top. I lay all the pieces of lump down. I never throw my meat in. I just lay it all in there real neat, you know, and everything. Because I never know when someone's coming after a pound of my meat, you know.

K.F.: Right.

L.C.: And some of them pick real nice meat, they really do. I mean they're very particular with their crab meat. Eddie, this is Holly. Holly, my husband, Eddie.

K.F.: Hello.

B.C.: Hi, Holly. How are you?

K.F.: I'm fine.

L.C.: It's not Polly, it's Holly. Holly.

E.C.: What, are you doing a story on -

L.C.: The crab.

K.F.: Well we're trying to record some of the traditions here on the shore. And crab picking is one of the traditions here. And particularly traditions that involve women on the shore, so that and shedding the soft crabs and-

Uh-huh (affirmative). Shedding the soft crabs.

B.C.: That's a man's job, shedding the soft crabs.

L.C.: Yeah, they do that. I wish you would come down sometime, down to Brooks crab house.

K.F.: I'd love to come down.

L.C.: They have the crab picking machine, and you would really get a good idea of what I've been trying to tell you. It's hard to visualin it until you see it.

K.F.: Right, right. And I've only seen photos, you know.

L.C.: That's right.

KR: I've never seen anyone pick a crab quite as fast as what you just demonstrated.

L.C.: Well you come down, and I'll show you how to do it slow so you'll learn. I'll bet you I'll learn - I'll teach you in 25 minutes, you'll know how to pick that crab.

K.F.: Okay.

L.C.: Because if you don't do it right, I'll make you do it over.

K.F.: Okay.

L.C.: Ask him.

(Laughter.)

K.F.: And how many times have you done them over?

IX.: He's never learned yet

E.C.: I haven't learned.

L.C.: He doesn't want to learn. He's like that old man. He says if he learned how to do it, then she wouldn't do it for him.

(Laughter.)

L.C.: That's what he said this morning. But there's a lot to learn. I mean to be very perfectionist at it, you have to learn to do it right. But Eddie knows all summer I'm picking meat for people. People calling here wanting me to pick so much meat for them. They don't want anybody's meat but Ren. They'll call down Jack, now I don't want anybody's meat down there but Ren.

K.F.: Really? So how do they know it's your meat?

L.C.: I have a number.

K.F.: You have a number on the can.

L.C.: Uh-huh (affirmative).

K.F.: What's your number?

E.C.: Seventy-one, that was your number last year.

L.C.: Seventy-one. It's been 71 since I've been working.

K.F.: Okay. Okay. Now do you pick here at home for people?

L.C.: I used to, but I got to the point that after I got older, I didn't want to do that. I would pick the meat, I would pick a bushel of crabs at a time. And I save my children, they come down in summer, and I'll get them a bushel of crabs, and they'll come here and pick them, and they come and they talk, and talk and talk. And the two of them get together, and three of them sometimes, and they get to talking. Not ever can say a word to them. And all you hear is about I'm going through the change of life and teaching.

(Laughter.)

L.C.: But that's, we always laugh about that, you know, because they have such a good time together picking their crabmeat. And they'll pick

it and make crab cakes out of it for winter, you know. They like having it through the winter.

K.F.: Okay.

L.C.: They all like crabmeat.

K.F.: Okay. So it seems like it's a very social thing too, I mean as you're picking even at work, you're talking and stuff.

L.C.: Uh-huh (affirmative). Everybody talked, Nobody eats any meat. You're not supposed to eat anything while you're picking the crab on account of bacteria, you know, put it in your mouth and everything. But they're very clean, everyone's clean. You'll see when you come down there. Everyone go clean - it's a lot of colored people, they're clean, very clean. And they know what to do, they know they're supposed to sterilize their pan and wash their pan out, weigh their meat, and then sterilize their hand. And the inspectors come in often.

K.F.: Oh, do they?

L.C.: Uh-huh (affirmative). Never find anything wrong yet.

K.F.: Where are the inspectors from, the state or -

L.C.: The state.

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

L.C.: Yeah, state inspectors. So everything's clean. Mostly kept clean down there for them. You let me know when you're coming. I'll make sure it's clean when you come in.

K.F.: All right.

L.C.: Call me.

(Laughter.)

L.C.: We had one, we had one black man came in and worked, and he washed, he scrubbed and he scrubbed with the hose, he was going all day long with the hose, and these little people, they were scared, afraid they were going to fall down because the floor stayed wet. So he finally had to fire him. It was the cleanest man I ever saw in my life. I never saw a man that keep a place that clean. But he just, the floors wasn't supposed to stay wet like that, not during the day when the people were walking to them, they're cement floors. It's clean in there.

K.F.: Okay. And -

L.C.: Everything's white.

K.F.: Does J.M. Clayton, do they buy the crabs right off the watermen or —

L.C.: Uh-huh (affirmative). They buy them right from the watermen. They come there, land their crab there. And then they have them sorted out. Most times, the watermen have the crabs in the baskets, the ones that are going to ship. They're put into another house. And the others are put in another house, and they're steamed, and they're kept in storage, cool storage all the time. They're never put out. Now there was one thing about back there when we were growing up, they steamed the crabs in huge boxes, wooden boxes. And they were emptied, emptied on a big porch. They were just upset like that, they would just upset them, like you would take a cup and upset it like that and left. We picked them until the crabs were gone. No air condition, no anything. But now everything is under refrigeration.

K.F.: Right. Has that made the job easier, you think?

L.C.: Huh?

K.F.: Has the refrigeration and all these advances made things easier for you as a picker or —

L.C.: Well it's to cut down on bacteria. They didn't know what bacteria was back there, nobody ever died from it or anything like it. They ship it, just ship it at the end of the day. Huge ice houses, loaded with ice, and they would pack it in a barrel. And then put a layer of crabmeat, those cans there, see those three little cans down there?

K.F.: Right, right.

L.C.: They put a layer of them, and a layer of ice, and a layer of can, layer of ice. And then as it would melt, they would still keep ice in there all the time. And they would ship them every day. The trucks would come in, get the crabmeat and then it would go out.

K.F.: And do they still ship them that way, packing them in ice in a box?

L.C.: Huh-uh (negative).

K.F.: No?

L.C.: They're put in paper boxes now. Big huge paper boxes, about this large. Real heavy thick paper boxes, and put tops on them, put them into—he has a big refrigeration place over there, large, large place.

E.C.: Aren't they wax paper boxes?

L.C.: And I still have one sister that still works, and she'll be 82, birthday. I have one sister doesn't work. She found herself a job in a dress shop, you know. But my children don't pick in the crab house anymore. But I still like it. It's a good pastime for me. I don't have to do it. I'll put it like that. I can do without it. But it gives me something to do. You don't want ever get old not doing anything. I didn't want — and I was a manager of the cafeteria at Cambridge High School, I guess for three or four years. I worked there for five or six. My husband, ex-husband, died, and he left me the store. I couldn't work there anymore. They wanted me, they built the new high school and they wanted me to go over there. I was going to be a manager there, and I couldn't do it because I told them I had the store and I didn't want to sell it then. I still have the darn thing.

