

Interview Log

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BEGIN SIDE A

S.D.: This is Shelly Drummond of the Chesapeake Bay Maritime Museum. Today is October 29th, and I'm with Danny Elburn of **J&J Seafood**. Where did that name come from?

D.E.: Just initials from middle names or first names. We had to come up with a quick name, so we just – it come from like a first or a middle name is all.

S.D.: Whose?

D.E.: My brother-in-law and myself. My name is James Daniel and his name is James Edward. So we just took J&J.

S.D.: You grew up in Rock Hall. Tell me a little bit about what the harbor used to look like when you were young.

D.E.: When I was young, the harbor was, it was 95 percent or maybe even 97 percent commercial. It was just one workboat after another coming in and out of the harbor from lunchtime till 9:00 at night, and basically six days a week. It was just a lot of traffic all the time, but it was all commercial boats. The harbor has, since then, it has grown. Where now it's 95 percent pleasure boats, and that's the change that I've seen, and I've seen it occur in the last several years. And it's just not nowhere near as many commercial boats. The charter fishing is coming back, and people tend to just get their young ones not to get interested in the water business because it's such a hard life, and it's such a demanding life that you just don't have the watermen we used to have.

S.D.: Do you remember your first day on the water?

D.E.: Oh, yeah. Yeah. I got seasick. I thought I was king of the world. I got seasick. I never felt so bad in my life. And the next day, I got seasick again, and it went on for four or five days till I got my sea legs, got used to the motion, and – but I remember it very clearly.

S.D.: And who did you go out with?

D.E.: He was an acquaintance of mine. He was an old waterman, he used to buy oysters on the buy boat, and I was in second grade, and I used to help him after school, and help him after dark till the oystermen got in, and that's where it started with me. And I fell in love with it, even though – after the sickness passed, I fell right in love with it, and that's where I am today.

S.D.: Tell me what kinds of technique, like you've oystered, you've crabbed.

D.E.: What did I do? I've dove for oysters, I patent tonged, I've hand tonged. I've done just about all of it. You know, different seasons, different times, do different things. I've gill netted, I've fished commercial with hook and line, anchor netted when it was legal, and just about – I've pound netted. Every source of the industry that you could do, I've probably done it.

S.D.: And your – who in your family worked on the water as well?

D.E.: On my dad's side, from my dad to my grandfather, his father, his father right on down, I don't know of anybody on my dad's side of the family that did anything but work on the water. And all my brothers, and a lot of cousins and everything, they all are watermen today. But it goes back generations and generations on my dad's side. That's all they ever knew.

S.D.: What do you think makes a good watermen?

D.E.: A lot of ambition, a lot of knowledge, paying attention, and changing with the times, also. Try to preserve and fight for what we've got, but don't go to extremes because

sometimes change is good, and just have an open mind and work damn hard, and you can make a good living at it.

S.D.: We've talked a little bit about how Rock Hall used to be. When did the changes start happening?

D.E.: My opinion, they started to happen when the – the jetty was raised at the mouth of the harbor, and it made it a much safer harbor. And that's when you started to see the pleasure boats. The harbor was, I guess, fine for the workboats that would get banged up anyway cosmetically, but you know, you're talking these couple hundred thousand dollar yachts and sailboats and stuff, it wasn't a very good place to tie. It wasn't bad, but it wasn't a very good place. And after they raised the jetty, it turned into an excellent place to harbor your boat. And that's when I seen the change happen. That's what I think kick-started the Rock Hall waterfront turning to a tourist attraction, let alone just commercial place.

S.D.: What year was that around?

D.E.: In the – I'm going to guess in the 70's. It was in the 70's, but it progressed really rapid. It was a lot of construction started, marinas being built, local people selling land off to high bidders coming in, and the bidders, their development and everything, and it did quite rapidly.

S.D.: What was one of the first marinas that came in?

D.E.: I'm going to say it was some existing marinas here, but they were pretty much mom and pop marinas, and they would harbor a lot of the working watermen and everything. **Pelorus Marina**, which I was a part of, after it had been, it had been built, a guy developed, he developed the land and built a marina. And years after he did that, I'm going to say five or six years, he got sick, and I bought the marina, some friends and I did. And that was probably one of the first marinas, besides the mom and pop marinas, that they pretty much all did face lifts and turned from commercial boats to pleasure boats, putting stores in, my little snack bars, just making a full service marina instead of just a place to tie.

