

Interview Log

Interviewee: Linda and Charles Hutson

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Comments:

BEGIN SIDE A

S.D.: All right, today is October 1st, and I'm with Buck and Linda Hutson and we're at their decoy shop. Let me get this right. Broad Creek Neck --

L.H.: Decoys.

S.D.: -- Decoys, in Bozman, Maryland. So tell me a little bit, Buck, where were you born?

C.H.: Actually **born** at Easton Memorial Hospital, but I've spent all my life down in Bozman, which years and years ago was called Broad Creek Neck. And that's how we derived our carving shop name. And I lived in Easton about a year and a half when we first got married in 1969, but other than that, we've been in Bozman, and the family has been here for many, many years.

S.D.: And how did you **meet**?

C.H.: Linda was a nursing student at Memorial Hospital, and I was just out there looking for a date (laughter), and we met. And that was the beginning of a long marriage that we are still in, very happily too.

L.H.: Long journey.

S.D.: What year?

L.H.: Married in --

C.H.: Married in '69.

L.H.: -- '69.

S.D.: So tell me a little bit about your **family**. Your family is from Bozman?

C.H.: Yeah. My dad and my mother's people had adjoining farms here way back. And I'm not sure how that relationship got going, but they were both Bozman people. My dad, my dad was actually born up on Wye Island, and come to this area when he was probably about, I'm going to say 13 years old or something. He lived at Tilghman Point down to Claiborne for a while, but my mother has been probably in Bozman all her life. Well, she has been, and she's probably been within a quarter of a mile circle the whole time she's been here, this December will be 91 years. So --

S.D.: What's your mother's name?

C.H.: She was a Jones. She's granddaughter of Theodore Jones who actually owned this piece of property.

S.D.: And you've told me a little bit about how long --

C.H.: Yeah, well my **family** that we know of has **been in this area** for over 200 years. We have documents that prove that. And the house that adjoins this property, where our carving shop is, was built after the Civil War by my great-granddad on my mother's side. And in the attic of that house is where we found a lot of the history that we now know because there was an old sea captain's chest up there with papers that go back to here and St. Michaels area back into the 1760's, and we have some family bills that were paid in St. Michaels by pound and pence instead of dollar and cents. So that's getting back pretty good.

S.D.: What was **their occupation**? What did they do?

C.H.: Farmers, they were farmers and watermen. And after the war, my -- after the Civil War, my great-granddad was like a sea captain, and he hauled freight from Bozman, St. Michaels' area all the way up to Baltimore back and forth all the time.

S.D.: Did they do both of those occupations about the same time, or was it different parts of the family were farmers?

C.H.: I think they had like multi jobs. I mean he was also a shopkeeper too, and had a little country store down here. But I think they're like, sort of like the watermen today. They do different things at different times of the year, but I do know that what is most remembered for is being in the Civil War and being a **sea captain** up and down the bay.

S.D.: Do you have any stories about that?

C.H.: Have a few. Mr. Otis Bridges, who's now passed, he would probably be -- he would probably be close to 100 years old. He remembers when he was a small child sitting around the country store like all the watermen do now, remembers my grandfather talking about being at Gettysburg, and being in the actual Battle of Gettysburg and stuff like that, and also, stories about my grandfather and a sea captain from Tilghman Island and Cambridge. When they got together and sailed into Baltimore Harbor, there was usually going to be a little bit of problem because I think there was a --

L.H.: A party when they got there.

C.H.: Maybe a party or they just didn't get along good, and he had the nickname of Rooster, which means I guess he liked to fight, my **granddad**.

S.D.: What was his full name?

C.H.: Theodore Thomas Jones.

S.D.: Let me pause here a minute.

(Off record.)

S.D.: Okay, we're recording again. Tell me about some of the memories of **growing up** here in **Bozman**, what it was like.

C.H.: I guess Bozman was probably like most lot of little towns around here, the kids used to make due with everything that was here. We played on, we all had little boats when we were younger, rowing boats, and then we'd graduate to outboards and there wasn't a whole lot of stuff to do down in Bozman. And, of course, we didn't know any better of anything else to do, and all the kids end up being hunters at early ages. I can remember dad getting me my first shotgun when I was probably 9 years old, and now you probably wouldn't even hear of that. They'd have to be 14 or 15 and have a safety course and everything. But we just entertain ourself here, basically. Played softball, baseball in the field behind the country store, and I remember --

L.H.: Bows and arrows.

C.H.: -- my dad saying that's what they used to do when they were younger. Matter of fact, this piece of property used to be the Bozman ball diamond back in the woods where we live. And, yeah, we all had bows and arrows and typical things that kids do. It's a lot different now.

L.H.: Fishing.

C.H.: Fishing. Yeah, fishing was a big part of growing up, fishing, crabbing, soft crabbing.

L.H.: Swimming off the pier.

C.H.: Yeah, swimming.

S.D.: You swam too?

C.H.: Oh, yeah. We used to swim all the time.

S.D.: What did your dad do for a living?

C.H.: My **dad was a waterman**. He actually came from a farming family. His dad hired out on farms before he actually bought a little farm down here, and he was -- in his early age, they moved from place to place. Like I don't know exactly what the name would be, not a sharecropper but a farm hand is what his dad was until he acquired some

property down here. So he basically has been a farmer as a kid, and then a waterman as he grew up. And as I -- I never knew him but anything as being a waterman, oysterman and crabber.

S.D.: So how did the season go, like as the seasons would go? Like he would crab?

