

Interview Log

Interviewee: Polly Shannahan (P.S.) Tape #:
Interviewer: Shelly Drummond (S.D.) # of Tapes: 2
Date: October 22, 2003 # of Sides: 3
Location: 117 Dover, Easton, Maryland. Polly's home.
Topic: Recreation on the bay, Yachting in the 20's and early 30's. Sailing from 1930's to 1950's, recreational racing, Miles River regatta, *Little Shamrock*, *Mary F.*, Oxford and St. Michaels town docks, long distance races, Gibson Island, hunting.
Theme: Recreation on the bay, women sailing, early sailing history on Chesapeake Bay.
Comments: Interviewer difficult to hear
Documentation:

Audio: 90 minutes, 2 CD's
Video:
Digital Photos: numerous
Slides:

Field Notes: I met Polly Shannahan while working with the Maritime Stakeholder Workgroup. She is a treasure trove of information – historical and anecdotal. In addition to years of work in local preservation organizations including the Historical Society of Talbot County and Talbot County Historical Trust, Polly has lived on the bay and sailed it most of her life. She grew up spending summers on the family compound near Gibson Island. Polly is one of only a few women who were participating in the early regattas on the bay.

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BEGIN SIDE A

S.D.: Today, what is today, the 23rd?

P.S.: 22nd. Wednesday, the 22nd.

S.D.: Of October.

P.S.: Of October 2003.

S.D.: 2003. And I'm with – this is Shelly Drummond from the Chesapeake Bay Maritime Museum, and I'm with Polly Shannahan in her apartment in Easton. Polly, where did you grow up?

P.S.: I grew up in the winters in Baltimore, and we lived in **Homeland** in Baltimore, and in the summers, my grandfather had bought a couple hundred acres north of **Gibson Island** by about a mile before I was born. And we had a family compound there with houses for each of his sons and his daughter and her husband lived in their house. So we had horses, and boats, and we had a wonderful life. The cousins all together, each in an individual house.

S.D.: Did you have brothers and sisters?

P.S.: I had one brother, but nine first cousins that we all lived in the same area in the summer.

S.D.: What time of the year, like what month?

P.S.: What month? Well we went as soon as school was out, and we stayed until, into October. We would commute to Baltimore to school from the time school started until maybe the second week of October.

S.D.: What did you do as kids?

P.S.: As kids? We did it all. We swam, we sailed, we learned to hunt in fall and winter, and we rode our horses, and generally had a very outdoor life.

S.D.: I'm interested in how you learned to sail.

P.S.: Well I learned about boats from my father, and we lived, our home was directly on the beach, so I guess the house was maybe 150 feet or 200 feet from the beach, and we would keep rowboat on the land and put it overboard. And so as small kids, as we grew up, my brother was two years older, so I dragged along, and of course we had outboard motors. And then my grandfather had what was known as a day fishing boat. It was built for the executives of Sparrows Point, Bethlehem Steel, as a recreation boat, and he purchased it from them. It was not a race – cruiser. They hadn't been invented at that point. But it was about 44 feet, and my father converted it into a boat that we could take overnights on, and – before that, a day sailer –
(Interruption – phone.)

S.D.: All right, I'm back with Polly Shannahan. You were talking about converting a boat.

P.S.: Yes.

S.D.: What year are we talking about now?

P.S.: Well I was born in 1917, and I would estimate this – it would be about 1925, '26 that – but I can't remember when we didn't go there for the summer because it was purchased before I was born. So I can remember my father, there was a forward cabin with a large engine in it, and then there was this after cabin that had benches and ice chests for when men went out fishing, for the fun of it, taking parties out fishing for the executives at Sparrows Point. Well

anyhow, in that space between the two, there was the wheel, and there was a stool like a conductor's stool that you would roll it up and roll it down to make the height. So my father would roll it up as high as it would go so I could see, and then he would show me as we would go out on the Magothy a point or a tree or a high tree in the distance or an object to steer for, and then he would go about the boat, and he'd leave me there to steer. And it was the best – steering was always my top skill around a boat because he had started me early. And then we would go out on the Magothy, from Gibson Island out of the Magothy into the Chesapeake and we would go to Annapolis or we'd go to St. Michaels, or we would go to Oxford. And we did that for years. And then he had friends with large sailboats who also took us, maybe 65-foot schooners, 8-meters, so forth. And then when I graduated from high school, he purchased a boat, which was a 47-foot yawl, very fast, and the name was *Gleam*. And we used that for years and years and years. And during the Depression, of course, teenagers did not take jobs away from family men who needed or women that needed it. So we had the freedom of, my brother, my cousin and I were old enough to have the freedom of sailing the bay all through our later high school years and college years. So that we went from the capes to Delaware Bay, and all the tributaries. So I have that, have that map of the bay in my brain, which was lots of fun.

S.D.: What was the name of the first boat that you were talking about, the converted boat?

P.S.: Oh, that was the *Mary F*, named after my grandmother.

S.D.: And do you know what size motor it had?

P.S.: It had – I don't know the size motor. The original motor was large and was, the name of it was a Buffalo. So people that understand about motors of that period would be able to designate in their minds. But there was a whole forward cabin for the engine room only. And then I would think in the early 30's, my father saw to it that we put another –
(Interruption – phone.)