(Laughter.)

L.C.: Twenty some years in it. And I didn't go back there. So then I said well he wanted to go in the store, and it give him something to do. And business wasn't that great anyway because we stopped buying a lot of things. We bought what we put in there ourself. And we made our money. I don't have to do it. But then I asked Jack if I could come down there and work for him. And he said oh, he's so tickled to death to have me. I had the experience anyway; he didn't have to teach me.

K.F.: Right, true.

L.C.: My sister's a very good picker too. Very good crab picker.

K.F.: And is she still on Hooper's Island?

L.C.: No, she's living in Cambridge. None of our people live on Hooper's Island anymore. They all moved away. Lot of people from the city moved down there, took over.

K.F.: Oh, really.

L.C.: Very few people living down there that are original. Most of the older ones are dead and gone. My mother and father, and all their age are gone. And very few older people there. I bet, the older people, a lot of them my age, see. I'll soon be 80. And so they're all, we all left. There was a few younger ones maybe stayed down there. The people, you say they were foreigners.

E.C.: The younger ones don't want to pick now.

L.C.: Huh?

E.C.: The younger ones don't want to pick.

L.C.: No, no. See they have a lot of Mexicans down there. A lot of Mexicans. Thirty some in one packing house.

K.F.: Oh, really?

L.C.: Uh-huh (affirmative). Jack has two, three sections of his factory going — there's a claw picking machine, and then the regular picking room, and then the crab picking machine room. It's a lot of people working there. It's like an assembly line. Picking through the meat, picking the debris out of the meat when it comes out of the crab. It's really interesting to see that. I had never seen it. Only one time's all I've seen it, working down there all this time.

K.F.: Oh, really?

L.C.: Uh-huh (affirmative). I've only been there one time. It's loud. You have to put earplugs in.

K.F.: Well equipment usually is.

L.C.: Uh-huh (affirmative). But it's interesting. I mean, you know, you wonder where all this crabmeat comes from and where do you get it? What does it come out of.

K.F.: Right, right.

L.C.: And people don't know. But it is clean. Jack has crabmeat, and it's pretty meat and it's clean. And it goes from our — we pick the meat, we can only pick so many pound. We have to weigh every two hours. How many hours, two hours, something. I can't remember now. We don't, it's so many hours we have to pick in. So many, I can't remember now. I'm not interested in that. I just do what I want.

(Laughter.)

L.C.: When it's time for me to get up and pick, I went — regardless of what time it is. But I pick five or six pounds, then I get up and weigh it, you know, whether I have the time or not. But they put it, you go up there and you weigh the meat. The top is put on it. It's not gone, never empty it. My meat is never emptied. And the top is put on it, and it's put into the box, gone in refrigeration. So it's not laying, you know, for the bacteria to settle into it.

K.F.: Right. And then at Clayton, you still pick the smaller crabs you said because the larger ones get sent off.

L.C.: We don't get any large crabs. It's the regular size that you're supposed to have, you know, to catch. But we don't get the jumbos. I'll put it that way. They're put in the baskets and sold. Which I don't blame him. That's his way he makes his money. It's part of the way he works. He still has plenty crabs to pick.

K.F.: Right, right.

L.C.: Well I'll tell you, it's a lot easier picking that regular size crab than it is picking that big jumbo. We like to pick the big jumbo because it's pretty, you know, pretty meat into it and everything. Big meat. But it's hard on you, those fins off, you know, and handling the crab.

K.F.: It's just bigger than your hand, so it's hard?

L.C.: Oh, my Lord, yeah. Huge crabs. But they're pretty when they put them on the table.

K.F.: Right.

L.C.: But we don't get that.

K.F.: Now what about the —

L.C.: But they're nice, we have three young fellow that took over the plant, and they are really nice to work with.

K.F.: Oh, good.

L.C.: Jack, Joe and Billy. They're very nice people to work with. And, of course, their father retired. He's home now, still living. It's way, way back there. And the funny part of it was, I went in there one day, and Mr. Brooks, the older — their father, he gave me my check. And when he looked at it, he said Lorena, Lorena, he said that was my grandmother's name. I said, Mr. Brooks, I said did you know that's who I was named after was your grandmother? Your grandmother's name, I'll put it that way. But I wasn't, I was named after my grandmother.

(Laughter.)

L.C.: I never did tell him any different. I thought Mr. Brooks might leave me some money some day.

(Laughter.)

L.C.: Jack, you know, we'd laugh at that so many times. But they're nice people to work with, they really are.

K.F.: And then what about in the wintertime? I know Maryland can't dredge crabs in the wintertime.

L.C.: We don't work anymore, most time, after December, because there aren't many, they usually send down Virginia and North Carolina and places like that and get the crabs. And most everybody stay home. I don't think they work around there much. If they do, they only get enough for their own plants down there. So we don't get many.

K.F.: So what do you do with your winter months off?

L.C.: Rest up for summer.

(Laughter.)

L.C.: Take a trip once in a while.

K.F.: Yeah.

L.C.: So nothing. Just to relax and rest. It's always plenty to do when you don't get your work all finished home, like fall cleaning and things like that. You catch up on that, and spring cleaning. So they have a lot of— people, I don't think any of them is very much older than I am in there. Might be two or three. But they're around 60's and in their 70's and things like that. So you just can't do it all.

K.F.: Right.

L.C.: Catch up on their working there too.

K.F.: Right. Now are there younger people in there picking besides the Mexicans?

L.C.: Very few. Very few young people. In the 30's, there's a few in the 30's, but no young people.

K.F.: And how much do you get paid per pound?

L.C.: Two and a quarter.

E.C.: Two and a quarter,

L.C.: Two-twenty-five.

E.C.: Tell her how much you got paid when you first started picking crabs.

L.C.: Two, two and a half We went on strike for three cents, for a half a cent.

(Laughter.)

L.C.: I didn't tell you about that.

KY.: No.

L.C.: The people, they were getting wise, you know. We were only picking for two cents, you know, along like that, and two and a half. And the people all got together. And mom, of course, we were all tiny

kids, And mom and all of the older ladies, I guess their 30's, you know, along like that. They got a little piece of pasteboard and put on it. One half cent. We want three cents. Picking for two and a half. We want three cents, half a cent. And they got it. We got that three cents.

K.F.: And what year was this?

L.C.: But you could buy a lot for three cents then.

K.F.: Right, you could.

L.C.: Uh-huh (affirmative). You could buy an ice cream cone for a nickel, you know.

(Laughter.)

E.C.: That was in the 1930's.

K.F.: In the 30's?

