

# Oral History Interview

Chesapeake Bay Maritime Museum

“The Culture of Tugs and Tugs in Culture”

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Interviewee: Joshua Biebesheimer (J.B.)  
DOB: 7/10/1981  
POB: Michigan

Interviewer: Michelle Zacks (M.Z.)

Date: December 2, 2011

Location: McAllister Towing of Baltimore, North Locust Point Marine Terminal, Baltimore Harbor

Comments: Josh was born in Michigan, raised in Pompano Beach, FL, and moved to Nova Scotia at age twelve. He grew up around and with a love for the water (sailing, etc.). He is married (wife: Tracy) and has a young daughter (Aubrey), born last year. Josh has a high school diploma, and in Nova Scotia he attended a year-long marine navigation program at a community college, which was a cooperative program of school and work. With that program, he worked on supply boats and on a seismic vessel, searching for oil. I believe he has also taken classes at the Chesapeake Marine Training Institute in Gloucester County, VA. Prior to coming to McAllister, he worked for the Living Classrooms Foundation in Baltimore; he worked on the Chesapeake buy boat *Mildred Belle*. Seven years ago, he started as a deckhand at McAllister; he did that for about five years. Two years ago, he got his Mate towing license. He is currently a mate-in-training with McAllister Towing in Baltimore. He is extremely satisfied with his job and sees it as a life-long career.

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M.Z.: Today is Friday, December 2<sup>nd</sup>. This is Michelle Zacks for the Chesapeake Bay Maritime Museum. We're in the engineer's trailer at McAllister Towing in Baltimore. **Eric Applegarth** is here as well, and I'm talking with Josh. What's your last name Josh?

J.B.: Biebesheimer.

M.Z.: And what's your job here at McAllister?

J.B.: I'm a mate-in-training.

M.Z.: What's your background? How did you come to this? Did you go through an academy?

J.B.: No, I didn't go to a maritime academy in the U.S. I did start out in a community college in Canada. And then actually came to Baltimore to work for Living Classrooms Foundation on the tug boat *Mildred Belle*. And then after about two years working there, I met someone who had been a captain at McAllister, told me there was an opening as a deckhand, and I made a phone call. It's been seven years since. So I've been working here about seven years. I just started from the bottom, worked my way up.

M.Z.: You started as a deckhand. How long were you a deckhand? Now you're a mate-in-training, did you say?

J.B.: Mate-in-Training. I've been a deckhand for about five years. The past two years have been in this transition mate training program. When I started here, they had just switched over to a two-man boat. So I was the first wave of deck utilities. And we had to start out by learning all the engine components as well as handling the dock lines.

M.Z.: What was it before they made the transition to a two-man boat?

J.B.: Well, originally, when they had seven guys on the boat, they would have two wheelhouse personnel, two engineers, two deckhands, and a cook. And that was only about thirty-five, forty years ago. And over through time, they started knocking back. The first person to go was the cook. And I don't think a lot of the guys really got that. They couldn't understand why they got rid of the cook.

So then they had six guys, and then they found a way to make the engine room more accessible and easier to manage and maintain, so they got rid of one of the engineers. And then they got rid of one of the deckhands. They figured that a deckhand can work a little more, so then they went to five. And then eventually they moved their way down to three, then two.

M.Z.: And was all this all just in the interest of cost cutting?

J.B.: Yes, definitely cost cutting. The engine room we kind of say is pretty automated. We don't have to be down there checking on gauges all the time. If something goes wrong,

an alarm signals. So even something as easy as a low oil level, an alarm will go off. Now we don't rely on that, but it's kind of the brains of the operation. So you don't need that engineer down there. Now on the shore side we have two engineers that are just willing to come in and do the maintenance, stuff that we cannot fix.

M.Z.: So they're on call?

J.B.: Yeah.

M.Z.: So as the technology has changed and gotten more sophisticated, the company can cut back on how many people are on the boat?

J.B.: Yeah, and even as far as the technology on deck, the lines have gotten a lot lighter and lot easier to work with. We have winches now, whereas before you made fasten on a H bit, and with the heavy line in the wintertime it would take two people to tie up. Now you get a winch; you don't have to worry about it. Right now you can't go any lower than two, but the biggest problem is the running time for the captain's license. He cannot work any more than twelve hours in a day. So that's the only restriction right there is the twelve-hour rule.

M.Z.: And is that new?

J.B.: No, that's been in effect for quite some time.

M.Z.: So six on and then six hours of rest, right?

J.B.: Well it depends on where you work. It's twelve hours of rest in a twenty-four hour period is how it's written. But a lot of times you can do twelve hour shifts, you can do eight hours on and four hours off, but it's generally a twelve-hour rule, except for extreme circumstances. And then the deckhands, the Coast Guard states it's sixteen hours or something like that, deckhand, is what they're allowed to work.

M.Z.: I'm not very familiar yet with the ship-docking part of the tug industry. Most of the people that I've interviewed are working for Vane Brothers, or Moran, or Kirby down in the Gulf and doing oil barge work, so either coastal or inland waterways. And there, the length of the jobs seems to be a lot different from the kind of work that you're doing here. So here with ship docking, do you just have one guy in the wheelhouse at a time?

