

Patsy Higgs (PH)
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Interviewed and Transcribed by Julie Broadbent (JB)

Other voices
Rick Morlock(RM) waterman
Donny- Patsy's son and waterman
Duchess- pet dog

JB: Alright, so you said that you learned to fish your father.

PH: Yeah.

JB: And he is the one who kind of taught you everything you know.

PH: He is the reason I worked on the water because my brother had a land job at that time and so I'd go out with dad.

JB: When did you start working on the water?

PH: When I was sixteen.

JB: That's when you got first commercial license?

PH: No, I didn't get my first commercial license until I was about twenty-one.

JB: Okay, so sorry.

PH: Dad handed it, you know, his over to me.

JB: Oh okay. So like the boat and everything?

PH: No.

JB: What do you mean he handed it all over to you?

PH: The license.

JB: The license, okay. So what did you do when you were sixteen?

PH: We anchor fished, we crabbed, and we oystered, hand tonging.

JB: That's rough isn't it?

PH: Yes it is.

JB: Which was your favorite to do out of the three?

PH: Trotlining.

JB: Trotlining, why was that your favorite?

PH: Because it was a lot different back then. It's so commercial now, you have to, they have everything. We didn't have that. They have winders now, dippers we done all that by hand. It was like, it was fun to work on the water with dad but I guess they're not going out there for fun.

JB: There going out there to make money.

PH: Yea, I was going out there to make money too but I enjoyed it.

JB: People don't seem to be having as much fun out there anymore?

PH: I could care less if I ever went trotlining it's boring. Going down that line crabs going in this dipper. The fun was dipping them so and I liked spring fishing too in the springtime anchor net. Winter fishing though I hated it was cold, it was cold.

JB: When you were doing it full time you did it year-round right?

PH: Twelve months out of a year. Well we took off a month to paint the boats up but yea twelve months out of a year.

JB: Was it normally in the winter when you took the time off?

PH: Naw-huh, spring time.

JB: Spring time, oh when the weather is starting to get nice you get off the water?

PH: Yea when we got done anchor fishing we pulled the boats up, paint them up, then get ready for trotlining.

JB: Ok. What was your boats name?

PH: My dad's boat was Anna G and my brother's boat was Sinbad.

JB: Where did those names come from?

PH: Well my father's boat is named after my mom.

JB: Okay.

PH: But where Sinbad that's what they call my brother, a nickname, Sinbad, so that's what he named the boat.

JB: Did you ever own your own boat?

PH: Huh?

JB: Did you ever own your own boat?

PH: No, I used one of the bateaus in the summertime to crab out of 'cause I worked with them you know the other time.

JB: Did you ever want to own your own boat?

PH: No.

JB: Why not?

PH: Because it is too much of a headache.

JB: Yeah.

PH: You have to keep up them.

JB: Did you and your brother both work with your dad growing up when you were little?

PH: Oh when I was little yea. Every summer I would go crabbing with him. Sleep in the morning, wake up, fix lunch, he let me sleep so this is when I was like twelve or thirteen. Duchess [the dog].

JB: Hello, how are you? You having fun there, good. So why did you get the commercial license from your dad instead of your brother?

PH: It was easier to get a commercial license back then. It's hard now. You have to be willed the license and costs a lot more too.

JB: You have to be willed a license anymore, you just can't show up and apply for one?

PH: Not now you can't no.

JB: What changed? Why can't you just show up anymore?

PH: I don't know 'cause it all changed when I got off the water.

JB: Okay.

PH: Now they are called TFLs and we just had a license to fish so many yards of nets and it was a lot cheaper back then too but now they pay a lot more for the TFLs. We didn't have to have a rock fishing license like they do now. And I could, back then I didn't have a license to oyster. Women didn't have to have a license back then.

JB: Oh.

PH: Yeah.

JB: So where there a lot of women then who went out to oyster since they didn't need a license?

PH: The men had licenses of course they were a lot cheaper to back then to oyster. But that all I did was cull them I didn't need a license.

JB: Oh ok did a lot of like daughters and sisters and wives go out and help cull oysters because they didn't need a license?

PH: No, not when I was out there.

JB: You were the only one out there? The only female?

PH: Yeah.

