

Oral History Interview

Chesapeake Bay Maritime Museum

“The Culture of Tugs and Tugs in Culture”

Interviewee: Kim "Socks" Parks (S.P.)
DOB: 08/02/1956

Interviewer: Michelle Zacks (M.Z.)

Date: December 10, 2011

Location: "Socks" and Maureen Parks' home,
Tangier Island, Virginia

Comments: Socks is from a long-time Tangier family, and was a waterman from a young age. In 1997, he turned toward tugboating instead. He attended the Tidewater School of Navigation for his Captain's and radar license. He started with Vane Brothers as a deckhand, and then moved to Dann Towing to get wheelhouse training. He then took some time off. When he returned to tugging, he went back to Vane and was able to get into the wheelhouse then. He has been with Vane ever since. He is the Captain of the *Roanoke*, which is a 2400 HP, twin-screw tug, 100 feet long and 35 feet wide, four stories high. This year, he was trained and put on the run from Norfolk (Portsmouth, Paradise Creek), running diesel fuel up the Wicomico River to Cato Gas and Oil in Salisbury, MD.

Documentation:

Audio:

Video:

Digital Photos:

Slides:

Transcription by:

Pearl Transcripts

P.O. Box 81

Woodford, VA 22580

410-310-5753

pearltranscripts.com

trevy@pearltranscripts.com

I N D E X

NAMES:	<u>Page:</u>
<i>People:</i>	
Parks, Kim "Socks"	4
Summer (daughter)	13
Lewis, Joe	14
Roosevelt, Bob	17
Eric (female tugboat crewmember)	21
<i>Boats:</i>	
<i>Roanoke, The</i>	20
<i>Businesses and Organizations:</i>	
Vane Brothers	4
MRC	8
The Save the Bay Foundation	8
Dann Towing	9
VMRC	9
MITAGS (Maritime Institute of Technology and Graduate Studies)	16
Tidewater School of Navigation	16
CMTI (Chesapeake Marine Training Institute)	19
Allied Norfolk	22
 SITES:	 <u>Page:</u>
Tangier Island	4
Chesapeake Bay	4
Cape Charles	8
Pooles Island	9
Tangier Sound	10
Philadelphia	11
Schuylkill River	11
Wicomico River	14
Norfolk, VA	22
Portsmouth	22
Paradise Creek	22
York River	22
Western	22
Elizabeth River	22
Town Point	22
Salisbury, MD	22
Orange, VA	24
Yorktown, VA	26

TOPICS OF INTEREST	<u>Audio:</u>	<u>Page:</u>
Origin of the name "Socks"	0:38	4
Working at Vane Brothers	2:00	4
"Parks" family on Tangier Island	2:44	5
Parks' family watermen	3:24	5
Going into tugging	3:49	5
Captaining his first boat	6:23	6
Working with his father as a child	7:21	6
Regulations on crabbing	11:24	8
Regulations on oystering	15:53	9
Pirates of the Bay	20:42	10
About losing his first wife	0:48	11
How Socks first got into tugs	2:01	11
First tugboat experience a shock	3:32	11
Learning housekeeping from boat-keeping	4:46	12
Early days working on a tug	7:46	12
Training on the tugboat	8:59	13
The education of being a deckhand	10:39	13
The pressures of tugboating	12:53	14
Responsibility of being a captain	13:57	14
The experience of being a captain	17:36	15
Safety of the crew	18:10	15
Training off the boat	19:53	16
Dealing with unusual situations on the boat	21:57	16
Gaining an awareness of potential issues	23:49	17
How to deal with an emergency	27:23	18
What it means to be the leader	30:03	18
Socks describes his tugboat	33:39	19
The crew as family	35:25	20
Working with his brother on the tug	36:34	20
Backgrounds of crewmen	38:05	21
Classes of tugboats at Vane Brothers	39:26	21
Range of travel for tugboats	41:06	22
Socks describes a typical tugboat job	41:40	22
Applying a waterman's knowledge to tugging	48:31	23
Using waterman's knowledge in scary situation	55:09	25
Getting caught in a storm	57:21	26
Socks on his view of watermen	61:23	27
Working and getting help from the community	63:40	27
Connection between watermen and tugboat captain	67:35	28
The definition of a waterman	70:10	29
Watermen as disciples	73:06	30

M.Z.: It's December 10, 2011. I am on Tangier Island and I'm in the home of Mr. Kim Parks, otherwise known as Socks. I had a neighbor when I was growing up, a boy, whose name was Kim.

S.P.: Have you ever heard the Johnny Cash song, my name is Sue; how do you do?

M.Z.: I have.

S.P.: Well believe me, I know what he meant.

M.Z.: So that's why you became Socks, as an alternative?

S.P.: Yeah, right. Socks is better than my name, yes.

M.Z.: Where did Socks come from?

S.P.: Well, now, that's a long story. That was back in my younger day, we won't go into that. Just take it for my word, it's better than Kim. My wife won't call me Socks; I can't get her to do it.

M.Z.: What does she call you?

S.P.: Kim.

M.Z.: I thought maybe she came up with something else.

S.P.: A lot of times, when she'll say it, I'm, "Who, me?" (Laughter.)

M.Z.: My next door neighbor, when I was growing up, they had a whole bunch of kids and one the sons was named Kim.

S.P.: Yeah. Poor guy.

M.Z.: Thank you so much for taking the time to meet with us. Really appreciate it. And as I told you, we're with the Chesapeake Bay Maritime Museum, and we're putting together an exhibit about tugs; tugs on the Chesapeake and kind of the history and the culture of tugboats. I've been hearing a lot from some of the people that I've been talking to that there are a lot of Tangier-men, they call you Tangerines I understand.

S.P.: They call us a lot worse than that a lot of times. (Laughter.)

M.Z.: In particular, a lot of Tangerines, I guess, work at Vane which is true for you, right?

S.P.: Yeah. Yeah, they do. There's a lot of guys work for the other companies. But I believe the majority would be at Vane Brothers.

M.Z.: How long have you been with Vane Brothers?

S.P.: I went for a couple year, then I come back. I'd say altogether about twelve years, maybe thirteen.

M.Z.: When did you start, do you remember?

S.P.: 1997. Well, really to the end of '96 and into '97.

M.Z.: Prior to that, what kind of work had you done?

S.P.: I was a waterman, commercial fisherman.

M.Z.: So mostly crabs and oysters?

S.P.: That's correct, crabs and oysters, (indiscernible 2:40). Tried fishing a little bit, but mostly crabs and oysters.

M.Z.: I know Parks is an old-time name on Tangier Island, so does your family go back here a long ways?

S.P.: Yes.

M.Z.: How many generations?

S.P.: Oh, man. Well, I remember my pop-pop, which he died when I was a young boy. I don't know how far it goes back. Ever since there's been a Tangier Island, I can say that.

M.Z.: So we're talking, what, like four or five, six generations, something like that?

S.P.: Yes, at least, yes.

M.Z.: Were the men in your family always watermen?

S.P.: Always watermen. From time to time, they would take on other jobs. My uncle runned a electric plant. He was the guy down there that, him and several more run the electric plant. Other than a job here and there, most of my family are watermen.

M.Z.: What was it like for you to make the decision to stop that kind of work and go into tugging?

S.P.: Well I'm gonna tell you how it happened for me. The crabbing business had slowed done for a while back in the nineties. It had started getting rough. The Chesapeake Bay was depleting somewhat on crabs. All these regulations were coming out to try to, you know, preserve the bay and that made it hard for the watermen, and especially me. The only

way I was going to stay as a waterman, if I upgraded on my boat, and that was going to cost me thousands of dollars.

M.Z.: Upgrade in what sense?

S.P.: In size, more power, just everything bigger. So I said, talked to all my family, said, "I think I'd like to try doing something else just to see how that works before I invest all these thousands of dollars into upgrading." So I decided to go tugboating. And when I went tugboating for my first time, I was deckhand. I studied, went to school and got my captain's license and the whole deal, the radar license and all that stuff. I liked tugging, it was a good job. For some odd reason, me being a waterman all my life, I love tugboating.

