

**Interview Log**

**Interviewee:** Henry Pipp Pratt **Tape #:** MAAF/KF/FT12.9.98 322  
**Interviewer:** Kelly Feltault **# of Tapes:** 1  
**Date:** December 9, 1998 **# of Sides:** 1  
**Location:** North East, Maryland; Cecil County, on Pipp's dock  
**Topic:** Delmarva Folklife Project  
Net fishing, working the water.

**Corresponding Photography Log #:** MAAF/KF/MD/PS12.9.98.306-311

**Comments:** Henry was recommended by Gary Potter and Bob Jobes as a good talker. He turned out to be quiet on this day. I think it better to interview watermen in groups or pairs. Pipp is a very good net mender and builder, especially for pound nets.  
**Transcription comments:** Lots of wind noise in the background.

**BEGIN SIDE A**

K.F.: Well let me just have you say your name real quick -

H.P.: I'm Henry, I'm Henry Pratt from North East, Maryland.

K.F.: Okay.

H.P.: Been fishing for about 35 years, pound fishing.

K.F.: Okay.

H.P.: Fyke net, and gillnetting, crab potting, whatever it takes.

K.F.: And were you born here in North East?

H.P.: No, I was born in Dillingham, Alaska.

K.F.: Oh, you're kidding? Okay.

H.P.: On Bristol Bay.

K.F.: Wow how did you end up here?

H.P.: Well my family came here in 1942 when we left Alaska, and settled here in Northeast. My family was originally from Cecil County family.

K.F.: Oh, okay.

H.P.: Originally. My father spent 35 years in salmon fishery in Bristol Bay, Alaska, Dillingham. So we kind of followed. Bit of a tradition, I guess you'd say.

K.F.: So you learned how to do this from your family?

H.P.: No, not really. My father never fished here at all. This was a little bit mild for him. (Laughter.) This type fishery. I don't know if you're familiar with Bristol Bay or not, salmon fishery, but it's not like Chesapeake Bay, that's for sure.

K.F.: How are they different?

H.P.: Well it's just a seasonal thing, like a 30-day opening. Very hectic 30 days. You know, you got 30 days to make your whole year's wages. It's not what you'd call a laid-back lifestyle, that's for sure, not like it is here. This is more my type of life.

K.F.: Now are you still working all year round on the water?

H.P.: Yeah, it's all year round. This is my only income. Well, I won't say that. (Laughter.) You know, you invest, if you didn't invest years ago, you wouldn't have much today, I don't think. It would be very difficult for a young person to start on the water, in the water business today and have to, you know, buy gear. Just like farming, you don't see many people going in the farm business, you know, buying a farm, getting machinery, starting out, you know, that's the way it is in the water business. I got a boy, I guess he'd do it if he had to, but I don't think he's going to, you know. He's been playing pro baseball for four years, so -

K.F.: Oh, okay. With who?

H.P.: Houston Astros.

K.F.: Oh, okay.

H.P.: I don't think he's going to pursue the water business, hopefully he won't. Because I think it's - I think it's on the way out. Do you hear a lot of that kind of -

K.F.: Yes, I sure do.

H.P.: -- talk around the -

K.F.: I sure do.

H.P.: -- around the bay?

K.F.: I also hear and see not a lot of young people going into it.

H.P.: Right, right.

K.F.: So I think that's another reason.

H.P.: The money's not there. If the money was there, you'd have people into it. Just like in my business right here now, I can't get any help. You know, how you gonna get anybody to help you. You don't have anything to attract anybody.

K.F.: Right.

H.P.: You know, I had a young boy crabbing with me, and made wages, but then after that's over with, we couldn't even pay the expenses on - and like I say, he went corporate, you know, building houses. But you got to do something else. You can't just make a living on the water anymore. You know, I'm kind of fortunate because, you know, I don't have a whole lot of overhead, a whole lot of bills to pay. All my tuition's paid. (Laughter.) I got my kids all through college and paid up, but it's not a very great business to get into for a young person, which is not a good thing to be telling you, I guess, but it's kind of the facts of it.

K.F.: Right. Now how did you learn how to do fyke nets?

H.P.: Oh, I guess just a little information at different places. I'll tell you, there was a man on the Sassafras River. I don't know if you were familiar with him, Lawes Hesse.

K.F.: Oh, yeah.

H.P.: He's dead.

K.F.: Doesn't he have a daughter who still works the water?

H.P.: Yeah, yeah. Lawes Hesse. Lawes Hesse taught me a right good bit about rigging these things, how to rig them, you know. And, see, he was a pretty good fyke net fisherman on the Sassafras.