L.C.: We went up to get ice cream to the ice cream place last year. It was a dollar. It was, it come to close to \$5 when we got finished with two ice cream cones with a little something on it, you know. I couldn't believe it. We didn't do that anymore. So we learned to economize, people did, down there. And they accumulated, got things together. Most of them own their home. And the crabbers, they work along with the wife, and most of them are crabbers, and the wives pick the crabs, and their children came along, they worked. And then came along where you had to be a certain age before you go in the crab house. But we had gone through all that before they came in.

K.F.: So you were already —

L.C.: We knew all about it, were already the age, right age, so we could keep right on working. But I went to school and I graduated. And my sisters did too. My mom, she make sure we went to school and got our education.

K.F.: And how many pounds can you pick in a day?

L.C.: It's according on the crabs. I can't ever tell anybody how many. Sometimes you get a good day, they'd have real nice crabs. Another day, you might have nothing. But —

(END SIDE A.)

(BEGIN SIDE B.)

L.C.: I've seen mamma pick over 100 pound many, many times. And I've been close to it as I grew older. But I got married and came into Cambridge in 1965, I think it was, something like that. I didn't pick crabs anymore after that. But I was picking crabs until then.

K.F.: Okay.

LC.: And but now, I couldn't tell you how many pounds I pick in an hour. Sometimes, if we get three or four, we're lucky. And then five or six if the crabs are better, I would say better. That's good money.

K.F.: Yeah. It is.

L.C.: It's good money. It is.

E.C.: Some of the women there make 10, 12,000 a year.

L.C.: Oh, yes. They do make good money. Uh-huh (affirmative).

B.C.: And that's just the -

L.C.: The ones that work steady, every day, every day. They work every time there is crabs to pick, they work.

K.F.: Right.

L.C.: I don't. At my age, I shouldn't. If I want to stay home, I stay home. I can say, I would say there was maybe two people there a little bit older than me. One of them's a preacher lady. She's a preacher. And there's another one, I think, Leoca (phonetic) is close to my age. And they're very nice. When I go there mornings, there's one who always have my little bucket, my trash can, one for the claws, tub we put up on top and put our claws in. Looks like a little baby bathtub, plastic.

K.F.: Okay.

L.C.: Everything is plastic, nothing wood. And she'll always have my pan there with my cans into it. Everything ready for me, my apron. Very nice.

K.F.: Yes.

L.C.: She's black. Very nice. Nice people. He has a nice group there. No fussing going on, nothing like that. It's nice working around with people. And every now and then they sing, you know, colored people like to sing.

K.F.: Right, right. What do they usually sing?

L.C.: They sing Christian, you know, they're hymns they learned in church, the Christian songs. And anything they come up with. Anything they get in the mood for and get happy with.

K.F.: Okay.

L.C.: But you're not, you don't have to sit there all day long and not say anything, you know. Be quiet. People come in, they quiet down a little bit. Their friends come in. But they're nice. It's a nice place to work in, isn't it, Eddie? He's been down there before and seen it.

E.C.: Yeah.

L.C.: Come in and see it. It's not too many people they let particularly come in. You just can't walk in there.

K.F.: Right.

L.C.: You have to go to him and see if you can go in and watch. He'll come in with you. Very strict.

K.F.: Yeah, yeah.

L.C.: You have to be.

K.F.: Well when I spoke with him, I asked if I could come down and take photos, and he said no. I don't want any photos.

L.C.: No, no. They won't let that. Unless it was sometime that we were there and they had it, I think last summer they had it, they had it on TV, which I was on TV last year.

K.F.: Oh, okay.

E.C.: That wasn't down there.

L.C.: Yes, it was down there too. Yes. Took me, sat right there picking. I tried to hide myself.

E.C.: But you picked down to Kent Island.

L.C.: That's right, that's right. I went up there. See, but it was another time they came down, you know. But they did pick some in there. And they had tape, put it on tape. And but he's very particular about - but being that you've called him and interested in things like it, you know, they write up and everything, he might. But that's the way they all are. I don't know if you're familiar with Phillip's crab house in Ocean City.

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

L.C.: You're not familiar with that? Oh.

K.F.: I don't think so.

L.C.: They really did well. They had a crab house down on Hooper's Island, they still have it down there. And now they're millionaires and billionaires from it.

K.F.: Oh, okay.

L.C.: They went down Ocean City, set a little place up down there, little tiny restaurant, because my daughter, one of my daughters worked down there in the restaurant. And they started steaming crabs in a little pot, just a little tall pot like that. And work, work, work. Now they have two huge places down there.

K.F.: In Ocean City?

L.C.: One up the Harbor Place in Baltimore. Big restaurant.

KS.: Oh, okay.

L.C.: One in Richmond.

E.C.: Richmond, Virginia.

K.F.: Oh, okay. And it's called Phillip's?

L.C.: Phillip's Crab House. I thought everybody knew that. It's all over the place. It does very well, very well. And it's not the crab house. It's a restaurant.

K.F.: Restaurant, right.

L.C.: If you ever go to Ocean City, look at Phillip's - Phillip's Restaurant, not crab house.

K.F.: Okay.

L.C.: And he has one down the island, still on the island. They just built a brick one, beautiful place down there on the island, and put - upstairs, I think one of his sons run that.

E.C.: No.

L.C.: Yeah. Well another fellow manages it, but -

E.C.: I forget his name. He's manager, that's how I know.

L.C.: I know, he's the manager, but the other fellow's in charge of it.

E.C.: Oh, yeah.

L.C.: Brice's son. He has one son was crippled. And he had two sons. But they were from Hooper's Island.

E.C.: They went to school with you.

L.C.: Uh-huh (affirmative). Brice graduated year before I did. Brice Phillips. Brice and Shirley. You see their picture a lot of times in the paper, or a write-up of them or something.

K.F.: Okay.

L.C.: Uh-huh (affirmative). Look it up.

K.F.: I'll have to check that out.

L.C.: Uh-huh (affirmative). Yeah.

K.F.: Because usually when my husband and I want to eat crabs, we go buy a bushel and, you know, eat them at home.

L.C.: Uh-huh (affirmative). They built a real modern crab house down there. It's beautiful inside.

K.F.: Okay.

L.C.: Looks like a big restaurant when you go into it and look at it. Big counters up there, all white, brick, all brick. Right on the water.

K.F.: I'll have to check that out. Sounds good.

L.C.: Uh-huh (affirmative).

K.F.: Well is there anything else that we should know about crab picking?

L.C.: That's all I know. Just to be clean, neat and clean.

K.F.: Right.

L.C.: And just do it the right way.

K.F.: I guess people who aren't very neat and clean don't last very long.

L.C.: No, no. They'll always find a way to get rid of them.

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

L.C.: But most everybody, they know the rules. If you don't go by the rules, he's not going to have you there. But most of the people know what to do. Just like when you come in, when you start cooking, I mean you know, you wash your hands.

K.F.: Right, right.