C.H.: Basically the same thing now. I think oyster season started in September, seemed like September the 15th used to be the start of oyster season. In his old days, he would crab as late as he could possibly crab because of health reasons, and crabbing was a lot easier on an older person than going out and doing all the hand tonging. It was all hand tonging at that time.

S.D.: How did he crab?

C.H.: He crabbled with a **trot line**. And toward his last years, he would just go out and crab for two or three hours and come in, and my mother, my mother used to pick crabs as I was a kid. He would bring her in a bushel of crabs in to pick, and my mom sold crabmeat on the side. And during oyster season, dad would bring oysters in and they would **shuck out oysters**. And just to show you how things would change, a pint of oysters was 50 cents, and a quart was a dollar. And now we're, I'm not sure what the price of them is now, but I know it's a lot more than that. Mom used to furnish the crabmeat -- dad would furnish the crabs, mom would pick it, and mom would **sell the crabmeat** for a dollar a pound, and now it's probably \$12 a pound or more now. So they have probably processed a lot of seafood in their days. That was mostly my time growing up at home, I remember doing that.

S.D.: So he brought it home. He didn't take it to a plant or anything.

C.H.: No. He sold crabs to the crab houses, but this was like a little side extra money for them, and a lot of families down here did that to make extra money, where the wife was a housewife, and that's the way she would help out. And also, I could remember **dressing out wildfowl** during duck season, which it used to make me almost sick to my stomach to smell these ducks being processed in the old country kitchen, you know, because they would scald them on the stove. And there's nothing much worse than wet duck feathers going through your whole house, you know. And they would pick them in the old kitchen sink. Mr. Otis Bridges, who I had mentioned earlier, he was a great hunting guide of this area, and I've seen just about the time we were getting ready to go to bed there would be a knock on the door where it would be Mr. Otis Bridges standing there with two great big feedbags of ducks, probably 25 to 30 ducks wanting to have them picked for his **hunting party** that he had taken out that day. So mom and dad would stay up late and start picking all these ducks.

S.D.: So your father, he didn't take hunting tours out, it was mainly Mr. Bridges.

C.H.: Right. Mr. Bridges was probably the chief guide or the main guide in this area. Dad hunted and I hunted a lot with my dad. His uncle had a farm -- or my uncle had a farm down there (indiscernible) and Mr. Frances Hutson, which I was able to hunt on that farm the whole time as I was growing up. But dad and myself hunted just basically for the sport and for the food. We always brought home what we killed, and we always eat what we killed, it's not like some people do today, unfortunately.

S.D.: Did the hunting take place on like a Saturday, or in the evening after working on the water?

C.H.: Well when I was in high school, we always utilized all my Thanksgiving vacation for hunting usually and Christmas vacation, but hunting during the week was basically done depending on the weather. If it was bad weather, rainy and windy, where you wouldn't go out on the water, the guys would go to the duck blind. So I always thought that was neat. We used to get teased about well you can't -- how come you can go stand out in the goose field shooting ducks in the rain and wind, but you can't go to work on the water, you know? So that was kind of an excuse, I guess, to get in the duck blind, the weather.

S.D.: Do you remember, have any **memories of a particular hunt** or like the first time you went out with your dad?

C.H.: I remember a lot of stuff about hunting which -- my dad and a couple of his friends, they were always sort of in the category of an outlaw duck hunter, and I remember hearing stories of everything they tried to get these ducks. And one thing that stays on my mind was I think they bought a half a gallon of bourbon whiskey or something and soaked all this grain and this whiskey for a couple days, and they put this corn out. And somebody told them that these ducks would come out there and eat this grain and be so drunk they couldn't take off and you could run out and pick them up. Well that turned out to be a fable. And another thing I heard them say one time, one of his friends, his name was Pete Vosso. He was a real talented mechanic guy. He could make anything in the world. He has a few inventions out there now. I'm not even sure whether he's still around, but they actually tried to make **silencers for their shotguns**, and it was made on the principle of a small car muffler that they bolted on the end of their shotguns. And I think the first test firing they had, they end up busting the barrel on one of the guns. So that was the extent of that experiment.

S.D.: How about the decoys? Did your dad make his own decoys?

C.H.: Yeah, **dad made all of our decoys**, and they were all, at that time, called root head decoys carved from a big block of cypress or cedar and using the tree root for the head or the neck. Head and the neck. Beautiful decoys. You may have 5 or 6 dozen geese decoys out and every goose was doing something different in the water. Some would be looking around, some would be feeding, some would be sleeping and all that. Big advantage over today is that when you buy your decoys today, goose decoys in

particular, they're either in a sentinel position or in a feeding position, so you only had like two different wood stances now. But with his decoys, every one was doing something different. And one time we had the opportunity to hunt over to Mr. Dupont's farm, which is now the Audubon Society. And Mr. Dupont actually -- we come home for lunch and Mr. Dupont actually seen his decoys along the river bank where we had left them out, and him and his guides actually snuck out on them they looked so real and was getting ready to shoot them before they realized that they were decoys.

L.H.: A source of pride.

S.D.: I want to back up a little bit and talk a little more, did your mother have a farm during this time period?

C.H.: My **mother**, the time period I'm talking about the gunning?

S.D.: Well like while the gunning, and the crabbing, and the oystering was going on?

C.H.: No, she -- they lived up a little house just a couple houses up above the Bozman store at that time. And this property now was actually my mother's grandfather or grandparents, and then it would end up being her mother's, and now she's here, and now it's been turned over to me and Linda now.

S.D.: So there was never like a small family farm?