S.D.: Mom and pop marina, what kind of services?

D.E.: Just a place to tie, and gas, and basically that's it. Pier's pretty much rundown, grass, you know, the premises, it wasn't groomed, and stuff like that, just necessities. And all that turned into, the cosmetic took over, and it turned into just wonderful marinas, wonderful-looking marinas.

S.D.: Tell me about the early days of Pelorus, when they first built. What did the community say?

D.E.: The community was opposed to any building of anything. You had a lot of old people in the town politics that were set in their ways. They fought it tooth and nail for a long while till finally the – we had new elections and we had some open-minded people. They were against growth too, but they weren't against growth, all the growth. Controlled growth is what they would like to see, and that's where it went. Pelorus, it was small, but it wasn't nothing nobody could do because the guy who built the marina, he stayed within his guidelines to build a marina. It was a lot of sarcasm and everything. Years later, I've been a waterman my whole life. When I bought into the marina, a lot of my friends, they would have nothing to do with me because they thought I had turned sides and went towards the recreational part of it, even though I was making my living as a commercial waterman. And those people are just close minded people, and they're struggling even today, where the ones who have opened their mind and went

along with the flow, because they found out it was going to help us more than hurt us, they're exceeding and doing very well.

S.D.: What about the first days when the sailboats were coming into the harbor as well as the large commercial fleet?

D.E.: It was a lot of making fun of them, and shouting at them. It was strange looking, but it, they didn't take long to settle in. And a lot of the sail boaters became friends with the watermen. And some of the old watermen that were set in their ways and stuff, they died off, and you had a new bunch that started, you know. And they kind of started to mix, and it's turned out to be a good thing, economically for the town and for the future of – for the future of the town.

S.D.: We talked a little bit about some of the locals going out with the watermen now.

D.E.: No. You're talking about the visitors.

S.D.: That's what I mean.

D.E.: Yeah. Some of the people that come in town that have sailboats and pleasure boats, they've gotten to be friends with watermen, and they ride along some days with the watermen because they're interested in seeing – they're not here to put us out of business. They're interested in our heritage and preserving our heritage. And, I mean, you know, we tend to blame the sailboaters and everything else for running over our crab pots, this, that and the other. But, you know, our main problem is pollution, and we're all part of it. But they've become friends with a lot of us, and they go out on the boat, and they even crew for us sometimes. They're just interested, and they're people just like we are and nice people.

S.D.: Tell me a little bit about the knowledge that you learned from working with your father and your grandfather.

D.E.: The knowledge that I learned was probably the common sense was the big thing. It had nothing to do with numbers. It was all about you had to know how the tide would run. You would have to, you would know at the bottom of the river or bay, you would have to know what kind of bottom you were setting your gear on. So, you know, I was taught all that about, you know, when to lay your gear on when the tide is slack, when it's not running at all. And I was told different areas to go where it would be little places that, little edges or something that you would do better than most places. And just the knowledge of navigation and doing stuff like that was just, it amazed me. And after I learned it, I don't know how I learned it, but it was just, it's just amazing now when I try to teach somebody, they can't get it. And I think why can't they get it, and I was the same way, you know.

S.D.: Is there a difference between the young watermen now just getting started and the watermen of the past?

D.E.: Oh, absolutely. The young watermen now, they're more carefree, and I'm going to say go day-by-day, where the older watermen were more conservative. And, you know, I don't think – the older watermen were more knowledgeable on natural things. Today you've got so much equipment that's so sophisticated that really helps us, and where the old-timer, they went by barometer, and what the tide was doing and the moon, a compass. Today, you've got your GPS's, the Lorans, you've got the satellite navigation. We've got it made compared to what they had it. They were much more knowledgeable about the bay, how the bay worked and the system of the bay and the product in the bay than we were, than we are today. We have a lot of help from our instrumentation and stuff.

S.D.: What kinds of things did the moon help with?