L.C.: And you put your apron on. You have to wear a hairnet. And he had managers in there, he'll tell you what - if you're not doing anything right, they'll tell you. The little Mexicans learned very well. They did. They had their hair covered up. Next day, they brought them; they will supply them hairnets and everything for you to wear. And they had their knife and sterilized their knife and their hands. They showed them how to do things one time, and most times, you don't have to go back, very seldom. They learned.

K.F.: And the other people who were picking there, did they all learn similar to you, some of the black ladies, did they -

L.C.: No. I never - I think I taught three or four people more that came in, and some of them stayed there and others didn't, they left

because they didn't want to do it. They were younger and they didn't want to do that,

K.F.: But I guess that's how most people —

L.C.: Oh, yeah, someone has to teach them, right. And if you teach them right how to do it, right the first time, they will — most, a lot of times, they'll stick with it.

K.F.: Right.

LC.: But a lot of the younger ones don't. The older ones will stay with you longer. But the young ones, they want something else to do now. And I'll tell you what, there aren't that many young people working in a crab house. And they want to be with their age yet. If you have somebody in there 15 or 16, they want to be where they are.

K.F.: Right.

L.C.: They don't want to sit around with somebody 75 or 80, or 65 or even 40, you know. They want to be where the young people are. And to really make anything out of it, you have to stick with it. It's piecework.

K.F.: Right, it is piecework.

L.C.: And you have to make your — amount for an hour, if he's going to have you, you have to make — because he would have to come up and give it to you.

K.F.: Right. Okay.

E.C.: He pays five and a quarter an hour. And he gives you a certain length of time to come up to that amount at two and a quarter a pound.

K.F.: Oh, okay.

E.C.: So, it takes time. Like me, I couldn't pick a pound of crab in an hour.

(Laughter.)

L.C.: I have to clean them up for him, and he picks the meat out.

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

L.C.: He never did learn how to pick that little top piece, so I just don't give him that, I just give him the bottom of the crab. And he will pick that meat out of there. He knows how to do that. Have you ever learned how to pick a crab?

K.F.: Well, not the way that you're talking about.

L.C.: Yeah, you break it in half, do you?

K.F.: No, I pick the legs off, and then I guess I do break the bottom part off.

L.C.: You take it in half. Uh-huh (affirmative). Yeah, take the apron off the back.

K.F.: Right, so I have the top of the shell in my hand and then pick from there, which is wrong.

L.C.: Right. You come down see me this summer. I'll teach you how to pick crabs.

K.F.: Okay.

(Laughter.)

L.C.: Where do you live?

K.F.: Well, I live in Maryland now, but across the bay.

L.C.: Across the bay on the Western Shore. Uh-huh (affirmative). Do they have crab houses over there too?

K.F.: Yeah, they sure do. Oyster shucking houses as well.

L.C.: I had some relatives, they used to live over there. The Hardings lived over there. Elizabeth Harding. But I think she's passed away too. How about a cup of coffee or something, cup of tea?

K.F.: I'm not much of a coffee drinker.

L.C.: How about a cup of tea, glass of tea?

K.F.: That sounds good. Is it iced tea?

L.C.: Iced tea.

K.F.: Yeah, that'd be great.

L.C.: But I don't have any lemon. Hooked for my lemons today, and I didn't have a lemon.

K.F.: That's okay. That would be wonderful.

L.C.: Will you cut that thing off?

K.F.: Sure.

(OFF RECORD.)

L.C.: You've never heard of the oyster puff?

K.F.: Huh-uh (negative).

L.C.: Oh, my goodness.

K.F.: How do you make that?

L.C.: Delicious. You take the oysters and wash the oyster. You save some of your liquor that the oysters are shucked in, you know.

K.F.: Okay, right.

L.C.: You save some of that. Of course, most time when you buy the oyster, they've already been washed. But you take the oysters and you put a little bit of this is a new recipe, I learned this here, we learned it down Hooper's Island. They have them all the time down there, oyster puffs. They have chicken and crab, oyster dinner, oyster and chicken dinner, and they have the oysters. So it's called chippy (phonetic), you've got to buy chippy, put a little bit of that into your oysters and mix them up with milk, canned milk, Pet Milk.

K.F.: Pet Milk, okay.

L.C.: Little tiny bit of milk. You don't make real runny. You make them like a paste. Take that tablespoon full, put it down in hot fat and it'll puff up, and that oyster's in there.

K.F.: Oh, okay.

L.C.: And they are delicious, They really are good. And they had a fit over them Christmas. I made them Christmas. And just put in there with my big deep fryer with — I use olive oil.

(Laughter.)

L.C.: It's good for us, you know, the fat. And that's all you do, that's all you put into them. Put a little salt and pepper if you want.

K.F.: Right.

L.C.: Salt, put the pepper. And just drop them down into the deep fat. And you make your crab ball, little crab balls are just like a crab cake only you just make it into the ball. Put it into the deep fat and fry it. Roll it in cracker meal. There's a lot of things you can do with crab. Make the deviled crab, save the back shell or you buy your shells, you know. I have a lot of pretty shells, red ones, yellow ones, green ones, every color. And you fix your deviled crab in it, and all your meal is right in that shell, you know, of your meat, the protein.

K.F.: Right. What are some of the other recipes from Hooper's Island that you remember?

L.C.: Oh, my goodness, honey. I don't know. Mama cooked very plain. Mama was a very plain cooker. But everything was so tasty, so good. I

keep saying everything to cook, I keep saying gee, this doesn't taste like mama, because the food doesn't taste that way. And I'll tell you something else. I can't blame it all on the food. As you get older, your taste changes. I do know that. Your taste changes, and you don't — the food does not taste like it used to. And I hear all the old people say it, so I ask along with age. My sisters will say well, Laurena, I had some chicken the other night. That didn't even taste like chicken. We had some pork. It didn't even taste like pork. I remember when mamma used to cook her chickens, and — well chicken don't. Chicken has really changed in taste, because they fed it on corn back there. They fed chickens on corn. Mama would take an old chicken, and of course they didn't let them run out then, all up and down the fields, and they'd pick the ones or whatever, and she fed them corn and cracked corn, I think The fine corn for the little chickens, and she raised chicken. And when she would fry one of those chickens, you could smell it cooking. Oh, you could hardly wait for it to get done. And it's like a lot of things now that they cook, just the taste is not there because the chicken houses just feed them on fast food.

K.F.: Right, right.

L.C.: And they just don't taste like chicken like they used to. And pigs the same way. The pork doesn't taste like it used to taste. My daughter brought this pork down. I didn't tell her. She bought it at Sam's club, and I didn't tell her. It was beautiful pork, but it didn't taste like pork. I asked Eddie if it tasted that way. He said, no, it didn't taste too good. And Linda said, mother, 'this doesn't taste like pork, you know. So it's not me all together in my taste as I get older. They just, your taste changes, I guess, but it's the food, I think, that — it's the food that they get the things to feed them on, to feed them to get them fast, get them fast. Faster they grow, the more they can sell.