It was a odd thing for me. Matter of fact, my father never knew I went tugboating. He passed away before I went. But if he was to come back today and see me tugboating, he wouldn't believe it. He'd say, "Now I can't believe this one." It was strange for me to do like I done. But I knew, in order for me to stay there, I had to move up in position to make more money, to make it worth my while staying there. Because you know, back in them days, deckhand paid, the most was \$110 a day. You take taxes and everything out of that and you work two weeks on, two weeks off and you don't get paid when you're off, that \$110 really goes down, you know what I'm saying?

M.Z.: So you know that you had to just keep advancing.

S.P.: Move up. And I knew the only way to do that was go get licensed to do it. I'm always like, I was the captain of my own boat when I was eighteen years old. It was really a little bit too young, but I did it anyway and I suffered because of it. But, I was so used to being in control. And, you know, really as far as the captain's job, it weren't no big deal for me to be captain, I just had to learn how they operate a tugboat with instead of having 300 horse power, of having 2400 horsepower.

It didn't start out with 2400. You started out with the smaller boats, which is about 11 to 1200 horsepower. Move on up as each (indiscernible 7:07) as you get on a boat, you move up in horsepower. But I knew I had to do that to exist, tugboating.

M.Z.: Let's backtrack a little bit then. When you were a kid, did you start working with your dad out on the water? How did that work for you?

S.P.: Yeah. All right.

M.Z.: How old were you when you first started going out?

S.P.: Oh, gosh. I was telling my wife, I was in the first grade. Which I was working with my uncle then, and my brother was working with my father. Now, I wouldn't do much work. The main thing I would do is just really, I can remember holding the stick that you steer by, with the older type boats. And I would just look for the next pot while he was

working on that stuff and when he come back, I'd say, "There she is," and I'd be steering the boat to a position. And that's basically all I did.

M.Z.: And you learned all of that kind of stuff when you were how old?

S.P.: Well, I was in the first grade. What is that, about six or seven? Now, like I said, I was not doing a man's job. I was just basically holding that steering stick and finding the next crab pot we had to go to.

Now but that's how everyone on this island starts out. As a young kid, you start out by steering the boat for a relative or just someone that hires you. And then you move up to doing the physical work of shaking the pots and all this. And man, believe it or not, you'd think the pride would be in steering that boat, but it was not. For a young kid, the pride was working the crab pots. You felt more like more of a man then, you know, "Hey, look at me." But that's how everyone around here starts out.

Matter of fact, by the time any young boy, not so much nowadays, but when I was young, when a boy reached the age of twelve year old, he could steer a boat and put her to the dock and everything like any man could do. I mean, you knew everything in the boat; you could do it all. Matter of fact, the dads would encourage that kind of stuff. I quit school. I had later got my GED, so I went back and got that. Anyway, what my dad would do, like the wintertime work. I'm sure you're familiar with the decked-over boats. They use them for oyster buying and they used to use them for crab dredging. Well my father owned one of them.

I used to take her out in the wintertime and crab dredge her. You know, a young boy at fifteen, sixteen years old, and he was trusting me to do that. Man, I really felt like a man then. I was the man catching the crabs, and doing the drudging, all that. But most young people around here could do the very thing I done.

M.Z.: Did you enjoy that kind of work?

S.P.: Oh, man. It was a lot of pride and, you know, being such a young age, "Hey, I'm the captain," you know.

M.Z.: So the pride came from being able to kind of handle the boat and know the weather conditions and that sort of thing.

S.P.: Right, knowing how to make somewhat of decisions. Not, like I said, I started saving for my boat just as soon as I got out of school. I was eighteen year old and I had a boat built. Well I felt real proud of myself because I don't know of many people, eighteen year old, had a brand new boat. I mean, I was very proud. I worked hard. I worked very hard. It was a good thing.

M.Z.: As time went on, it just became harder and harder to earn a living and, like you say, you would have had to upgrade it.

S.P.: Yes, for me it did, yeah. Like I said, regulations, that played a big role into it.

M.Z.: What kind of regulations?

S.P.: Well, like we have a crab pot and you've seen these rings in the crab pot. Well, before any regulation was made, we already had the rings in our crab pots. But let me tell you how crabbing can go from time to time. When the little crabs around, what we call the little he crabs and all this, they're not lawful to save them. Well we would open the rings up and let the little crabs get out. And we would basically have nothing but the big crabs.

Well, certain times of the year, like the female crabs, what we call sooks. Okay, what we call sooks, once they become a sook, they never spawn or nothing anymore. They're just a sook's all they are. Well some of them are small. Well they were getting out. Well then we would close the rings on our own discretion. See, if it's a small sook, you can't get fined; it's lawful to save them.

Well, lo and behold, us having the ring, they stopped that process. The MRC, the Save the Bay Foundation joined in, trying to do what they could do, you know, to bring things back. Well right then there was a law we couldn't deal with in (indiscernible 12:52). We were losing a lot of our crabs. Let me tell you how I know.

You would still try to, in a roundabout way, close your rings off, hoping you wouldn't get caught. Well, your catch would go up several bushels a day. As soon as you knew that the law was going to get on your back, you opened them up and you would drop off several bushels of crabs a day. And that hurt a lot.

There were other things. They put a limit on the amount of crabs you could catch. They put a limit on the amount of crab pots you could fish. They put time limits on how long you could work. And they also had sanctuaries that would forbid you, after a certain time of the year, of going back to go to work there until the next year. That was hard. That was just about one of the roughest things they did. I'll give you an example of that.

This spring, my son was working out here in one of the sanctuaries, and he had had a rough spring. He was in the sanctuary; here come the time to get out of the sanctuary. And he was making very good money. He had to stop, and he had had a rough spring. If they had let him stay there two more weeks, him and the other guys would have caught up what they had lost.

See this ain't like a normal job, I know my check's going to be there after two weeks. So do you, maybe. Not those guys. If they don't make it, they don't get it. And when that boat's in the dock, they're not making anything. So he lost then. Well this fall, before crabbing was over, he moved down to Cape Charles because it had been a rough year. Well, just as he started making money again, the season was over.

See when I started out as a waterman, you could put your pots out whenever the water temperature got up enough that it was time to go to work, that you could catch crabs. Now you can't do that anymore.

M.Z.: There was no set season; the season depended on the crabs.

S.P.: Right. Now if they have a very warm, say, end of the winter, they could miss the whole run of crabs because of the regulation of the time period. See, we didn't have to worry about that. I used to have my crab pots out from time to time down at Cape Charles 10th of March. Now they have to wait until April before they can put their pots out. It's not right. I mean well, we know it's not right but what can you do about it?

So, it was all them kind of things that played a role. And not only that; my boat was getting older and I was going to really have to upgrade so that's why I went tugboating.

M.Z.: What about oystering? Were there regulations there that were coming down that affected you?

S.P.: Yes. Now when I was an oysterman, no. But before all them regulations started on oystering, I went crab drudging in the winter, I changed jobs. It used to be, when I was an oysterman, they had a limit of thirty bushels and you could – you could decide the kind of dredge you wanted to use. Now they had time limits on it and there was no work on Saturday, which that was a good thing. But the salaries had stayed the same. Well now with the oystering, you have people down at VMRC and all this stuff, telling you when an oyster rock is going to be open, when you're going to be able to work it, if you're going to be able to work it. We've went to rocks, or these guys have went to oyster rocks, that they were just a year too late and they were all dead. The oysters had died. That's sad.

I got to say, over the past few year, they have got more observant for the watermen. They have. I say that and also, I got to say, they have been trying their best to bring the oyster back in Virginia. But if it's anything you know, by working to that museum, you have learned down through the years that oysters are like, they're here for a certain amount of years, then you have a certain amount of years of scarce oystering. You know that by working in the museum. You got to know the past. And also, if you live up on the upper end of the bay, you got to know years and years and years ago, like Pooles Island if you're familiar with Pooles Island (indiscernible 17:56) Baltimore, that was flourishing with oyster rocks.

Well, since the seventies, there's no been no oysters there. You know, you can't say the oystermen killed them. The shells are still there. Matter of fact, they're dredging up, the shells around Pooles Island are supplying even Virginia with shells.