J.B.: Yes. Well, it's safer for both of us to be in the wheelhouse at the same time. The deck utility will have to go on deck as well as he'll have to go in the engine room at times. So generally, unless any other reason, they stay in the wheelhouse with the captain for just safety reasons. Especially when you're on a job, you don't get your sea legs, I would say, when you're on a job because you're bumping and pulling and twisting so often that you lose your balance very easily. And if you're down in the engine room, there's machinery down there. It's not very safe to be walking around down there. And it's also not safe to be on deck either because you don't know when the captain's going to turn

real sharp or bump a little bit and you might lose your balance and fall overboard. So the wheelhouse or the galley is the safest place.

But when we're going down the bay in a transit run, generally, we try to keep two people up in the wheelhouse. We'll hire extra crew to come on to come for a long trip so the captain can get rest. But it's more or less to have two people in the wheelhouse is to keep each other awake. (Laughter.)

M.Z.: But how long does each job last here? So what you guys do is you go out and meet the ships at the Key Bridge. Greg was telling me it takes about forty-five minutes to get out there?

J.B.: Yeah. We'll get a call. The agent will call McAllister and say that, "You're going to have a ship coming up the bay on Tuesday." "Okay." And it's usually a couple days in advance. So we follow it on Baltimore Maritime Exchange, and we see the ship coming up the bay. And we're graced by the fact that Cape Henry is about eight hours away, quickest. That's a 20-knot ship is eight hours. The cruise ships, they could do it in eight hours. And if it's a slower ship that goes 14 knots, it's going to be twelve hours to come up the bay. So we kind of have a good heads up. When it's coming through Cape Henry, we know it's going to take eight to twelve hours to get up here.

So we follow it up the bay, it comes into the Key Bridge. We get a call, and we get an hour-and-a-half notice. So if we're at home, they'll call us up and say, "You have a 12:00 shove off," say. And we come in and the engineer fires the engines up about a half hour before shove off, get them warmed up. And then we motor out there. And depending on where the ship is going, the wind conditions, it might take between an hour-and-a-half to two hours to tie it up, and then it's another forty-five minutes to come back to the dock. So all in all, it's about a four-hour evolution.

M.Z.: How long did you say it take to tie them up when you're out there?

J.B.: It takes anywhere from an hour to two hours. I mean, it depends on where it's going. Some ships, if it's coming into Dundalk, we meet them at bridge, probably about a half hour to get to the dock, spin around, push, held to the pier forty-five minutes total, maybe an hour.

M.Z.: So can you describe in more detail what you do when you meet the ship? What does it mean to tie them up? This is audio, so if you can paint a picture with words.

J.B.: All right. So it takes two to tango is a good way to say it. There's a docking pilot. And the docking pilot is in charge of the vessel and gives all the commands to the tugs. So when we go to the Key Bridge, the docking pilot will come aboard the ship, he takes his own pilot boat out there. He boards the ship and he has a list of questions that he has to ask the captain of the ship: How much horsepower do you have; how much are your thrusters, how much power do they have; what's the rudder condition like, if it's a balanced or semi-balanced; it's just more maneuverable or less maneuverable. And then

he takes that information and decides which tugs and where he wants the tugs to be. Generally, the car ships, most of the time, tie up starboard side, too. And the reason is the ramp is positioned on the stern to lay on the dock on the starboard side.

So if it's a car ship coming into Fairfield, which is one of the farthest berths up the channel, the pilot will have two tugs, and one tug will land about mid-ship as it's transiting up, and the other one will land on the other side mid-ship as it's transiting up the channel. And then when it gets closer to the berth, the one ship on the port side will slide up to the shoulder, and the tug that's on the starboard side will slide back to the quarter, which is near the stern. And both tugs will push, and that will spin the ship almost about a ninety-degree turn.

And then they might ask for the tugs to come around and put a line up in the hull chuck (ph), which is a bit that's sunken into the side of the ship. And we could put a line up so we can pull or just to stay there. When the ship is backing around, there's a lot of forces of water. And water is rushing by the hull, and you fall off. Not only is that semi embarrassing to be falling off and then you have to land again, it also takes time. So they like to have a line put up to just stay in your one position.

M.Z.: For somebody who doesn't know anything about this, what does falling off mean?

J.B.: There's a wedge of water – what we call it is bow cushion and stern suction – the wedge of water between the ship rushing by and the tug, and it will cause the tug to move away from the ship. We call it falling off, but it's actually just getting pushed away.

M.Z.: And that's a big faux pas? You don't want to do that.

J.B.: Yeah, because it sometimes might take awhile to come back. And if the pilot wants you there; he wants you there right then and there. When the pilots say, "Push," they want you to push right then and back. The older tugs, sometimes it would take a minute or two in order to react to each command. The newer tugs, we're more advanced. We can get into our line or push against the ship, should be less than ten seconds.

M.Z.: What has made the difference? What kind of technological changes have made a difference?

J.B.: Well, we don't have a rudder anymore. We have a Z-drive.

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

J.B.: Sure. Basically, we have a propeller. And the whole propeller spins 360 degrees, kind of like the old-style outboard motors, the less than four horsepower each. To go in reverse you have to move the whole unit all the way around. That's what our tugs have now. And so without having a rudder speed, and when you go forward and reverse, it's the same position of the propeller. You're just moving that drive all the way around. Does that explain? [Laughter.]

M.Z.: Yeah, I think so. I guess what I still don't understand is how that makes the response time so much quicker.