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

H.P.: And probably 25 years ago, I got a lot of information from him in how to build these things. And over the years, you know, it's just a little bit here, little bit there. You just pick it up and learn it yourself. But like I say now, somebody to go into it takes a lot of money and knowledge that young people just aren't going to do, because the return, the return isn't that great. Catfish, catfish is one of our mainstays, catfish and - I'd say catfish and perch.

K.F.: Right, right.

H.P.: And that's about it. And rockfish in the winter a little bit and crabs in the summer. But, you know, nothing's really all that great. But the old Lawes Hesse was a pretty good - man. A lot of work goes into one of these things.

K.F.: Now how do you start to build one of these?

H.P.: Well you've got to build this frame first.

K.F.: Okay.

H.P.: Then you just measure your meshes out all the way around, how many meshes it takes to go around. You hang that all in there. And then same way with your hoops, measure your meshes and build your funnels. Building the funnels is probably the most time's taking. We taper them down, like see that piece is the same piece as this. I turn that back.

K.F.: Okay.

H.P.: Make their front one. But then this one, I built it separate. I narrow it down. See, it's been narrowed down right here.

K.F.: Okay. So the second one's -

H.P.: And it's been narrowed down here.

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

H.P.: I cut it in half each time, take up on two and pull it out. Of course, the fish go in and can't find their way back out. It's just the same thing as a pound net, you know, except it's small.

K.F.: Right.

H.P.: You know, has a liter. It has a hedging and a liter goes to it. And returns, these are wings, and returns. If you don't put these on there, some people will fish and think you don't need these, but you need that return, that wing. Otherwise, he'll come in here, and a lot of times, he'll swim right away. But if you have this return to turn him back, see, just like a heart on a pound net.

K.F.: Right.

H.P.: And he'll go, he'll go in there. Perch, you can catch perch without these, but you can't catch catfish with them. Catfish, he'll go on out. Then we got stakes, there's a wing stay hooks on here and goes out and you stake these in the bottom with a little stake and a little pole and drive them down so they don't stick up. They're all under water.

K.F.: Okay. Now the perch are spring fish, right; usually set the fykes out in the springtime?

H.P.: In March. March and April is perch time; and May and June is catfish time. July and August is crab time. But now we've got a little rock fish quota in pound net fishing that helps us out. But to maintain a boat and everything it takes nowadays, it's tough going.

K.F.: How many boats have you got?

H.P.: I've got this one right here, and then I've got another small fiberglass boat, 24 foot, another small 24 foot boat. She was built down in Trappe.

K.F.: Okay.

H.P.: Man by the name of Clarence Limpky built her down in Trappe 12 years ago. I put that top on in the summer and take it off in the spring for pound fishing, the top comes off, of course.

K.F.: How are you driving your pound stakes in?

H.P.: One at a time. (Laughter.) No, we jump them in, and then we pump them in and hammer them in, whatever it takes, you know. On a soft bottom, you can usually shove them in. But our poles are usually like 35 to 40 foot, and it takes about 150 to set a pound. So it's a lot of work. Pound fishing's a lot of heavy work.

K.F.: Right. Where are you getting your stakes?

H.P.: In the - cut them in the woods, local right here in Cecil County. Some of the guys are going down to Cambridge and getting them now, but we got plenty of them around here if you look hard. I've never had to go look - I've never had to go out of the - right here where I live. I can get them right here close to my house.

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

H.P.: I live right on the water right in the woods. So I got pretty good access to poles.

K.F.: Right.

H.P.: Yeah. I'll set these nets now, mainly for yellow perch. And see we can't sell any in February, so I'll probably fish them like in January a couple times if it's not froze up, and then no more until the 1<sup>st</sup> of March. I set them in deep water, like 20 feet of water.

K.F.: Okay.

H.P.: Yellow perches have gotten to be a real good fish for us to catch.

K.F.: Why is that?

H.P.: The price is so good.

K.F.: Oh, okay.

H.P.: The price is real high out west. Not in Maryland, but Ohio and Illinois, out that way, it's a good price on yellow perch. Used to be we couldn't hardly give them away, but it doesn't last long, only about three weeks of it, and then it's over with. So I don't know what else I can -

K.F.: Well let me ask you about the first time you went out on the water? Do you remember?

H.P.: No, I don't. (Laughter.) I started out working like in the boatyard and just fishing part time, you know, in the 50's, 50's and 60's. And it's changed a lot, changed an awful lot over the years. It's nothing like it was then. You know, it's regulations have changed, regulations have got us shut down so bad on fish that gillnet was just about a thing of the past as far as our, any livelihood goes about it. '55, '56, there was a lot of shad. We had a lot of shad here in the late 50's. Well we had shad all the way up until after Hurricane Agnes in the early 70's. Well after that, there wasn't any shad. They shut it down. I think they shut it down, I think they closed the fishery maybe in '76, maybe, something like that. So we don't have any shad market anymore. And shad have come back, but shad was a big fishery here in North East, a real big fishery, pound net fishery, and gillnet fishery, an awful lot of shad.