K.F.: I talked to one woman who remembered when she was younger that you really didn't have fried chicken until July because the chickens weren't ready.

L.C.: No, no. Mamma would never, she would never — she really didn't want to kill the hens then. She would kill the rooster. The little rooster, the he —

K.F.: Oh, right.

L.C.: You know, the male. And it was the rooster. And she said no, we have to keep the hens to lay the eggs. She said they laid eggs, and she shed her eggs for winter. But and then at Christmastime, you had an old chicken, you'd bake it. You'd bake your chicken at Christmastime or make a pot of soup with it. And they didn't want to really get rid of them now because they save their old hens until they were real old, till they couldn't lay any more eggs. The old roosters were no good, so –
(Laughter.)

L.C.: But these little spring chickens, that's when she liked to go out and get those little spring chickens. And go in the garden and get her potatoes that she'd grow, and always had her English, her new English peas as they called them. They didn't call them peas, they called them new English peas. And they were good. We'd go to Sunday school and come back, and she'd have dinner all done.

K.F.: And would lots of family come over for dinner on those Sundays, or was it –

L.C.: Just family, our family, we had four, and mom and pop was five, six. That's as much as we could afford to feed.
(Laughter.)

L.C.: I don't know how Eddie lived. He never did tell me. How did you live? You were from up in Rhode Island.

E.C.: I know. Well, we had Sunday dinners, but it was just family.

L.C.: We had more to eat on Sunday than we did any day to the week. The biggest –

E.C.: The doors were always open. We never locked the doors.

L.C.: No, we didn't either, down on the island.

E.C.: Even when I was younger. And, of course, my friends, my brother's friends, whoever would just walk right in, don't even knock on the door.

L.C.: No. No, no.

E.C.: They were always welcome. And my mother played the piano, and she had a roll-away piano. And many a day we had sing-alongs which lasted for four or five hours, just to have something to do. But now, the kids, they have something to do, it costs money. That's just it. Just like the – to go roller skating, it costs. To play ball, it costs so much.

K.F.: Right, right.

E.C.: And I don't know, a lot of the parents don't have the money to put out \$50 so a kid could play basketball and all at the Y, and learn how to play basketball.

K.F.: Right. So lots of stuff you did on your own to entertain yourselves.

L.C.: But when we were growing up, we just had a little four-room house; two rooms down, two rooms up. It was a kitchen and a living room, you know. And mom had an old pump organ, You know those old pump organs you pump, you have to pull pieces out, you pump on them to play. Well she could really play. But she had it in the corner, in the corner, you know, catty-corner. And whenever she'd get me the mg or something go in the kitchen floor, we had Nathan's Furniture Store in Cambridge here, so it was there for years and years and years, Nathan Furniture Store. So that old man named Mr. Molar, his name was Molar, real old man, long mustache, you know, you don't see anything like that now. Big beard hanging down on him. And he came in, and she'd give him a quarter or something a week on it, let them pay on it on time. So one time, she didn't have that quarter, quarter or 50 cents, she didn't have it to give him. And she sent one of us, I don't know which one it was, one of us, she's told this many times, she went to – she'd say well our mother's not home now, she's not home now. And they looked all round, we were in the living room, came to the living room, looked all around. And some way or other, her foot was out like this. He said well you tell your mother next time she leaves, take her feet with her.

(Laughter.)

L.C.: And she was hid behind, hiding from him. She didn't want to tell him she had the money. She still had a little bit of pride, you know. Even though they didn't have anything. He said tell your mother next time she leaves, take her feet with her. I never will forget that. Many times, I think it was Edith who did it, my older sister. 'Cause she would always tell Edith. But then she'd, she would say come in, Mr. Molar, I can hear her now. Come in, Mr. Molar. And she'd always have fried oysters or something for him to eat, always gave him something to eat. You've heard me talk about mamma how she fed everybody came in. But she would always have something to eat, and he would come in and sit down, that old

big man would. And I'm thinking, look, he's eating all of our dinner up. We won't have enough dinner up. She would give it away, mamma would.
(Laughter.)

L.C.: But he looked forward to having something to eat. And back there, they had these big long things, about this long, and I know you've seen the old antique pouches with the little snap at the top that you clicked. That's what he clicked his money in. And he'd have that thing full of money, change, because everybody didn't have a dollar to give him. They give him 50 cents or a quarter or something, or a dollar maybe in quarters or something.

K.F.: Right. So he'd come by the island to collect everybody's monthly credit?

L.C.: He collected. Uh-huh (affirmative). He did it. I mean if they paid him anything, it was all right, and if they didn't — but Nathan made a fortune of money in Cambridge. Had all these little tiny islands and places around, little communities. It was only store it was you could buy anything. They had nice furniture. Pennsylvania House, furniture. That's all gone now too. They die out. Still carry a big, big, big foundation here in Cambridge.

K.F.: Oh, really?

L.C.: They have a big boat going now called the Nathan. Touring up and down the river. And they have their big places in Cambridge still there, they're still there. Nobody into them.

E.C.: He left so much money to the city. And the city uses the interest to give to different organizations.

L.C.: Different organizations. Nathan's.

K.F.: Oh, okay.

L.C.: Always Nathan's giving somebody.

E.C.: Fourth of July, that was DuPont that did, DuPont lent money, he used to live here.

L.C.: But Nathan would do though — my deceased husband worked there 40 years, 40 years for Nathan. He didn't give him one penny when he died — when he retired. He retired from there.

K.F.: Really?

L.C.: Uh-huh (affirmative). He retired. They never did give him one penny. The ladies at the store that worked there gave him a watch. And he

died. And he thought he was going to get a little retirement check, but he didn't. And there was another furniture store in Cambridge, and it was Dean's. And he wanted Tony to quit Nathan's and go work for him. Says I'll put you a shop up and let you handle all the used furniture you want, he says, and sell it. And I'll pay you well. And he wouldn't leave Nathan's. And I think he really thought when he retired, they gave him a dinner, retirement dinner. And I can see him now standing behind me holding onto my shoulders when they gave him a letter. And that one thing, he looked in there, and he looked and I think he thought he was going to see a check or something. There wasn't anything in there. (Laughter.)

L.C.: And he didn't give any of his workers anything. They worked for him years, they died, all of them died. But he retired. The year he retired, he died. He retired and left the store, and they closed the store down. When he retired, they closed the store down. And then we put the old store up we had, you know, Tony's Furniture Store, named it after him. And everybody calls Eddie Tony. Tony died. And Tony, he goes by Tony. Call him Tony, he'll answer you.

E.C.: And Tony's been dead almost 23 years.

L.C.: Yeah, 23 years. And they still call him Tony.

(Laughter.)