S.D.: Okay.

P.S.: The Buffalo motor was replaced maybe around 1932, '33, as motors had increased in horsepower and reduced in size. I do not remember the name of that motor, but it was very efficient.

S.D.: When you went out in that boat, did your mother go with you?

P.S.: Oh, yes. My brother, and my mother and this cousin who was only six weeks younger than I, **Billy Flannagan**. My brother was **Leo Flannagan**.

S.D.: What do you remember about those days, like the cooking and how you –

P.S.: Oh. Well my father improvised because this was set up as a day boat. So in order to make it into an overnight boat, my family were in road construction business, **P. Flannagan and Sons**, which was started by my grandfather, and his firm started in the late 1800's and is still going. So we had trucks, and they had a settling, I believe is the word, lights. Today we call it gas – turn that off a minute.

(Off record.)

P.S.: Today, they'd be propane tanks, and we had individual burners that he had welded to a heavy metal plate to hold it secure, and used that as the cooking element, the heat. And, of course, as I say, the ice chests were under the log benches. And for bunks, why, he designed a Navy style pipe berth and put it in chains from the carlines and so we could accommodate a half dozen people. And so it worked very well.

S.D.: Do you remember your mother complaining about trying to get meals together?

P.S.: No. My mother didn't complain about that. She would plan it ahead, what she was going to do. And also, my father was a fairly good cook, and so he would do breakfast. And then well after breakfast, he would get the boat going and we would clean up from breakfast and be all ready for the rest of the day. No, my mother loved it, so she was not – and she was not a complainer.

S.D.: Where did you – you talked about going to certain places. Did you ever go to **Rock Hall?**

P.S.: We lived directly opposite Rock Hall. And I do remember briefly going to Rock Hall, but not as much as going to – going to Solomon's or to Oxford or to Cambridge. We didn't go to Cambridge that many times, or going to Norfolk. We had a tendency to go more down the bay into open water rather than going – or into Baltimore. We would visit the old Maryland Yacht Club, which I believe there's a hospital there now. And, of course, we – every ship that went to sea had to pass our house. So we knew when we saw the Norfolk overnight boats, they passed our house promptly at 10 minutes of 8 in the evening, and we knew that that was time to come out of the swimming, and dinner would be on the table. We gauged our lives by what **Smokey Joe** was a ferryboat that went from Love Point into Baltimore, and we knew – I remembered what, I don't remember right now, but we knew the time, it would be passing. In other words, we kind of didn't need watches. We kind of gauged our days by what boats were doing what. And, of course, every ship that passed down the channel, I mean the channel, which was about two miles out from our house, and when I was 15, I went to Europe with some friends on the Baltimore Mayo line. And so it left, it left Baltimore. My family put me aboard. And then they went as fast as they could with the car down to the, down to the boat in Pouring Field Creek, which was off the Magothy, and everybody got aboard, and they put out the dress ship and they had a loud speaker with music, and they went out – makes me a little emotional – they went out to Baltimore light as the City of Norfolk went by on our way to Europe. And they greeted the ship, and the ship greeted them, it was very thrilling. So then it was just so exciting, I do get a little emotional about it because it was the first time I had left home with that much, six weeks before I'd be back.

Well anyhow, so we had a sailboat, which we called the *Little Shamrock*. My father had it built. It was about 23 feet, and it had an old Star rig. Star Boats, at that time, were putting the new rig, shorter boom and taller mast. So my father purchased an old Star rig and had the hull made, which was quite interesting because it had a long iron keel with a slot in it, and a metal centerboard. So it had the stability of the keel, and that went along the full, almost full length of the boat, and then this metal centerboard. And so we used that to practice sailing on, or we used it to sail. And as a matter of fact, we sailed it back from – it was towed to St. Michaels regatta one year, maybe 1934, '33. And then my brother and a friend and I sailed it back through, and we – we jibed through the Kent Island Narrows. The wind was right behind us, and we were doing so well, that the *Mary F*, which was the boat that was the mother ship, couldn't catch up with us, and we just kept going. And we sailed all the way to Gibson Island. So but – I mean they just didn't catch up with us to stop us. So anyhow, that was fun.

S.D.: When you were going out in the early days to St. Michaels and to Oxford, where did you dock up and get supplies?

P.S.: Well we would mostly – well, whatever. We were usually pretty well supplied, except for milk and things like that, ice, gas. In St. Michaels, there was the Town Dock. In Oxford, there was the Town Dock. Of course, one of the exciting things was when we got to any

of these – at Queenstown, any of these little town, Chestertown, any of these little towns, we would go for milk or ice, but we also go for ice cream cones. I mean that, you know, one of the first things you want to do when you got to town, to a town, was – because the ice cream on the Eastern Shore at that time was far better than the ice cream in Baltimore. It really was. And so that we looked forward to having Eastern Shore ice cream because the main – I don't mean that there weren't good ice creams, but they were more in the confectioner's rather than the general business.

S.D.: What – how about gas to run the motor?