C.H.: Well, yeah, but before my mother and dad were married, is mostly when it was still a farm. The only thing I remember here is that my father's brother used to put crops in the fields around here, soybeans and corn. But I don't remember any of my family actually doing the farming here. So that was much earlier.

S.D.: Did your father ever fin fish?

C.H.: Fin fish meaning --

S.D.: Commercial fishing for --

C.H.: With nets and stuff. Yeah, he used to -- he had a commercial license. He used to set **gill nets** to catch rockfish and perch, and he also caught Diamondback Turtles.

S.D.: With what?

C.H.: He had **turtle dredges** which were pulled by his old workboat and were approximately 6 to 8 feet long. Very similar to a crab dredge today. I think the crab -- I think the crab dredge doesn't have teeth on it if I remember correctly, but the turtle dredges have old iron nails on it for teeth, which would just kind of rake the turtles out of the mud. There are certain areas up these creeks where the diamondbacks would -- I don't

know what the correct term is, not nest, but there were certain areas in certain muddied bottoms, whether it be abundance of the diamondback turtles, and he seemed to know where all of those little spots were.

S.D.: What time of the year did that happen?

C.H.: It seems to me, that was done in early spring, I think. The turtles probably were still in like a dormant stage. They can lay underwater for many weeks at a time, and that's when they were dredged up, mostly when they were like a dormant, I don't know if they're sleeping or what they're doing.

S.D.: Well the early spring would also be when people were setting the gill nets --

C.H.: Right. And he did some in the fall now. Of course, there's so many more **regulations** now than there used to be. I mean when you went to go fishing, you went fishing. Now you can't. We used to grab rod and reel and go rock fishing any time during the summer. Now there are certain seasons. Of course, the length of the rock only had to be 12 inches, which is really a nice eating rock or pan fried rock compared to today where they got to be at least 18 inches, which are almost too big to pan fry. You have to fillet them out.

S.D.: How about **maintenance** of the equipment and the nets?

C.H.: Him and mom would re-string their nets or hang, what we called hanging nets. You buy the pre-made net from different places and they would actually attach them to a bottom line and a top line. The top line being the cork line, and the bottom being the ring line which weighted the bottom of the net to the bottom of the water. So that was something they always did early spring. Or as soon as the winter broke enough that they could start hanging nets, they would start hanging nets. And they used to do it for other people too. They were pretty efficient team going down there. My dad would do like the cork line, and my mom would do the rings or vice versa. The rings required a little bit more work because they'd go on every so many feet and then you actually had to tie several knots around the ring.

L.H.: And you also had to mend the nets too.

C.H.: And also mending the nets, you know. Sometimes you would get a snag in the net. I remember one of the most horrible days fishing with my dad in the net, helping him pick up the nets is that we had a great big osprey in there, so that was probably early spring when the ospreys were starting to come down here. Apparently, this osprey has seen a rockfish in the net and dove down. So here we have this four foot osprey in the net and I got as far to the back of the boat as I could. I was horrified. And my dad got up to the bow and held the bird in between his legs and was able to take his knife and cut a lot of the net away from his feet, was almost impossible to get it untangled. I mean they had

claws like that are unbelievable. And then we turned him loose. So I guess the osprey learned a lesson that day that what you see you can't get sometimes.

S.D.: The -- your mother made dip nets.

C.H.: My mother made **dip nets**, yeah. We always called them bow nets, and they were used for crabbing around the shore and the people, most of the old timers used to dip their crabs off the trot lines with these nets. But now, most of the guys use steel nets or what made out like a chicken wire because it's less apt to tangle up, the crabs are less apt to tangle up in them. Of course, now today they all have automatic dippers too where they, big device that they drag underneath the line to catch the crabs.

S.D.: Did your mom make them for just your dad or for other people as well?

C.H.: Oh, other people. I think there again she got a dollar for the net. It seemed like everything in the old days was a dollar. I don't know why. But it was quite a process of making one. And she probably could still do that even though she's 91 years old or will be 91.

S.D.: Okay. How about **maintaining the boat**, or where did the boat come from?

C.H.: Okay. All the old boats around here were wooden boats which required a lot of maintenance, and everybody pulled their boat up in the spring and put a fresh coat of copper paint on the bottom to prevent the marine bores from getting in there, marine worm. And that was a yearly thing, and it was a lot of work. And, of course, there was always bad wood to take out of a boat after it got some age. I built a couple small boats in my time, and my dad had a great big boat that was really getting in bad shape, and so 1976, I thought well I'm going to reproduce your boat. So I built him a brand new boat, and luckily, we just found out in this *Soundings* magazine, which has done a little story on Bozman, there's a picture of my dad's old boat on the railway, which had been sunk for a couple years, and somebody's trying to salvage it now. So quite a bit of, quite a bit of maintenance on a boat in the old days. Now they're mostly fiberglass, which has cut the maintenance probably three-quarters of the work.

S.D.: And did he use the same boat?

C.H.: Yeah, he had -- he had the same old open boat ever since I could remember until 1976, and it was an open boat approximately 36 feet long, maybe 9, 9 feet wide, built down to Witman, Maryland by Horace Brando and his dad.