Even when I worked with Dann Towing, the reason I knew about these oysters, these shells, I worked on a boat that moved these oysters around from the dredge that was dredging them up. We would even carry these shells to like Russian ships. And they

would put them on the ships and take them over and grind them up and put it into chicken food. How, I don't know, but that's what they were doing with the oyster shells. Was it calcium or something they were getting out of the shell?

M.Z.: Russian, did you say Russian ships?

S.P.: Russian ships, yes, I done it personally. It was with Dann Towing because Vane Brothers is strictly petroleum, you know. But yeah, I used to go to a ship, and they'd unload this ship and put them onto and I'd say, "Man, I've never seen this before." I said, "I thought all a shell was good for was growing another oyster." That's (indiscernible 19:12).

I don't know, it's just like how we all feel around Tangier Island. I know in my day, too much too late is what they done with trying to manage the bay. They started too late, and they tried to throw too much in our lap at one time for us to deal with, is what happened to me. Like things we suggest, by crab drudging, it was like going in one ear and out of the other.

You know one guy stood up in one of them meetings. He's an older guy here, and he said, "Look, you got all these graphs and charts," he says, "I don't even know what they are." He said, "I'm sorry, but I don't even understand, when you talk about that stuff, it goes in one ear and out the other." He said, "But, for fifty years, I've been working the Tangier Sound in the Chesapeake Bay." He said, "Not 365 days a year, because we don't work on Sunday." He said, "And we do have some windy days." He said, "But other than that, I'm out working on that bay." He said, "Now when you do something that long and that many days, you learn something about crabs and you learn about oysters. When are you going to start listening to what we're got to say?" But they never will. It's like we're a, "Hey, yeah, whatever."

We've been nicknamed Pirates of the Bay, or raping the Chesapeake Bay. That's so far from the truth, there's no funning it. No one loves the Chesapeake Bay or the Tangier Sound or all the tributaries more than the watermen because we know without this, we don't have a livelihood. So we would be fools to try to rape it or destroy it. That's not the thing. What we try to do is make a living. And we have things wrote about us, well, your crab pots are being doubled on what you used to work, it's because there's so many regulations, we have to to make the living. It's not because we love being out longer or working harder; it's because we enjoy eating supper. Without working harder, we don't eat supper. Like I said, my paycheck's gonna come in whether that tugboat moves or not. But these watermen's not. It's going to stay right where it's at, zero.

M.Z.: I'm just wondering then if given –

[Telephone. End of Parks 1 FR. Beginning of Parks2 FR.]

M.Z.: I'm just wondering, given your personal history, your family's history and the passion that you have for the kind of work that you were doing as a waterman, I guess emotionally,

what was it like for you to make the decision to go into tugging. Was it a difficult thing for you to decide, was it painful? Did you feel like you were giving something up?

S.P.: When I lost my wife, I had been with her since the first grade; I lost all desire personally really, to work on the water anymore. I was really a go-getter, but I lost all of it. Now when I met 'Reen (Maureen), I got that passion back. But that's when it was really a little bit too late because of my boat and also the regulations. That's when I went tugboating.

And that's when I went back and I became mate on a tugboat and then I moved up to captain. Before I was deckhand and I had to come home, see I said I worked a few year, then I come back, it was because my wife was sick and cancer, I had to try to take care of her. I just lost a lot of desire to do it anymore. That was my problem.

M.Z.: I'm so sorry to hear about that. Why tugs? How did you hear about that as an option?

S.P.: Well, a guy I used to work with when I was what we call mate on a crabbing boat, was a captain of a tugboat. I would talk to him, and he's the one that kind of brought me into the business. He talked for me and I got the job and he also was the guy trained me as mate on the tug; he was also the same guy. And really now, think about it, most watermen are uneducated to anything but the water business. So what I done for a living, other than crab, was limited. And tugboating was one of the things I was capable or familiar of doing, was working on the water.

I had a good advantage when I went tugging. I was so used to being away from home being a waterman, that that part didn't bother me. And I so loved the work of a tugboater that I just adjusted very easily. I rode up with another guy, when I went my first day on the job as a tugboat, up to Philadelphia on the Schuylkill River. If I had had my own vehicle up there, I would have come back home that day. Oh, man, I was so down. I said, "What in the world and I doing up here? What is this?"

M.Z.: Can you describe that a little bit more, just kind of blow-by-blow what that experience was like?

S.P.: It was like a three-hour drive, and the farther north I got, the more depressed I got. And by the time I got to where them tugs were at, the tug I was getting on, we were laying to a dock that was cruddy and looked rough, looked like it was in a rough part of town.

M.Z.: This is Philadelphia?

S.P.: Yeah, and it was right on the Schuylkill River. Man, I'll tell you what, like I said, when I was driving up and I was looking out of that window at them tugboats and I said, "And this is what I'm going to do?" And then look, you got to remember, I went from captain of my own boat. Well my job now was being the low man on the totem pole, cooking supper, cleaning the boat, which means heads and all, which is not a good job. If you ask my wife now, she never has to touch mine very rarely. Because I take care of my – she has her own bathroom, I have my own. And I take care of mine.

I had to do all of that stuff. And here I was used to people doing all that for me, you know. And it was anything they didn't want to do, I had to do. I said, "What in the world is I thinking about here?" But guess what? After about a week, I said, "You know what, this really ain't that bad." I learned how to cook. A lot of times I cook supper for my wife. I know how to clean the house, because I learned how to clean. A matter of fact, when I'm home, she never has to touch the house, I do all of that. I know how to wash clothes. I know how to keep house, which ain't a bad thing.

How marriages was back in the fifties, them days is gone. You come a long way, baby, and now we do our part. This is a new millennium and guess what? I was able to move into that. If it hadn't been for tugboating, that was one thing I would have never learned. The only thing I could cook was a grilled cheese sandwich, and if I didn't watch out, I'd burn that. (Laughter.)

So now, you give me two hours, I can put you a dinner on the table. And I don't mean a little dinner, I mean a good dinner. And I can do it quick. Because when you're cooking for five men, when you're on a tugboat, you don't eat something out of a can. I could take you on our boat this time and you wouldn't believe it. We have steaks, ham, roast beef, pork, chicken, seafood, turkey. We have it all. What you have home, we have it all, and we have a good cook to cook it. I was that good cook. Now, it was through people teaching me what to do. Really, the simple thing is, if you can read, you can cook. This here saying, "I can't cook," is just a cop out. If you can read that book, you can cook it.

I don't cook as much as I do clean. She goes to work, she works at the school, and I keep the house clean. And believe me, with Summer around, that's needed. You know a fifteen-year-old girl. I try to help her all I can help because, you know, I really don't work that hard in my job and I just tell someone else to do it.

M.Z.: Isn't that funny, though, that what we would traditionally call women's work, you learned on a tugboat? I mean when you think of a tugboat, it's all, like man.

S.P.: Right, that's why I didn't want them calling me Kim on a tugboat. "Hey, I'm Socks, and don't ask me how I got that name." (Laughter.)

M.Z.: How old were you when you started working on a tug? You said it was '97.

S.P.: Let me see, I'm fifty-five now, so what does that go back 'til?

M.Z.: What year were you born?

S.P.: Fifty-six.

M.Z.: So you were about forty-one.

S.P.: Yeah. Maybe a little younger than that. I started really in, yeah '96 when I started, yeah you're right.

M.Z.: Or, about forty, I guess you were. Did you start with Dann? You've mentioned Dann Towing.

S.P.: No, I went to Dann later; I started out with Vane Brothers. At that time, they did not have a mate training program. So I had to leave Vane Brothers to go with Dann Towing to get my wheelhouse training. Which, that didn't work out neither, so I come back and Vane put me in the wheelhouse anyway.

M.Z.: I'm getting a little confused. What kind of training did you go through then? When you were first on, you were the low man on the totem pole, you were deckhand?

S.P.: Well you come on as deckhand, you train at deckhand stuff. My job was, at the time, was, see like you're on a tug, you're pushing a barge in front of you. Well when you go into a dock or anything, this is about a 400-foot unit. Well you need a guy up here giving you distance, you know, on knowing when to bring her in or knowing when to come ahead. I was that guy and they trained me in doing that.