P.S.: Well we would go up – those docks had gas tanks. So you would get gas, water, ice, and then you'd go get whatever else supplies. And then on Sunday, my father would, by Saturday night, the only Catholic Church, well St. Joseph's in Cordova was there, but the closest to the water was the church in Easton. So he would make it his business to find out about the taxi and – a taxi, and then we would take a taxi into Easton to go to church. And then always, there were interesting places to little hotels or different things. The boarding houses in Oxford where he would arrange that we'd get breakfast when we got back. So that was another interesting – so I've been associated with Easton, with Talbot County all my life.

S.D.: How many other people were doing this kind of –

P.S.: Not many. I really can't remember any. You know, I can remember late on after we purchased *Gleam* that there were many more. But you have to remember that the period that I'm describing was – well it was very early and you could stay out all day almost and not see another yacht. Or you could – because it's so – that there was, you see from '27 to '35 or '36, we were in the depth of the Depression. So I know that there were boats because we would see them, powerboats, at Maryland Yacht Club, and there were a few sailboats.

S.D.: What did you see when you were out?

P.S.: We saw – all right, that was very interesting. We saw skipjacks, and we saw bugeyes and we saw lumber schooners. We saw freighters, we saw oil tankers, we saw ore ships going to Sparrow's Point. Oh, and one of the things that was interesting was that there was a – in that period, and I don't remember the exact period, but I do remember there was – in Cambridge, there was the Phillips family that had canneries, and they had kind of day boats that were powerboats. And also they had a mast and a square sail so that if the breeze was in the right direction, they put that up too. But they were the boats that they used to ship the goods from the canneries, which were the tomatoes, corn, lima beans, from the Dorchester, lower Talbot area, to market in Baltimore. Then we would see, oh you'd see bugeyes and – boated down to almost the gunnels with watermelon, mainly watermelon I remember. And, of course, if they hit a sea, there were so many watermelons – they hardly, when they came back, they didn't shift the balance very well. And so if there was a sea, those watermelons washed off the bugeyes and would wash up on our beach. And so I do remember that.

S.D.: What about the –

P.S.: Oh, the weight fruiters, weight fruit – they had special steamships, and that passed our door, but we always knew when bananas were going to Baltimore, that was – Baltimore was a big, you know, where they were seized to be distributed by railway. Baltimore, early on, Charles Carrollton realized, that with his railroad and the water coming to Baltimore, and he saw to it that he had enough land, and the grains from the Eastern Shore were, you know, up and down the bay, so that it was – that's what built up the railroad and Baltimore because it was reached by sea, and then could be by rail and go west. And we saw all that.

S.D.: What were the skipjacks doing? For the summer, right?

P.S.: Well they were transporting produce, mainly transporting produce in the summer. And, of course, in the winter they were – and there were certain skipjacks. I remember starting when we were cruising on *Gleam*, say around '35 on, that the skipjacks would come in to – we usually made our last cruise the first weekend of November. And as we would be sailing into the Magothy, the skipjacks would be sailing into the Magothy to anchor behind Mount Bar Point, which is on Gibson Island, the north point of the Magothy, and they would – then the next morning usually would be the first Monday in November, and they would go out and make the dredge. So I kind of think that the present skipjack race off of Sandy Point really developed from that period because the skipjacks were in that area.

S.D.: When did Chesapeake Bay Appreciation Days and the Windjammer races off of Sandy Point, do you remember when that started?

P.S.: I vaguely remember. I remember when it started, but I don't remember a date. But I, it had to be, I guess it was in the 70's. You see, Sandy Point Park was purchased by the state, and I don't remember that date either, but it had belonged to a man named **Bill Labroe**. And there was a movement afoot for the Navy to take it over as a recreation kind of place. And Bill Labroe was not interested in that. So as I remember the story, he went to the governor and said that he would sell it to the governor for, considering its value, a very low price. Which he did. And so the State of Maryland and then the people of Maryland owe a lot to Bill Labroe for making that possible. But it was years after that that they started Appreciation Day.

S.D.: You talked a little bit about the Star race?

P.S.: Star Boat race.

S.D.: Yes. Who built that hull?

P.S.: Oh, a man named Larry who was a neighbor at Gibson Island.

S.D.: And the name of that boat was?

P.S.: The *Little Shamrock*. It was when **Sir Thomas Lipton** was sailing his cup defenders, *The Shamrock*. And being very Irish, my mother took a clover and enlarged it, enlarged it, enlarged the pattern and got some green cloth and she was a good seamstress, and with the sewing machine, she was able to sew it on each side of the sail. So on the sail was a large shamrock.

S.D.: Did you sail this boat in the races or –

P.S.: Well, you see, it was not a class boat, it was an individual boat, but we did sail in some of the races at St. Michaels when they had a lot of races for, you know, boats that were not alike. They did work class boats.

S.D.: When did that change from – help with the chronology, from the class boat racing to the non-class boats?

P.S.: Well the non-class boats, there were some class boats, like the Star, the meter boats. Of course, the meter boats were much larger, but there were 8-meters. And there was a 22-meter, square meter I think they called it. But anyhow, I would say after World War II that they started to be very prolific, the class boats. And they started with a – went up to the meter boats. And then the cruising class, which *Gleam* was in, then they had handicaps to adjust them.

S.D.: And you raced in these races?

P.S.: Oh, yes. We raced, and we did very, very well. So we were either the largest boat in Class B, or the smallest boat in Class A. And they kept switching us back and forth depending on how many trophies we had won the year before. So it was a joke.