L.H.: Tuxturn? (phonetic)

C.H.: It was an old-time **Tuxturn boat**. And he run the single cylinder Palmer engine in that thing for 27 to 28 years straight, this old 6 horsepower Palmer engine. I remember going out with him crabbing and oystering with this old engine. And in the head of it,

they had a plug which was a freeze plug. If it was water cooled, it was an old water-cooled motor. And this old freeze plug was just kind of vibrating and leaking in the head of this motor the whole time I can remember as a kid, and I can remember one day reaching for that freeze plug and my father said boy, don't touch that thing. So it was about to come out any second. But I remember, I remember the thing went on many more years after that day. And it was, it was a neat old engine. It was a single cylinder engine, and I often wondered how these people up these little coves thought about that engine being out there 5:00 in the morning putting up and down the crab line 'cause it was a terrible noise from this thing. But very dependable engine. His father had a big sharp stern, sharp ender they called it, it was sort of like a canoe. He had a double cylinder, one of these Palmers, in his workboat. His dad was James Hutson. And this boat was actually run with a great big flywheel, about 110 pound flywheel is how you started this thing. But there is a certain way on this motor that my grandfather could stop the spark and all the stuff that they have to do to make the engine backfire and actually get the engine to run backwards. So he could actually back out of boat slips with his, a certain technique. And then they'd get out so far and he'd take the spark off and make her backfire the other way, then he'd run forward. So it would run frontwards and backwards, this motor. So you've heard a lot of stories about the old Palmer engine. Real dependable. Palmer still makes an engine, but it's nothing like that now.

S.D.: At what **age** did you go to get on the boat? Do you remember?

C.H.: Golly day. I can remember going out there when I was probably 7 or 8 years old. Used to go out there oystering with him. I was real, real little. And get so cold. Dad had a great big old galvanized bucket on the boat. They called them a draw bucket. He used to bail his boat out with them, and use it for a bathroom if you had to. But I can remember being so cold that I can remember one day he filled this thing up about three quarters full of water and put maybe an eighth a cup of gasoline on top of this water and lit this gasoline. And it just set there. It wasn't no big explosion or nothing, but it set there and burned for about 5 or 10 minutes, and I got my hands warm that way. I wouldn't recommend anybody doing that (laughter), but that was his heating system on there. Central heat. (Laughter).

S.D.: Did you go out with him on Saturdays after school?

C.H.: On the Saturdays, and if we had a day off that we didn't go hunting or something like that, I'd go oystering and crabbing with him.

S.D.: Let's pause for a minute.

(Off record.)

S.D.: All right, I'm back with the Hutsons. Tell me a little bit about you said that you built a boat for your dad, and you were a carpenter for a while. How did you get back into **working the decoys**?

C.H.: About six or seven years ago, the building industry had really come to a slow down around here, and I was working with a friend and I told him I think I'm going to try to carve a couple decoys because I had made some as a kid, and just see what happens. And at the time, I said why don't we start a decoy business together. And he was all for it, but it never materialized. And I went ahead with it, and it's turned out to be a nice experience for us. The first three decoys I made, took them to town and sold them right away, so that got me started, give me the initiative to go on with more, and that's basically how we got going on the decoys. Now it's a full-time business for my wife and myself.

S.D.: Do you remember the **first decoy** that you carved?

C.H.: I still have some of the ones I did when I was a kid, like back 9 to 13 years old in that age, somewhere around that, but I remember the first ones that I did when I decided to make it into a business, it was a canvasback, and it was a pair of red breasted briganzers (phonetic). I do remember that.

S.D.: And, **Linda**, how did you **get involved** with the business?

L.H.: I had retired from nursing. And once we built the shop and opened up and I had been watching Buck all along doing these decoys, and I just felt like that's something I could do too. So I have made a couple decoys, but mostly I have participated with the shop in regards to photography. I started out getting pictures of wildlife, the waterfowl in particular for Buck, and he uses that for reference for his decoys in how he wants to position them, color reference and that type of thing. So this photography kind of grew on me in that it was really exciting to get these natural pictures of these wildfowl, and it was really exciting. It kind of keep growing and growing, and we thought well maybe we could offer some of my better pictures for sale, and so that's how that started.

S.D.: How did you first -- I mean how did it come about that you, the two of you decided for you to go out and get the **photographs**?

C.H.: When I was starting to carve stuff, it never seemed like you could find a reference book that had the right picture of the view of the bird. Wanted to see what it looked like from behind or underneath or something like that, and it was never, could never find that book, and you could find a lot of money on reference books. And one of the biggest things that we like doing are the swans of the area. Could never get a good swan picture, and now she's accomplished that by getting, probably has got 50 or 75 nice swan pictures in a collection that I use for references, different head positions. We want to do a big -- swan with its wings fully puffed up like they're sailing, and she's got some nice pictures of that now for me to use. Just could never figure out how that swan really folded his wings up.

S.D.: Yeah.

C.H.: It was always, it was always interesting to me how that swan would fold his wings up, yet put them up and sail with the wind like they do. Now we have pictures to show how those wings are folded up.

S.D.: How did you get those **pictures, the first ones**?

L.H.: Well we had a friend that had some waterfront property, and she was gone most of the week and would come down on weekends. And so we would go down there. And Buck says well there's a pair of swan out there. So I took my camera down there one day, and just that was the start of it, got these really neat pictures of the swan coming in as a pair, and then we started to feed them so they would get used to us and come closer so I could get better shots. And then later on other people, after they found out that I was getting pictures of the waterfowl would give me a call and I would jump in the car and go down wherever and try to get these pictures.

S.D.: Swans can be protective.

