

Oral History Interview
Chesapeake Bay Maritime Museum
“The Culture of Tugs and Tugs in Culture”

Interviewee: John Edward (Jay) Ward (J.W.)
DOB: 12/31/1976
Iain Scott Everton (I.E.)
DOB: 7/14/1985

Also Present: Bridge Tender (B.T.)
Jamie (photographer)

Interviewer: Michelle Zacks (M.Z.)

Date: January 26, 2012
Location: Aboard the *Captain Johnny*
Upper Wicomico River

Comments: We met where the *Captain Johnny* was docked at the Brew River Restaurant in Salisbury. The captain of the *Ellis* (another Ward family tug), Mike Bohannon, had brought the *Captain Johnny* over from Tappahannock, VA, so that Jay could have a few days off. The other crew were Mate: Iain Everton, and Deckhand: Berend Tyson. Jay Ward and his fiancé, Jami Luburgh, drove over to Salisbury by car from Deltaville to meet me and take me on board the boat.

Once Jay and Jami arrived, we all went upriver on the *Captain Johnny*, passing under the Main Street Bridge and the Rt. 50 Bridge, to the Perdue grain terminal at the end of the navigable portion of the river. One barge was being unloaded, the corn being sucked up by “evacuators” and loaded into trucks that would pull into the facility sequentially. A second full barge was waiting to be unloaded.

We had headed upriver at a little before noon and stayed at the Perdue terminal until about one. The bridges can’t be raised between noon and one, for traffic concerns.

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M.Z.: Today is January 25th, 2012 and I'm in the lower wheelhouse with Captain Jay Ward aboard the *Captain Johnny*. We're on the Wicomico River, and we're heading towards Purdue.

J.W.: The Purdue facility on the Upper Wicomico River. We'll be going through two bridges; the first one would be the Main Street bridge and then the Route 50 bridge is about a 150 feet behind the Main Street bridge. So I'll call the bridge tender now and he'll put in for an open.

Hey, Captain Johnny to the Main Street bridge.

B.T.: *Go ahead, sir.*

J.W.: Yes, sir, captain. We're going to be inbound, like to get an opening whenever you get a chance, bud.

B.T.: *Ten four. I'll call central and if everything's good, I'll raise 'em to you.*

J.W.: Okay, thank you a whole lot. Now they call in, like when we request a opening, they'll call in if there's any emergency vehicles in transit, then they'll delay us or whatever they have to do to get them through.

M.Z.: You do this so often. Is this just completely old hat and routine for you?

J.W.: I guess it is now.

M.Z.: Was it hard to learn in the beginning? It's so narrow here, it's unbelievable.

J.W.: It was difficult at first. I had some good teachers. Floyd Jean and my father, he's taught me coming up here. But I was a nervous wreck when I came up here for the first eight months. (Laughs.) He can tell you a lot about it, he's been on here for almost five years.

I.E.: It'll be five years in the spring.

M.Z.: And, Iain, you're the mate?

I.E.: Yes.

M.Z.: And your last name again?

I.E.: Everton.

J.W.: For the last four and a half years, he's been learning

CALL:-- *calling Captain Johnny.*

J.W.: Yes, sir, man.

CALL: *Hey. Good afternoon, Jay. How you doin', brother?*

J.W.: Hey, Steve, I'm doing all right. How are you? I don't know if we want to really --

M.Z.: Do you want me to pause this?

J.W.: No, you're fine.

CALL: *-- getting back onboard. Are you guys coming right back out?*

J.W.: No, Steve. Actually, we're just going up here to check on our barge and then we're going to be coming out light boat. But as far as coming out with a barge, we won't be out of here until tomorrow.

CALL: *All right, man, just checking. I think we're going to be gearing up and rolling out of here sometime in the next few hours. Just wanted to know if I'd have to work around you.*

J.W.: No, I think we'll be fine, Steve. Is everything else going well? You have a good time off?

CALL: *Yeah, everything's well enough.*

J.W.: Okay, good enough, buddy. Have a good day.

CALL: *Take care, brother.*

M.Z.: He's on the Schuylkill?

J.W.: Yeah, he's on the Schuylkill.

M.Z.: What company is that?

J.W.: Vane Brothers.

M.Z.: I think I interviewed somebody who used to be captain on there; Mike Grosh, do you know him? He lives in Claiborne, right where I live on the Eastern Shore, near St. Michaels. He works for Vane. But now his boat is the *Oyster Creek*, I think.

J.W.: He got one of the new boats. With a barge coming through here, I think they were in some of the pictures Jamie had. Yeah, you've got about two feet on each side coming through here is all you have.

M.Z.: Crazy.

J.W.: And you just kind of line it up and steer on through there. (Laughs.)

M.Z.: Trying to get a picture of you right when we're going through.