D.E.: The moon can tell you if the tide, what the tide's doing. You know, your barometer can tell you if you've got a breeze of wind coming your way and things like that. If you have the tide running, if you have a hard-running tide, then you know you've got a certain type of weather coming. If the wind's out of a certain direction, like in the wintertime or anytime, you knew you were going to get, like it was around here out of the northeast, we know we're going to get some kind of precipitation. And you learn things like that. That's natural things that I was taught from my father and grandfather. As far as finding the edges and stuff, they used to use a big stick to feel the bottom and feel what type of bottom was down there. And now you have depth sounders and everything that pretty much tell you what kind of bottom was there.

S.D.: How about net fishing, gill net?

D.E.: Gill net, that's a dangerous job. The reason it's dangerous is it's turned into – they regulated our season so much, and they regulated our buy catch so much that we've got to go in any kind of weather because we know we only have a certain amount of time and a certain amount to catch. And it's in the winter months. When it's very cold, a lot of ice. We used to lose a lot of boats a year, and sometimes a crew, we would lose until the boats got more sophisticated. And I'm only talking back like 10 years ago. In the 70's and early 80's we used to lose watermen. And the boats, and most of the time, it was from gill netting. But it's a very dangerous job. And the reason what makes it so dangerous is we're so regulated. We've got to go because we know our time, we know we're limited.

S.D.: Tell me what you mean by regulating the buy catch and how that's limiting.

D.E.: Well you've got, you've only got a certain amount of days you're allowed to fish. And if you miss a day, you more likely, you don't make it up. And you're only allowed so many poundage to catch amongst the whole fleet. And you want to get your share. So you're going to drive yourself to go out there in any kind of weather to make sure you get your share, and that you don't miss a day because once you miss it, you can't get it back.

S.D.: How about finding the fish?

D.E.: Finding the fish, it's pretty much common knowledge. You learn growing up that in the winter months when the water gets cold, the fish bunch up in deep water. So that's where you tend to lay your nets. If the water's warmer, your fish are scattered out up on the flats and close to shore and everything. So you just pretty much lay your net out, and it's just a guessing game till you find a bunch. Some people get lucky enough that they can ride over a bunch and tell on their fish finder that it is a bunch of fish. And they get lucky and catch them like that. Very seldom that happens because you got so much of the trash fish out there that gets tangled in your net too. I'm talking like bait fish that's good for nothing but bait. And once it gets tangled in your net, it's just a mess. You can't, the net won't fish no more, so you've got to take it up and clean it out.

S.D.: How about the cycle of the rockfish when they began to decline, and then the moratorium came in?

D.E.: My opinion as a waterman, was working on the water back in the days before the moratorium. I believe that, my opinion is that the industry was over-fished. I don't know if it called for a full moratorium like was put on us, but we needed something. We needed some kind of regulations on the rockfish industry. So they put the moratorium on us. And in my opinion, it helped. It's also my opinion that right now, they should be easing up on the regulations after they lifted the moratorium, we've got so many rockfish that they need to ease up on our buy catch.

They need to be more lax with it and let us catch more because we have such an abundance of rockfish now that they're eating the clams, they're eating the crabs, they're eating the rest of the, you know, the habitat that we make our living on. So they need to let us be more free and catch more fish to keep it, keep it even I guess is the word.

S.D.: In terms of regulations, what do you consider to be making good regulations?

D.E.: A good regulation, to me, as far as fish are concerned is the size limit. I agree you shouldn't be allowed to keep the big – the spawning fish and the fish that's going to make your future. And I think that on the other end, the small fish are really not good for nothing, the small striped bass, until they get bigger so it's no sense keeping them. So I think that's a good regulation. On crabs, pretty much the same thing, the size limit. I think that you shouldn't be allowed to carry a crab, a female crab bearing eggs, shouldn't be allowed to keep. And you shouldn't, you know, be allowed to keep a crab that's too small because it's really not worth nothing. It's really no sense, it's asinine to even catch it, I mean to keep it, you know.

S.D.: What is some of the bad regulations in your opinion?

D.E.: Some of the bad regulations is like I said before, I think they need to be more lax on the amount of fish we're allowed to catch. It's too many fish, and they're eating up all of our other, our product that we depend on making a living on like your soft shell clams, your crabs. They need to be thinned out just like they thinned out the deer for the farmer, you know, let the farmer thin out the deer. I don't think they should let us go full force. I think it needs to still be regulated, but they need to be – I think they're doing a bad job of opening the rockfish back up after the moratorium. I think they're dragging their feet.