S.D.: What was your job in the races?

P.S.: Well my job was helmsman. Also, being a yawl, I handled the mainsheet and the mizzen sheet. And when we were on a reach, I handled the sheet from the mizzen staysail. But our mainsail, our mast was, overall, 70 feet. Our mainsail was 1,000 square feet. So we had two sets of block and pull, and a traveler to go across for the main. So it was, it was a pretty powerful piece of sail.

S.D.: Were there a lot of women racing at that time?

P.S.: No. No. My mother raced with us, but no. And then in 1937, my father entered *Gleam* in the New London and Gibson Island race. And so I pleaded to go, you know. It was not too well thought of at that time. And I was just 19, and so I finally, he agreed that I could go up as far as New London and then get on a train and come home. Well he relented, so I sailed all the way, and that was very exciting. We sailed down to the capes, and through the capes and up the bay. And, unfortunately, headlines came up that said we were lost at sea, which of course we weren't at all. But the way that they received who had gone around the Chesapeake Lightship had been by telegram. But this particular time, they telephoned it into the Gibson Island Club. And the porter who received the message didn't convey it. And so that day, the newspapers went and said well which are the boats you haven't heard from, and they said *Viga*, which was a schooner, and *Gleam*. And so that night they came out with headlines that we were lost at sea. And, of course, we weren't. We were – off of Solomon's Island, but nevertheless, so that we, when we crossed the finish line and the Coast Guard boat was there, cutter, and they called down to us, where have you been? We've been looking for you for days. But, of course, they hadn't been. But people loved to exaggerate. But my mother's friends, my mother couldn't go because she had broken her wrist the day before, and my mother's friends and the family all came moaning and saying imagine losing your whole family at one time and all this stuff. And she kept on saying but I know that they are not lost. I know that the boat is sound. I know that my husband is conservative, and there's just something in the communications that – and so, of course, we came home at 10:00 that night (laughter). It was a mess. And do you know, we've never lived it down. Never. Anybody that can remember it said oh, yeah, they either think we cut the mark, or – I don't know what. All – but we heard *Viga* reporting, and saw them reporting, and we – they could hear us reporting. And, what's more, the Chesapeake Lightship had when we reported. So that – but nevertheless, talk about adventure.

S.D.: You talked a little bit about the attitudes towards women racing.

P.S.: Was women – well they weren't accustomed to women sailing or racing. There was one other woman in the fleet. And I don't remember how large the fleet was, maybe 40 boats or something like that.

S.D.: What was her name?

P.S.: The woman's name? I don't remember. I remember that as we were going across the starting line, she was on a larger schooner. I remember standing there and wave, but that's all I know.

S.D.: Do you have any stories about an exciting sail?

P.S.: Many. Many. But I think the one that's most significant for people to realize was that my brother and, you know, friends and I were out, and we saw this black squaw coming. And we took down our sails, because we knew it was going to be a very bad one, and ran off in front of the wind. With the bare poles, we were doing 8 ½ knots. And that was very exciting. And then there was another time that we were sailing in that race that I was talking about, and we

had – we were off the Potomac, coming off the Potomac, and a very black squaw was making up. And, again, we took our sails down because we knew that was not good. And so usually, you just take them down, and 20 minutes later, it goes by and you put them up. So in order to keep on course, we were in an area that we could anchor. And the sea picked up so much that when it was time to put up the sails and pick up the anchor, the chop was so bad there at the Potomac mouth, that my father said he thought that it was dangerous to try to lift the anchor for fear that as we went down into a trough of a wave and we had the anchor close to getting aboard, it could bang into a wooden hull and poke a hole in. So then we get up on top of another wake, and he just took his knife and cut the – going to the anchor, and it went zing, and was gone. And that was pretty exciting too to watch the power of the sea and the wind. And I'm telling these stories because I think it's important for people to realize we love the sea, but we have to learn to respect it.

S.D.: How did you communicate with the shoreline? Talking about using a telegraph or a telephone --

P.S.: You didn't. There was no way. Well we had a wireless -- we had radio that they had worked on to try to get it organized. There was no -- it was the beginning of ship to shore. And going up to New England, we went out of the cape that -- Cape May. And it was the fog, we had a brand new mainsail that we put up to stretch out and get it in being before we got into the race. And the fog mildewed it immediately. By the time we got up to Sandy Hook, that was mildewed just from the, the material was cotton and canvas. And it was very good sail. So, unfortunately, it was mildewed. So then, here we were in this heavy fog. And they were trying, the boys, young men, were trying to get the ship to shore going. Of course, it was homemade. 'Cause people thought they could put things together like that. They did it more than I think they do now. And so they could not -- the radio direction finder it was, we were trying to use that. And so they -- it really saved our lives though. Because somebody got the thought, oh, there's moisture on the connections. And they took the fire extinguisher and sprayed the fire extinguisher onto where the antenna went into the radio, and got it to work. At which point, they communicated with a large freighter that was coming through the fog that did not see us, and they veered off. And they went t heir way and we went ours. So that if all the monkeying around with that -- but otherwise, that was the only kind of communication we had.

S.D.: Tell me a little bit about changes in the shoreline and the development of marinas.