L.H.: Yeah, they sure can. I've been told I was either crazy or really brave one, wasn't sure which. I've gone out in the marsh and attempted to get some pictures of the **nesting swan**. I didn't know whether the female would come after me after getting off her nest, but that was one picture. I felt like a lot of people didn't have the opportunity to really see a nesting swan up close, and I wanted to see what her nest looked like and, if possible, get pictures of her eggs. And she was very cooperative, and I was just tickled to death. She looked so beautiful sitting there, serene. So I got these pictures. But another day, I was on the marsh with a family of swan, and they had -- hatching, and had seven signets. And they were only about two days' old. And I was daring enough to go out there on the marsh with them. Just kept on creeping up slowly. And the female swan, pen as she's called, stayed off in the water and kept looking at what was going on and talking to the cob, the father of the signets, and but he stayed there and he just kind of, like he was ignoring me, but he was doing all of this preening so that he could tuck his head back and keep an eye on me. He did that for about 40 minutes, I think. And I just kept getting closer and closer, and I got some wonderful shots of him and the signets and the whole family. It was real rewarding, but scary at the same time. I had one foot turned one way, and the other foot the other way so that if he came at me, that I could take off running, but I'm sure he would've won because with all those potholes in the marsh, I would've fallen down. (Laughter).

S.D.: And you've been **carving the signets** from her.

C.H.: Right. That seems to be one of the very popular things is a swan with a couple signets sitting on top of it. And women especially like it. I like doing it too. It makes a really unique piece. We're just intrigued by the swans. They get a lot of bad rap from the grass destruction that they do in the bay, and we hear so many negative things about them, but they are certainly a most beautiful thing. And, you know, a lot of people were wanting to kill them all and all that. Well they're not native here, you know, and I just

feel like saying, you know, we're not native of here either, you know. So I think the world was meant to share stuff like this, and it's just a shame that they are catching all the rap that they are. But they do do destruction, but there's many other things that do destruction to the bay too.

S.D.: Do you think that there's any relationship to the **root heads**? You talked about the root heads having all these different stances, and your desire to have a more varied stance in your ducks and swans, your waterfowl?

C.H.: Quite possibly. A root head has such a natural curve to it, it's hard to duplicate that with a regular piece of wood. It has just a natural flow like a real bird can really put his head in a natural position, and it really does represent a lot of nature's curves that a wildfowl can get his neck into. And they are a beautiful thing to do if you've got the proper root. It's really an experience to work with that and just make that root come alive. And we collect all kinds of roots and driftwoods, limbs and stuff when we can, and we put them in a basket in the shop. And one day you'll pick this root up, and instantly you'll see what's in that root. And we've had several people tell us how in the world do you go out and find the head for the bird? And I always tell them that you never do that. You never carve a bird and go out to try to find the root because you never would. But we just collect all kinds of crooked limbs and roots that we can, and then some day we'll pick the head, we'll pick the root up, decide what kind of head it is, then we'll carve the body for the head. We'll do it backward from what most people would think we would do it.

S.D.: The two of you **built the workshop together**. Tell me about that.

L.H.: We've done everything together since we've been married. We built our first home together, and then later on we built a second home, and that property adjoins this property where the shop is, and it's -- and when we decided to build the shop, of course, the more economical way to do that was to build it ourselves rather than to have all that labor spent in the shop as well. So we managed. And so we're very proud of the finished product so that we can say we did this together too.

C.H.: I think a couple days while we were doing this, we were wondering why we were doing this. But it turned out really nice. And we know what we got, and we've had people say why didn't you just buy one of these pre-made metal buildings and have these construction companies come down. I said well a wooden building like we had just goes with being a decoy carver and nature much better than a metal building would be out setting here out in the field.

L.H.: And we wanted to, what we built, to keep in sync with the community and have something that was attractive to look at, and not an eyesore, and something that was compatible to the decoys.

C.H.: And the Talbot County Planning and Zoning, we presented the plans to them and they were just ecstatic about us doing this, and they were really glad that we were doing

this because this was part of the heritage of this area, and we went right through the planning process really quick. And thanks to a lot of the people up there, they helped us getting it passed and everything.

S.D.: How do you think that -- when you think about the fact that your family and the kinds of things that they did, and then the two of you, you know, you in nursing and you in carpentry, and then **coming back to** doing something like **decoys**?

C.H.: I think it's pretty neat. I actually feel like we should be here on this property because of my ancestors and stuff. They did carpenter work too in their days. We have all kind of carpentry -- they built half the coffins in Bozeman, I guess. We have all these coffin bills where they built coffins for the residents down here, got the price of all their coffins and measurements and everything of them. And a lot of the old family names in this ledger, you know, I recognize from being Bozeman people. So they've been into woodworking and the nature of being out on the water all their life, and we're actually coming back to it more. I think carving, I think they'd be proud of us if they can know what we're doing and where we're doing it.

S.D.: And how do you feel about the **changes on the Eastern Shore** over time with the tourism?

C.H.: Well, you want to answer that?

L.H.: Well, certainly, the tourism trade has made a significant impact on wildlife in general. There's influx of hunters, people that are interested in the wildfowl, per se, and that they have learned to appreciate the wildfowl itself and the decoy making and the art of decoy making and it's -- it has been a growing thing with tourism and the effects that it's had on all the small businesses in general and decoys in particular.

C.H.: I'm surprised, really, how much the **tourists** come here just to see the way of life, the way it was here, the skipjacks, the Maritime Museum, which represents all the old ways of life around here, and come into our carving shop, and they're really excited when they come in here. We show them how they're chopped out and everything, how we do things. We really get a lot of compliments for doing this and praises saying how lucky we are to be able to do this. And we feel like we really are lucky to do this.

L.H.: I think the majority of the people that come to visit the area are interested in the typical way of life of this area, and what went on back when, and what's going on now and appreciate being able to see decoys in the making and to perhaps buy that craft to be able to take home and to represent all that this area is.