J.B.: The other boats, they also had a clutch. So when you went from forward to reverse, you had to de-clutch and then clutch in again. And I know the last boat I worked on, it was the *Elizabeth*, and I'd had an eight-second clutch. Now eight seconds, when you put it into gear, you counted eight seconds and then it engaged. So when we put up a line, say it's about thirty feet up and you have about an extra twenty feet off from the ship's side, you can't go right from slack to strain real quick. You can't just tug on the line; it will break. So you have to gently ease into the line.

And if you had a clutch, it took some time to do that because eight seconds. So you're stopped, put into gear, eight seconds, and then it lunges. And when it lunges it just really all of a sudden takes over control. And then you have to stop again and wait eight seconds. And then you can put it back in gear again and you got to wait eight seconds. And then you lunge again and you got to stop. So it took some time.

Now, with the new units we don't have a clutch. We go in reverse; we just spin the unit around. We got power right away. And two of the boats, the *Donal* and the *Kaleen*, we have a reverse pitch, and it was variable pitch. So it's like a fan blade. So if your ceiling fan turned a different way, it rotates, the actual blades spin the opposite way. So more thrust, it's bending the blades more, so it gives more power. And we also have reverse pitch which you spin it the opposite direction, so we have a little bit of power to go in reverse. So you don't have that lunging effect or that possibility of breaking the line, tugging into it too tight.

M.Z.: That's good; that's really helpful. And something I'm not sure if I still understand fully is when you're out there and you meet the ship at the bridge, and you said that the docking pilot has a bunch of questions to ask the tug captain, is that what you said?

J.B.: No.

M.Z.: No.

J.B.: They generally know the tugs, because they've been working in the harbor. It's only if it's an out-of-town tug. No, it's mostly the ship. A lot of times the ship – language is a big factor. And the reason why they have docking pilots is, one reason is that the docking pilot knows the harbor very well, knows where the deep water is, where the shallow water is, knows the piers and the facilities, knows all the local workers in the area, the line handlers, the stevedores, type of thing. Or at least they know who to contact if there's such an issue. And the other reason is the language barrier. They don't want the captain of the ship, who speaks very little English; to tell tugs what to do, so they have a docking pilot.

M.Z.: And the docking pilot has to be bilingual if the ship captain is not a native speaker?

J.B.: No, the ship captain needs to be able to speak English. English is the national language on the water, even though I think French is the most spoken or whatever. But English is on the water, all signs have to be put in English or Greek. And Greek; I think it's "or" Greek.

M.Z.: You're talking throughout the world?

J.B.: Around the world, yes, every ship that comes in. We have ships, they're registered in Panama, but they're Chinese names, all the Chinese characters, all that can be put on the ship, but underneath, it has to be in English. And all the safety signs, says "Exit," it could say "Exito," but it has to say "Exit" in English. So the captain speaks some English. Some of them, they barely speak any English. But the master of the ship should have already contacted his agent. His agent should have been able to fill the Pilot Association in with the characteristics of the vessel: how heavy is it, how deep is it, how much power it has, horsepower, what its drive system is like.

Some vessels, to go from forward to reverse, they have to stop the engine and restart it to go into reverse. And you might only have enough air pressure for two or three starts. So that's very critical for a ship backing into a slip where the ship uses forward and reverse to maneuver itself in. Well if he only has two or three starts and stops, he can't use that as an option. So they're going to use a tug a lot more. So the docking pilot asks the captain of the ship what limitations to work with.

M.Z.: So the docking pilots gets all those technical specifications, and then he tells, I assume it's always a he?

J.B.: There's three; there's one, we call them hybrids: docking and bay pilots, that's a female, Alison Buckler. And then there's two bay pilots that are females.

M.Z.: Okay, so for the most part, it's men?

J.B.: Yeah, it's a man.

M.Z.: Yeah, but there are some women.

J.B.: Yeah.

M.Z.: So the docking pilot finds out all those kind of details. And then he, or occasionally she, tells the tug captain what to do. So then I'd like, if you could, to describe exactly what you do out there when you're at the bridge in terms of tying it, you have to connect yourself to the ship. Describe it for somebody who is completely ignorant.

J.B.: Okay, so we'll give a scenario of a ship going same place, Fairfield. The docking pilot will address the tugs and determine which place that they're going to. So if you're up on the shoulder, a ship is moving ahead generally around seven knots. And to meet the ship

up to the shoulder, you're going to have to go a lot faster. So once you get up to your position parallel, you always want to stay parallel, you get parallel to the ship. You try to match their speed, so if they've sped up or if they've slowed down, whatever, you match their speed. And you have to land on their shoulder, or mid-ship.

And all of that requires very, very, very small turns, watching your throttle a lot. There's what we call bow cushion and stern suction. And up on the shoulder, you'll have this wedge of water. If this ship is moving this way, the bow pushes the water out. So there's this reaction, like I said, the falling-off effect. When you're coming in, you're going to get close enough. If you're up by the shoulder, you're going to get this wedge of water that's going to cut between you and the ship. And it might drive your bow off, so you have to use a little more throttle and a little bit more right wheel turning into the ship to get in there. And you want to land flat, so a lot of times you have to come in on almost a twenty-five degree angle and get that wedge of water to help you, and then you kind of land in nice and smooth.

M.Z.: And are you making actual physical contact with the ship?