K.F.: Were there processing plants for the shad?

H.P.: Yeah. There was a canning house right down there. That big gray building there was a -

K.F.: Oh, okay.

H.P.: H.L. Harvey and Company. They were in business, I don't know, three or four generations of them back in the 1800's they started. And they went with it until about '67 or - no, I guess they worked until about '73 or 4, and the herring business got bad. There was a big canning house there. They canned there, and cut roe, cut shad roe, hired probably 50, 60 people.

K.F.: Okay.

H.P.: There in the 50's. Forties and 50's, 60's, they were pretty busy, pretty big outfit there, but that all went down the tube when the Herring quit.

K.F.: Right.

H.P.: They fixed about 20 pound nets there, had a lot of help. But when the herring dried up, so did that place. So, you know, that's kind of the way it's going. As the fish dried up, so did the businesses. Used to be half a dozen people fished. Now there's about four of us that fish here for a living.

K.F.: Really?

H.P.: Yeah. Maybe a half a dozen in all Cecil County that actually make a living off of it.

K.F.: Right.

H.P.: Most cat fishing is mainly what it boils down to.

K.F.: What market are the catfish going to?

H.P.: They go to the Midwest, Chicago, maybe 5 percent of them will go to the Chicago market. Not any market in the East Coast much. Philadelphia and Baltimore don't have any big market. Some go to New York, but I'd say 80 percent of them, at least 80 percent of them probably go to the Midwest, live. It's all live markets. But that's changed because the 50's, the 50's and 60's, there wasn't many catfish. That's changed. There wasn't many catfish, wasn't any kind of fishery then, but we had a lot of large mouth bass then.

K.F.: Oh, okay.

H.P.: And now we don't have many large mouth bass, because the large mouth bass in those days, they like to eat the little catfish, and they eat up all the little catfish and now there's no bass. The state come along and wanted to clean up the grass. They cut the grass, killed the grass, you

know, took away the habitat of the large mouth bass. Now we've got catfish instead of bass. (Laughter.) You know, kind of works in mysterious ways, you know.

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

H.P.: You know, how people look at things through different lights. But the yacht, the pleasure boat business has taken over this river, our area. Five or six real large marinas. You've got a lot of boat traffic you didn't have years ago. And -

K.F.: How has that affected you guys since -

H.P.: Oh, it's churned the water up. It stirs the water up all summer long. The water's murky, no sun gets through for the grass to grow, you know, the water's dark, and like now you can see the difference in the fall, the water will clear right up when there's no boat traffic. But fiberglass boats what's done it. You know, used to be in the old days, you know, a man worked on his boat and he had to caulk - paint the bottom and get it ready. And it was Memorial Day before he got it ready. Now they call up on the telephone and say put my boat overboard, you know.

K.F.: Right.

H.P.: So, you know, they're ready to go. So it's made about an 8 or 9-month pleasure thing out of the water, this waterway here that we didn't have years ago. It's a change of the times. That's what it boils down to. It's just changing times. And the same way with ducks. We used to have oodles of ducks here, used to run gunning parties, and that was a big deal here on the Susquehanna Flats was the gunning. But that's all dried up. That's over with.

K.F.: And what are some of your memories of being out on the water?

H.P.: Oh, I don't know. I could - I don't even, some of them I don't even like to think about - my memory. (Laughter.) You know, you always had, you've had some, we've had some times where we caught tons and tons of rockfish, and you remember - you remember the good ones. But, you know, just to single like one experience, it would be kind of difficult for me to do that. You know, over the years, I don't think I could singulate one single time. Thing about fishing, pound net fishing and all, that's what was my favorite was pound net fishing. You never know what you're going to catch. Probably the biggest thing that we stirred up the most interest was we caught a shark.

K.F.: Oh, okay.

H.P.: We caught a nine foot shark up here one time in '87 in a pound net, and that was as far north as I'd ever caught one, bull shark, and we hung him right there in that tree. Boy, it caused a lot of emotion. (Laughter.) Had people come from all over to look at that shark, but it was a real dry summer, and I guess he was further up the bay than ever had any record of ever seeing one, you know. Catch them around the Bay Bridge occasionally, but never this far north. That was probably one of the most exciting times. Different. I won't say exciting. It was a little bit different. Caught him in a pound net on the Proving Ground shore. But that's probably one of the most different mornings we had, you know. (Laughter.)