J.W.: Come on in here, mate.

I.E.: I'm okay, I don't wanna mess her picture up, though. (Laughter.)

M.Z.: You're part of the action.

J.W.: The barge is a lot wider than the boat, so you can imagine. You can tell here, too, it's pretty much low tide, and these barges are drawing around ten and half feet, so we wouldn't be able to get one through because it's just so shallow in the bridges. We wouldn't be able to get one through right now. We'd have to wait for high water, another couple feet of water.

What do you think, Iain? We're celebrities now, buddy. (Laughter.)

M.Z.: That's right, it's your claim to fame.

I.E.: I was just laughing last night, came through there. Only thing about, you know, coming on the boat, I was in my pajama pants. I come to the bridge and all these people looking at me, standing over here in my pajamas. (Laughter.)

M.Z.: So this is right where we're heading, right here?

J.W.: Yeah, this is it right here.

M.Z.: I recognize it from the pictures. So up on the left, can you just describe it?

J.W.: Okay, the first barge tied here to the bulkhead, that one's completely loaded and she'll be the next one in line to unload behind the one that they're working on now. She's drawing about ten and half feet of water on the stern and probably about ten foot on the bow. That barge came out of Tappahannock and that's about a eighteen-hour run from Tappahannock over here to Salisbury, to get over here loaded. To go back with an empty barge to Tappahannock, it's about fifteen or sixteen hours, because you just make a little bit better time without the draft.

M.Z.: Did you say how long it takes you to come over?

J.W.: To come over here, about eighteen hours, to come over here.

M.Z.: Are these Ward barges or Purdue?

J.W.: No, Purdue owns these barges, these are all Purdue barges.

M.Z.: Does it make a huge difference, each different barge, or all they all pretty much the same?

J.W.: These barges, there's pretty much two different class of barges. These are 195 feet long and 35 feet wide.

I.E.: About 70,000 bushels.

J.W.: About 70,000 bushels on there, which is about 1,600 tons, is what they'll load on them.

M.Z.: Sixteen hundred tons?

J.W.: About 1,600 tons on these barges. And then the other class of barge, which obviously it can't come up here because it's too wide, but they're 260 feet long and 54 feet wide. And they're loading out at about 3,000 tons, so they're carrying almost twice as much. This barge is loaded with corn and they're sucking it out with these two.

This facility, actually, doesn't have a whole lot of storage so the only storage they have is in that corrugated tank right here. So the only thing they can do is pretty much load from the barge to a truck and then the truck will go right out. Wee the empty trucks coming in? So they're actually just pulling it right out of the barge. They keep a little bit in this tank just to be able to load in between trucks.

M.Z.: Is this the only facility that you deal with here in Salisbury?

J.W.: Yes. Now up in the Nanticoke River they unload barges, but they do a different technique of unloading. They'll actually unload the barge with a track hoe or excavator and just bring it out, unload it right from the bucket of the excavator right into a truck. So you can actually see the corn sucking up in these. You probably see it if you –

M.Z.: Go out.

J.W.: Yeah.

M.Z.: Hey, Jamie, could you get a picture –

Jamie: Of that? Yeah, absolutely.

M.Z.: I might get a picture from inside here.

J.W.: Yeah. I tell you, probably can see it pretty good from up here, from up on that top level.

M.Z.: Okay, I'll pause this for a while.

I.E.: Don't leave it down here then go up there. (Laughter.) Be alone when you play it.

(Begin Ward S'bury 2 FR)

J.W.: I don't think they were as productive as they had hoped.

M.Z.: I think I didn't actually have this recording yet when you were saying what it used to be like with all those other barges. Could you talk about that a little bit more, how jammed up it would get?

J.W.: Sure. I guess in this quarter mile stretch between the bridges and the end of the river here where it's not navigable anymore, it could get as high as twenty-one barges in this one area. And it'd really be difficult to get in and out with the barge in the position that you needed to put it in and get the one that you were taking out, get it out. Really be kind of tricky. At one time, it was two oil facilities here that were owned by one company.

M.Z.: What company was that?

J.W.: I can't remember right now. They were just going out when I was coming into it. Then it was an aggregate business here and it was a construction business. It was kind of crowded up here. It was a really happening area.

M.Z.: And you said the deckhands could get pretty frustrated.

J.W.: Yeah, when you're shifting barges for four or five hours a night, just trying to get the one out that you needed, on cold nights, when there was ice and rain and snow, it was very frustrating to be a deckhand in those conditions up here. All the deckhands used to hate coming to Salisbury when it was like that. But it's a whole lot more enjoyable now, I mean as far as shifting barges and the barge traffic. Anyway, up this way is a whole lot better now.

M.Z.: Did you start out doing that kind of work? Did you work directly for your dad?

J.W.: I started out directly under my dad on deck, I did.