J.B.: Yes, we're touching the ship with our rubber tires or the fenders that we have. Once you're alongside, with just a little bit of pressure on the ship, just ever so slightly, you're stuck there. You're keeping your speed up, the same speed as the ship. And there's nothing. Because once that wedge of water eventually changes from between you and the tug, it goes around your bow. And it kind of holds you in nice and tight. And, I mean, if you just move the wheel just a little bit to the other way, to the left, you'll start moving away.

But for the most part, you're stuck there. You don't have to touch anything; more or less, you just stay there. And if we have to put a line up, there's two types of situations, there's lines up that go up top and the crews have to send down a line to us. Or there's a hull chuck and it's a bit that's sunken in the side of the hull. And what we do is we put a bite out, is what it's called.

M.Z.: What's a bite?

J.B.: Bite is we take the eye of the line, we put it on one side of the H bit, and we put basically a big loop around from an eye on one end, a loop that goes up and around through the bull nose and then made fast on the other side of the bit. And the only reason we do that is that way it's easier to get it off, and if we have the opportunity that if we need to get away in a hurry, we could just take the eye off and just back away, and the line will follow its way through.

If the line has to go up to the ship, if it's low enough and you're good enough, you could take your heaving line and a monkey's fist and throw it straight up, and the waiting crew members will take your line and take the heaving line, haul up your messenger line and then haul up your ship line. And it will go up to their hull chuck.

M.Z.: Okay, so we've got heaving line.

J.B.: A messenger, and then the ship line.

M.Z.: And we have a monkey fist.

J.B.: Monkey's fist, yes, which is a weighted ball. You can buy them now, but we still tie them. And it's either a Turk's head knot or the actual monkey's fist knot. And you just put a weight in the middle of it. A lot of times guys use ball bearings or nuts and bolts and stuff like that.

M.Z.: Might be neat if we could have some examples of some of that stuff in the exhibit.

J.B.: Oh, yeah.

M.Z.: So heaving line, messenger line, what was the other one?

J.B.: And then the ship line.

M.Z.: Ship line. What's the difference between those?

J.B.: Well the main purpose of the heaving line with the monkey's fist is to get up and into a distance. So it's a lighter line about three-quarters of an inch, and the monkey's fist is the weight so you could throw it a long distance or straight up. A lot of times we're throwing them straight up directly above us. And then it's attached to a messenger line, which is a little bit thicker, maybe about an inch and a half. That way, they have more grip when they're hauling up the actual ship line, the towing line. The towing line is very thick and it's very heavy.

M.Z.: How thick?

J.B.: In diameter, about three, four inches in diameter, I'd say.

M.Z.: Ship line and towing line is the same thing?

J.B.: Yeah, same thing, yeah.

M.Z.: And what material are those lines made out of these days?

J.B.: They're synthetic, which is plastic, but it's very, very safe to work with. There's no stretch, and it's not like polypropylene or hemp, which is a natural fiber. The technology is so advanced, and just with the smaller diameter it's got a stronger hold. For instance, the one line that's on the *Kaleen* that we're using right now is rated at 240, tons which is the weight of the tug, you can hang the tug on the line, it's that strong.

M.Z.: And what's the diameter of the line?

J.B.: It's about three inches. The diameter or the weight has nothing to do with how strong the line is.

M.Z.: It's the material.

J.B.: Yeah, with today's technology. The old line, it did. You know, the heavier thicker line, all the captains, "Oh, that's the stronger line." Today, it doesn't. There's line out there with the technology that's called Spectra. It's smaller, it could be almost an inch and it's twice as strong. It's like Kevlar. It's just very, very strong stuff.

M.Z.: You seem like a pretty young guy. I don't know how old you are, but some of the older guys that you work with, do they have a hard time looking at this stuff, kind of trusting it?

J.B.: Yes.

M.Z.: Because it looks too thin?

J.B.: Too thin, yep. There's one guy, Captain Hardin, he's been working on this harbor for almost forty years, and he started out with the original Baker-Whitely. And just even last week having discussion with the line, in his mind thicker, heavier, stronger. But, in fact, it's just very hard for him to wrap his mind around that it's a lot lighter and thinner to be stronger.

M.Z.: Is he getting there?

J.B.: You have to remind him. Steve, this is fine. It's rated a lot higher. There's standings, safe working load type of limits. And you just have to present the evidence and he eventually gets it. I can understand. It would be hard to understand that all these years you just always thought bigger and thicker was stronger.

M.Z.: Yeah, I imagine that's a really hard transition to make because so much of the work that you guys do is experiential. I'm sure it does matter what you learn in the books, but when you really learn is by doing it.

J.B.: Yeah.

M.Z.: And you have this kind of physical knowledge of how things work, so to make changes, it's like muscle memory or something, you really have to relearn I guess.

J.B.: Yep.

M.Z.: Okay, so you've been describing tying up those lines. And so is it generally one tug, sometimes two, sometimes three?

J.B.: Yeah, I would say on average it's two tugs that is used. And when you get to the ship, you know, it depends on where they're going. It's very hard to give scenarios because some ships turn to port, some ships turn to starboard, some go bow in, some go stern in. So regardless, when we're docking a ship, we're pulling on it, we're pushing on it constantly to get it lined up. Every boat has got the wheel, just a standard conventional ship, it's got the wheel, it's either right-handed or left-handed wheel, and it depends on which way it's spinning is what determines right and left wheel. Right-hand wheel is going to spin clockwise going forward. Now when it goes backwards, it's going to cause what's called a port backing. And this theory is true is that with the port backing ship, it's going to make the stern of the ship move to the port as it's backing up.