K.F.: Well can you describe to me what it's like going out and setting the pound nets?

H.P.: It's all hard work. I don't look forward to it. You know, I like to fish in pound nets after they're set, but going out setting the pound net is - the weather's always against you in the early spring, you know, you've got to have a perfect day, and you don't want to set too early or the ice will get you, cut your bolts off, tear 'em down. But after you get the net set, the fishing part, that's the easy part, bailing the fish out. We bail with a hydraulic monitor, so you know, that's the fun part. The hard part's setting the net.

K.F.: Now do you have someone helping you with this?

H.P.: Yeah. We have - we get three or four head, you know, to work, setting poles, putting net on. It takes three; it takes three guys, takes three people. Yeah. Brother helps me. That's him over there working on crab pots.

K.F.: Okay.

H.P.: But, yeah, we get -there's several of us go do that. I got a younger guy helps me. My boy never has because he's always been in school, playing baseball. He's never around in the springtime. (Laughter.) But he's fished with me in the summer. I mean in high school and all, he fished with me. It's good to have young help, and you can't find any good help, like I say, 'cause the money's not there to attract any young people into this business at all. So I don't know. I don't know, you know, I think when we quit here in the next 10 years, I don't know, I guess somebody will pick it up. (Laughter.) I don't know why. I couldn't see why. But I do get enjoyment out of pound fishing. I say, I didn't go last year. I had bypass surgery and all a few years ago, and I just got tired. We used to set eight nets. We had to set eight pounds, and I kind of scaled back. I'm going to go back next year to set one. One. Just 'cause I do enjoy it, you know, I do enjoy fishing. And, of course, we'll have to get our crab bait out of it too.

K.F.: Right.

H.P.: Our bait bill was a little higher this summer, you know, than I like to - than it ever has been because I didn't have any pounds set. So we're going to, we're going to set a pound mainly for crab bait. That's what it boils down to in the long run, but we'll catch some perch, and some rock and some cats in it too, you know. So I - I do like it. If I didn't like it, I wouldn't do it, you know, that's just the way it is 'cause it's not profitable by a long shot. And it's getting harder and harder to find a place to tie up. Used to be there was a half dozen boats in here, and this was a fish house right here. Right, that dock where them sailboats are tied was a fish house.

K.F.: Oh, okay.

H.P.: There was a little liquor store here, and a grocery store. It was a busy place. Now it's an apartment house -

K.F.: That -

H.P.: Right, that building right there. He changed it over into an apartment complex. That's how things have changed. That was a busy place during fishing. In the 50's and 60's, that was a real busy place. But now you can't find - this piece of property right here belongs to the church.

K.F.: Oh, okay.

H.P.: See.

K.F.: Do you guys have to rent it from the church, or do they let you -

H.P.: Well I can't say rent. I donate, make a donation, a hefty donation. (Laughter.) But legally, they can't, they don't, you know. But I got a pretty good relationship with them, and it makes, it gives us a great place to work.

K.F.: Right.

H.P.: If we didn't have it, you know, you couldn't - you know, you'd just get tired, you couldn't pound, you couldn't pound net 'cause you wouldn't have - like we stretch into this lot, we stretch our nets out after we tar, and we've got room to do it. It takes a lot of room. Our nets are 36 feet square, cribs and all, you know, it takes a lot of room for that stuff, and we're lucky to have it, have this here, you know, freezers and stuff here. I mean, I know it looks kind of rough, but it all serves a purpose, you know.

K.F.: Right.

H.P.: It all does a job. So it's handy. We've got deep water, you know. Not much here today, but right down along the side, you come down here, probably seven or eight feet all the way out there. Maybe eight and nine.

K.F.: Okay.

H.P.: Even now. But, you know, we've got, we've got a decent place to work, you know, load and unload. We got a conveyor we run up here, spring, unload fish and all.

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

H.P.: So but there's not many places like that left.

K.F.: Right.

H.P.: I mean they're squeezing, they're squeezing the watermen out, you know. Getting squeezed out more and more. These marinas, they don't want you. Nobody wants you. They don't want your stinking nets and crab pots laying around, you know, it's different.

K.F.: Right. (Laughter.) And what do you guys tar your nets in?

H.P.: We got a big tank over there, big tank. And we use a forklift, hoist them up. And we try to make it easy as you can, you know. But the paint, copper paint is - I mean pound netting is all work. Like I say, the fishing part is the easy part. Painting the nets, mending the nets and all, you know, you fish, you can fish about eight months, and spend the other four working on them.