M.Z.: Tell me about that.

J.W.: It was fun a lot of times. Dad, I guess, looking back I can see how patient we were with each other (laughs) but at the time, it wasn't so obvious. But, yeah, I started – I graduated high school in 1995, then I went to work at Newport News Shipyard and went through the apprentice school for four and half years.

M.Z.: That's right. I'm so glad you brought that up because I completely forgot about that. Because we have a tug, we have the pilothouse from a tug that came out of that program, it's called *The Huntington*.

J.W.: Okay, all right.

M.Z.: Eventually, that's going to be part of this exhibit, we have to fix it up and stuff.

J.W.: Oh, that's cool.

M.Z.: But that's great to have a connection to that program. So tell me about that program, how long was that for?

J.W.: That program was for four years. I went through as an inside machinist and actually in the machine department, we did a rotation, depending on the machine, a lathe, and metal machines and actually, ship repair and new work. But we went through different rotations where we'd spend two or three months at each station until we actually graduated that station and moved on to the next one.

It was very, very interesting, an amazing program as far as learning hands-on ship construction, working beside guys that have been in ship construction for their whole lives, and these guys are seventy years old.

M.Z.: Wow, that must be really incredible.

J.W.: A wealth of knowledge, I mean, unbelievable.

M.Z.: It's beautiful out, but with the noise, I'm wondering if we could go just inside.

J.W.: Yeah, let's just go in here.

M.Z.: It's nicer sitting outside, but I think the sound will be better in here. Are they the instructors, or how does that work?

J.W.: In that program, you actually do your school physics classes, ship construction classes, math, some business classes, leadership classes, things of that sort. You actually had sit-down classroom time with those classes throughout your four years. And you go through semesters just like college would.

Then also, in addition to that, you do your shop training and more so, probably 75 percent of the schooling is shop training and actual hands-on, different levels of the ship construction. It's an amazing program, it really is, just everything that you learn there from the history of shipbuilding right on through the modern day aircraft carriers and submarines.

M.Z.: And the location is so historically important.

J.W.: It is, and just what you see coming in and out of Newport News Shipyard, it's a lot of history there and a lot of knowledge. It was an excellent program to go through, it really was.

M.Z.: What was your goal for going to that program? Why did you decide to do that?

J.W.: When I graduated high school, I didn't feel like going to a college or university was really my cup of tea right then. And I'd made up my mind if I could get into that program, I was going to go just until I could figure out just what I wanted to do. You're making money the whole time, so from a financial standpoint, it works out pretty well.

M.Z.: They pay you while you're going through –

J.W.: They pay you forty hours a week whether you're in the classroom or in the shipyard.

M.Z.: That's amazing.

J.W.: It is, it really is. That's one reason it's kind of a tough program to get into because you're competing with guys and girls that have just gotten out of high school, and right on up to fifty year old men trying to get into the same program to get a trade and to actually get their foot in the door down there to work there or really, take it anywhere once you go through the apprentice school.

M.Z.: Do you think that your background, your family's history helped you get in with that part of it?

J.W.: I looked at that, at that stage, it really made me proud because out of high school, that was the first thing I'd done on my own. I went down, I didn't know anybody there, I didn't have any connections, and I just went down and sat down, actually filled out an application at the desk at the apprentice school registration office. And a couple weeks' time, went through some interviews and got accepted.

It was really a proud point. Being eighteen, and getting a job when you're eighteen and getting into the apprentice school, and such a respected school. The shipbuilding, I figured, as far as whatever I did later on, I knew it would pretty much be on the water whether it was in the ship construction stage or the mechanical stage of it or the actual pilotage and running the boats or from the company standpoint. So I figured it wouldn't hurt anything to go through the shipyard.

M.Z.: Did you ever think about doing something different with it other than working for your family?

J.W.: I did, I did. I thought about staying at the shipyard in Newport News and thought about some other shipyards, actually going to work. And of course, around 1998, '99, 2000, it was a whole lot more construction going on everywhere and then the ship construction was busy then. It was busier then than now, I would say. But it was a lot of room for opportunity then, a lot more room for opportunity then.

But now, looking back, I'm certainly glad I did what I did, and I always kept it in the back of my mind that I would come to work in the family business.

M.Z.: That was always your plan?

J.W.: It was always my plan, yeah, I'd say so, I'd say so. At that point in my life, I really didn't have a plan set in stone. But I figured in the back of my mind, I always would come at some point. And after exploring a few other options, I figured it was a whole lot more opportunity here than it was anywhere else.

M.Z.: How did your dad feel about you going to that program? Was he supportive of you?

J.W.: He was supportive 100 percent of that program, he really was. I wouldn't have felt that way, but the way that my dad would have thought, his mindset would have been, if I'd come right out of high school at eighteen, come to work on the tugboats and not have known anything else, he would have thought that he had persuaded me or, I don't want to say trapped, but led me into a career that would have been what I had the rest of my life without exploring any other avenues.