C.H.: And also to see your photographs that are taken right in this area that when they come they may not particularly see this particular bird, but we'll have a picture of it, and they'll say where in the world did you go to take these. You know, right down the road about half a mile or something. They're amazed at that, you know?

L.H.: All my pictures have been taken in a three-mile radius except for one picture, I think.

C.H.: Right.

(END SIDE A.)

(BEGIN SIDE B.)

C.H.: In the later years, they got sold to antique dealers and stuff, but and quite a few **watermen** down here **made all their own decoys** simply because there was the economic part of it and there's no place like a Wal-Mart to go buy them in. Several watermen had sheds full of decoys in this area. And I can remember as a kid helping him go out and look for these roots and tree heads and stuff, I can remember him taking an old tomato basket, cutting the side slats out of it so where he could put his hand in there, and what he used to like to do, a lot of these old woods, when I was a kid, I had just been harvesting it for the first time, virgin timber, and the old growth pine trees were probably 150 years old, had a real nice bunch of crooked limbs up to the top. That's one of the ways you could tell these old growth pines, plus the great big mark platelets, but these old growth pine had a whole lot of little crooked limbs that would make these root head or limb head decoys that we used to use. And he'd find woods that had just been harvested or timbered. We could go through there with his hatchet and his tomato basket and chopping off all these little crooked limbs and stuff. And if a tree was uprooted, drop a root off. If it was -- he did the same thing. He just gathered a bunch of things that could be made into heads, you know, he wasn't looking for a particular head at the time, but I can remember doing that when I was real young, like 7 or 8 years old.

S.D.: And when you started doing them again later in life --

C.H.: Well as dad would make some decoys, I can remember trying to make a couple of decoys. Matter of fact, some of the old guys, Mr. P.T. Hambleton, an old man that would be 100 years old this year, Mr. Pete Richardson, they used to go over to Mardela Springs, which is just on the other side of Vienna, and cut cedar and cypress out was over in the old marsh over there, an abundance of it over there. I can remember them coming home with these 5 foot, 5 or 6 foot logs about 14 to 16 inches in diameter on the back of an old pick-up and I can remember dad always had a bunch of these old logs in the back of the old garage that we had, which would basically be made into a floating goose decoy. I can remember getting a piece of that and trying to make one myself when I was real little, like 8 years old or something.

S.D.: And do you have any **stories** about learning again even?

C.H.: **Learning to carve** again?

S.D.: Yeah. Or not again, but about when you started making them for this shop and to sell, the first ones that you sold in Easton.

C.H.: We've had a few tourists that know very little about decoys ask some really funny questions. All my big swans have dropped keels on them and they have these big chunks of lead on them which are the ballasts for them. And I had a lady holler into our shop, we had a little shop up in St. Michaels on the weekends a couple summers ago, she hollered in from the sidewalk, she said that's a great idea putting those little silver fish underneath

your swan like that. And I finally figured out what she's talking about. I said that's all right, isn't it? She said that's a neat idea. Of course, the silver fish was the lead ballast for the decoy. And then one day we had a woman come into the shop. I have a carve -- swan with its wings up in the air and a baby signet sitting in between the wings, and her question she asked me was did you know that baby swan was in there when you started carving that decoy? And I'm thinking, ma'am, what did you say? She said did you know that baby swan was in there when you started carving that decoy? And I said do you mean did I know I was going to make one and put it in there? And she said no, when you were cutting those wings out, did you realize there was a baby swan in there? I said no, ma'am. She said oh, that's so neat, isn't it. And she walked off, and I was just standing there shaking my head. We were definitely not on the same wavelength. (Laughter).

L.H.: But you have, you have grown in your talent, you know, you've basically self-taught yourself, other than comments from other carvers, that your friends, some of their techniques, you have a lot of initiative in attempting different things from the basic slick decoy to the decorative decoy, and you have grown a lot in your expertise.

C.H.: Yeah. I like **designing different stuff** on my own, own thoughts, and I always tell people that I had my own carpenter business for 27 years, and I've cut plywood and 2 by 4's every way they could possibly be cut, and I don't want to cut anymore. And with making the decoy, it's no limitation of what you can do. You can just let your mind go, and you can have the bird doing anything you want it to do. You can make feet for it, or you can have it flying or standing or have babies on their backs. So it's no limitation of what you can let your talent do there.

S.D.: I never asked, but have you ever hunted a swan?

C.H.: Never have **hunted a swan**. My dad has many years ago, and I had an uncle down to Neavitt. I can tell you his name 'cause they can't arrest him now, he's gone. His name was William Noonam. His dad was also a root head carver, Mr. Frank Noonam. Probably some of the museum has some of his decoys. But he decided one time he was going to go to the end of Neavitt, it was called Nelson's Point, and kill himself a swan. I don't know whether it was for Thanksgiving or Christmas, but he went down there and killed this swan. So to carry it out, he had an old white flour bag which he never thought about, so he put the swan in this flour bag and threw it over his shoulder and come on out of the fields by Neavitt, and everybody in Neavitt said hey, I seen you bringing that swan out. Of course, at a distance, it looked like a dead swan in his bag. So he got ribbed about carrying this white flour bag with a white swan in it. (Laughter). But I actually have never hunted, but I've heard my dad say when he was younger that his mom used to fix him a special dinner and that they were really tasty.

L.H.: Of course, they're illegal in Maryland right now anyway.

C.H.: Yeah, illegal to hunt in Maryland. But years ago, apparently, they were not legal, illegal, when the trumpeter swan was shot into extinction in the bay, that's why we have

no trumpeters here now. They're trying to introduce them back into the bay. But apparently, their feathers were quite valuable, I've read on it, and their actually -- they're, they were skinned and actually the pelts were sewed inside of garments, you know. The leather was tanned and the feathers were left right on there. Of course, that's how they made a lot of the pillows and stuff and feather mattresses back in the old days were from these kind of feathers.