L.C.: 'Cause he had gray hair too. And Eddie's got gray hair. And they're both small. And most people, Eddie doesn't correct them, he just goes along with Tony.

(Laughter.)

E.C.: No, as long as their money's green.

L.C.: Just as long as they buy something, you don't care. And Eddie was a born salesman. He could really sell. They made Nathan's a barrel of money.

E.C.: Tony.

L.C.: Made a barrel of money. Of course, we got a lot of things. We got a lot of things. He would see something for himself when he would go someplace, and he would get it, like the hanging lamp and things we have in the other room, the furniture we have in there. But they called here, and they say is Tony there? And Eddie will be in the kitchen or place, and I'll say Tony? Poor Tony. I wonder sometimes if he hears us.

(Laughter.)

L.C.: But he was a wonderful person. Nice. Nice to live with.

K.F.: Uh-huh (affirmative). Now how did you two meet?

E.C.: Through Moose Lodge.

L.C.: I think it was going through Moose Lodge. When Tony died, we were in the Moose Lodge, you know. Doing things with Moose.

E.C.: My wife died a month after.

L.C.: And his wife died.

E.C.: And eventually, we got together.

L.C.: We'd been together a while, then we thought it would be best to get married. He's been good to me. I don't know what he thinks about me, he doesn't express himself.

E.C.: I couldn't be anywhere without you.

(Laughter.)

L.C.: Tony and I built a little house here. He lived in it four years anyhow. Four years. First of the year, we moved in and he died — no, three years and a half I think it was. Something like that. I don't think it was four years. He died in November. We moved in here in January.

E.C.: Yes.

L.C.: He was going to take the roof off it and make a steep roof on it, real high roof, you know, pointed roof, and make an upstairs. Oh, he was going to do a lot. Dreams are always big, you know.

K.F.: Right.

L.C.: Had a stroke and died. Only 60 some, 62. Sixty-two. He just started getting his social security.

E.C.: Thought he was 65.

L.C.: Huh-uh (negative). Sixty-two. That's life. That's life, isn't it?

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

E.C.: Well, do you think you've got enough to write a book about crab picking?

K.F.: Well, maybe not a book.

L.C.: No, it's hard to — unless you have something to demonstrate it with, it's hard to show anybody how to pick a crab. Pull the shell off, pull the claws off first. They're in your way. Hold it in your hand with the bottom, with that apron next to your hand. You don't turn that and put that shell on that side.

K.F.: Okay.

L.C.: That'll tear your hand up.

K.F.: I won't do that anymore.

L.C.: No. Hold it in your hand. Take your hand, put it in back of the shell. I should've called you and told you go over Kool Ice and got a few crabs. I never thought of it, 'cause they do have them at Kool Ice. And pool the claws off first. Have a little thing put the claws in. Pull the shell off. Cut that mouth off, front of there, in between that crab right there, that old big thing there, the eyes and everything are there.

K.F.: Right.

L.C.: And that day I was up Harry's cleaning these crabs up, this man, I thought he was going to cut my hands off. He said look at her, what she's doing. I says what am I doing? I thought I was doing it right. He said look, she's throwing it all away. See when they eat them, they eat all of that in there, in the middle of that crab.

K.F.: Who eats all that?

L.C.: Well they do when they beat them up. See, they beat it all up. They take the mallet and they beat, and beat, and beat and beat. They're beating, beating, beating, and they mashed it all up, and then they picked through it and got the meat out.

K.F.: Well I thought some parts of the crab, I mean, you're really not supposed to eat.

L.C.: No, no, you're not supposed to eat any of that.

K.F.: Right.

L.C.: And when I took those little things there, those little rough looking things on them –

K.F.: Yeah.

L.C.: Well they're called their lungs really.

K.F.: Yeah.

L.C.: Well back there in the older days, they called them dead man's fingers.

K.F.: Right.

L.C.: Was what they called them. And some people still call them that. But they are, they're lungs. That's what they breath through.

K.F.: Right.

L.C.: But they eat them. Said, look, she's throwing them away. And I got so tickled, I didn't know what to do. And Jack was standing there watching me. And he didn't say anything either. Cracked him — he knew I was, he was letting him think that I was throwing it all away. So when he got finished, I cut all this off, and I cleaned all this mess off and threw it away, you know.

K.F.: The mustard and —

L.C.: All that mustard. Well, sometimes, if you want a little bit of that fat, that real clean fat, you know, there's some rough stuff inside there, you know. And I cleaned the — I pulled the lungs off, and then I cut the fins off. And he said she's really messed that crab up. He said look, she threw half of it away. And I punched him in the stomach, and I said would you want to eat what's inside of you? I said that's what that crab has.

(Laughter.)

L.C.: He says, right? Really? You can't eat it? I said no, you're not supposed to eat that. That's not good for you. That's the waste.

K.F.: Right, right.

L.C.: Waste material. And that lung, who in the world could eat that rough thing inside it? No way. The rough, you know.

K.F.: Yeah, no. I've always picked that out.

L.C.: Yeah, right. Pick that off So Jack got so tickled when I did that to him. He got thinking about it. I said when you beat that crab up now, you don't know what you're eating. You're eating all this messy stuff there that I'm throwing away. Look, she's throwing every bit of that away, he said. That really put me in a bad spot there, you know, throwing Harris's Crabs away.

(Laughter.)

K.F.: Well Harris knows better. I mean they have crab pickers, right?

L.C.: Oh, they laugh over it.

K.F.: I guess the only time you eat all that stuff in the middle is with a soft crab.

L.C.: Well, right. Well, you do. Well even when you do that. And the female crab, don't you ever do that, don't eat all of that. In the female crab, there's two little round things, little hard round things. Have you ever seen them in there?

K.F.: No.

L.C.: Well they're female organs. That's the female.

K.F.: Okay.

L.C.: The hard crab has it too. And just like a man has different little things than a woman has.

K.F.: Right.

L.C.: That's what you're eating.

K.F.: Okay.

(Laughter.)

L.C.: So you kind of go up inside the front of that crab to cut the mouth off-

K.F.: Right.

L.C.: And I don't know what that's called there, but that's what they eat, that's what they eat with is that front there, we call it the mouth. And you go up in that, pick your knife and - where did that knife go?

K.F.: I think you put it back.

L.C.: Okay. You take that knife and go up inside there, and take your knife and it's right there, the ones - they're on each side of that mouth. The round thing. Don't ever eat that. That's not good for you.

K.F.: Okay.

L.C.: And rest of can stay in there. I mean it's nothing but mostly fat and a little bit more of the other stuff. It's not matured when it's like that. It's still soft. But when it gets hard, it's not - you don't eat that, you still don't eat it. Don't eat it. That's why I don't like soft crab.

K.F.: Yeah.

L.C.: I pull that shell off and I dig all that mess out and then I put the shell back on it.

K.F.: Okay, yeah. I'm not fond of soft crabs either.