And they also, like I say, trained me in cooking and line handling, and safety, all about safety. Not only safety for myself, but keeping the vessels safe for other people so no one would get hurt on the boat with like, (indiscernible 9:46) laying around the boat. If any oil, which was very rare, but if a little bit of oil may have been spilt on the deck, with some kind of transfer, making sure that it was all clean and well took care of. Not only for environment reasons, but for safety reasons. You know, slip and stuff like that. Watch standing, making my job was, as deckhand, was making sure the guys up in the wheelhouse were awake and obvious to what was going on, which is very important.

Also, I was like a lookout during bad weather, low visibility, I would be an extra set of eyes up in the wheelhouse looking out when the captain determined that I was needed. So all them things come into role as a deckhand. But see now I was deckhand, I was getting familiar with things up in the wheelhouse, but I was putting it here [pointing to his head], but I weren't putting it here [gesturing with his hands]. You know, there's a big difference in having education here –

M.Z.: Here in your head.

S.P.: -- and being able to bring it out of here and to do it. I know people –

M.Z.: So what you're saying is there's a big difference between what you have in your head and then actually –

S.P.: What goes into your mind, lot of times with our line of work, don't go into your hands. I know guys who have license that anybody would be proud to hang on a wall. But when they started training in the program, they could not grasp bringing it out of here and

putting it in here, and doing the job with the boat and maneuvering and everything. You know a boat is not like a car. You push on the brakes you're going to stop, most the time. We're not going to do that. You got to allow for a boat with 30,000 barrels of product in, you don't just, (noise) "Well, I'm a stop right here." No. You have to learn how to prepare for the stops. You have to learn how to use the engines in reverse. Sometimes you put one in reverse; one in head, is what we call the twin-screw method. Sometimes you use all different kinds of (indiscernible 12:11). We got rudders in front of the wheel, and we'll got rudders in back of the propellers, and we're using them to maneuver the boat sideways.

You have to learn all that stuff. It don't just come natural; it comes through training. Like I said, because some people can train in three months, so more it takes a year. Some, it takes longer than that. Some never get it; they wind up having to go back deckhand or move on to another job other than working in the wheelhouse. Some people ain't got the mind, the mentality to do it. They can't deal with the pressure.

Do you realize if I run into something and it's my fault – you know accidents happen – and I put oil in the water, you know how they're going to take me off the boat? I'm going to be handcuffed, I'm going to jail. Now that's some pressure. And not only that. For some kind of product, different kinds of product that we move, like benzene, and you know the danger in benzene. Well what if I was to go aground with a barge load of benzene? What do you think would happen to me? What do you think would happen to the community I was by when all that leaked out? So there's a lot of pressure in the job that what we do. But you have to kind of go by your training, go by your equipment in the boat, go by what people tell you to do. It's a very professional business.

Vane Brothers didn't just say, "Here, Socks." Like the job I'm doing now, I'm going up the Wicomico River. Look now, I've been captain running a boat since 2001. I just started running up the Wicomico this year. Now they didn't say, "Here Socks, go take her up the Wicomico." No, I was trained, and I'm one of the seniors at Vane Brothers. I was trained by a younger guy who had experience up the Wicomico who trained me how to go up there. Now I don't no longer have to have a trainer. But guess what, now I'm a trainer on other people going up there.

It's not like when you go into business, I'm done. Just, "Hey here's good ole Socks here; he used to be a waterman, he owns his own boat, we'll let him run this tug now." No, no, no, because guess what? Even though I was familiar with the water and boats, it was a whole different ballgame than what I had been used to. Man, you had two engines to deal with, and knowing how to maneuver the rudders, you're doing this all the same time. Well you get to the point, you do it without even thinking about doing it. Your hand's already there.

I'm sure you remember the boxer Joe Lewis, don't you? I've thought about that many times. He knocked this guy out; I don't even know who he knocked out. And he said to his manager, he said, "I'm on my way out." He said, "What do you mean, Joe?" He said, "You seen the opportunity and you knocked him out." He said, "That's right, I seen it."

He said, "But before my hand was already there before I seen it." Well that's the same way I base on what I do. My hand's already putting her in reverse before I can think about doing it. I just see it, I know it. It ain't a process I go through, you ain't got time to do that. Sometimes it's split-second decisions you do.

I'm not trying to make me sound like I'm something should be put on some kind of hill. No, I'm just telling you what our job is. I mean, look, don't think I'm saying, "Hey, look at me, I'm way up here." No.

M.Z.: No, I hear what you're saying and it sounds like, even though you've had to go through these training periods, I would imagine that somebody like you, with the background that you have, is one of the people who can really learn and kind of move along at a smoother pace than somebody else.

S.P.: You know what I tell 'em? I'm going to knock that theory right down. I know people who never seen a tugboat, and they're some of the best captains up there I'm ever seen. The best boat handlers. You'll look at some of them and you say, "Man, how they do that?" It's just, he knew how to put it here. Like I say, it's all in what you can bring out of your brain and put to your hands. And what you allow your brain put to in your hands. Like I say, it's a unique job. And let me say this, everyone on the boat has to know their job. If the deckhand didn't do his job, my job would be no good. I could not do my job without him doing his. Same thing with the engineer, and same thing with cook or whatever. They're taking care of the crew, or they're telling the crew what needs to be done or whatever.

My experience of being captain as a waterman taught me a responsibility when I was younger. Because I knew if I didn't go out and make that money, my family was not going to eat or I weren't going to be able to pay my bills. So I already had a sense of being able to handle, you know, stressful situations working my own boat. But I got to say, the stress is a higher level one.

I'll tell you what else, in back of everything else, what you got to keep in your mind when doing the job I do is keeping those guys safe and keeping the environment safe. One thing that I do know, we had so many training sessions with Vane Brothers on safety. Anything from knowing how to clean the boat, your sanitary work, from knowing how to keep colds and flus down. Health reasons, knowing what to do in any given situation, CPR, we have everything ready just for that occasion. We have firefighting; we have the equipment on our boat. We call it the scuba gear. The (indiscernible 19:00) and everything, we can go down in the engine room and get someone out if we have to. We know how to fight fires; we know what kind of fire extinguisher to use on certain fires. I mean, Vane Brothers has taught us well, very well. We conduct drills every time we go back, we conduct man-overboard drills, in-case-of-a-spill drill, fire-fighting drills, medical drills. We don't do every drill every two weeks, but we pick what drill we're gonna do and we refresh ourself. We even take tests on it. We're even tested on it and all the results is sent into the office. It's not like I say, they throw you out there and go, "Run this tug." People out there are professionals.

M.Z.: So the training that you've had in your progress moving along from being a deckhand, was the training just onboard the boat, or have you had to take classes?

S.P.: Do you know MITAGS in Baltimore? It's a maritime school, it's a maritime college.

M.Z.: What is it called?

S.P.: MITAGS is all I know, that's all we called it. I don't know if that was short after what all we done. But anyway, they would put us in simulators there. I've been in several simulators; Vane Brothers would foot the bill for all that stuff. We also were sent up to New York City, all the wheelhouse people, to bridge resource management to a maritime school up there. I can't remember the name of what that was called up in New York. Because, matter of fact, some of our guys were up there during 9/11, back there at school.

M.Z.: Is it the SUNY something? Is it in the Bronx?

S.P.: No, it wasn't very far. I'm trying to think where it was at. Being from Tangier Island, knowing much about New York, I don't, I sure don't. But it was a maritime college, I do know that.

M.Z.: So you've had training in those kind of situations. Is that how you got your licenses?

S.P.: No. I went to school to a guy over here on the eastern shore. I went down to, at the time was called Tidewater School of Navigation, which is no longer called that, it's called something else now. But I went down and got my radar license, then I got my wheelhouse license.

When I become mate, is when all the training to the colleges started. That's when Vane Brothers started upgrading on us, on our responsibilities on how to deal with situations on the boat, health reasons, accidents on the boat, or some guy just blowing his top. Knowing how to deal with what was going on.