P.S.: There was very little of that. See, 'cause I really stopped doing all of that, more or less, when they moved here. I would go and race them, but I didn't do as much cruising at all. So it would be -- okay, 10 years after World War II for people to get on their feet and have families and start to, you know, have a little free time and little free money to go do that. I would say that it would be in the late 50's, 60's, that there was really much of a development.
(SIDE B.)

S.D.: How about changes in the amount, the kinds of boats that were on the bay?

P.S.: Yeah, same period started to increase, increase, increase.

S.D.: When there were a lot more recreational vehicles, were there conflicts between the occupational vehicles and some of the sailors? Or do you remember any of the early conflicts?

P.S.: No. The only conflicts that I remember and still exist are that motorboats became more and more powerful, and people that were running them lots of times were less and less knowledgeable, and absolutely irresponsible about going by small sailboats or racing sailboats. I

mean I just think that there are a percentage of people that are using boats, even sailboats today that don't understand how much they have to respect the water and the other people on the water.

S.D.: How about between some of the sailboats or the motorboats and the crabbers?

P.S.: Well the crab pot, really. One time we did get a crab pot on our propeller. We didn't know it because we'd been not using propeller to race. Well after the Bay Bridge was put up, the races didn't start at Gibson Island anymore, they started at Annapolis to Oxford. The – that was Chesapeake Bay Yacht Club race, which was the Friday, it's always the second Friday in August. And then the Tred Avon Yacht Club picks up Saturday and Sunday. Well this particular day, we had raced, we had anchored, we had gone ashore to have dinner at the club, and a bad, once again a bad squaw was coming. So there were tenders that took people out to their boats. So we got, my father and brother and I got on the tender to get out to *Gleam* because there's an oyster bar off Oxford, and lots of times the anchors don't hold in a bad blow. So we got out there, and I – they were pulling up the anchor, and I was at the helm, and the wind was howling, and I couldn't hear them. But they couldn't hear me. And I had put the boat in forward gear, which I was supposed to be doing, or reverse, I can't remember, and maybe forward first and then reverse, but when I went to put it in reverse – that's the way it was, it was in forward and then I was to reverse it, it wouldn't reverse. And we were going up on this New York 40 that was anchored in front of us. It was pretty hairy. And they thought I wasn't hearing them. I was hearing them, but it wouldn't respond. So, fortunately, the man from Gibson Island who owned the 40, he got going in time, and we took the boat over to the Bellevue side and anchored again. So the next morning, my brother went overboard to find out what was the matter, why it wouldn't answer the helm, and we had a crab pot on our wheel under the water. So it almost caused a real problem. But so that the crab pots are a problem. And if they stay in a row and you can establish, you know, that and are careful, but it does create a real problem. And for everybody, outboard motors on. Of course, an outboard can move around it faster.

S.D.: Let's talk about how you learned to sail. Do you remember any accidents?

P.S.: No. Not really. Because as I said, my father was – he liked adventure, but he doesn't like careless. He wanted things done correctly, and we were always advised to not take risky chances. So I don't remember any bad accidents.

S.D.: How did he know how to sail?

P.S.: Well I guess, I guess he just did. When he was younger, sailing with friends, and then, you know, he was pretty young, he had a young family living right on the water and always loving it. So then a little later, before we were in our teens and he started sailing with a friend named **George Whiting** who had a boat, a 65-foot schooner named *The Lady Susan*. And then he sold that and bought another schooner, a Sparksman and Stevens schooner, I believe, named *Dauntless*, and he raced on that with some friends to Bermuda. And he was kind enough, he wanted my brother who was 16 to go in the crew. So to make room for the crew, he accepted the difficult assignment of being the cook for 12 men. And under those conditions, that was a labor of love. So they won that year. I'm trying to think of the year. Well I don't remember the exact year. But anyhow, they won the All Adventure prize for the best boat to Bermuda. And my mother and I, with two friends, took the Bermuda boat and went to Bermuda and were there. We got, we rented a boat and I got to sail it and watch the fleet come in. So that was fun.

S.D.: When you went out, particularly in the early days and then even as you were traveling on the sailboat, what did you tend to take for meals?

P.S.: We took canned goods. We took, often my mother would have our cook do stews that we would refrigerate or we would take whole hams or roasted chicken or – I mean in other words, she was very smart about planning it so that it was easy to put together. But we did, I mean after all, when we went to New London and back, we were gone three weeks. So when we were a little slow coming in, because our navigator had gotten sick the day before the start of the race, so we had to do it on dead reckoning and you can't sail as fast that way. One of daddy's friends said well I knew when *Gleam* was down on her waterline that you all had that much food aboard, and you had all those teenagers, and they wouldn't come home till you'd used up all the food.

S.D.: You have told me a little bit about earlier hunting with your brother and cousin.

P.S.: Yes. Well, you know, as a girl, to get to go, you carried the ammunition and brought the lunch, as I look back, and you pumped the boat, you know, brought the lunch. In other words, yes. We, I didn't – I have done some shooting, but I didn't do a whole lot of it. I did enough to enjoy it, and if I was, it was a day that we were duck shooting, and it turned out to be a nice sunny November day, I would just leave them and go get my horse and go off on the horse instead because it was very boring to just sit there when the ducks and – we didn't have geese. We didn't have any geese. We had lots of ducks.