L.C.: No. And you always take the apron off the back of it when you - don't ever cook that apron on back of a soft crab. Pull that off.

K.F.: Okay.

L.C.: That's where the female organs are up in there. That's where a crab will mate, through that back.

K.F.: Right. Okay.

L.C.: The male and female both. But you're supposed to take that off.
And you come down,

he'll let you in. Tell him you're Holly. He'll want to see you around.

K.F.: Okay, all right. Now how did you get the nickname Ren?

L.C.: It's in my name. L-A-U-R-E-N-A. Ren.

K.F.: Okay.

L.C.: They were going to call me Rena, and I didn't like that. So I told them, no, I don't want, I don't want Rena. Well grandmother was named Laurena. And you know what they called her? Rena, they called her. I hated that. Miss Rena, they call her Miss Rena. I thought, Lord have mercy, mama, what did you give me that name for? Look what they're calling me, Rena. So then it broke it up in Ren. I wouldn't answer the kids when they called me Rena. They didn't say Rena, they said Ree-nay. And they called Grandmom Ree-nay. That's what they called her. I said just call me Ren. So a lot of the people, when they call me Ren, W-R-E-N. I guess sometimes, a name comes through the mail, L-A-W-R-E-N-A. W-R-E-N, see, Wren.

K.F.: Oh, okay.

L.C.: And I have a little niece named after me, Ren. Ren, Ren Marie Asquith (phonetic). Her father's the principal of the South Dorchester High School.

K.F.: Oh, okay.

L.C.: And her mother liked the name of Ren, so she named her Ren. Just Ren R-E-N.

K.F.: It's a nice name.

L.C.: It's not even a name. It's just a broken name. Just something picked out of a name. I do have a name.

(Laughter.)

L.C.: Right?

K.F.: Right, right. Okay.

L.C.: That's like Betty. You know, most times Betty comes from Elizabeth. I don't know why, but they do have Betty as the name of Elizabeth. Elizabeth.

E.C.: That's because a lot of the women didn't like the name Liz.

L.C.: And they call them Liz, you know. Elizabeth really is the name for — Betty is a nickname for Elizabeth. Like my son has the name of Maurice. His name is M-A-U-R-I-C-E, but most people call him Moris. M-O-R-I-S.

K.F.: Oh, right.

L.C.: See, but his name is M-A-U-R-I-C-E. Well I don't know of anything else to tell you about that crab.

K.F.: Okay.

(Laughter.)

L.C.: Now you can change it around any way you want it. Once you get that crab and know how to pick it, you'll know really how you can really get that many pound of meat out of it.

K.F.: Okay. I'll pick up some crab on the way home tonight.

L.C.: I should've really, I should've really got you, bring two, three home. You know, got a half dozen, brought them home. And I could've really showed you how to do it. You would've known how to pick crab when you left here.

K.F.: Hopefully, I'll come down to Clayton.

L.C.: Do that.

K.F.: And you can show me how to do it.

L.C.: You can come down to Clayton's, and I'll show you.

K.F.: That sounds good.

L.C.: I'll set you down at the table, put an apron on you.

(Laughter.)

L.C.: If I see you doing it wrong, I'll say no, Kelly, you don't do it that way, you don't do it that way.

(Laughter.)

L.C.: These little Mexicans, they were nice though, weren't they? Eddie went to the party, he just couldn't believe it. I've been telling him how nice those little Mexicans are. And they just love to sit down.

E.C.: They loved you to death.

L.C.: Yeah, they really did. They always come smile, the mornings. A lot of the black ones, a lot of them didn't want them in there because they thought they were there picking up the crabs, and they wouldn't get as much, you know. If you had 20— if you had 20, I would say, well they don't, they have crates they put the crabs in, steam them in a big, round crate about this tall, it's huge around. And if you had 20 crates of

crabs, well normally with them there, just the black ones and a few white ones they had, they would pick them up and have a good day's work. But those little Mexicans come in, and they were fast, and they picked there, well half a day's gone, you were finished. You didn't have enough crabs for them. So that's what they thought, but it was always last year, it was always that Jack had enough crabs for them to pick all day. So until 3, 4:00 in the afternoon. Most times, it was three., Huh?

E.C.: Now you only work eight hours.

L.C.: Yes, seven, eight hours we work, I mean if we have enough crabs. That's if we have enough crabs. But normally, he has a big, he's got one of the biggest, like I said, crab houses around here anywhere.

K.F.: Right.

L.C.: And he has enough crabs. Because if he has enough crabs just for us to pick, he doesn't have the picking machine going. But if he gets a lot of crabs in, and we can't pick them, then it turns to the picking machine.

K.F.: Oh, okay.

L.C.: So they don't pick, if it's later in the fall, they have a lot of crabs – more crabs in fall than you do in spring and summer.

K.F.: Right, tight.

L.C.: And this is what happens there. But they had so many people come in 'cause it's always somebody looking for a job, make a few dollars. They're paid by the hour, so much an hour.

K.F.: Right.

L.C.: But we are paid by, like piecework. We pay by how many pound we pick.

K.F.: Right.

L.C.: You remember that.

K.F.: Yeah.

L.C.: We don't work by the time, hour. Most time, the pickers that come in – but those little girls, honey, were making 3 and \$400 when they left to go back to Mexico.

K.F.: Wow. A day or –

L.C.: Oh, yeah.

E.C.: A week.

L.C.: A week, a week.

K.F.: A week.

L.C.: Yeah. They made big money. They could beat anybody in there. They were going past everybody in there.

K.F.: Really?

L.C.: Uh-huh (affirmative).

K.F.: They caught on that fast that they were –

L.C.: Uh-huh (affirmative). Very, very fast. They're very – well you notice, anything they do, they do well anyway. You look at all the piecework that – their needlework that they do. You buy some of the needlework that's made over there in those countries, and it's beautiful, it's beautiful. And that's just how neat they were. And they come every morning. They were clean, they didn't wear the same thing everyday, you know, they come clean every morning, and they kept their hands sterilized all the time, clean.

K.F.: Were any of them doing needlework here, did you see?

L.C.: I don't know what they did. I don't know. But they had, you know, when you buy pretty needlework, it's always the Philippines and all around in that area.

K.F.: Right, right.

L.C.: And they're very intelligent, very intelligent people. They're nice people. I mean I can't say anything I could say bad about them. These colored ones would want to get around, these men would try to get around them get the food away from them. And I told them one time, I told that girl the – she knew some English, she could speak some English. I told her don't let nothing take their food away from them. So then when the Cambodians were there, it was one that hung around me a lot. She had beautiful blonde hair, and she was a nice pretty – all white. We didn't have any black ones at all, all white. And some of the plants had black ones, just like we have black and white people here, see.

K.F.: Right, right.

L.C.: And she, I said why aren't you over there with the rest of the girls, your friends? Why aren't you over there eating with them? She said, men. She could speak a few words. She said, huh-uh (negative), huh-uh (negative). Shook her head. Huh-uh (negative). She said babies, babies. She meant the men would get them pregnant.