That's about what it boils down to. I mean when we were fishing eight nets, I had a partner, it was two of us, and it was just a constant, we just worked all the time. I mean winter wasn't any slower than the summertime because, you know, you had poles to cut and skin and point. You had nets to mend, and then you had to paint them and just get - oh, something all the time, you know. We did it for 20 years, my partner and I. Like I said, last year, I just kid of wanted to scale back. That's his boat there. He kind of went on his own, but hasn't been too successful. Anybody going out on their own like that isn't going to be very successful now, you know. It's just too much. And it's just not there. I went and bought crab pots. I haven't crab potted for quite a few years, and I went back to crab potting. But it takes a lot of money to get into that.

K.F.: Yup. Got to get the license, and then the pots.

H.P.: Well a license, I have a license. We always had to have a license. But, you know, \$20 for a pot, and you want 500 pots. You know \$20,000. You know, it's not hard to spend \$20,000. You can spend 20,000 real quick, and you might, you might not never get it back, you know.

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

H.P.: So crab potting is probably the best thing on the bay now. Like I say, it's a big, it's a big investment. And then labor's a problem with everything. That's with pound netting. Nobody knows how to set them. There's only a couple of us know how to set them. Nobody knows how to mend net.

K.F.: Right. (Laughter.)

H.P.: You can't find a young guy, you know, you could get young guys will come down there some, but they don't want to learn. Nobody knows how, so you know, it's not, it's not much future in it compared - but I mean say, you know, I've enjoyed it. I'm probably painting a very negative picture to you about it. But -

K.F.: No.

H.P.: But I've enjoyed it.

K.F.: Yeah.

H.P.: You know, it's been good to me. It's been good to me, it's been good to my family, you know. Had three kids. I've put two of them through four-year schools. You know, we've got a beautiful home on the water. What else can I ask for, you know? It's been good to me. But I don't think, I think it's over with, the good part of it. I don't think it'll ever be - I know it'll never be like it was. Nothing is. Nothing is.

K.F.: Right, right. Do you do gunning out on the flats too?

H.P.: Yeah. Yeah, I gunned canvasbacks in the 50's when I was a kid, bushwhacking for them over decoys, and then when they disappeared, we went body booting for geese in the middle 60's, all the way up until about late 70's. And then that kind of petered out. But we killed an awful lot of geese body booting, you know what I mean, standing in the water, you know, and decoys around you. It was good gunning. It was a lot of fun. But that, even that's gone, fizzled out.

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

H.P.: Did you talk to anybody over Havre de Grace or over that way?

K.F.: Talked to Bob Jobes.

H.P.: Did you?

K.F.: Uh-huh (Affirmative). He's the one recommended I come talk with you

H.P.: Oh, yeah?

K.F.: He and Gary Potter.

H.P.: Oh, yeah? You talked to him?

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

H.P.: Gary Rooster. Yeah, he's - he's knowledgeable. Now Bobby Jobes is younger. He never, you know, he's a decoy carver and all.

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

H.P.: But he's not, he's not, he's not, he's not been on the water long. He never worked on it for a living, you know. I mean he carved ducks and did it part time, which probably was better. But, yeah, he's a good, he's a good decoy carver. Gary Potter, he's done a lot of haul seining.

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

H.P.: And his father was - those guys, they're the ones sent you over here, huh?

K.F.: Yeah.

H.P.: (Laughter.) Yeah.

K.F.: Yeah, actually, they said go talk to Pip. He'll tell you some stories.

H.P.: Yeah, well I don't know about stories. (Laughter.) Hesse's, you know, of course he's dead now, but he was - he fished about as long as anybody around here in Cecil County, in this county. And his daughter, I don't know if you've met her.

K.F.: I haven't met her yet.

H.P.: Haven't you? You gonna stop down there and see them?

K.F.: I was thinking about it.

H.P.: Yeah, that's pretty interesting. I haven't been down there in years. I haven't been down there since he died.

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

H.P.: But his son, Billy, he's working on the water. He's using his father's gear and Edith, she still runs the business and helps. She works too. They got - but that's quite a unique place if you know where it is.

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

H.P.: (Laughter.)

K.F.: Yeah, someone told me where it was. So I think I know where to find it.

H.P.: Yeah.

K.F.: At least their little shop there.

H.P.: Yeah, yeah, yeah. They're interesting. I mean they've made a load out of it. I mean they have made a living out of it. They have a better living than it looks like. (Laughter.) I know it don't look like they made much, but they've done all right, they've done all right. You know. Then there's two boys over Carpenter's Point, Setz brothers (phonetic), that just strictly catfish. They've done real, real good. They're fishing every day right now, two of them. But they're in their middle 40's. And Denny, he's my age, he's 50 - well, he's not as old as I am. He's probably 54. But they've done real good over the years. They've been at it probably 25 years or so at least. Maybe a little more. But other than that, that's it for up here.