So he was supportive 100 percent of doing something else, other than what he had done. And I think that he feels better now, too.

M.Z.: That you're going into it with your eyes wide open.

J.W.: Going into it more mature. Not that I was that mature, but I came in at twenty-two instead of eighteen, you know. So I did know some different things, I'd actually lived outside of the house and been in society, I guess, a little bit before I came in and then worked under dad.

M.Z.: Can you tell me again what it was like working with your dad? You graduated from that program, and then what happened?

J.W.: Graduated from the program and then I worked in the shipyard for another six months after I graduated the program. I left the shipyard and went to work on the *Gram-Me* with dad under him as his deckhand for about a year and a half. He taught me a lot, he really did. He taught me a lot about being on the water. And I'd been on the boats before and worked with him on weekends and maybe not took it as serious then as I did when it was my full-time job, but still –

M.Z.: But as a kid, you did go out with him some?

J.W.: As a kid, I did go out with him.

M.Z.: So you were kind of familiar?

J.W.: Kind of familiar. It was, like I say, you kind of take it a little more serious when it's your job, your full-time job. And we got along real well, we did.

M.Z.: Well, wait a minute. You said earlier something like now you realize that you were pretty patient with –

J.W.: (Laughs.) For the most part, we got along real well. I mean, with anything, it can be frustrating being with the same people and having a working relationship, and a roommate relationship, and being in tight quarters for so long, it's hard to carry the leadership role and the stern captain, I'm-the-boss role, and then sit down and eat supper with everybody after you've just maybe reprimanded your deckhand for not doing something correctly.

And you got to find the line in there that you don't want to cross to make your living conditions measurable. Because if you have somebody on a boat that really doesn't want to be there, or has a bad attitude, or doesn't pitch in as a team player, then it funnels all the way down to everybody and it just makes your whole hitch not very pleasant at all.

Where, just the opposite way, if you've got people that really care, a good attitude and everybody pitches in, everybody plays as a team, and you can make it as fun as you want. Dad, he taught me that. He actually taught me how to make the best of everything. The weather's bad, it's cold, we were talking about earlier, being on deck with ice. Nobody wants to be in those situations. Everybody's got to be there and you kind of make the best of it more or less, and make it fun. You can make it fun

M.Z.: Now that you're captain yourself, have you learned how to handle that kind of living situation, that vibe?

J.W.: I like to think so. (Laughs.)

M.Z.: Create a good atmosphere.

J.W.: I like to think so.

M.Z.: Seems like everybody has a good attitude on this boat.

J.W.: Yeah, it seems like it. I try to pass that down. I bring up Iain, not to take anything away from the other guys, because Mike, he was in the industry before I was into it, but Iain was kind of new to it. Iain's got a real neat story, you'll want to talk to him later on. He grew up on a sailboat that was built in the twenties, or something like that, and his parents. He actually never lived in a house until he was in high school and moved in with his aunt.

But anyway, I like to think that I took Iain in. I'm sure you hear it a lot, or we hear it a lot, but a lot of times it's easier to teach somebody that doesn't know anything about it than it is to take somebody that has done it and try to retrain them in your ways and change somebody. I guess it's kind of the old dog, new trick thing.

M.Z.: That's really interesting, Jay. I was just thinking as you were talking that it must be that different boats or different companies have kind of a different culture, you know, they have a different style, different customs.

J.W.: They do.

M.Z.: Not just in terms of the technical stuff, which I'm sure there's variation there, but also the more informal stuff, just the daily life kind of thing.

J.W.: Exactly, exactly. Well, just like you say, some of the last boats that I know of on the bay that are still owner operated and that carries a whole different, I'm sure, style of running a boat or business than a lot of other boats and businesses that guys are used to.

M.Z.: What do you think some of the differences are?

J.W.: We're a lot less formal as far as your chain of command. We like to see what's going on on our boats, be on there. And, mechanically, you know, you can tell what's going on. But even down to running your crews and being around the guys, I think it gives them a little more sense of pride in being on the boat and actually taking the initiative to keep the boat in good working order. I'm not saying that with everybody, but if they're working right next to the man that owns the boat, it seems to be that they say, "Well, hey, you know, I can kind of relate to this guy. I can get in here and jump in and do this or do that."

Even standing watches on the run, it's a little less formal than a regular, at 6:00 we switch hands and you go down and eat or whatever. You know, I'll get up in the evenings and say, "All right, guys, I'm going to come down here and cook y'all a big supper," you know, and it's a little different. I'm sure it's not many boats that captains actually go down and cook supper for everyone. I think it adds a personable sense to the boat.

M.Z.: Did you learn some of that directly from your dad?