S.D.: How about the general health of the bay? What do you think is critical to the changes of the bay?

D.E.: I think that the pollution is a very critical part of the bay. And I think that's got to be controlled. And I also think that the people who are making their living in the industry have got to also be controlled because I think buy catches are good. You're only allowed to take a certain amount of this or a certain amount of that. I think that's good because if you let, if you let any industry go wild, it's going to deplete the industry in no time. And I've seen it happen, and that's why I'm not against controlled regulation.

S.D.: What did maybe you learn – would you have learned from your grandfather, or your father or uncles about the health of the bay and how to maintain it?

D.E.: I think they were more into putting back what you took out. Replenishing the bay. Letting the little stuff go. Letting the crabs, you know, carrying eggs go. I think they were more conservative about how they treated the bay than we are today, I really do. I think they looked more forward towards the future than the watermen today look towards the future.

S.D.: Speaking of the future, what do you think the future is for Rock Hall?

D.E.: For Rock Hall, I think the future is, it's going to turn from a semi-poor town, commercial town where everybody was close, it's going to turn into a rich town where people are going to come. It's going to turn into a resort area, and I think it's going to be good for my kids and grandkids. And I'm, like I say, for controlled growth. And in the future, I can see Rock Hall just being a major tourist industry.

S.D.: How did you get started in the seafood business, the seafood market?

D.E.: I seen the changes that was happening and the growth of Rock Hall, and the marinas popping up. And most of the time when a marina popped up, you will see two seafood businesses, or seafood-oriented businesses go down, and it was more people coming into town.

And we were shipping all of our seafood out of town to another town, another area, and I just figured that didn't make much sense. So I opened up a retail wholesale seafood market. And I always wanted to do it, but it was premature to do it years ago because we didn't have the influx of people coming into the town that we do now. And now that we, it is going towards more, a tourist town and a recreational town, if it wasn't for the tourist people, I would have to shut down. So I have to really, I wanted, I say I wanted to do it all my life. I had to wait and let the people come to town and make sure it was enough people to, you know, to withstand – my business to withstand.

S.D.: So do you go out on the water in the summer, or how is your schedule?

D.E.: I used to go in the summer and winter. However, in the last two or three years, the recreation part of Rock Hall has grown so much, the busiest time has been the summertime. When people come down, they sail, they do whatever. So I've had to stay ashore in the summertime to run my retail store. In the wintertime when it quiets down, they all pull their boats up and winterize their boats, and they all go home for the season. Then I'll go back out on the bay.

S.D.: How has your family worked with you in your business as a waterman and as a –

D.E.: They've stood behind my decision-making 100 percent, and they worked by my side 100 percent. My daughter and wife pretty much runs the retail seafood part. I'm pretty much in the background doing the wholesale part of it. And they've stuck by me, and I couldn't have done it without them.

S.D.: How about with the nets?

D.E.: With the nets, like my daughter, she's got into – I used to have to pay people to rig up my nets, to gear my nets and whatever. My daughter, somebody showed her how to do it, and – I showed her, somebody showed me how to do it, and I showed her how to do it, and she does all my gearing of the nets now. My wife's learned how to do it, so we do the whole thing. At nighttime when we close the retail store up, we'll come back here in the net shed, and we'll all gear net and mend net and stuff. It's pretty much a family thing. They know that this depends on our livelihood, so they jump right in there. And it's an art to it, and they've all picked it up.

S.D.: We talked a little bit about Pelorus changing into being bought out by the state authority, or authority of the state as a public park.

D.E.: It was bought by the county.

S.D.: The county, okay.