So if you just envision a ship a long distance away backing up with no assist, no thruster, no tug, if it's got a port back, it's going to be constantly moving port. It's going to eventually go in a whole complete circle because the stern's going to back to port all the way. So ships will use that to their advantage or disadvantage. And they'll use tugs to counter it or help it. So on really windy days, if it just so happens it's a port back and you got a wind that's going to help it, that's great. But a lot of times it's a disadvantage to have that port back. And if they don't have a port back, they're going to have a right back [laughter] you know – a starboard back. You have to have one or the other.

And so when the ship is backing up into its slip or into its berth, you're going to have tugs on the bow, and on the quarter if it's a two-boat job constantly backing a little bit to straighten the ship up, or even pushing on it to straighten the ship up. And that's all done by the pilot. The pilot will tell the tug by its name, "*Kaleen*, back her up." And there's different commands that they use.

We use in this harbor – and every harbor's different – we have idle, which is a little bit more than a dead stop, it's just a little bit of power into it, about a quarter speed, or just a little bit lower than a quarter, because then you have easy, which is a quarter speed. And then you have one bell, which is half, and then you have full ahead. And if you have two engines, the pilot might say, "Give me two bells," which is two engines, half speed. And then other slang, "shake her up," which means just give me all the power you got, because a lot of the boats shake when they get full power. And then you get into other fractions. Some pilots will use, "Give me two-thirds." So you just have to look at your RPM gauge. You know what your maximum is, you know what your minimum is, and you just figure it out yourself.

M.Z.: To somebody who's not involved with this at all, it sounds incredibly confusing.

J.B.: [Laughter.] No, with the tugs, it's pretty simple because other than drive the tug and the actual knowing what we need to do for the pilot, how to maneuver the tug, the actual job is pretty mindless because the pilot is telling us what to do. They tell us, "Okay, back her up." "Come ahead." So the actual maneuvering of the ship for us to get the ship to the dock isn't us, it's the pilot. But to maneuver the tug –

M.Z.: That takes experience and years.

J.B.: Yes. And you got two tugs working. That could be confusing at times.

M.Z.: In what ways?

J.B.: Some of the pilots like to use first-name basis, so Josh and John sound very similar, and sometimes Bob and Steve. It depends on how well the radio sounds. If it's a two-boat job, a lot of times we use whistle signals to answer back to the pilot. Whoever's closest to the pilot will blow the whistle. And the signals have changed so much. There used to be a whole list, there was about twenty different whistle combinations, and the pilots knew exactly. Before radios, they would be out on the wing of the ship blowing a whistle. And the mate would be out there listening to the whistle, and then he would reply with the whistle.

Now we listen on the radio and if there's a lot of activity, we'll switch to the whistle just so that way we use less time on the radio. Because each time you key that mike, sometimes the pilot's keying at the same time and you talk over each other. And, of course, you don't hear what they want. So whistle signals, today the twenty combinations have turned into about three or four. One blast of the whistle means come ahead and stop, or I understand. Two is backing up. Three is okay, I get it. And four is full speed ahead. But that's basically all. We've shortened that list down.

M.Z.: Does that have anything to do with the technological improvements?

J.B.: The radio is more advanced now, and I think it's just tradition. I think that that tradition will affect, has kind of disappeared a little bit. We've been spoiled with radios for so long that I think that the importance of the whistle system isn't in existence now.

M.Z.: I know that there had been fairly recent changes, I guess within the time span of your experience, changes in the docking pilots and the bay pilots and their relationship to the tug.

J.B.: Yes, I don't know the exact time when it happened, but back in the day they had the captain of the tug, he was a pilot, and the mate was on board. So what happened was the tug would go out to the ship and the captain of the tug would climb the ladder to the ship, and the mate would take over and drive the tug. So the captain of the ship would be the pilot and would tell his mate, "Okay, yeah, push, pull." And so each company had their list of their own docking pilots. So Moran had a few pilots, McAllister had a few pilots, we handled our own ships. We had our pilots that were captains with the company, they were company employees.

So then they broke apart and formed their own association, the Docking Pilot Association. The Moran pilots, they started working with McAllister and McAllister pilots started working with Moran and Krause as well, which is the other tug company. And I think there was some animosity there.

Some guys that were most likely promised a career, because you went from being a deckhand, you moved your way up the ladder. And once you got to mate, you knew you were going to be a captain soon and you were going to be a pilot soon. Most of the time it was, my dad was the captain. You were the son, the son was the mate. So when dad was ready to retire, you were going to take his place. So when they broke apart, that chance or promise went away. Moran had their guys, McAllister had their guys, and then they were merged, and there was no seniority.

So I think a lot of dreams died then. Then the third and final merge was they merged the Association of Maryland Pilots, which was the bay pilots, with the docking pilots. And what's going on with that is that not only is it just one company, but the newer pilots that are coming in to the apprentice program are learning to be docking pilots and bay pilots. So the older docking pilots, they didn't go down the bay. A lot of time, they just have the harbor chart, they draw the chart and they know only the harbor.