Not that I know everything, how to deal with it, but I'm somewhat got a foundation. If someone's coming with a gun, what do you do? And I said, "What do you think I'm going to do? I'm going to give him the boat." They said, "Exactly. Do nothing, let them have the boat because you can't do nothing." They said, "But try to get word to the Coast Guard," I said, "Yeah, like if he's holding a .45 on me, Mister, I'm going say, 'Hold it, I'm going call the Coast Guard and let them guys know you're here.'" I said, "No, Mister, I'm afraid I'm going to do nothing." I said, "If I can do anything, I'm going to try to jump overboard." (Laughter.)

I always tell my crew on the boat when we do a lifesaving drill, the life raft and all this, I'll say, "Now what's the number one rule about getting off of the tug in the life raft? What's the number one rule?" They say, "Make sure you're on here." I said, "That's it, if

I'm not here, you hold that boat." (Laughter.) But no, that's just joking around with the guys.

M.Z.: How do you compare the stuff that you learn in those kind of training sessions and what you learn just being on board the boat and actually doing stuff, like getting your hands on it and maybe learning from other people who are more experienced than you? How do you compare those two?

S.P.: They give us an awareness, and with that awareness, we see it real.

M.Z.: They give you an awareness through the training sessions?

S.P.: Right. Now look, you go to a place where – one place we went, something like four days, down at MITAGS we went there, different occasions, no more than three days at a time. Now, they really can't teach you everything in three days. But they give you an awareness what you need to be looking at on the boat while you're there. And guess what? You think it's a lot of malarkey, but it's not. It's get in your mind when you get on that boat say, "Hey, maybe they did know something," and you see it. They make you aware of what can happen and what to do in the case the situation occurs and you just do it. And you just do it, you follow through.

Vane Brothers has been – we have a safety department at Vane Brothers is out of this world. This guy, the safety CO, is Bob Roosevelt, which he has people working all under him, but you talk about a guy who's on top of safety, it is that guy. Vane Brothers hired the right guy. He's second to none. He's got everything in line. He don't just give you part of the story; you get it all, and in all scenarios, what can go wrong.

Every time I go back on the boat, my crew and myself, we have a safety meeting. I conduct a meeting, I study the material, and then I give them opportunity to study material and then we have a meeting on what the material's about. Whether it's about how to handle paint, or whether it's about health, getting someone off the boat, or a man overboard, or getting the whole crew off the boat because you're abandoning ship. I mean, it's all this, and oil spills and what to do if someone gets oils on them. What kind of cleaner or solution to use to downgrade that certain product on their body. It's all these kind of things. What kind of equipment to wear doing certain kind of things on the job.

Like I say, my education is very limited, but they train you into being what they want you to be or not. You're not what you want to be, if you're not what they want you to be. So like I say, I didn't just say, "Here Socks, here's your boat." No, no just like everyone else, I had to learn what the deal was. Well not only did I learn that in schools, but I also learned it with hands-on on the boat. What they talked about, we did. And you learn. Not that we do everything perfect, we're not perfect. But we have learned, if we're not perfect, someone has a problem. So we do a lot of training. And you know these ball players, before they go to a game, they don't just go to a game; they learn the plays and they use them. Well it's the same thing with us; we learn how to deal with it and we do it.

They have taught us so much on, teaching us on how to control our excitement. Say, for example, we start going down; it's my job to be in contact with that Coast Guard while the crew is preparing us to abandon ship. My job is to let them know where I'm at; without that, it's nothing. Well, I can't do that by (mimics panic-type yelling). Huh-uh. Calm, cool and collected. "This is the *Roanoke*, my name is Kim Parks," and you give the full crew's name so everyone's accounted for. You give them longitude and latitude so help can be on the way. And you tell them the problem and how serious it is and how you're tried everything you know, if you have any suggestions at this time, we would appreciate it to save this vessel.

If they say, "Look, you've done all we think you're able to do with the equipment you got on the boat, we have guys on the way, your crew keep maintaining what they're doing in case the vessel goes down before we get there. But we want you on this radio." And my job is to stay on that radio continually giving them information. We got a hundred-foot tug, she's fifty-three feet draft in the air and she's black, white, with green stripes and also with a blue stripe. And give them things like what kind of flags you got in the air, what kind of barge you're pushing, whether she's in pushing gear or towing her. All that stuff, you have to be – now this is while your vessel's going down. I'm not saying I'm going say everything, "Well, okay guys, wait a minute, I'm just going to rest up a minute here before I talk anymore." I'm going to be standing, giving him information and letting him know. And if I have to leave, I have to let them know, "I'm departing the vessel now and I won't be in contact." Which I have an emergency radio that I'll be taking on the boat.

If a boat's going down, and your crew's already in the raft, there's a chance I might forget that radio. You know, "Hey, you ain't going nowhere without me." Or, you know, "Hey man, it's going to be cold if I have to jump in that water," or anything like that. So, we're trained into that kind of stuff.

M.Z.: Do you think you have to have a certain kind of personality to begin with to be able to be trained in that way?

S.P.: Yes. You have to be able to establish that you can lead. If you're not a leader, the crew will ride all over you. That's in anything; you know that. You've got to be a leader. And they got to know you're a leader. You're not got to be a, "Hey, I said I wanted everything done." Not that kind of leader, but let them know when the rubber hits the road, you are the captain. And it's not your way; it's my way. This is not Burger King, we don't do things the way you want; we do it my way and that's that.

I say one thing; I've had such a good crew with several people that we're got such a good working relationship, I do not have to tell them what to do, they know what to do. That's because Vane Brothers is so good on training their people. They're not going to come on that boat and not do what they're been trained, which Vane Brothers has spent a lot of money training. And then for me to call and say, "You know, I'm not going go out and yell and this guy or this guy." Now, we have some women on the tugs, too. But all I got to say is, you know Gather (phonetic), this guy ain't working out, he just ain't doing his

job. I said, "We thought he knew it, but we went ahead and explained it and he's still not willing." Well, I went and had a meeting with him and approached it and told him his problem. And I seriously told him that it was getting to a critical point, "You either start doing your job or I'm calling the office." I always give them one, two chances, but after two I figure, hey, I'm done my part. I do inform them that I'm going to the office. They know I'm here, they know I'm talking.

You can't have a bad apple with a six-man crew; everybody's got to be in sync. You can't mess up the apple cart; you can't do it. It's too dangerous. So many people can get hurt if someone's not doing their job. I don't think I could deal with that if I knew that my boat handling got someone hurt. I don't think I could live with that; someone's dad, someone's husband, someone's child, someone's daughter, and I got them hurt, I couldn't deal with it. I believe that would be the end of my career. So I'm going to try to see to it that everyone – if someone's not doing their job, that we all encourage him to get with the program. You know, do what you're trained to do, use it. Vane Brothers has went to great lengths and great expense to train you.

You know before Vane Brothers sends anyone on a tugboat; they have to go down to school at CMTI for a full week of learning just the basics of sanitary work. Knowing your fire extinguishers, knowing how to handle lines and, basically, learning how to cook a few meals. Just getting them prepared for what the task is ahead.

M.Z.: I've heard some people say that the crew on a tug, because it's so small, was kind of like a family. Would you put it that way or how would you put it?

S.P.: Yes, just like that. Now let me tell you this, we're got a nice size tug.

M.Z.: Tell me about your tug.

S.P.: She's a hundred foot long, about thirty-five feet wide and she's four stories. She's got a eye view of about thirty-eight feet in the air, which she goes up a lot higher than that. She's got three heads on her. Each crewmember has his own stateroom.

M.Z.: How many crew?

S.P.: Most the time, there's six of us.

M.Z.: So we've got the captain and you've got two mates?

S.P.: No. One mate, two deckhands, engineer and most time a rider, just riding on the boat. What he's doing, he could be a new guy that's basically learning the if, ands and buts and he's got a trained deckhand teaching him. Or it could be someone who hasn't found a boat yet, and they're just riding him around until they find him a boat. Or it could be a training mate. So, it varies who that extra guy is.

M.Z.: What's the horsepower on your boat?

S.P.: Twenty-four hundred horsepower.

M.Z.: It's a twin-screw?

S.P.: Twin-screw.

M.Z.: And what's the name of it?

S.P.: The *Roanoke*.

M.Z.: Is this an ATB?

S.P.: No, it's not. It's just a tugboat type.