J.W.: Sure, absolutely.

M.Z.: Like, do you imitate things that he'd do.

J.W.: Yeah, absolutely. I find myself doing that a lot.

M.Z.: What are some other examples? Can you think of any? I know it's hard to think when you're put on the spot, but if you do think of any, I'd be interested to hear about that.

J.W.: It is. I will, I will.

M.Z.: Let's go back to your chronology then. You finished up the apprenticeship, you worked in the shipyard for a little while, you started with your dad as deckhand.

J.W.: I started with dad as deckhand.

M.Z.: And then how long did you do that for?

J.W.: While I was in the apprentice school with the shipyard, I worked day shift most of the time. I went to school with CMTI there in Gloucester and got my captain's license at night while I working at the shipyard. So I held a license when I came to work for my dad. I already had my license and worked on deck. And then in 2000, we had bid on a contract and actually got a contract running pre-casted concrete from Cape Charles to Camden, New Jersey.

It was for a bridge system that they were putting in at JFK Airport, and they were unloading the concrete in Camden, New Jersey. So that was the first job where we ever really diversified out of the grain business and got into a little bit of the construction side of it. And at the time when we got the contract, it was only the two boats, the *Nicky Jo C* and the *Gram-Me*, and the grain business was a little bit slow at the time.

M.Z.: When was this, did you say? 2000?

J.W.: This was in 2000. We bought this boat, the *Captain Johnny*, with the plan of me running a boat with my own crew and kind of putting the third boat into the rotation. We put this boat right on that job with the concrete. The other two boats stayed in the grain business.

M.Z.: So the first time you were working independently as a captain, you were doing this whole other route.

J.W.: I was doing a whole 'nother route, exactly.

M.Z.: How was that for you?

J.W.: I enjoyed it because I was – well, my dad and Floyd were doing this route, doing the grain, what they've always done. I enjoyed it because I felt like I'd got into it and I was doing my own thing, you know. I wasn't in their business, and they weren't in my business and on this boat – of course we were all there to help each other if we needed it. And if work was slow on one end or the other, we went that way. I ran grain with this boat also in between slow times with the concrete.

M.Z.: What about your learning curve? I mean here, it's very particular, it's very challenging because it's so narrow and so shallow, but you must get into kind of routine with it. But when you're running up to New Jersey it's like, whoa this is a whole different set of conditions, I imagine.

J.W.: It is, it is.

M.Z.: And sometimes you're more open ocean or no? Or is it all inland?

J.W.: We had another job we ran some in the ocean. It ended up being only about a twenty mile stretch in the ocean, maybe thirty miles. But we ran up to Egg Harbor, New Jersey. We were actually carrying boat molds from down in Carolina. So that was two; one end was intracoastal; the other end was the open ocean. And that was a different route, it was different conditions than dad or Floyd had ever done. I was proud of that, you know, being in different places than they had ever been and explaining to them what it was like.

M.Z.: So you were in the position to be like the teacher.

J.W.: Yeah, we kind of switched roles there for a little while. And at twenty-four, twenty-five years old, that's a pretty cool thing when you can sit down and eat supper with your father and actually tell him what you've done that he hadn't done in the business he'd been in all his life. So that was a neat setting and a neat way that all that unfolded.

M.Z.: Was it difficult for you to learn those new conditions?

J.W.: It was difficult, it was.

M.Z.: Did you ever get into any dicey situations?

J.W.: Never got into any real, real dicey situations. Maybe a few times with the weather conditions and as far as being navigable, like down in Intracoastal Waterway where it's real tight, real shallow water, maybe the water's not necessarily where it's marked or where the channel is. Times where you would get a little nervous, but it kept you on your toes. It kept me on my toes, anyway. You knew that it wasn't a choice, you had to get it done.

That's one thing about this, or being on a boat in general. You're committed, you can't walk away and throw your hands up and say, "I quit," or "I'm done, I'm a leave it." You got to stay with it until you at least get to a dock. That teaches you a lot in itself as far as I guess, it's problem-solving skills. It's room for error, but it's no room for quitting, you know, it's no room for walking away from anything. That really teaches you a lot. And just like passing that down to Iain is – and he knows the theory behind everything and he's turned out to be an excellent captain.

But when you get to the point where you start at deckhand, then you move up to being a mate and, as a mate you can even knock on a door whether it's, like in my case my father or whoever's the captain on the boat and say, "Look, I don't know what to do." And you always get guidance. But when you got the guys coming to you saying, "Hey, what do I do in this situation?" you're stuck there and you wiggle your way out some kind of way. That's a interesting part of it as far as being an efficient problem solver. You don't have a choice.

M.Z.: Yeah, I bet. That's really interesting. I haven't talked to anybody who's put it quite that way. That's a really good point.