D.E.: By the county, as a public park. Far as I'm concerned, it was a great move. We had, one of our commissioners, who was a waterman all of his life, he had run for county commissioner, and he had won a seat on the county commissioners. And I was the owner, one of the owners of Pelorus at the time when he was a commissioner. And he knew that we had interest in selling the place. Right next to the marina where Pelorus was is a county dock that's been there for years. His name was Commissioner Fithian, **Ronnie Fithian**. He had enough sight to see that connecting Pelorus with the county dock, you're talking about a nice piece of waterfront for the county. And also, Ronnie, Mr. Fithian had in back of his mind that the watermen were getting shoved out more and more as far as having a place to tie their boats because we could not afford the slip rent that the pleasure boats could pay, and so he made, he seen the insight of buying the marina and having a place for the watermen to tie their boats, and that's what he did. He gets full credit for doing that, and it's a lot of people said it wouldn't work, but it's full right now of commercial boats, where before, commercial boats were tied here,

there and everywhere and moved around almost on a daily basis just to have a place to tie the boat at nighttime while they went home. And because of Mr. Fithian, he's made it so, he's put the commercial man in a safe harbor where they're, you know, they're protected, and they got all the amenities they need, and the county has got their self a nice chunk of real estate.

S.D.: How about the statue?

D.E.: The statue? That's all part of the tradition and the heritage of what Rock Hall used to be, and part of what it always will be, because it is a fishing village. First and foremost. Then a tourist town on top of it, if it's any way possible the two can mix, and they are mixing. And it's good. It's good.

S.D.: What do you think about the artists' movement?

D.E.: The artists' movement?

S.D.: Like there's a lot of artists. There seem to be a lot of arts and music and –

D.E.: Yeah, yeah. Well that's all, you know, part of the tourist industry. I mean people, when they come here, they want things to do. I think it's neat. I think the artists and the people like that, I think they're help preserving our heritage. And I just think it's all wonderful and interesting.

S.D.: Tell me, did you ever participate in any of the workboat docking or the workboat races?

D.E.: No, for the simple reason I sat on the board of our local Watermen's Association and I always worked, keeping things organized. But I never got into the games itself. However, since I have my retail, this only happens on the 4th of July, the boat docking, and that's really boom time for my business, so I'm pretty much stuck in my business. I haven't been to a watermen's show now for probably 5 or 6 years for the simple reason I'm just so busy at my retail store, which is a happy problem.

S.D.: Do you have any good stories about some of the competitiveness, or some of the competitions between the watermen in the races?

D.E.: Yeah. It's just, you know, we have a shucking contest. My business, they sponsor a oyster shucking contest out of – we have a function here in Rock Hall. And we have these oyster shuckers that's been shucking, they're like in their 80's, 70's and 80's, and boy, they can shuck oysters. And they've been shucking all their life, and they get in the contest. And I sponsor \$100 prize for first place, and here lately, we've been having these young guys, these preppy type guys come from the city that's worked out a raw bar that puts these oyster shuckers to shame. It's unbelievable. So that's happened two or three times. So I'm having trouble sponsoring the contest now because the oyster shuckers aren't showing up. The only people showing up is a couple of these preppy guys from the city. And, which is all in good fun, you know, but it's just – you also have some of the people that come from the city that they gave rowing contests and stuff, and boy, they put us to shame, they just put us to shame. But as far as the anchor tossing, the mending the nets, most of the activities, hand on the boats, they just sit back and watch because they know that, you know, we're the ones that can do that and can do it good.

S.D.: What kind of watermen are the ones that participate in the workboat docking?

D.E.: They're mostly young, looking for a good time and just having a day off and partying and just having fun. But it's mostly the young crowd.

S.D.: You had told me that you used to work on the charter fishing. Tell me a little bit about the early charter fishing business.

D.E.: Like I said before, in the wintertime, I'd work on an oyster buy boat. And in the summertime when school got out, we had a lot of charter boats because we had a lot of rockfish, and people would come. And the sport fishing part of it was very good. And I used to mate on charter boats. I probably did that for five to seven years. And I learned an awful lot from those captains too about how to throw an anchor so the anchor would hold when it hit bottom. And how to coil up rope, how to tie knots. I learned a lot from the charter captains. Then, you know, it went on. We had a time there where the fish were not coming up the bay, and we were catching them as fast as they would come up, and the charter business died off. And we went from probably 25 to 40 charter boats to basically none. Then when the moratorium lifted on the rockfish, then you had, you started seeing one charter boat would try it. And he would struggle for a couple years and build up a good business. Then you'd have another follow and another follow. And now you're probably up to 20 to 25 charter boats to get in the harbor, which is just like it was – reminds me of when I was a kid, except everything's more sophisticated. But it's the same type of people come down and go fishing. What I mean come down, come from different areas. It's the same type that it was when I was a kid. But the charter business is a thriving business, and it's a good and upcoming business. It brings a lot of revenue to a town. And I really enjoy watching the charter boats go in and out of the harbor because it carries on the tradition for me of when I was a kid growing up. And it carries on the tradition of Rock Hall being a fishing village. And I just think that they're, I'm just glad it come back.