The newer pilots, they have to do the whole bay. They have to be able to bring a ship from Cape Henry, or from Delaware, the C&D Canal, to Baltimore and vice versa, go back, and are now learning how to dock the ships, too. A lot of the bay pilots, they don't know how to dock the ships. They know some, a little bit, but they don't do that. That's not part of their job. So probably in the next twenty years, you're not going to have a difference between a docking pilot and a bay pilot. They're all going to be one unit type thing.

M.Z.: What do you think about that?

J.B.: I think it's somewhat good, but at the same time the docking pilot, it's a skill in itself and not saying anybody could take a ship down the bay, but having the most experience just docking ships in the harbor, you have to have a feeling for it. I'm not trying to sound negative, but I think some people just might not have that feeling for that. And when you're working with these pilots and you know when they come up the ship, if it's a docking pilot you know that they're going to do their job A-one. They're going to know that they're looking out for your safety, and they know how to get the job down quick. I mean, we don't do it quick and dirty.

There's a difference between pushing a ship for two hours versus pushing a ship for four hours. And that two extra hours, sometimes it takes a while or they run into the mud. It's good to have guys that are really perfectionists in their field. And I feel that if they're bringing it into the bay as well, they're going to be on the bay, say, bringing a ship into the bay, and then maybe every other month they're going to be docking the ship in the harbor. So they're not going to keep that experience firsthand all the time.

M.Z.: Can you say a little bit more about what it means to have a feel for it?

J.B.: Yeah, it kind of goes back to your first time going on the bay and sailing or even rowing a boat, to know what the boat wants and what the boat feels like. And the feeling is knowing that if you're rowing a boat, and to know that if you give a real strong pull on

your left oar you're going to spin real sharp; but if you give just a gentle spin, to know that you're not going to turn as sharp. And to work together with both oars, you feel the motion of the vessel kind of within yourself. So you know without having to think too hard of what you need to do to get something done. You just kind of feel what's going to happen. I mean, you don't think too much into it, I guess.

M.Z.: Where do you think that feel comes from?

J.B.: Some people just have it. There's other guys I've met through the years that they can't steer a boat at all, they can't steer straight. And they don't have that feeling where when you're steering a boat with a wheel, or even any boat, to know that you give two or three degrees left, and then you give two or three degrees right, you're just going to fishtail all the way down. They don't have that ability to go two to three degrees left and then only one to two right. They don't know that the wind is blowing them this way, which is going to cause them to be off course, so they don't need to constantly be giving the same degree of turn both ways.

So I've just grown up on the water, and just from the beginning, being young and steering sailboats and taking sailing lessons. And eventually a lot of the guys, you just get it, I think. It's hard to explain where you get this feeling for a boat. And each boat's different in each and every way, but you either have it or you don't. I think airline pilots probably agree with that. Some have it, and some don't.

M.Z.: Where did you grow up? Did you grow up in Canada?

J.B.: Yeah, I grew up Nova Scotia.

M.Z.: So you're Canadian?

J.B.: Yeah, I'm dual. I was born in the U.S. but my parents retired, born and raised in Florida, and then my dad had this great idea of retiring in Nova Scotia. And so we moved up to Nova Scotia. That's why I would say I'm more or less from Canada because I spent my teenage years in Canada from age twelve till twenty-one when I moved down here.

M.Z.: And you always had a water orientation?

J.B.: Yeah, I did dock attendant and marina supervisor, and then worked on charter boats and booze cruises.

M.Z.: So of all the different kinds of water experiences you've had, how does this rate, this job here?

J.B.: This is by far the most professional. I would say this is kind of like from all the jobs I've done, that was nothing compared to this. I would say this is kind of like the corporate type of job. [Laughter.] Yeah, I would say this is the most professional.

M.Z.: What about in terms of just personal satisfaction?

J.B.: Yeah, I like working here in this type of job. It's a nice schedule. I work fourteen days on, seven days off. Because we run two-man crew and it's a little slower, we have the ability to go home between jobs if we want to.

M.Z.: Where do you live?

J.B.: I live in Bowleys Quarters, which is about thirty minutes away. That's the only requirements with McAllister in general in Baltimore is that you have to be within thirty minutes of the boat at all times while you're on call. So I usually get an hour and a half wake up call, and a half hour to get in. So it's nice. I get to see the family as much as I can. A lot of times, we're here working all through the nights, so you don't get home as often. But that opportunity is available.

M.Z.: Are you married?

J.B.: Yes.

M.Z.: Do you have kids?

J.B.: Yeah, I got a baby.

M.Z.: So what's that like for your wife and your child?

J.B.: We started dating when I more or less started working here. We worked together at Living Classrooms when we first started dating. Then at the end of that season, I started here. And she's been used to it. She's used to not seeing me for several days. She's also used to, you know, it's 6:00 and I'm so tired I can't even call home. She's gotten used to the fact that I'm not home all the time. And the baby, I mean, she's only fifteen months old so she's not quite speaking yet, so she can't tell me that she likes it or not.

M.Z.: But is it working out okay for the wife dealing with the baby and the home and with you gone for chunks of time?