S.D.: What was your favorite duck to eat?

P.S.: I guess a Mallard. I don't remember. Ducks were – no, I mean of course we were always very careful not to bring fish ducks home.

S.D.: Did you fish?

P.S.: Oh, yes. We did, but once we were old enough to sail on our own boat, we didn't do much fishing. We'd much rather sail than fish. But we, the fishing that we did was going out in whatever skiff we had on the beach. And so that would be the fishing. Why they thought they had to go fishing at 6:00 in the morning, I don't know. But that's, 5 or 6:00. So that's when the fishing was done. But, actually, we would get a lot of rock, hardheads, and there are two other fish that I can think of.

S.D.: What did you use for bait?

P.S.: We used peelers for bait. And we didn't crab off of our place. See, we didn't have seaweed. I mean it was sand, all sand. In the creek, in Cornfield Creek where we had the boat, it was crab, it was crabgrass, and you could crab there or fish for sunnies. I mean when we were, you know, bobbing, we were that age with the bobbing.

S.D.: About when you were a teenager sailing on the bay during the Depression, tell me a little bit about those trips. Did you go on overnights?

P.S.: Oh, yes. Well that's, you know, when we had *Mary F*, yes, we went on weekends to see places on the Eastern Shore and Solomon's or the Potomac. And eventually, when we bought the other boat and my grandparents were dead by then, there was a Camp Calvert down on – Bretton Bay, which is a gorgeous place. And it was a Jesuit camp for boys. So my father, I didn't go on that trip for some reason. I was somewhere else. But my father and brother and a couple friends who had gone there to camp, and through them, my father had become interested so that the *Mary F* was given to Camp Calvert for them to use, and they did for quite a few years. I really don't remember what finally was, you know, as its final days, but it was used as a boat that the camp could take boys out on.

S.D.: You told me a little bit about – you talked about the races up the Miles River.

P.S.: Yes, and there were races up and down the bay, races to the Hampton Roads, races to – of course, there were day races, races from Gibson Island to Cedar Point, which was an overnight race, and I think it's still going. That's the first weekend in – that's Labor Day weekend. And, of course, the big race was always the – was the Poker Cup run that the **Chesapeake Bay Yacht Club** of Gibson Island to Oxford. That was kind of a best fun race, but there are races off Gibson Island from Baltimore Light to Love Point to off Rock Hall.

S.D.: There was an early race off Rock Hall?

P.S.: It was – wait a minute – turn that.

(Off record.)

P.S.: -- off Swan Creek. It would be Baltimore Light, Swan – Baltimore Light, I think maybe Poplar Island buoy, you know, the main marker off Poplar Island up to Swan Point and back would be one of the early races – Gibson Island. And then a later race would be the Poplar Island just down to the buoy and back, and then, of course, the Cedar Point race would be an overnight race down to Cedar Point and back. That was considered – when it went from Baltimore Light was considered a 100 mile race.

S.D.: And the one that went around the Swan Point buoy, do you remember the name of it?

P.S.: That was a day race.

S.D.: It was a day – did it have a name?

P.S.: I think they called it the **Swan Point Race**.

S.D.: Was Swan Point Marina there?

P.S.: No. Well we didn't go anywhere. We just went around the buoy at Swan Point. And we drew 6 ½ feet. So we didn't go into every creek.

S.D.: What's the earliest race that you know of that you remember people talking about?

P.S.: The earliest race that I went on that I can think of is on Mr. Whiting's *Lady Susan*. No, it was the – Mr. Whiting's *Dauntless*. And that was a Poplar Island race. And then later on, I was – this is before we had *Gleam*, so I was pretty young. And then we – then I was on the Cedar Point race a number of years before we owned *Gleam*. So before 1935, I had done those races.

S.D.: Do you remember the storm of '33?

P.S.: Very well, very well.

S.D.: Tell me about that.

P.S.: The storm of '33, I later found out, was the 100-year storm. And that storm came up into where part of our property was a marsh, and there was a wooden bridge in the marsh to another side of the property. And that storm came up all up in there. But, fortunately, we had had a bad storm in '27, I think, that had cut 25 feet off of our place. So that, and then we had quite an – as a family, we had quite an – as a family, we had quite an extensive piece of waterfront there. And so my father and uncles and grandfather all put up a breakwater, sea walls. And my father realized that it needed, our sea wall needed to be very deep underground rather than – that was more important than being over it, I mean the height above. It was enough height above. It was about 5 feet, but there was much more underpinning, which was very good. Because in the Storm of '33, the water came up over the sea wall and washed some dirt out from behind it, but it did not – that sea wall is still there, still there, because it had enough depth to it. And the other sea walls got undermined. But it was a pretty wild storm. And so my father went

down to see what was happening to the causeway. See we were about a mile above the causeway at Gibson Island, and that was being torn up. And I think it was the Storm of '33, and I remember going the next day to go down, and next to the little office that the man checks people in and out of the island, there was a Star boat up in the tree next to his little station. So it was a pretty wild storm. But it was different than this storm that we had, Isabelle, because we had had a northeaster several days before, and then the storm came up the bay from the southeast. All the water that was pushed out by the northeaster was turned around and pushed back by the southeaster beside the surge, so that created – and that's what happened again this time except that we did – we had a dry northwester. So that, in a sense, the ground was not, of course our ground was pretty wet from all the rain we've had, but it wasn't wet from that three-day northeaster. So, but I've heard, I've been told that some of the marks in Annapolis that where people had marked where it was before, that this time it was greater, the flood was greater. I don't know because I have no way of, you know, developing a mark.