S.D.: Are the captains different than they used to be, the same kind of people?

D.E.: Basically – well some of them are. A lot of them are – or not a lot of them, but a part of them are your preppy type, who learn from books about how to dock a boat, or how to throw anchor, or how to bait a hook or how to even tie a knot. Where you still got some that were growing up that are my age that they learned by common sense and by an old captain. And so you got a mix. And my opinion, the guys who were taught by the older captains and stuff, they'll out-catch the other guys two-to-one because of the knowledge, the natural knowledge that they got about the bay.

S.D.: Who are some of the older captains? Do you want to name a few?

D.E.: You got **Captain Larry Simms**, you got **Captain Bob Gibson**, and it's just a number of them. **Captain Richard Bailey**, then you got **Captain Bob Ritchie** and **Captain Lennie Fletcher**. And those are the ones who, I call them they learn out of a book. But Captain Larry Simms, Captain Bob Gibson, they run charter boats back when charter boats was running before, and their knowledge towards fishing is natural knowledge. **Captain Wayne Gavin** is a very good fisherman, and all his knowledge come from natural knowledge. But I mean natural knowledge is from an old captain that taught him years ago. That's what they go by compared to some of the other guys that learned it out of the book.

S.D.: What's the difference between the charter fishing and the recreational fishing?

D.E.: It's not a whole lot of difference except that, you know, charter fishing is a big money making industry. The recreational fishermen, I mean the guy's just pretty much on his own. He puts his boat over. And 9 out of 10 of them wait around until the charter boat goes out of the harbor, then they follow them. The recreation fishermen, they can tend to be a nuisance because – and they, they're dangerous too to be around because a lot of them don't have no knowledge of how to run a boat, they think they do, and they have no respect because it's not like going on land. You can't park your car, I mean you know, you can park your car next to another car, and it won't move. But out there, if you anchor next to another boat, the wind's going to

shear you around, and the tide's going to move you and everything. And they have no knowledge of that whatsoever. And with the recreational guys, they tend to be a nuisance, some of them, and some of them's real good. You know, they've been doing it for years. But that's the difference between the charter captain and the recreational guy.

S.D.: How about the **Watermen's Association**? Tell me a little bit about how that got started.

D.E.: A bunch of us got together, and we felt like we needed to be represented over, you know, in politics, we need to be heard. So we elected a president to work for us over in Annapolis, and that was Captain Larry Simms. And I think we elected him 30 years ago, and he's still president to this day. And I think he's done one hell of a good job. And as far as I'm concerned, the reason he is still president to this day is because people know what he goes through, and they don't want his job. So I take my hat off to Captain Larry Simms.

S.D.: What are some of the main issues that you're working with right now?

D.E.: Some of the main issues in the commercial, you're talking about the commercial end of it?

S.D.: Well the Maryland Watermen's Association.

D.E.: They're always lobbying against laws and stuff for us that the **Chesapeake Bay Foundation** is, you know, it's one of those deals, they see blue and we see red. And you have that in the fishing industry or the potato industry or whatever. But it's always something, a law somebody wants to stir in there about making the size of the product bigger or cutting back on the size, the buy catch, or something like that. And that's an ongoing thing. And but we hang in there. We got a good association, and we got good, you know, they represent us good. And we're doing all right as far as the Maryland Watermen's Association goes.

(BEGIN SIDE B.)

S.D.: Tell me a little bit about the harbor and some of the packinghouses that used to be there.