J.B.: Yeah, and the most amount of time we've agreed on is three weeks, the max of being able to be away from home for that amount of time straight. So I only work fourteen days on, seven days off, so I'm available. I'm home around every four or five days. So I see them for a little bit, but if it's fourteen days and I'm not home, she's fine with that. And that's why I've kind of got her into accepting that I leave home on Wednesday at midnight. I pack fourteen days worth of clothes. I usually go grocery shopping and have fourteen days worth of food onboard, and if I get to see you, it's a blessing. If I don't, that's reality. And that's how I leave it. I don't make plans.

I always tell the new guys you can't make birthdays, you can't make Christmas. That's what we do. We miss a lot of things. I don't make any plans for getting together with

friends or anything like that for my fourteen days on. And the same with seeing the wife, it's kind of a sacrifice. [Laughter.] But I'm very blessed and pleased the fact that we only do fourteen days. A lot of tug companies, they do three weeks, four weeks straight.

M.Z.: Is there anything from when you guys were talking that you want to ask or bring up?

E.A.: Maybe a little bit about the history of the company. Just they were a New York company, nothing real complicated.

J.B.: Yeah, McAllister Towing is formerly of New York. There's a newsletter over there, I mean, it's got some information.

E.A.: Oh, you mean Baker-Whitely?

J.B.: Well, yeah. McAllister in Baltimore was formerly the tug company Baker-Whitely. And it had six tugs running in Baltimore. McAllister, over the years, started buying other tug companies up and down the East Coast. They eventually bought Baker-Whitely in Baltimore and then it became McAllister Towing. I'm not the most familiar with that. One person I'm going to try to get a hold of on the phone or at least give you his phone number, is Steve Hardin. And he started out with Baker-Whitely. So he's got years of experience.

M.Z.: Is that who you were talking about with the weight of the line?

J.B.: The weight of the line, yeah.

M.Z.: Okay, great.

J.B.: Yeah, he's a true tugboat captain, I would say. And the other guy is a bay pilot, and he was a tugboat captain as well, Greg Lukowski. And he's got a very well known name. A lot of them, like I said, were family members. And to get into a tugboat company was very, very hard. It was uncles, cousins, sons, fathers. I mean, it was very, very difficult. So a lot of the names, Lukowski, Steve would say, "Oh, yeah. Greg Lukowski. His dad was this and his uncle was this." So it's interesting to see. And also how difficult it was for some guy off the street.

Today, anybody off the street can just come in and apply. There's no, "Oh, who are you related to?" That doesn't have any effect. I mean, the training and everything like that is a little different, but if you have all the credentials, the only thing now is a TWIC card which is a Department of Homeland Security ID, you can get a job.

M.Z.: So do you see changes? I know you're relatively new compared to some of these older guys, but do you see changes in the kinds of people who are working in the industry in terms of either race or regional?

J.B.: Yeah, as far as race goes, down south and some north there's different. There's African Americans that are working on the boats. Here currently in Baltimore, for some reason, just don't have any that have applied. The segregation is over with it. I don't think there's any problems, any reason why there isn't any African Americans working here. It's just, they haven't applied. [Laughter.]

M.Z.: Is it part of the leftover of that family orientation?

J.B.: I don't know. I know Moran has hired so many in the past, African Americans, and that was just because they were located downtown. They just walked on the boat. "Hey, can I get a job?" "Yeah." "Okay."

M.Z.: So Moran here in Baltimore?

J.B.: Yeah, it's Moran in Baltimore. We've been stuck out in Dundalk for so long and outside the public eye. This is the closest for a while we've been. And we're still restricted. We can't have people just walking on our dock just to come on the boat. I would say with the tugs, there's tugboats enthusiasts that want to work here. And these are semi-retired. Usually they're on their midlife crisis. And they come down and they think it's neat.

Whenever I explain that I work on a tugboat, I used to get offended, not really offended because this is a job, this is my industry. And the most common response was, "Oh, you work on a tugboat? How cute." That's not cute. There's nothing cute about it, and especially not in the wintertime. We're out there in the wintertime; we're out there in the middle of the night. There's nothing cute about having to wake up at four in the morning or being out in the ice and snow. It's an industry; it's a real-life thing. And so the guys that are coming in for their midlife crisis and they think, "Oh, this would be a neat job."

Some work out; some don't. A lot of them don't. They don't realize that four in the morning, middle of winter, ice and snow and you got to shovel the deck before you go out, and the spray is freezing, and the lines are all covered with snow. It's not for the faint of heart. You got to be really into it do to this job.

M.Z.: So some of the midlife crisis guys actually get hired?

J.B.: Yeah, some do, yeah.

M.Z.: As deckhands?

J.B.: Yeah, a lot of times, yeah, because that's all they're trained for. Over the years, we've had guys come in that they had their own private business, their personal business at one point in time. Or they had a job and they just decided to kind of retire, semi-retire, whatever. So they had a career before. Or when the economy collapsed, we had one guy that had a decking company and no one was building houses, no one was building decks. So he came to work for McAllister. He's still here. This isn't in his blood type of thing to be working here. He's meant to be building decks.

M.Z.: Where do you think that cuteness factor comes from? Why do people think tugs are cute?

J.B.: I think the boats, because they're different looking. A lot of the older boats, lots of roundness in the boats, and the fact that you can look at the front of the tugboat and you can almost see a face. The rubber usually moves a little bit, or if it had pudding, which is the rope fendering system, it looks like a moustache. And you can look up to the windows and say, "Oh, there's some eyes up there. And it looks like there's a nose." I find I'm attracted more to tugboats myself because I work on them, but I can see where people think that.