S.D.: I'm going to stop right here for a minute.

(Off record.)

(BEGIN TAPE 2)

P.S.: -- I don't remember that.

S.D.: You were telling me about some of the races, like which – the chronology of the races, the history of some of the earlier races.

P.S.: Well the races that I just was talking about, I do not remember just when the races for cruising boats started from either Gibson Island or Annapolis to St. Michaels, as I was describing the Chesapeake Bay Poker Bowl race. I don't remember when they started. But the first – well we did race, we did race *Shamrock*. And later on when we purchased *Gleam*, our first race in St. Michaels was quite an experience. It was for yawls, schooners and cutters, I think they called it. And it was – I think it was the first time they had that, because it was obvious they didn't understand about the course. And so they put us on the same course as Star boats, and I believe Comets, but I'm not sure about that. And here we were, you know, a much larger boat with a big mast and these big sails. And it was fair breeze, fairly good breeze, and we started out, and of course we went right through the Star fleet. They put the – they started the Star fleet first, and we sailed right through the Star fleet, and we get to the turning mark. And so it was a triangle race, which meant that you had a beat, and a run, and a broad reach. And so we had to get the mainsail – I mean we had to get the spinnaker up. And the spinnaker pole, in those days, was a wooden pole, and it took two people to move it, it was so heavy. So we put out the spinnaker, and we get to the next marker, we had to get that down, and then we put up the mizzen staysail and a broad reach, and we go back, we're supposed to go around that three times. Well, I tell you, we were panting because these legs were so short that we didn't have time to even get our breath before we finished with one and did the other. So after we'd been around it twice, they sent a speedboat out to tell us we didn't have to do it the third time. Of course, we won it. There wasn't any problem. But it was, the next year, they learned that they didn't put all those boats on the same course. It was out beyond the Deep Water Point. But even at that, it was a short leg, and it was – we have giggled many times about that race. We were anchored, we were so exhausted, we couldn't even fix lunch for a while. However, that was St. Michaels. And then I don't remember how many more years. You see, they had the speedboats on the inside course. I don't remember whether they had the log canoes on the inside course or not, 'cause they liked to have the log canoes so that people from St. Michaels could see them. But I –

that part I'm not sure about. But then several years later, one year they had 3,000 entries in a St. Michaels regatta. It was after that that they realized that they just had to divide the regattas into two parts, one powerboats and one sailboats. So that's an interesting thing. The other thing of interest was that the Saturday night parties were on the dock, and there was a pavilion at the end of the dock. And there would be music, and sometimes you'd feel that dock swaying with all this activity. But anyhow, another funny thing was that they gave the prizes away from a platform, raised platform. And *John Charles Thomas*, the opera singer, lots of times was the person that gave – gave them away. And there was one night that John Charles, when he was feeling a little good, loved to sing *Home on the Range*. So whoever didn't come up immediately, and of course, it took a little while to walk from your position up onto this platform, he would be singing different versions of *Home on the Range*. And he got into the whole throws of it, and we could never get him stopped. But we had fun.

S.D.: Where was the dock that you're talking about and the pavilion?

P.S.: Up right where the docks are now, right off the club into the creek. Not into the river, into the creek.

S.D.: We've got a very, very early picture, a historic picture around 1907 of people watching the log canoe race off of Parrot Point.

P.S.: Yes. But, of course, I don't remember that.

S.D.: Where did people gather to watch?

P.S.: Well I don't know because I was usually out. But they were around the club, and maybe they were watching from other points, but I wasn't ashore so I really wouldn't have known.

S.D.: Did anybody ever say anything to you for being a woman on the boat?

P.S.: No. Well, it was our boat. They couldn't.

S.D.: But they didn't make any side comments if they were passing you, or you were passing them?

P.S.: No, I don't remember any comments.

S.D.: Do you remember any practical jokes?

P.S.: Huh-uh (negative).

S.D.: What age were most of the racers at that time?

P.S.: That I don't remember. I would think that they would have been mostly young men in their late teens and 20's and 30's, and you know, in other words, it was not a – it wasn't an age thing, it was an interest, whether you were interested.

S.D.: Were there whole families like yours?

P.S.: Very few. Very few. Almost none that I can remember. No, I'm talking about the earlier days. I'm talking – after World War II, things changed a lot.

S.D.: So the year of –

P.S.: So that after World War II, the other family that I can think of was predominant would be the Lippincott family that did it as a group.

S.D.: So the times that we're talking about here, the race with *Gleam* –

P.S.: Yes.

S.D.: What time period would that have been?

P.S.: 1935 to the late 50's, early 60's.

S.D.: And the time on the –

P.S.: *Mary F*?

S.D.: Yes.

P.S.: That would be from 1924 to 1935.

S.D.: And the one where everybody was racing together, do you remember around what year that would've been?