M.Z.: How long have you and your crew been together?

S.P.: Three years now.

M.Z.: And you say you're pretty much like a family?

S.P.: Oh, yes. I mean, it ain't nothing for me to call one of them when I'm home or them call me. You know, just talk about something or say, "Hey, did you know this, or whatever." We got a very good relationship, very good.

M.Z.: But at the same time, there is a kind of hierarchy where they know that you're the boss.

S.P.: You got to. You try to be one of the boys, but I really can't be. Now the mate and engineer and the deckhands have a better relationship than you do when I'm around. Now they know I got their back; oh, they know that and I know they got mine. But, you know, now me and the engineer and the mate, we have a great relationship. I mean, just like that. The engineer is authority, the mate's authority. When I'm to bed, he's really the captain. Only time he'll get me up if it's a situation. But the deckhands, they're kind of closer to the lower rank. I'm not saying we're not friends. Matter of fact, my brother works with me, he's one of my deckhands.

M.Z.: How does that work? Does that work out okay?

S.P.: Like I told some of the guys around here, it works out fine long as I let him be captain. It's when I decide to be captain he don't like it much. But, no, he's my younger brother and we don't work on the same watch. See I work on the watch from six until twelve. That's six in the morning until twelve that day, from six that evening until twelve that night. Well my brother's on duty from twelve to six, so he's opposite. We only see each other when we're eating or changing watches.

M.Z.: Do you do that intentionally?

S.P.: He kind of liked it better because I don't think he liked the idea of me, you know, if something weren't right. I can't let Todd get off with things that the other crew will see so I was a little strict. It worked out better he went on with the mate and I got the other deckhand. He's also the cook, very good cook, very good. I trained him. (Laughter.) I did, really. His wife helped out.

M.Z.: So your crew has been together for three years. One of your deckhand is your brother so he's from Tangier.

S.P.: He lives over on the eastern shore, but he's from Tangier.

M.Z.: What kind of backgrounds do people generally have that you've worked with in Vane? Are they mostly from the Chesapeake area?

S.P.: Oh, no. Some, yeah, but no, there are all kinds of different backgrounds. You got people come from car garages, mechanics, you got farmers, you got welders, you got people who didn't know what a boat was, you got people lived in Texas, farmers, you got watermen up in Maine, you got service people retired from any branch of the service, or getting out of the service coming to tugboating. You got so many different backgrounds, it's not strictly watermen, it's not that. It's so many different people, so many different attitudes to work with from so many different places. No, it's not basically watermen, no.

M.Z.: You said occasionally there's women?

S.P.: Oh, yeah. We have Eric, I can't think of her name. I don't know, but she's a mate. Mate on one of the big boats. You know, there's so many different class boats at Vane Brothers; we're in the middle of them. You have some boats with 1000 horsepower and they're what you call the low class. Then we're got some with 1800 horsepower; that's the next step in powerboats. Then you got us, which is the 2400-horse class. Then over top us, you got a 3000-horsepower class and a 4200-horsepower class. So there's two classes below me, and two above me.

M.Z.: So you're smack in the middle.

S.P.: Yeah, our boat is basically – what was that John Wayne said on that movie when he was on them PT boats? He said, "We're expandable." Well that's us. We can move the big barges, but we can also go down and move the little barges if the other boats are busy. So we can move a variety of barges and get away with it. But a lot of boats can't do that. So a lot of the little boats can't move what we move and a lot of the big boats can't move what they move. So, you know, it's how everything's arranged. A certain class boat has got a certain class job they do. We can pitch in, pinch hit as they say in playing ball, I can pinch hit and take someone's barge from them and do their job. If a breakdown or weather or whatever, I can fill in and do that.

M.Z.: So now you're going up the Wicomico River?

S.P.: Yes.

M.Z.: That's one of the things that we're interested in is the range of habitats that these tugs cover in Chesapeake. Are you based in Baltimore at the harbor there?

S.P.: No, we're based in Norfolk, Virginia. Down in Portsmouth, Paradise Creek. You know, it's all there together.

M.Z.: I've been sort of through Norfolk a little bit, but I don't know that –

S.P.: I just been shipped down there myself. Without my GPS, I couldn't get there.

M.Z.: I'm wondering, keep in mind that this is radio basically so people can't see you, obviously, but I would love it if you could kind of paint a picture through describing it in words, what a typical job is like going from Norfolk, going across the bay and then going up the Wicomico River, kind of what that looks like, what it feels like and what the routine is.

S.P.: Well first of all, we start out, it's a two-load job. First load is up in the York River, up at Western. Just as soon as you get into the York River, when you get up maybe four or five mile, then you come to a place up there and it's called Western. They supply part of the product, which is a diesel fuel. Once he's completed his loading process there, we pick the barge up, whether in pushing gear or tow her, depending on the weather, down to Norfolk. Then we go to a place called Allied Norfolk.

What we do, when we turn into the Elizabeth River, which is by the Navy yard, you go on by the Navy yard and also the NIT [Norfolk International Terminals?], unloading docks for the ships. Then when you get up so far, you get up to a place called Town Point. You have branches from Town Point; one branch is the southern branch, and the other branch is the eastern branch. Well, we go to the eastern branch to take on product. But once that the barge has taken on the product, we have to leave the eastern branch from Allied Norfolk and bring her around to the southern branch which is Paradise Creek where we go at to tie up, which is a base for Vane Brothers.

It's like a fork, like a fork in the road. You have a main channel, Elizabeth River, and it branches off into branches. So that's basically what it is. Once we get the go ahead from the office that Cato [Cato Oil Company, Salisbury] up at Wicomico is ready for the product, then we adjust our timing to leave Paradise Creek and head up to Salisbury, which is Wicomico, up the Wicomico River. Now that's about a twenty-hour voyage from when we leave until we get up to Salisbury, give or take, depending on weather or currents or things like that. But basically twenty hours, you can say you're going to be up to Cato.

You have to have ETAs and you pass all this information on to the companies. We usually tow up the bay and when we get up off of Deal Island, we stop and what you call pick our tow up.

M.Z.: Can you describe what that means?

S.P.: Just grab her and we'll take the hawser in, drop it off, I'll come around and I'll make up in back of the barge like this. I push her into Wicomico. Well, going up a river like the Wicomico, you have restrictions. I can only have eleven-foot draft going in, no more. Eleven foot draft because of the average of the water depth in the Wicomico, I can only carry eleven-foot draft. It's a slow procedure, you don't go in and, you know, (imitates noise), no, no, none of that, or going around corners fast, nothing like that. It's well marked, it's a well-marked river with buoys and beacons and very well laid out. It's about a four-hour trip from when I hit Wicomico number one until I get up in Salisbury at Cado. About a four-hour voyage from there.

Two hours of the trip is actually nice. The last two hours it's more congestive. Everything's closer, you got docks coming out with pleasure boats, yachts on turns and all this kind of stuff. It's a more slowed-down thing. The type of barge that I push up there is what we called a double skin. That's two barges in one. Vane Brothers used to have a lot of single skin barges, but a few year down the road, all that's going to be outlawed. Well Vane Brothers done before it was outlawed. They're very environmental aware. I mean they really go the extra mile. On the Miller (ph) venture, clean venture, and we're right in with them. Matter of fact, their equipment's at our docks and we're all in one of keeping the environment safe. So far, the history of Vane Brothers has never, never lost a drop of oil in the Wicomico.

M.Z.: I was interested in something you just said. You said the first two hours of the trip are kind of nice.

S.P.: Laid back.

M.Z.: And then the second two hours is more congested. But when you say nice, you mean laid back, the river's wider at that point?

S.P.: The river's wide. You have a narrow channel but it's just, the farther up a river you go, you know and I know the land gets closer. Well, that's what I mean by everything – and not only that; the first part we enter is marshland. The second part is communities, and you know living along a river are rich communities. Well they got their nice docks with their nice yachts sitting out on the end. Well you're coming by these yachts with a barge and a tug, so you know what I'm saying, is it's more slowed down. If anything, at any given towing, if I got one doubt in my mind that something don't look right, I stop. I got the power to stop her, that's how slow I'm going.