K.F.: Yeah.

H.P.: Those guys. That's about all that make a living, I mean, you know, 100 percent off the water in this county. And I think you probably know more about it, but I think you go down the shore, or I'll call. You find less and less people doing it for, you know, 100 percent of their income.

K.F.: Uh-huh (Affirmative). That's true.

H.P.: They supplement it with something else. Yeah.

K.F.: Well more and more people are relying on crab pots.

H.P.: Yeah. And I don't know. You know, used to be when I first started - well not when I started, but when I quit crabbing, we used to set our crab pots pretty far apart because it drew from - you figure you drew from a bigger area, you know, if you didn't have them real close. But now, they're so close that you can reach out and hook another man's pot on each side of you they're so thick. You know, it's unbelievable. You could not believe the amount of pots there is in the water, you know. I don't know. I don't know where - you know, I guess if there was more crabs then, you know, people would scatter out more. But when there's only a few and they're concentrated at the head of the bay here, then everybody jumps in here, you know. It's like the crabs all want to get to the head of the bay, you know, where the salinity is high. They all go up the bay. All crabs come up the bay, and all the crabbers come up the bay, you know, Kent County, Baltimore County, even Queen Anne's. there was crabbers up here from all the way down, all the way down, all the way down - I think it was from Somerset County crabbers up here.

K.F.: Wow.

H.P.: So bad down there. So, you know, that's just -you know, that's -if they're only in a small area, everybody wants to - everybody's trying to make a dollar, and the crabs have gotten so high, price of them, you know, the retail price, the price is so good, there's money in it. That's why everybody -

K.F.: Right, right.

H.P.: Yup. But, yeah, crab potting would be - it's the mainstay of the bay right now, no doubt about it.

K.F.: All these fyke nets still have the front on them.

H.P.: Those are fish pots.

K.F.: Those are fish pots.

H.P.: Yeah. Those are fish pots. What you do, you put them on a stick, stretch them out, put them on a stick, bait them.

K.F.: Oh, okay.

H.P.: Bait them with clams, or oyster crabs or something.

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

H.P.: Put them on a long line so you put 1,000 feet of line out, and put one of those every 100 feet.

K.F.: Okay.

H.P.: And then you just back down the line, got rollers on the side the boat there, and you put the line in the rollers, just like a trot line, you come down to that pot, and you pull it up. Big thing, a big cradle goes down. You take fish, and run them in that, shrink them all back in that, then you hoist it up. You have a couple hundred pounds, but it's gotten bad the last few years. You know, fall, you've got maybe three weeks in spring, and maybe five, six weeks in the fall. And that's about it for catty potting anymore. Summertime isn't any good. But cat fishing is good in the fall, but then you can't sell them. The market's real bad in the fall. It's hard to sell them. Just like anything else, if you can catch a whole lot of them, you can't sell it, and if you can't catch anything, everybody wants it. (Laughter.) That's the way it goes. That's the way it goes.

K.F.: Are there any special secrets to being a good waterman up here, or one that has lasted?

H.P.: Just if you want to get up early and work hard everyday.

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

H.P.: That's what it boils down to. (Laughter.) You know, you got to work, you got to do something, you got to go do something every day almost, you know. You've got to, whether it's on land, you know, or on the water, you've got to be involved in some, something every day. If you're going to be successful, you've got to work at something, whether it's repairing gear, building gear or actually fishing it. That's my theory. That's the way I feel about it. I don't know, other people might have different outlooks. But you can't pay somebody to do any of your work.

K.F.: Right.

H.P.: See, you got to do it all yourself, just liked these nets. I mean I make all these nets myself. I couldn't pay anybody. You couldn't find anybody to do it to start with, but you know, you got to do it yourself. It's like rigging crab pots. I mean you got to do, you got to do your own work on your crab pots, and your pound nets, you got to mend them and make them and cut your own poles and do all that if you're gonna be successful.

K.F.: And all of this stuff is you and your brother, and your former partner?

H.P.: Yeah, former partner, he got some of it around here, yeah. Yeah. But you know, we gonna have more of them line boxes full of fish right now. Last year I had 30 some thousand penned up, and sold them right this time, about the first week of December.

K.F.: Wow.

H.P.: I couldn't sell them through the fall. Through November, I sold them November. Like I say, we've been fooling with the gillnets. My brother and I, we've been fooling with them. We just got a little bit of net on the boat there, and we've been trying to catch a few rock. But we haven't made anything, haven't caught enough to make any money. But we'll probably, I'll

probably stay with it. I don't ever want to quit, you know. I like doing it. I'll probably stay with it as long as I'm able to do a little something.