S.D.: Do you have any particular **tools** from the past that you use now?

C.H.: I have a few things that my dad used to use. I have one of his old hatchets, I have a couple of his old wood laths. I still use his spoke shave, which he used to use, it's an old Stanley spoke shave. I've got his draw knife, but it's in real bad shape. But I do have a couple of his old tools.

S.D.: Have you ever made your own tools to help?

C.H.: I can't think of anything that I've actually improvised to carve with. I do know that the older tools are much better than the newer ones that you buy. Unfortunately, probably 75 percent of them come from different countries which don't have as good quality steel as what we used to have here 100 years ago, but there are a few countries, Germany and France, that does have some pretty nice wood-working tools. I guess it's probably a lot of wood workers still in Germany and France, I would guess. But a lot of stuff is not worth bringing home. (Laughter).

S.D.: Let me stop this for a minute.

(Off Record.)

S.D.: Okay, now we're back from the pause. Tell me about your first participation in the **competitions**.

C.H.: Okay. About 1996, we went to Pennsylvania and happened to run into a decoy shop owner up there. His name was Mark Lennings (phonetic). It was in Intercourse, Pennsylvania in a little village called the Kitchen Kettle Village. And I got talking to him and, really nice fellow, he was also a carver. And I told him that I was doing a bit of carving, but I never had a piece in competition. He said well, you know, every first week in June we have an annual woodcarving competition up here, why don't you come on up this spring or this June. So that ended up being in 1997, wasn't it? I think. We took all our decoys, and tables and went up there. And I had done a set of swans, whistling swan or tender swan (phonetic). I had a female swan sitting in the nest with two or three eggs by her and a little baby signet with its head stuck out underneath of her, and I had the big daddy standing by her with her watching the nest. I took that up there and entered it, and I got a -- my first competition that I'd ever been in, I got a **second place** with it and a third best to show, and that was my first ribbon that I won, and can't really describe the feeling. It was -- I'd been through my whole life through high school I played sports, but I was

never that great. You know, I was not an outstanding athlete, but I did play baseball and was on the track team and all that. Never accomplished anything that I was outstanding in, but this really give me a nice feeling to have, a third best to show for my first competition piece, and there was quite a few competition pieces there. And I don't know how to describe, I remember her talking on the car phone and talking to her mom coming home, said Buck cleaned up up here today. And she was proud of me too. I think we won \$25, didn't we?

L.H.: I'm not sure.

C.H.: That was basically my first competition, and now I probably have got, probably got close to 100 ribbons now, I guess.

S.D.: Which is the one that's most important to you, the one that you --

C.H.: **Most important ribbon**, probably that first one, probably that first one even though it was a second and a third, it just -- I would say that stays in my mind most of all. And then probably the most recent thing that happened to us was in Warsaw, Virginia two years ago. I had a black duck, standing black duck that won the People's Choice award, and I was just totally shocked about that. That was --

L.H.: A decorative piece.

C.H.: A decorative piece. That was declared the best decoy in the show that day.

L.H.: That was chosen by all the public that --

C.H.: Right. As everybody came into the show, they got a card to fill out which they thought was the best decoy. That's really, a People's Choice award ribbon, as your husband is an artists knows, that's a nice ribbon. That's not one person deciding, hey, this thing's okay or this thing's not okay. That's a sense, 2 or 300 people, you know, so that makes you feel good.

S.D.: And, **Linda**, I know you got your **first ribbon** just recently.

L.H.: Yes, that was a surprise. I've been watching Buck carve over a number of years now, and he's encouraged me many different times to do some carving. And not until recently did I really feel like I wanted to do that, I guess because I've been watching him so long, I thought well, all the sudden, I thought well I can do this too now. So he had carved a heron, and I thought perhaps that would be something that I could try to do too as well. The heron picture that I have has been one of the best and most popular pictures that I have, and so that kind of went together.

C.H.: A great blue heron.

L.H.: Great blue heron, yes. So it took me about a week or so to complete this heron off and on as I worked on it. And he went to a show over in Dorchester County -- no, it wasn't Dorchester.

C.H.: I don't know what county that is, really. Bivalve, Maryland.

L.H.: Bivalve.

C.H.: Over around Hebron.

L.H.: And he entered the decoy for me, but didn't enter his own because he didn't want to compete against me. But anyway --

C.H.: It was open competition, which is the stiffest of all competition. You can have somebody in that same competition that may have been carving for 40 years that you're competing with, and this was actually her first or second bird that she had done. So she was entered in there and she ended up getting 4th place, which was a super award because there were several birds in that that didn't get any recognition. So I was very proud of her.

L.H.: So I must try again, I guess.

C.H.: You must try again.

S.D.: What do you think your **next bird** will be?

L.H.: Well I love the swans and I've been wanting to do another swan. I have did -- I have done just one other piece, and that was a miniature swan, but I want to do a life-size swan.

C.H.: She's trying to decide now whether to sell her first ribbon bird or keep it, and I think she should really keep it because it's special. Also, we try to keep most of our ribbon birds here in the shop because people come in can order something from that bird, but it's also a big help when you start your next piece. Like if she was to do another blue heron, she'd be surprised how helpful that first one will be to look at and say hey, you know, I don't like this thing right here on this one, but I'm going to make my other one a little better or a little different, and you can refer back to it for paint reference, which is hard to do.