D.E.: Oh, boy, that was incredible. The packinghouses, it was probably three or four major packing houses in the harbor. It started on one side of the harbor, went through the middle of the harbor to the other end of the harbor. And you would see commercial boats waiting to put their catch out at each packinghouse. They would, literally, be waiting in line. Used to have oyster shells, piles of oyster shells, I'm talking about three stories high of oyster shells because oysters were so plentiful, and they would shuck them and put the shells in a pile, and a certain time of year, they would take them back out and plant them or, you know, put them back on the beds. And the smell, it was just a smell that, it wasn't a bad smell, it was just a, I don't know, it was a smell of being around, it wasn't a fishy smell neither, just being around a seafood industry. It was unbelievable. And they were all, they were pulling a lot of us young boys, they kept us busy and out of trouble. And it was just so neat and interesting to see how things went from A to B, to point A to point B because everything was shipped to New York, or Washington, or out of, you know, out of town. And some of the houses, you had, you know the shuckers, it was an art, you know, to watch them shuck. I remember one shucker, she was an old lady, and she was a grandmother, and she was shucking oysters, and she was bobbing back and forth as she shucked. She had a rhythm going. And her four-year old grandson was standing beside her, and he was bobbing every time she would bob. And it was just so neat to see things like that. And at nighttime, you know, I was young, but it would be like going to a carnival because it would be so many lights, and the conveyors moving, and trucks moving, and people hollering. It was just a

good strong business, you know, unbelievable. I would like to live those days again. It's just I miss it a lot.

S.D.: When did it start changing? Or when did you start noticing, getting alarmed that it was changing?

D.E.: It started changing, we had a couple bad hurricanes, and like I say, it really started to change when they raised the jetty level. That's when it really started to change in my eye, and made the harbor a much safer place to dock. I think that's what kick-started the whole thing about the recreational boaters.

S.D.: Which – what was the first packing house to go, to close up?

D.E.: If I'm not mistaken, I think **Hubbard's Pier** was the first. Or it might have been – no, I'm wrong. It was **Roy Evans**. And there now, it's called the Watermen's Crab House. It's a big restaurant with an outside dock bar that they have crab feasts and bands and stuff. It's part of the same building that's still there where we used to throw fish and oysters in the floor and pack them up. Then I think Hubbard's Pier went. Then it was like a domino effect. We had one packinghouse left. The state or authority of the state bought it to try to preserve it and try to, this is when **William Donald Schaeffer** was in office. And just to try to keep the, you know, to help us watermen and stuff because packing houses were really going down quick then. And to try to keep it. But the industry started to fail, and you know, right now I can't sit here and name you one packing house that's still in business. Not one. And it was four right in this small harbor not too many years ago.

S.D.: Where do you send the seafood to get picked now? Crabs.

D.E.: Well the crabs, down in another county down the shore in the lower bay, it's a lot of picking houses down there. That's where all of the picking crabs go. The fish, everything goes north to Boston, New York, and they get processed out up there and go to upscale restaurants and different things. And, basically, you know, we have nothing that gets processed in Rock Hall here, nothing. We're pretty much just a middleman area where we pack it, ice it down and ship it out. And basically, that's all that's left around here.

S.D.: What do you want people to know about Rock Hall when they visit?

D.E.: I want them to know that nice people do live here, that it's – you hear some horror stories about the locals and the vacationers coming and stuff, but I just want people to know that nice people do live here, and Rock Hall is a fun town, a close-knit town. And I wouldn't want to live anyplace else.

S.D.: I talked a little bit with your daughter this morning, and she had said that she was going to be – what are her plans for staying in Rock Hall?

D.E.: I think she's going to stay in Rock Hall. I don't think she's going to stay with the business, which I'm kind of sorry about. I'd like to see her stay with the business. She's going to school for radiology, and I know that's probably the best for her. But I've got kind of bittersweet moments where I wish she would stay with the business because it is somewhat in her blood, and she's damn good at it. And I'm kind of upset that she's got better things ahead in her life, but she's going to hang around. She's a home girl, and she's going to hang around close to me because I've took care of her all these years. So she's not going nowhere. She's a Rock Haller.

S.D.: How about other young people in the town?

D.E.: Ninety percent that were born here, stay here. It's very few that leave. When they do leave, a big percentage that do leave come back. Some of their families that the people who

lived here that were born here, some of their cousins or aunts or uncles that lived away from here, they've even moved here. I mean again, I say it's a nice town, you know, on a very, very good waterfront, you know, waterfront town, and nice people do live here.

S.D.: What jobs do they do now?