We try to keep it safe for all them kind of things. I can say without a doubt, Vane Brothers has a record of keeping things right on. Matter of fact, there been write-ups about Vane Brothers on the good job that they doing going into Wicomico.

M.Z.: I'm just trying to think about your personal history and your many years of experience as a waterman and what kind of very intimate knowledge you must have of the bottoms and tides and currents and weather and wind and everything else. Now you're a captain of this pretty good-sized tug with a pretty good-sized barge. Does any of the knowledge that you learned as a waterman about bottoms, about tides, about all of that stuff, come into play, especially when you're going up there in the rivers?

S.P.: Yes.

M.Z.: Can you talk about that?

S.P.: One thing you notice, one thing you'll find about any given waterman, the things they know is tide and weather. Now, not that we hit everything right on, but I remember a guy, the same engineer I was telling you about out in Orange, down below Washington. We were leaving Baltimore one day, and it was blowing a good thirty knots. And he says to me, he says, "Socks, when we get by Pooles Island, it could be a little choppy." I said, "Yeah, but it's going to be dropping out by then." He said, "What do you go by?" And I got to explain to him how land looked at a distance. I said, "You see that land there?" You ever been out, a hard wind, and you look and the land looks like it's up on blocks or something? It looks like it's above the water. You know, you look out and say, "Man, looks like it's something on top something." Well, if the weather's going, it's starting to die down then. I said, "You see how we're look up and it looks like that land's on blocks?" I said, "That's telling me the storm's over." I said, "We can go."

Well when we got up to where we have to turn off Poole's Island and go up by Worton Point and all to go up the C&E Canal, I said, "Jim, come on up here a minute." He come up there I said, "Look." He said, "How do you do that?" I said, "Jim, I just told you how I done it earlier." I said, "It's not that I'm brilliant," I said, "but I was a waterman all my life." I said, "In my small boat, I had to know what kind of storms was coming in order to protect myself and the crew." I said, "It's just knowledge that I borrowed from there to here and also currents, you know, knowing when it's going to be flood tide or ebb tide."

See when you have a flood tide going up the Wicomico, naturally you've got a 400-foot unit, which we are, and here's a beacon; you don't wait 'til you get up to that beacon and say, "Oh, I guess I'll turn over here." No, you start your turning process long – and the word is, when I get to this beacon here, if I'm not two-thirds around my turn, I'm not going to make it. So here I got a yacht right here. I got a yacht just about, I want to say no more than 100 feet on the starboard side of me and I'm making a port turn. If I ain't got most of my turn done and complete by the time I get to that beacon, I've missed my turn and I need to stop and stop then.

But if it was the ebb tide, I have to worry about when I'm trying to make my turn around; I have to worry about that current coming this way, stopping me from making my turn. So all that comes into play with having the knowledge of what the current's doing; flood or ebb and how high your tide is, which has nothing to do with current, but how high or how low it is.

All them things come into the ballgame when you're taking a barge up the Wicomico. I learned that working in certain places into tributaries. Knowing what current would do to me when I would work certain places. So that was really a bring-along thing with me that when I got on a tugboat, we fine-tuned it. You know, it was fine-tuned into something a little different. Because when you're going in a river with a flood tide and you're making a turn, you got the flood current pushing on your port stern, if you're making a port turn, it's pushing your stern around. Well, when your stern goes that way, which way is your bow going? Just the opposite. So the current's taking you around, but it's also bringing your bow this way. And that's knowledge of knowing the currents.

We also have computers, tide charts and everything to figure all that out. I don't have to say, "Let me look at the moon, here and tell you what." No, back in the day when I used to be a waterman, if the moon is on the up rise from the eastern shore, it's flood tide without a doubt. I don't care what time of day it is you see that moon, because sometimes you see it in a day, you know that. But if that moon's coming up over to the eastern, it is flood tide. You can look at that today. If you look tonight, and you see the moon and it's overhead but falling, you can say, "Guess what, it's ebb tide out here." But, if it's coming up from the east, you can say, "Well Socks says it's flood tide," well you can bank on it; it's flood tide. You can bank on that. But as soon as it starts falling, guess what, the ebb tide starts going and you can bank on that.

It ain't like I do them kind of things. It's like I got equipment telling me exactly when the currents is going to change. You know, currents and tides are two different things. Tide is a movement up and down, but currents are in and out. You can still be having, like when you have a flood tide and it switches over to ebb, you still have a rise in the tide. You know, that kind of knowledge you say, "Wait a minute now, I do know the ebb started, but I still got a little bit of rise left here." And you can take advantage of that situation going to a dock or whatever. So, yes, that knowledge did, to some point, come over with me and then it was just fine-tuned on the tugboats.

M.Z.: Given that you have all that knowledge and you've been fine-tuning it, are you able to pretty much avoid any kind of real scary situation?

S.P.: Most the time.

M.Z.: Can you give us any example of maybe in your younger days when something really dicey happened and you had to get yourself out of it?

S.P.: Well here's how it was when I was working on the water. We'd have the VHF giving us weather, we got a northwester moving down, should be here somewhere around midday,

something like that. Well, hey, I'm a waterman; I wake up and it's calm. Guess where I'm going? I'm going to work. But now, I got this knowledge that this storm's coming, I'm already got this in the back of my head. So I'm out to work, and all of the sudden I start seeing the sky look a little funny, you know. You ever seen these small, dark clouds like start springing out, blowing all over the place. Well, you know when you see them, we call them – what we used to call raingear was oilskins, I don't know if you're familiar with that term. Well, we used to call them little clouds oilskin coats. We'd say, "Hey boys, here comes the oilskin coats." And guess what, we'd start working our way to getting closer, not quitting, but getting closer to the home port and then we'd usually stay there until it really started blowing hard. Then we'd usually quit. If we seen we couldn't catch many crabs, we'd wind up going in. But that depended on the crab catch.

Now I have computers telling me about weather, pinpointing exactly where it's at. I got maps showing me on the computer. I get the maps out, I look where it's at, and I got my timings down on how the weather's moving. I can just about pinpoint when the weather's going to hit. Now, there's always a surprise that you don't figure on of a storm making out quicker than you realize, and then you get caught in it.

M.Z.: Has that happened to you?

S.P.: Yes.

M.Z.: Can you give an example of that?

S.P.: Let me give you the scenario. Crew change. Had been on the boat two weeks. We're up in Baltimore. The office calls me up and says, "Socks, we need you to head down to Yorktown." I said, "What, this evening? It's crew change." I said, "Really, are you serious?" And they say, "Yep, got to have – emergency popped up, government contract." So, knew we was picking up wind, and knew if I stayed there and waited, that I was going to have to leave and I was going to really have a terrible crew change, I left.

Well guess what, to no surprise, what happens to me? I get caught in the wind, blowing hard. But we made out fine, we got a big boat and all that. But you know, sometimes, if you don't watch out with a no-win situation – but I've known there were times I've been out there, especially on the water business, that soon as storms come out that we didn't anticipate that were going to be that bad, the wind amount they give out was so different from what hit. Matter of fact, I've even been out when three guys got drowned because of us getting caught in a storm. I mean, we were all there together, and guys sank and no one knew it until we got just about into the dock and it was too late. And it was such a horrible storm, I mean it was terrible. It was all we could do to just get in, really.

Now I've been caught in that. But with the boat that I'm in now, than what I was in then, I would be fine now. We'd be miserable, but I'd be able to maneuver and do my job. But Vane Brothers, you know, their policy's not, "Hey we got a job, sail." We got a restricted wind amount or sea limit that we can go out in. So it's not always our call whether we go; it's here's the conditions. And then if the office calls, "Why haven't you sailed?"

Well, we got a four to five-foot sea out there and it's Vane Brothers' policy that we can't go out in that. It's more now that – back in them days, I had to go out in bad weather. Now, I get paid, and the office backs me up because of the rules they have. So that's the difference. Even though you still get caught in conditions, it's something you don't plan on unless you got a crew change. (Laughter.)