J.W.: Let me yell down to Iain, I want to get him up here. Or if you want to come down here, it's fine, too. Either way.

M.Z.: Sure, yeah, I'll come down, I can come in. Hey guys.

I.E.: Where have y'all been? We've been worried sick. (Laughter.)

M.Z.: Not too many places to go. So what's going on?

Jamie: We just been having story time in here, not much.

J.W.: You should have been recording down here.

I.E.: We've been parachuting and caught on fire, skydiving, hanging out by the fire.

M.Z.: Awesome.

(Begin Ward S'bury 3 FR)

I.E.: I started on a tugboat almost five years ago, just as deckhand. Something new, I'd never been on a tugboat before – well, besides just looking around, never worked on one. Walked down the dock one day, because Jay talked to a friend of mine and said they were looking for someone, so I walk down and said, "I'll try it out," and here I am.

M.Z.: So you grew up down there on the sailboat in Tortola, and then you came up to go to high school, did you say?

I.E.: Yes. Well, came up to Charleston because the charter business had kind of slowed down so then my daddy came up there for work. And then, it was big school in the city and it wasn't really what I was used to, I was more used to smaller schools and didn't really like it a whole lot, the big school. So, my dad had a sister up in Deltaville she said, "You all should come check this place out, it's pretty small." And we did.

M.Z.: And then Jay ran into a friend of yours?

I.E.: Right. Jay, I think, was talking to a friend of mine, mentioned that they were looking for help. And I walked down the dock in Deltaville where they were tied up and went and talked to him. Here I am.

M.Z.: So do you think that all you're growing up on sailboats, did that help you be able to handle this big huge boat? I mean, relatively speaking, big huge boat.

I.E.: I'd say definitely. Just being around boats as a kid growing up, you know, handling small boats, it's kind of the same fundamentals, transfer over. You get used to how momentum affects things. The biggest thing on the water, I guess, is the heavy equipment difference – well, different from heavy equipment on land is the momentum. You get used to how

you work with that. Growing up as a kid on boats and always being around boats, I guess you kind of, it's sort of second nature.

M.Z.: What size boats when you were growing up, the sailboats?

I.E.: The sailboat I grew up on was a fifty-foot wooden ketch built in Argentina during World War II. It was a pretty neat boat; old funky wooden boat. And, yeah, that's what I spent my childhood on.

M.Z.: And you all were mostly in the West Indies or all over the place?

I.E.: A little bit all over. I guess mostly down in Carriacou which is a small island just north of Grenada, all the way down on the end of the island chain. So I went through the better part of elementary school down there.

M.Z.: So you did go to a school, you weren't home schooled?

I.E.: Right, I think I home schooled maybe two years total out of my childhood but mostly went to school down there.

M.Z.: Where you in a public school with regular kids from the island?

I.E.: Yeah.

M.Z.: That must have been really interesting and cool.

I.E.: Yeah, it's a little different. It was neat, though, to be there.

M.Z.: Was that an English island, English speaking?

I.E.: It was English speaking, yes. It was, like most islands, it was French at one time and English when they got their independence so they spoke English there, yeah.

M.Z.: Tiny place, isn't it?

I.E.: Yeah, pretty small.

M.Z.: Was it a sugar island?

I.E.: Grenada's known pretty much for their spices like nutmeg and cinnamon. Carriacou, which is the small island where I grew up is, I guess they're not really known for anything.

M.Z.: Fishing and stuff?

I.E.: Yeah, fishing. Yeah, it's a pretty small island; it's a thirteen square mile island.

M.Z.: So you must have really grown up on the water.

I.E.: Yeah.

M.Z.: I mean, literally.

I.E.: Yeah. (Laughter.)

M.Z.: But you must have also messed around a lot with fishing and whatever.

I.E.: Yep.

M.Z.: Well that's interesting that those skills would translate into being able to handle a tug, which is sounds like you're saying that's true.

I.E.: I guess it made it easier to learn. Having a good teacher helped a whole lot.

M.Z.: Who's that? (Laughter.)

I.E.: That'd be Jay.

M.Z.: This guy here.

I.E.: You know, still learning. It's a learning process every time we go out pretty much.

M.Z.: But you have the chance to handle the boat completely on your own right? I mean, you're mate, right? So what is it, twelve to six and six to twelve you guys switch off?

J.W.: Yeah, absolutely. And Iain is actually moving more to the captain's role now on this boat so, yeah, it's no problem. It takes a lot of trust to turn someone loose, you know, with your boat and everything that you've done with it. Iain's made it a very easy transition.

M.Z.: That's really great. I've talked with a few guys who work for Vane who are Tangerines. Have you heard that? (Laughter.)

J.W.: Yeah (laughs).

M.Z.: They grew up on Tangier. It sounds like they, growing up on the water, working as watermen, their skills translate very well to working on a tug. And they seem to be really highly regarded in the industry. You're along those lines, too, I think maybe.