K.F.: Well how does a waterman retire?

H.P.: You're right. He doesn't. He doesn't retire. There's nothing, there's nothing to retire on.

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

H.P.: You get tired, but you don't retire, you know. No, no. You don't pay any pension plan, so you don't get any money back. Just whatever you can get out of it yourself. But I, like I say, I've been pretty fortunate. I've been pretty fortunate myself. But, no, there's no retirement.

There's no retire - there's no way to ever retire. It's getting cold.

K.F.: Well it's pretty brisk.

H.P.: Big change from the last couple days.

K.F.: Yes, it is. (Laughter.)

H.P.: Now what do you do with this? Are you putting a book together, or a brochure or something?

K.F.: Well what the project's trying to do is help some of the local communities preserve some of these things, and some of the organizations like the MWA, they want to be able to come out and interview watermen and save some of that stuff, and some of the stories. So what we're hoping is going to happen is some of it'll go into the local museums here, some of it will go into - I guess there's a center in Salisbury for the Delmarva history and culture.

H.P.: Where are you centered? I mean where are you out of originally? I mean work out of?

K.F.: Well, I'm contracted to do this.

H.P.: Are you?

K.F.: So I work out of my own office.

H.P.: Okay.

K.F.: But the project's run by Mid Atlantic Arts Foundation, which is in Baltimore. Then we do have an office in Salisbury at Salisbury State.

H.P.: Okay.

K.F.: They let us have an office. And I've been working, since we are working in Virginia and Maryland and Delaware as well, I've been all over. (Laughter.) So I've been in Virginia talking to watermen, and farmers, and trappers.

H.P.: Is that right?

K.F.: All kinds of-

H.P.: It's a pretty interesting job.

K.F.: It is a very interesting job.

H.P.: We think. (Laughter.) Travel around and talk - if you like that kind of - if you like, if you're interested in that kind of stuff.

K.F.: Yeah.

H.P.: Yeah, I would think - I know in Virginia, you can get some characters down there, I'm sure. How about in Delaware? Where did you go in Delaware?

K.F.: Well, you know, it was funny. Nobody could really tell us any commercial watermen that were still around. They said a lot of them had passed away, and nobody really continued, and the recreational, like the rod and reel guys had kind of taken over most of the marinas.

H.P.: Yeah. They're all crabbers over there. There's a lot of crabbers in Delaware. I know a lot of them. Some of them fish too, but I tell you, most of them do something else on the side, you know.

K.F.: Yeah.

H.P.: Do something else.

K.F.: Yeah. It was pretty interesting Delaware didn't have- I mean I saw very few commercial boats like this, you know.

H.P.: Yeah, right. I know.

K.F.: It was one or two, and that was it.

H.P.: No, it's not - it's not a big fishery over there. Like you say, crab, they got good crab population. They do pretty good on that, outside of that. Now Virginia, on the Eastern Shore of Virginia, there's got to be - well, both sides, I guess there's a lot of watermen left.

K.F.: Yeah. There sure are.

H.P.: Yeah.

K.F.: Pound netters, and gillnetters and crabbers.

H.P.: Yeah.

K.F.: And clams. There's a lot of clammers.

H.P.: Yeah. But all you got to do is get the map out, chart out, and look at where we are in Cecil County, and we got some crabs and some fish, and we don't have anything else.

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

H.P.: We don't have any clams or oysters or anything unless you want to travel, you know, and do something. But, yeah, we don't have - that's why I targeted catfish, 'cause we did have them, you know.

K.F.: Right.

H.P.: And it's something - I don't want to leave home, I can be home when the sun goes down. Travel around the bay looking for oysters or something. I have, I have gone crabbing. I've gone to Tangier Sound one year and crabbed. But I didn't like it. I didn't like it. You know, I like to be home. So I come back, fished, cat fished here, made a living out of it, you know. But -

K.F.: Well is that how the fishing industry's different up here than it is down in the bay? I mean this is mostly relying on net fishing?

H.P.: Oh, you have to be, yeah. 'Cause we don't have any shell, you know. No shell at all. No oysters, or crabs, or clams at all. So, you know, that's why Cecil County never had many full time fishermen. You had to just strictly fool with these things in the winter or fall if you had market where the fish are caught, and then gillnetting in a lot of the year for rock and stuff. But, you know, we didn't have anything else. And, you know, it's hard. And we're close to industry too. You go - further down the shore you go, you don't have much else, you know.

K.F.: Right.

H.P.: Tidewater, Virginia and all, there's not much going on. You know, we're close to, you know, Delaware where there's a lot of car manufacturers.

K.F.: Right.

H.P.: Like my brother there, he's been 37 years with Texaco at Delaware City, you know.