L.H.: And if you're lucky enough to have the judges critique your bird, personally openly to you, then you can -- you have those comments and suggestions on how to improve the next carving.

C.H.: Right.

S.D.: Tell me a little bit also, this is going to sound kind of stupid, but you've got the decorative birds, the ones that are purely decorative, and then you've got the working birds. What is something like this swan here?

C.H.: That swan could actually be classified as a **working bird**. Working bird criteria is basically simple paint, nothing real fancy. No texturing unless it's done with a paint brush by applying a stucco underneath your paint, or scratch finish or also they call it combing. You can comb a finish on the wet paint. All that's allowed, but it cannot be a burnt texture or a burl texture with a carving machine or burn texture. You can't use burning on it. But this swan right here would be, would be normally a gunning decoy.

S.D.: How about the -- what would be the name of the birds that are, the classic working bird, very basic almost geometric --

C.H.: Well every show has different **classes of birds**. They have gunning birds, and some of them have a new category now called river hunting birds, which is about as bleak as you can get on a bird. That's the bird that you're going to grab by the head and throw out of the boat and get stuck in the mud and all that, you don't worry about it. That's very minimum painting. And then they have a gunning bird which can be painted a little bit. Now some of those shows we go to, there's no limitation on the painting of a gunning bird. That's the IWCA. They've dropped all their limitations on paintings, so you can paint the heck out of a gunning bird now, which I don't agree with, because they still have a category called sleek decorative, or smoothie, which is basically a gunning decoy painted to your max. And I keep asking these judges where do you draw the line between your gunning bird with no painting restriction on it, and your slick decorative which you can paint to the max? I said it's too close to being the same bird. So every show is different, and you cannot make a universal bird that you can take to every show because some shows that bird will not do because of the rules.

L.H.: Won't qualify for certain class.

C.H.: Right.

S.D.: What would you like to say about the decoys today coming from this area?

C.H.: Well **decoy carving from this area** and probably from most areas, but particularly from the bay area, it's probably one of the oldest folk arts from this area that I can think of. I mean probably decoys and quilt making probably are right hand in hand with some of the very early folk arts from here. And now people are really starting to recognize them as art, and I would say 95 percent of our birds are bought as an art object instead of a hunting object, but we do do some for hunters to hunt with, but most people appreciate it as an **art**.

L.H.: Which basically started out as a necessity, a way of life is now considered art.

C.H.: Art, right. And the economy doesn't --

L.H.: A craft.

C.H.: The economy doesn't seem to affect the decoy market yet for us. I mean the people that like art don't mind spending the money for something like that. And, of course, they kind of creep up in value, you know, like the stock market has done lately. It seems to be a fairly good investment. And I think we do have some people that buy them for an investment. And talking about the decoy show, I'll relate a real **funny short story**. We went to Havre de Grace about four years ago. I had my first slick decorative goose in there, and one of the Havre de Grace rules was that the bird had to be life size or larger. So I had a small goose, it was a really small goose. So also on the entry form, you have to enter is it a male or a female. And I thought, man, you know, this thing ought to be disqualified because it's right on the edge of not being the right size. So my strategy was well this is going to be a little girl, this is a little female goose. So I took it up there, and I told the woman, she said what's the sex of the goose? I said it's a female. She looked at the Canadian Goose, and there's no visible way to tell what the sex is of a goose. She said well how do you know it's a female? I said, ma'am, I said I seen her before I put the feathers on her. I said I know she's a little girl. So she said well that's a good enough answer. (Laughter). She got a big chuckle out of that.

S.D.: Do you have anything you'd like to say about **running a business together**?

C.H.: It's pretty neat. As this summer, we were working in the museum and we were the Chesapeake people, portraying husband and wife teams which we really do in real life. And it's pretty nice. We have several orders to do now. We've probably got 60 or 65 decoys to carve right now on order, which has been great, and she's got several pictures to get out to different people. So it's nice.

L.H.: It's been a challenge, and you become known to the public, and the tourists as well. Your -- our business is growing, and it's becoming more rewarding.

C.H.: We've had some articles done in a couple magazines, which is a big help, and working at the museum has been a tremendous help, meeting all the people have come down, and we do the same thing in our shop. We try to explain the history of the decoys, show them how they're made, different styles, different materials. I guess probably the most asked question is what kind of wood do you use. So this summer at the museum, I took about eight blocks of wood up there and wrote the names on them, all the different kind of woods we used. And people would actually lean on these blocks and ask me what kind of wood did we use. I'd say you got your elbow on it. That's probably the most asked question. And I can remember when I went to the waterfowl festival 31 years ago, I can remember asking that same question to these carvers, what kind of wood do you use. So I think that's a standard, I think that's the standard decoy question.

S.D.: Anything that we have not talked about that you want to talk about?

C.H.: Can't think of anything right now. I just --

L.H.: I might add that Buck and I both appreciate what **God** has given us in the way of nature and its beauty, and that is part of what we want to return to the public in whatever art form, whether it be the decoys or the photography, and to offer praise to the Lord and thanksgiving and think the public appreciates that.

C.H.: I'd like to add too that since we've been carving, I've really appreciated God's work and all that. There's a lot of people that don't believe in God, but when you get into all these birds and see all these colors, you know, I cannot possibly relate that back to the big bang where some slithery creature slid out of the ocean and now is a beautiful wood duck, you know, I just don't go for that. So they're definitely God's creations.

S.D.: Thank you very much for taking the time to do the interview.

L.H.: Thank you.

S.D.: We'll end it now.

C.H.: Thank you.

(End of Interview.)