J.W.: Yeah, and actually Mike is also. Mike worked on the water a lot in his younger years and went in to work in the tugboat field.

M.Z.: Can you describe a little more specifically what kind of things you have an instinct for that you make use of when you're operating the tug? You said something about the way that the water moves. Can you just be a little more specific about some examples?

I.E.: I guess tide and current plays a big factor, especially when you get around these rivers for instance, pretty narrow and windy. And coming up the river with a loaded barge with a tide behind you, the boat handles different than if the tide's coming out. Because for one, you're going faster and it kind of pushes you around every turn. You have to account for it by starting your turns earlier because it tries to sweep you around to the outside of the river on the turns.

M.Z.: And that's something that you have a feel for just from sailing and stuff, even though the scale is so different here?

I.E.: It helps. It's different in the rivers and around the docks. It's definitely different on what we do on a tugboat, but I guess just being on the water in general as a kid helped kind of get used to everything.

M.Z.: Have you gotten into hairy situations? Well, I don't know if you want to talk about it with Jay sitting right here. (Laughter.)

J.W.: You want me to leave, you want me to leave? (Laughter.)

I.E.: We try to plan the weather accordingly and avoid those, but I wouldn't say "hairy;" maybe not comfortable.

M.Z.: Can you think of any examples?

I.E.: First time, when we're towing a barge, we get to where we're going and we have to wind the tow cable in and then we have about 200 feet of, it's a halter, it's a six inch line we pull in by hand as you back the tug up to the barge. And you pull that in as you back up towards the barge and then come along side of the barge with the tug. One person gets from the tug onto the barge to take the tow bridle off and then you take the tugboat and go around to the other end of the barge where you can put the push cables out and get in what we call pushing gear. That's where you get behind the barge and put the push cables from the tug onto the stern of the barge, tighten them up. It kind of holds it together as one unit. And the first time I did that without Jay on the boat, well the first time I did it in heavy weather, it was not a hairy situation, but it was definitely, I guess you'd say, challenging.

M.Z.: Was it raining or icy?

I.E.: It was raining and blowing. It's blowing pretty hard.

J.W.: These empty barges, when they don't have anything on them, they tend to blow, we call it blowing off, but the wind affects them a whole lot more than the current or tide. You

really have to plan your approach when you're maneuvering a barge, coming in and out of these rivers, changing from pushing gear into towing. It can probably be one of the – I don't know what other captains would say, but for me, it's one of the most challenging maneuvers, I guess you would call it, that we would get into.

Probably for everyone aboard the boat as far as the deckhands or anybody, it's one of the most challenging maneuvers that we have to do. Because most of the time, when we're towing these empty barges or loaded barges, for the most part it's because the weather conditions aren't favorable for us to be pushing them, and it tends to be challenging a lot of times.

M.Z.: So you prefer, if you can, to be able to push rather than tow?

J.W.: We prefer, if we can, to be able to push.

M.Z.: Always.

I.E.: It's easier on everyone.

J.W.: For the boats, like the other two boats that we have with the push boats, with the two push knees on them that are designed for pushing –

M.Z.: That's the *Gram-Me* and *Nicky Jo C*?

J.W.: The *Gram-Me* and the *Nicky Jo C*. They can push their barges in a whole lot more adverse conditions than we'd be able to push. They've got more rubber up there to stick to the barges better if the waves are hitting from the side, they kind of move with the barge where this boat doesn't have that much grip, you would call it, I don't know any other term. But, you know, it's gets working against the barge. So we end up having to tow.

But at the same time, when we're towing, it's more comfortable on a boat that's got a pointed bow rather than a square bow. So each boat has its advantages and disadvantages.

M.Z.: But is that why they got those two boats, because of this particular run that y'all do, was it better suited?

J.W.: Yeah, that boat's better suited. It's hard to say.

M.Z.: You guys and other people I've talked to get a lot of boats from New Orleans. People who are towing in the Chesapeake, that's seems to be a popular place to go to the boat auctions and whatnot. And I'm wondering if there is design elements to the boats there that work really well here in the Chesapeake, or is that just not true?

J.W.: Yeah, I mean it's some similarities, I would say, to this area because they've got the river there, the Mississippi River, and the protected waters where they actually really do use the push boats a lot. Then they have the gulf also, where the model bow boats – the pointed points are what we call model bow boats – where the model bow boats are more prominent probably on the gulf side in those areas, in the open water areas.

So it's similar. I guess their landscape is more similar to this area because we're so close to the ocean with the open water in the bay, with I guess semi-protected water and then all the rivers that we have would be, I would call them protected waters. So it's kind of similarities, I would guess, in that area with our conditions here with the way the weather affects us as far as which boat is best suited for which job. I would say that's probably one of the reasons why a lot of boats come from down that way.