D.E.: The young people? You still have some that crew on commercial boats. The charter industry, you have young people that crew on, you know, for the charter boats. The marinas really employ a lot of local people. The restaurants employ a lot of local people. The thing that I really, really like about Rock Hall is I think it's mixed so well because you've had a lot of people come in and turn a place into a big upscale restaurant and hire local people. And that really shows me that you can, that any two outfits can work together if they try.

S.D.: Do you have any stories about close calls on the water?

D.E.: Yeah. Yes, I do. I was clamming, I clammed for years, dredged soft shell clams. And the wind was blowing hard one morning, nobody went out. And the wind had come around, it had died out and come around and was blowing from the west. So I got in my boat, and my brother, I called him up. This was probably in the middle of the day to go with me, and we went to the Western Shore and started, we were dredging clams. Well we were over on the Western Shore, this was in the wintertime, and the wind broke out from the easter. That means that it was blowing across the bay and hit me right on. I had to come all the way across the bay to get home, and it was cold in the wintertime. And this was close to the edge of dark. We started across there, and it was so much water that was coming up on the boat that it froze as soon as it hit the boat, and the boat got so heavy, she lost her buoyancy. And we had to literally get up on top of the boat in the dark while we were running along in the middle of the bay and beat the ice off the boat with hammers. And we were beating -- big chunks of ice would fall off the boat, and the boat would pop up like a cork. And I'm talking about a 44-foot boat that the net weight's probably 12 to 15 ton. And I've also went across the bay before, and had a guy working with me. And it was so bad trying to get across the bay, that he made me take him into a port on the Western Shore, he wouldn't ride back across the bay with me, and he called somebody to come get him in a car. But it's been some close calls. I picked up people who lost their boats in ice where you're running in a track, and the tide starts moving the wind, and the track closes up and it literally smashes the boat right to -- splinters it right to pieces.

S.D.: What do you mean running in a track?

D.E.: You have a track just like, it's just an area where somebody's broke a path in the ice, an ice breaker or something, and it stays open for days and days and days, but when it starts to thaw and it starts moving and you're running through the track, that's when it sometimes comes together, the path does, and it just squishes you like you're a piece of cheese between two pieces of bread. And just, you know, you have nothing left. The good thing is the ice is thick enough where you can get out and stand on it if somebody comes and gets you most of the time, you know. But we've had that happen several times.

S.D.: Does it make your wife nervous for you to be out in the winter like that?

D.E.: Yeah, yeah. It used to. She knows I'm a fairly good captain, and she knows that I'll take just so many chances, and she knows I know when to turn back. And if anything does happen, she knows it's going to be because it was out of my control. And she's at ease with that. She still worries some. The main thing they worry about, her and my kids, is I had a brother who was crabbing, and we had a -- it was in the summertime, it was in August, and we had a very small thunderstorm come through. We could see the clouds coming. And he was out crabbing,

and it was like one dark cloud that passed over the town, and very little bit of lightening. And after the storm cleared, the sun had come out, and it maybe was 40 minutes, my dad come to my house and come busting in the door and was crying, and my brother had got struck by lightening in that little storm while he was out crabbing. And it killed him. And so my family is scared to death of thunderstorms now, you know. When I'm out there and it's thundering and lightening bad, they worry a lot about me. So, you know, they got a right to after something like that happens. That was tragic. He was 27. Young, you know, and it's just a freak thing. And but they know that if something does happen, they know it's out of my control because they know I'm a good captain.

S.D.: Do you have anything else you would like to add?

D.E.: I think we pretty much covered everything. I just would like to add that, again, Rock Hall, I'm not going to be around here forever. I'm trying to do my part to keep the heritage in the town with the seafood store and stuff like that. I just want people to come to Rock Hall and enjoy what Rock Hall has to offer because it is a nice place with nice people.

S.D.: Thank you for doing this interview.

D.E.: Thank you.

S.D.: One last thing I'd like for you to do is to say your name and sort of introduce who you are.

D.E.: Hi, I'm Danny Elburn. I'm a life-long resident of Rock Hall, and a commercial fisherman, and have been all my life, and I still am. And I also am into the retail-wholesale end of the seafood business. I've also been into the recreational part of the business. I've owned a 50-slip sailboat marina, and I've seen all changes and all kinds of people come and go in Rock Hall and all the changes.

S.D.: Thank you.

(End of interview.)