M.Z.: We've been talking for a long time now and I don't want to take up too much of your time, and I know you have to eat and get going this evening. But just before I turn this machine off I want to ask if you have anything you want to say about what you think about the importance of this industry in Chesapeake culture and history. You've been a waterman, and so has your family for a long, long time. At our museum, we tend to focus a lot on those kinds of traditions in the Chesapeake: boat building and also people who work on the water as commercial harvesting. But at our museum, and I think when we think about Chesapeake history in general, we don't tend to pay as much attention to something like commercial shipping and the tugboat industry. But it's very important, and it's a very old story. You know, the tugs and barges and ATBs and petroleum, that's a newer part of the story, but it's kind of a continuation of what's come before.

So I'm just wondering if you ever think about that. Thinking about the exhibit, we're going to be putting together this exhibit for the public to see. What would you want the public to know about this?

S.P.: About the watermen?

M.Z.: No, about –

S.P.: Well that's what I want to talk about first. I'd like to say, it would be very nice, greatly appreciated by the watermen, if people would get more knowledge about the watermen than what some corporations tries to put out there. It would be nice if they got their own learning of what the Chesapeake Bay and what role the watermen play on that. Not as pirates or raping the bay, but of understanding and knowing how hard these men work to take care of their families. It's a dying tradition. The happiness and the seafood that a waterman supplies for the country really, for them to realize what it takes to get that crab cake or that clam or that oyster on the restaurant table. You know, know what the history is behind it. Knowing what the elements, knowing what the crabber has to go through.

Now, not only is it a war with pollution and a war with the weather, but now it's a war with regulations that's really hurting the poor guy.

I'm just talking about the watermen here on Tangier Island, and there's so many over the Chesapeake Bay, but I'm just zeroing in on the guys I know. You got a lot of good guys here on this island who want this Chesapeake Bay to live and the tributaries. They do, they don't want nothing to happen to it. They're not foolish enough to try to destroy what's out there so they'll be here sitting without a job. And they want people to kind of see what they have to do instead of trying to shoot them down to kind of more or less help them out. I'm going to go into that with tugging.

We go up the Wicomico River, Vane Brothers do. We have lots of help from the residents of the river of making our job safer for the environment up the Wicomico. We work together.

M.Z.: In what way?

S.P.: Like docks, making it more easier transporting in and out you know, with the docks. And the respect that they have with the ferry services, always ready to help us and assist. Any time we head up that river, the locals and their boats will call us in advance and let us know they're coming and stay well clear of our unit. I mean, they just work with us, they don't work against us. Well, going back to the water and the watermen, it seems like that the lawmakers are more against the watermen than they are in favor of the watermen. They're making it hard for the young – well it's not only hard, it's just about impossible for a young guy to buy a license anymore. Only if somebody like me was to sell them or turn them over to him. Where's the fairness in that?

It's like they're trying to tell us they want us off the bay is what it's like. That's the big picture we're getting. Whether that's the truth or not, I'm not saying, but they're sure showing a good picture of that.

M.Z.: But you feel more respected in your work as a tugboat captain? You feel like you get respect from the community.

S.P.: Yes, yes, because they see how environmental friendly we are that they're willing to work with us. Now if we work with some rinky-dink company that was going to not care – like if I was going by someone with a fishing party and I started discharging my bilge water out in the bay, that's just rubbing it in your face. We're not going to do nothing like that, we have trucks come down and do that. But I mean we respect the angler, how they love coming out and making it. We try to respect them in our navigation. In return, we want the same respect we give them and they do.

Always on the lookout for a boat that's in distress. We're always there, someone's always out there and we're always willing to help. It seems like as being a waterman, they just don't have that respect. I mean, the lawmakers, like I told you about the older guy who had fifty years of experience and knows all there is just about to know about a crab. But they don't seem to want to listen to experience. They'd rather draw a graph for some guy in an office that don't know beans about what we do to tell us what we need to do. That's wrong. That's not right.

They're letting a treasure of the Chesapeake Bay die. You all know about the treasure. How about the sailboat oyster dredge boats, the skipjacks? Look what Maryland's doing to preserve the skipjacks. That's how the watermen should be preserved, just like that. They should stand up and look what's going on and what they're doing to the watermen. You know, we're families just like you are. You're all got a good job. Well this is what we chose to do. Who gives anybody the right to rule us out of that job? I mean, really.

M.Z.: I know there's a connection in the skills that you bring as a waterman to the tug industry, but do you feel like there's kind of a cultural connection between what you did as a waterman and what you're doing now? Do you feel like it's part of the same kind of story?

S.P.: Yeah, I mean, no doubt. Like I say, different operation, but basically the same foundation. You know, we were talking about tides and currents and weather; same thing I had as a waterman. Being gone away from home, I was prepared for that. Living on a boat, prepared for that from living on my own boat. Far as experience, yes, knowing that like excitement solves nothing, keep your head, do the job at hand. Knowing that, I don't know exactly how to put it, I'm trying to think how I need to put this, I usually can't spell it, I can say it but usually can't spell it. Well, without a doubt, without my life as a waterman, I don't believe I would be as good as captain as I am today. Now how do you explain that to you is a different story. But it was like move from one job to the next.

Now I also explained that I was trained in things and different ways of doing things, but it was like the water business moved right with me. Matter of fact, I still tell people, they'll say, "You used to be a waterman," and I'll say, "I still am. I still am because I work on the water. I might not be catching crabs, but I got something more important than crabs, I think. I got something could be an environmental disaster if we didn't do our job."

I don't know how to tell you how I'm bringing what I used to be as a waterman into what I am now as a tugger. Determination to succeed, I got that same determination. I steady grow in the company; I'm not satisfied to be mediocre. I learned that hard work on the water business. Let me tell you what a waterman is. Are you familiar at all with the bible?

M.Z.: Yes.

S.P.: Okay, the Lord Jesus had twelve disciples, right? What were seven of them?

M.Z.: Fishermen.

S.P.: Why did he pick fishermen?

M.Z.: You tell me.

S.P.: Fishermen are used to long hours, hard work and uncertain results. You know what that means? We never, never give up; we keep going. When my father was operated on for heart, his heart surgery, the doctor told me, he said, "I don't know what it is" he said, I've been told, by Maryland the doctor is from, he said, "But I've noticed island people really come around a lot quicker than city people." He said, "I don't know why that is." And I begin to explain to him what we have to do. How we have to push ourself to make a living for our family.

We go in weather that's not fit to be in. Whether it's heat – I've been so hot working on the water that I actually had to jump overboard to cool off, that's how hot it was. I've been out and it's been so cold that my beard had ice in it. And I've been, when it's been blowing so hard, that people have got drowned. I've been times when it's been so hard to make a living, you have to work so hard just to put bread and butter on your table. But guess what? I got up the next morning and went again. We're used to enduring; we don't stop. If the old bay throws us a curve, we go in the old sound. We go in another tributary and we try to make a living the best we know how.

I'll say the watermen of the Chesapeake Bay, that's all I know, I don't know the lobster people and I don't know *Deadliest Catch*, only what I see on television. But I do know, the ones I know are hardworking, proud men is what they are. I know, because I was one of them, and that's the same thing I do as a tugboat captain. I get a job and I do 110 percent to carry it out. If I don't, I have earned a reputation with Vane Brothers, they know it can't be done because I've done all I could do. Because that's the worst phone call I can make, is call them up and say, "I can't do it." It's a hard thing for me to do because I'm so used to enduring.

Just like disciples, when you go out and you witness for the Lord Jesus Christ, it's hard work, long hours and as you know, it's uncertain results. Well, as a waterman, even though you go out and work until you're so tired, you don't even feel like you can pick yourself up to walk home, I have done that so many days in a row, and I didn't have enough money to buy this. But guess what? I was out there the next day trying again.

Now for that to be so regulated, when I'm able to make enough money to go from this to buy this, they stop me from working with money out there to be made. It's not right, it's not right at all. It's not right at all. I hope that helps, what I said.

M.Z.: It does, very much, thank you so much.

S.P.: That's as clear as I come to what I was and what I am. You know just about everything about me.

M.Z.: Is there anything else you want to add before we go ahead and turn this off?

S.P.: No, I just thank the Lord for what He's give us and what He's allowed us to go for.

M.Z.: Thank you. Really appreciate your time.

S.P.: You're welcome.

[End of interview.]