Another reason is just so damn many of them down there. It's a lot of tugboats. It's a lot of commercial boats down there.

I.E.: They're known for their shipyards down there; they build a lot of boats down there. So I guess the more they build, the more they have down there.

M.Z.: And the prices are better.

J.W.: Prices are better and it's a lot more – being retired, you know new boats coming in and older boats being retired, being sold. Which is where, I guess we have always found it better to – I don't know if it's better or not – we've always tended to buy older boats that were in working condition but could be upgraded as was needed. It's worked out pretty well for us.

M.Z.: Yeah, your dad and your uncle talked about that and how part of it is just the family – what should I say – the family tradition of just really wanting to do stuff from scratch.

J.W.: Yeah. Everyone, pretty much in the family has – my granddad, his brothers, my great-grandfather, my father right on down to myself – I guess tend to want to work on the boats, take as much interest in working on the boats as they do running them. It's been an experience. It's pretty neat as far as when you get actually running the boat and you've pretty much worked on every end of it, if something goes wrong, you know right where to go, you know exactly what it is. It gives you more of a feel, more of a, you know, closer contact with everything.

M.Z.: This is a question for both of you guys. But since you mostly do this run, right? Or you also go over to Seaford?

J.W.: Also go over to Seaford.

M.Z.: And then you're coming from Tappahannock and those kind of places.

J.W.: Right, exactly.

M.Z.: So you're dealing with these rivers, narrow banks. What have you learned about just the feel, the feels of the bottom? It must be very different towing in this kind of shallow water than being out on the bay.

J.W.: It is. It's different. This is, as far as being on –

M.Z.: I mean are there things that you can kind of physically feel about where you are, what the conditions are like, what you need to do. Is that making any sense? The vibrations and that sort of thing.

I.E.: This boat is not a whole of difference for how she handles. The *Ellis*, the bigger boat the Wards run, being a bigger boat, in the rivers you just have to take it slow. She doesn't turn as quickly in shallow water, being the propellers and the rudders everything, closer to the bottom in the banks. With a bigger boat like that you just have to take your time and go slow because she's a little slower to respond in shallow waters than she is out in the bay.

J.W.: But then at the same time with the bigger boat, out in the bay, when the weather conditions do get bad, it's a whole lot more comfortable. It's not so much jumping around, it's just a whole lot better ride on there. It's like everything; it's got its pros and cons and everywhere.

M.Z.: Do you guys, I guess especially you, Iain, having growing up on a sailboat and been down in the West Indies, and I know firsthand how beautiful it is down there, and you spent a lot of time in the keys, right?

I.E.: Yeah.

M.Z.: So when you're doing this kind of very industrial work in these bigger boats, compared to a sailboat, do you still get, I don't know, a feel for the beauty and an appreciation of the environment?

I.E.: Oh, definitely.

M.Z.: Can you talk about that, and if there's differences between being on a sailboat and being on a boat like this in terms of that sort of thing?

I.E.: It's not quite the same as being on a sailboat. I guess it's not quite as quiet and peaceful all the time, but you're still out on the water and sometimes you'll have a really pretty sunset coming down the river and it's not too many people, when they're working somewhere, that a lot of people don't get to enjoy that. Their view out their office isn't of a picturesque sunset on a riverbank or a river coming down. So that's neat, when you see stuff like that.

And then every now and then in the summer, we'll have dolphins come in the bay, you'll see them sometimes. That's always neat. Yeah, it's not quite the same as sailing in the Caribbean, but it's got its own beauties.

M.Z.: Do you feel pretty satisfied with this work?

I.E.: I do, I enjoy the work, I actually really love my job. The toughest part, I would say –

B.T. *You all ready to come on through, Captain Johnny?*

I.E.: Yes sir, ready when you are. The toughest part would be, I'd say, being away from home, which for me right now is not that big a deal, a young single guy. But someone with, married with kids it's, you know, obviously tougher. But the work itself, I really enjoy it.

M.Z.: Where is your home base now, Deltaville?

I.E.: Yes, I live in Deltaville. I'm lucky that my parents are still down island, so a place to go visit down there (laughs) when I get the chance.

M.Z.: I worked in Antigua on a sea turtle project, and I did my master's research in Haiti.

I.E.: Oh, neat.

M.Z.: Yeah, very neat.

I.E.: Yeah, I bet that was quite an experience. We were in the Dominican Republic –

M.Z.: I haven't been there.

I.E.: — for about two months one time when I was a kid. It's really neat seeing the way of life. That's really not as poverty stricken as Haiti, but still pretty poor. But super friendly people.

M.Z.: Yeah, same in Haiti. I'm going to turn this off and I want to get some pictures of you. Do you want to stop?

(End of interview.)