P.S.: That would've been '35 to – all that period. Now the later time element, my father and mother weren't going with us as much, but they pretty much, I would say they did until the late 40's.

S.D.: And when do you think, like in the 50's, did the Town Dock start offering more in the way of supplies, like fishing supplies? Or do you remember anything like that?

P.S.: I don't remember them ever offering fishing supplies.

S.D.: And swimming in the bay, do you have any stories with nettles?

P.S.: Oh. Well we swam in the bay every day, two or three times, and Gibson Island was usually three weeks after Oxford as far as the nettles coming. But I do remember when I was quite small one awful summer with nettles, and my mother had a very good friend who was a great swimmer, and she was visiting us, and I remember getting out – we had a beach, and then we had sandbars out 500 feet. And so it was a very safe beach, and then we had a raft out there that we would swim to and so forth. Well anyhow, I remember as a very small child, and I guess maybe six, that it must've been a draught that summer because we had oversupply. I mean so that you never, everywhere – I kind of panicked because of the sting, apparently. And I remember her taking me by the hand and saying now you just – I was afraid to walk back to the beach. And she said now look down and walk where the sea nettles aren't. But that was really difficult to find a spot when they weren't. That is the worst sea nettle summer I could think of.

S.D.: How about stories with mosquitoes?

P.S.: Well mosquitoes were mosquitoes. And the interesting thing is that every now and then, it didn't happen often, what did happen one time, we were off of – we were fishing, we were trolling on *Gleam*, and we were south of the Patuxent. I don't remember exactly what we were fishing. And we were sailing slowly, and my father described it as a cargo of flies. All of the sudden, the boat was absolutely covered with flies. It's the only time I remember this happening, that that could happen, you know. And I don't remember, I remember we sprayed and swatted and did all that stuff, and got away from it somehow. But it's a phenomenon that is interesting that I think can happen, that a swarm of flies lighted on the boat. But on the whole, you watch your wind and you don't anchor where the wind's going to blow the mosquitoes on you.

S.D.: Is there anything that we haven't talked about that you would like to share?

P.S.: Well I'd like to share a need for us to protect the bay. And starting in the period of, relatively the period of the mid-40's is when I remember the – it happened before that to a degree, but the awful fish kill. And there were, I don't know what fish there were, but there were maybe six inches. And our beach at Gibson Island would be covered with these dead fish. I've never heard what was killing them. I don't know if people know what was killing them. I remember from very early on my father talking to me about the need of passing legislation, and then they did pass legislation about the steamships coming and pumping their bilges out into the bay. Then even after it was legislated against it, they still did it to a degree. They would do it at night. And then, of course, they were going on who was going to catch them. But that was very early on that I remember my father being a conservationist about the bay. And I think that he

was – we must put all our thoughts on it because it is our greatest asset, and we need to put our mind and our treasure to protect it.

S.D.: Oh, I have one more question. Did you ever go up to any of the amusement parks up in Tolchester or Betterton, or do you remember avoiding that area for a certain reason?

P.S.: No, we didn't avoid that. I remember going to Betterton. I don't remember the amusement park. I remember going to Tolchester once. But when we went out, we went out to sail. So, however, I do remember always at the St. Michaels regatta that they had the fireman's carnival and going in and being on the ferris wheel. I do remember that. But I – actually, we could see the Tolchester boat going. I've seen, you know, the boats when we've been out going from Baltimore to – but we didn't go in that much.

S.D.: Well thank you very much. I appreciate you doing this interview.

P.S.: Well, it was a pleasure.

S.D.: I have one last thing. I'd like for you to introduce yourself and say something about who you are.

P.S.: Oh. Well my real name I'm not going to tell you because I don't like it. But I was given the nickname of Polly when I was two by my brother. And my maiden name is Flanagan. And then I married Jack Shannahan, moved to the Eastern Shore when we both were released from the military after World War II. I am a mother of 6 children, and 14 grandchildren. I have lived on the Chesapeake or on Spencer Creek near St. Michaels when we moved here. Then we moved to Locust Grove, on the Peachblossom later on. And then when my family started going on their own, why I sold – we sold that place and built a second place on Peachblossom Point about 1,000 feet away and lived there until I finally sold that and built a house on Bachelor's Point outside of Oxford looking right at Baloney Point or Choptank Light. At present, I am living in a condo in Easton and enjoying it. We have been associated with and owners of the Shannahan – Hardware Company that became a rental company in 1966, I believe it was. And we still own the property and we rent it out. My children are all avid sailors and have been successful in their own fields. And they are Mary Carol Shannahan Gregory, and her sister, Eleanor Shannahan, who had been married to an artist who, unfortunately, has died named O. Brad Militenivich. And my son, John Shannahan, III, has his own business in Oxford, Oxford Yacht Agency, and he has also another yard in the Trappe area on Trappe Creek. I have a son, Chirp, who lives on Boone Creek and has been in his own business in Beltsville for years, and a son – a daughter named Molly, and her married name is McAdams, and she has been very successful in the field of education, both as a member of the commission on the staff for President Regan, on the – and helped to write *Nation at Risk*. And my son, Patrick, who lives in Davidsonville, Molly and Patrick both live in Davidsonville, and he has his own business there. So that we've been a very happy family life.

S.D.: Thank you very much.

(End of interview.)