It's kind of like meeting someone who's a rocket scientist. It's not every day you hear someone that works on a tugboat. So I think a lot of people see them. They think, "Oh, it's kind of neat." And I get it all the time. "Oh, whenever you guys are hiring, let me know." It's hard to tell them straight up that this is what I do for a living. This is what I do fulltime. I always joke with my friends, that usually have corporate jobs, that my time off I like to go sit at a cubicle and stare at a wall on my time off. Because they all say, "Oh, man, you get to look out the window every day." I'm always like, "No, I like to go to a cubicle and just sit in an office building." [Laughter.]

M.Z.: That's great. I was just thinking, I used to do sea turtle work, like tagging sea turtles. And when you have something, like you say, that's kind of unusual and that's a little niche, when people want to give you something they give you that stuff. So I would get sea turtle earrings as presents or whatever.

J.B.: Yes.

M.Z.: I was just wondering if that happens with you. Because of the cuteness factor of tugboats, do you end up getting just little tugboat memorabilia type stuff?

J.B.: Yeah, I have a wedding gift; someone had a bucket painted by this artist. And my wife at the time was working at the aquarium, so it had fish and aquarium stuff. On the other side it had a tugboat on the other side. The living room has got, she decorates, but it's got some maritime feel to it. There's some charts hanging up on the wall and pictures. And there's pictures of me on the tugs and stuff like that. I do have a tendency to bring home old junk from here, life rings and stuff like that. And, of course, every two years I got to get rid of them somehow because you eventually build up too much. And it's just stuff, life rings from old tugs that have retired. I have a little collection of them.

M.Z.: I was wondering if you also get stuff like kids' toys or books or things like that.

J.B.: I was there when it was launched, *Theodore Tugboat*, the boat that was built at Synder Shipyard up in Nova Scotia. It was the wooden tug with the cartoon face and the hat. So I was there when it was built, and then I was there when it was running in Halifax. And it was that TV show, *Theodore Tugboat*, like *Thomas the Train*. And I am going to have

my daughter watching that. [Laughter.] We do have lots of books in the house, tugboat books like children's books. And when we do look for birthday gifts, that is definitely in the back of my mind, the tugboat thing. Because that's what I'll be doing for the rest of my life, I'll be working on tugs.

M.Z.: So you do feel that way?

J.B.: Yeah. I don't have any intention to go off deep sea, go on ships, because it's a different ball game. I'm thirty years old, and I'm kind of in the career and training to stay in the tug line. I just don't have any desire to go on shore to work fulltime.

M.Z.: That's great. I mean, it's unusual to hear in this day and age somebody who can find a career path that's really working and that has a future to it. It must be very satisfying to have that.

J.B.: Yeah. And, of course, with every job there's pros and cons. The pro is, just something that I like and I've always been on the water and it just fits naturally. The only con, like I said, was the scheduling, being away. And the only times when it really is bad is holidays. I'm working Christmas. I worked Thanksgiving, I was able to go home and have dinner, which was great. I work Christmas. If I don't make it home, I'll be off on the 28<sup>th</sup>. We'll celebrate it then. [Laughter.]

You've got to look at every job, the pro and con. Like I said, I can't see myself sitting at a cubicle, or answering phones, or digging a ditch. And we do everything here on the boats: the maintenance, the painting, that you would do on any other type of blue collar. There's paperwork, there's all sorts of jobs in one, but it's not the same monotonous job every day. Every day's different, you can come in, you could work twenty-four hours one day and the next day only work two. That's what I like about this place.

M.Z.: Well, that's great. Thank you so much, Josh.

J.B.: Yeah, no problem.

M.Z.: I really appreciate you taking the time. Before I turn this off, is there anything you want to add? The exhibit is about the life and work of Chesapeake tugboats and what it's contributed to the area's history and to the cultural traditions of the area. Is there anything you want to say about that or that you think would be important for us to communicate to the audience about what role this industry has played in shaping the history or the culture of the area?

J.B.: I guess the only thing that I would say is that tugboats, we're the little guys, but we do so much. With the Chesapeake Bay for a number of years being so shallow, stuff can only move around on barges. A lot of these little creeks and little towns that exist because they produce something or they ship out or manufacture or grow something, can only have been accessible by these little creeks. And to get that cargo moving before highways and trucks were developed, it had to be maneuvered by tugs and barges.

I guess we're the little people compared to these big ships that are coming out now, but we do so much more. To get these big ships to eventually come into the bay, the bay had to be built. The channels had to be dug. Who did that? Tugs and barges. To bring these ships into the harbor, who brings them in? Tugs. So the tugboats, there's so many things that we do. And to have developed this bay all up and down the East Coast is quite a lot that the actual tugboat does. And we're in so many areas; we're pushing barges with grain, pushing barges with gravel and oil. And then you got the harbor assist docking ships. I'm sure you've interviewed so many people, but there's just so much that we do.

M.Z.: Yeah, that's very, very well put. Thank you very much.

J.B.: Okay.

M.Z.: Great. I'm just going to let this run for a little while just to get the quiet sound of the room. That's something that we need just for the audio editing, so if we can just be quiet for a few seconds. There that's probably good. Well thank you so much.

J.B.: All right.

M.Z.: Great.

EA: Thanks a lot.

[End of interview.]