K.F.: Okay.

H.P.: He's retired out of there. I mean he's crabbed, always crabbed part time, and worked shift work over there for a year, he gets, you know, but it's close to us. Chrysler, General Motors, you

know, you can go up there. The guy's go up there and make 40, \$50,000 a year with a little overtime, you know.

K.F.: Right. (Laughter.)

H.P.: It's hell of a sight easier than beating your brains out for this, you know. Don't have to worry about whether it blows, or rains, or snows or what, you know. So that's what's happened, that's what's happened to our fish. We had an awful lot of guys who used to gillnet part time, you know, in the spring time. But then they took that fishing away from us. You know, anchor net, took anchor net away from us.

K.F.: Right.

RP.: So nobody, everybody got out of that. Nobody stayed with it. Just a couple of us who were foolish, I guess, kept on fooling with something. But everybody's going to work doing something else. There's so much construction around here, building and roadwork and everything, guys are running bulldozers and what have you, you know, and make more money than they do here. That's the name of the game.

K.F.: And what does your wife do? Does she help you with this business at all?

H.P.: My wife has a business. (Laughter.) My wife has a business right here in town. She has a day care business.

K.F.: Oh, okay. Okay.

H.P.: Not at our home, but we've got another place up here at the avenue, and that's been a big plus for us. She's got a day care with 90 children in it.

K.F.: Wow.

H.P.: And 14 employees, so she has a thriving business, has for 28 years.

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

H.P.: Twenty-eight years she's been in business. So that's helped too, you know. I mean all my income hadn't come from here, you know.

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

H.P.: I mean that's my sole income, only thing I do. But, of course, she works too. So, you know, she works at that. And it's been good, it's been good for us. We got it on the market now, we're trying to sell it. Get out of it. She's burned out.

K.F.: Yeah. It's hard working with kids.

H.P.: It's not the kids. It's the people that work for you. (Laughter.) It's help. That's - staff, you know, she can take the kid part of it.

K.F.: Right.

H.P.: And I got a daughter that's 34 years old, and she's never been - she's single, never been married. She's at Brandeis University in Boston, Cambridge, working on her Ph.D. in neuroscience. And then my other daughter's married with two children, and I got a boy that's been with the Houston Astros for four years. But now he's back at North Carolina Wesleyan getting his degree.

K.F.: Okay.

H.P.: So, you know, we raised three kids there. We live in a very rural area. We live on out towards Turkey Point.

K.F.: Okay, yeah.

H.P.: Yeah, right on the water. We've been there for 35 years. And got a nice place. I mean the little dirt road goes down through the woods, and we live right on the river there. Very

private, very secluded place. Hasn't changed at all over the whole time we've been there. It's kind of private. We're kind of private people. We don't have much social life or anything. (Laughter.) It's just kind of the way we always liked it, you know. So it's been good. It's been good for us.

K.F.: Well this certainly is a pretty spot you've got here.

H.P.: It's not bad here. You know, it's not bad, it's not a bad little spot. Some day, that'll be all canals, though, and condominiums or something built up, you know what I mean?

K.F.: Right.

H.P.: You see it. It'll happen someday. Maybe, probably not in my lifetime, but someday that's probably what it'll be. Maybe. I don't know. Maybe it won't, but I imagine it'll all change someday. It's quiet here. I like working here. I mean we work here everyday if we're out on the water, if I'm up here doing something.

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

H.P.: I got a nice garage where I net in the wintertime, I make a lot of stuff too.

K.F.: Like what?

H.P.: Huh?

K.F.: Like what?

H.P.: Well like nets, you know, building fykes. I do it inside in the wintertime.

K.F.: Yeah.

H.P.: Yeah. I usually build half a dozen or so. It takes a long time to build one of those nets.

K.F.: How long?

H.P.: Oh, it takes, it takes - I don't know. I can't put actual hours on it, but -

K.F.: Right.

H.P.: It's not something you do real quick when you're by yourself

SPEAKER: Almost on bottom, ain't we?

H. P.: Yeah. What, have you been hunting?

SPEAKER: No.

H.P.: No?

SPEAKER: Just around the -

H.P.: Yeah. Yeah, this tide's really out here today.

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

H.P.: You know, usually you got it right up here pretty decent, but she's blowed out of here on this cool weather, I guess.

K.F.: I asked Gary and Bob what some of their favorite fisher places were and their names.

What are some of your favorite places to put out your nets?

H.P.: Well my favorite place is probably Turkey Point. Northeast river side, Turkey Point. Any place on the Susquehanna Flats we like to fish.

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

H.P.: That's about where we pretty much concentrate our business.

(END OF INTERVIEW.)