K.F.: Oh, okay.

L.C.: She didn't want anything to do with them. I said oh, now I know what you're talking about.

K.F.: Right.

L.C.: She didn't want anything to do with those men. And they were the black men that worked there. Babies, babies. She knew what that was.

K.F.: Right, right.

L.C.: She was nice. She was very nice. Every day, they'd have a break, and that's just like down Jack, every so many hours they work, and then they have a break, 10 or 15 minute break.

K.F.: Right, right.

L.C.: And then they'll go upstairs and get something to eat and they had – even black ones, they didn't even want them to use the microwave oven to heat their lunch up with. The one said well they're taking their time up, we didn't have to go there, we have to get ours, you know. And they didn't want to go along with them. Some of them did. Now the lady that weighed the meat, they wanted her to go back with them to Mexico. She said they begged her to go back with them to Mexico. They fell in love with Leona, her name was. Nice lady, colored lady. And so Jack says, Ren, do you have a microwave in the store? And I says no, we don't at this time. Have one now, but we didn't have one then. I says I have a nice one, I have a nice one now. I said I didn't, but I said do you want a microwave oven? He says yeah, I'd like to have a microwave oven. He says they're fussing over the microwave over there, black and white, the Mexicans are. And I'd like to get another one. So I said well you just hold your horses, I'll find you one. So I got the paper, Banner. We looked through it and there was some in their advertising. We took, went up the highway and found, went to two, three houses, and I didn't like what I saw. I went to one, and it had a real nice one. And they're clean. And I asked her how much she wanted for it. Forty. So I came on back, I called Billy. I said Billy, the other boy, I says you want to pay \$40 for one? He says my, Lord, yeah. That's cheap, \$40 for a microwave.

K.F.: Yeah.

L.C.: So I came home, brought it home. You know, just needed wiping out. It was all clean 'cause she was using it. And so I said well I'll tell you what. Went out in the van, cleaned it out in the van this morning and cleaned it out. I said it's still in the van. And tomorrow

morning before Eddie goes to work, I'll get him to bring it down because the men will be there to take it out. And they took it out. And he said that was the best one, better than the other one he had. So the Mexicans got that. They got the better one.

(Laughter.)

L.C.: You see who you gave it to, he gave it to the Mexicans. He didn't give it to the black ones. He told them that was theirs, and the other one was the other ones. It was a little one. But little things I do help them, you know, help them out.

K.F.: Right.

L.C.: They were good to me. Jack, Billie and Joe, all three were good to me. They paid me well for what I did.

K.F.: Well, that's important to make sure people are trained right.

L.C.: He'd always come and ask me, you know, pick me so much meat, his mother and father always come, wanted my meat to pick, you know. And I'd really go out of my way a lot of times and pick it a little bit better than I really would if! just was going to weigh it up, you know.

K.F.: Right.

L.C.: Lay every piece of backfin shining, pretty, it was just like it was in layers, you know.

K.F.: Oh, right.

L.C.: Each layer. Wasn't thrown in, you know, like we usually do. And it was really nice. I try to be good to them. They were always asking me to pick. One day Jack came in. He says I don't know what you do to these men, but he said they call down here and they don't want nobody's meat but 71, 71. Don't send me any crabmeat by 71, they want 10, 12 pounds. Well sometimes I just pick special meat all day long. I don't hardly make anything.

(Laughter.)

L.C.: Rest of them in there wouldn't do that. The black ones wouldn't do that.

K.F.: Right.

L.C.: They'd be bony. I'd pick a lot for families. Just so I don't pick any bones, long as I go on like that. I've picked enough crabs not to pick any bone into it.

K.F.: Right.

L.C.: Put any shells in it, rather, bones they call them. But it's interesting, you know. Never know what you can do when you go down there days, what you can see. And when I get tired, I come home. I quit and come home. I'm not obligated to have to stay.

E.C.: Are you doing this for schoolwork?

K.F.: No. This is for the Delmarva Folklife Project, and it's a regional project here on the shore and it's funded by Midatlantic Arts Foundation out of Baltimore, and the Maryland Humanities Council, and Delaware and Virginia's Humanities Council. So it's not really a school project.

It's more of a peninsula project. So looking at different traditions on the shore. Virginia still has several places where they pick crabs.

L.C.: Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah. We get a lot of crabs from Virginia, we do. Down North Carolina too.

K.F.: Yeah.

L.C.: They come in from Florida, all over the place. Any place you can get crabs, we get them.

K.F.: Okay. Even in the summertime?

L.C.: In summertime, you never know where crabs are coming from. Of course, round here, we get a lot of crabs from around here. But there are a lot of plants around here. There's one or two in Cambridge here, over in east part of Cambridge there they have crab houses. And there's one in back of your store, back of the store they have one over there.

E.C.: Yeah, there's one in back there.

L.C.: Yeah.

E.C.: By the store, there's a crab house.

L.C.: And Clayton's.

E.C.: -- Clayton's. Used to be another one, Todd. He went out of business.

L.C.: Todd. Todd's out of business? I thought he was still working.

E.C.: Huh-uh (negative).

L.C.: Shoot. I didn't even know it. No oyster houses. They're all gone out. Mama used to shuck oysters.

K.F.: Oh, really?

L.C.: Uh-huh (affirmative).

K.F.: That was the winter job?

L.C.: That was way back. Yeah, winter job. She was a very fast shucker. Beautiful. She never cut an oyster. Left-handed too. I never did shuck oysters. My sister did for a while. She left and came to Cambridge. They have some crab houses up in Secretary, Maryland.

E.C.: Yeah.

L.C.: Uh-huh (affirmative).

E.C.: There's one or two of them.

L.C.: Uh-huh (affirmative). Yeah, These crab houses in Cambridge, they had three or four. They've gone out of business, you know. Well the people stopped picking crabs. That's what happened. They couldn't get the pickers. They couldn't get the pickers.

E.C.: Then they have Madison.

L.C.: Madison, uh-huh (affirmative). Down toward Hooper's Island, yeah. But Hooper's Island had two of the big houses. Charles Henry Parks, Billy, you know, and the Ruark Brothers, and Phillips. Phillips Crab House is big now.

E.C.: Oh, you've got three -

L.C.: And the little houses. A lot of people have small houses on their property.

K.F.: Oh, okay.

L.C.: Uh-huh (affirmative). We had one one time. See that's where we had our little cans, you know, over there.

K.F.: Right. Okay. Now are there still ladies picking out of their house just themselves?

L.C.: They have a little house outside. Has to come up to regulations. Everything has to be just so-so in it, you know.

K.F.: Okay.

L.C.: You have same regulations in that as you do in the big ones.

E.C.: It's just like if you read couple of years ago about Smith Island

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(END OF TAPE.)