JB: Did the guys say anything to you about that?

PH: No. They treated me just like anybody else. Just one day I was oystering with my brother and this one guys said something about why isn't she up there tonging. So I got up there and we were working the right side and I had so many oysters in there I couldn't get them back in the boat. So I guess I knew how to pick them [laughter] but that was hard.

JB: Yeah, I'm sure.

PH: See now when they hand tong and all that, they got winders to pull them up. We had to do all that by hand.

JB: Yea sure. You had to pull them up hand over hand. It must be hard on the back and shoulders.

PH: Yea it is a lot different now.

JB: So you learned everything from your dad. Did your mom ever come out on the water with you?

PH: Who?

JB: Your mom, did your mom ever go on the Anna G?

PH: No, in the springtime when they would go up to Perryville and shad fish which I was still young in school and we would go up on weekends and spend the weekends on the boat and that's the only time mom would go.

JB: Mhm [affirmative].

PH: No, she never went out there you know when they were working or anything.

JB: Did she ever help cull oysters while you were little?

PH: No.

JB: Why didn't she go out on the water?

PH: I guess because she had a land job.

JB: What did she do on the land?

PH: Worked in the factory

JB: Oh okay then...

PH: In Chestertown they had the defense plant where they made fireworks and stuff like that and then she went to work for a Vita Foods.

JB: Oh ok, she always have been busy on the land. She didn't have the time to go out on the water.

PH: Yea, she was busy on the land and of course when I got married and she was retired, her and my sister would watch my kids.

JB: Mhm [affirmative].

PH: While I worked.

JB: Yea, that's nice that you had them to take care of your kids when you were out there.

PH: I didn't need no daycare center.

JB: How many children do you have?

PH: I had three.

JB: Yea, are any of them working on the water now?

PH: He [Donny] is a full time waterman. I lost a son when he was twenty-seven. He was a waterman too but my daughter she never cared for it.

JB: Did you take your sons out while you were working?

PH: Yes I did.

JB: Where they able to help you out?

PH: Mhm [affirmative].

JB: What did they do on the water?

PH: Oh well when he at sixteen or so and I didn't feel like going I would say Don can you get up and go in my place today and that's how he I guess that's how he got started. Of course he learned too from my dad trotlining and everything but he's, he is the fifth generation so.

JB: Are your grandchildren going to go on the water as well?

PH: Nope my grandson is a paid firefighter and my granddaughter works in Aetna Medical care. They didn't have it in them and I didn't want them too either because it's not a very good life.

JB: It's not?

PH: No.

JB: Why not?

PH: Because it is hard.

JB: Yeah.

PH: You have to go out there. I don't care if it snowing, blowing, raining, you got to go and you were working in ice, working around ice. It's not fun.

JB: So if it's not fun why did you choose to go out on the water instead of taking a shore job like your mom did?

PH: Because I am a gambler and working on the water is a gamble. You make big money one day then go two weeks and not make nothing. That's how the water business is. You have to learn to save what you make 'cause the next day you go you might not make nothing you know. Of course that was in the book.

JB: Yeah.

PH: I'd have rather, I won't of worked in an office for five-hundred dollars a week because out there you are your own boss. No one to tell you what to do well but do it again? No, I wouldn't do it again knowing what I know now.

JB: Would you encourage your children no to do it either even though they are doing it now?

PH: Well yea I'm sorry that he is a waterman because it is dying.

JB: Why do you think it is dying?

PH: Because it is overpopulated. There's too many sportsmen into it now and you got these, I call it white collar workers always jump in it when the gravy on for trotlining and stuff like that but if they don't make one-hundred percent of their living on the water they shouldn't be out their selling the stuff. That's my opinion.

JB: Yeah.

PH: They are taking it from others, you know, that depend on that water for a living. We got them right here in Rock Hall jumping in when the gravy's on. I guess it has been like that for years I don't know.

JB: Did you notice it while you were working on the water these white collar workers coming in?

PH: I noticed it in the summertime trotlining, not winter, you know. They don't bother with it in the wintertime but in the summertime they do. They have good jobs and they go out there and take and they sell them because they got the license to do it. Where they got them I don't know.

JB: Did you notice that as, have you noticed that as more people come into Rock Hall outsiders that is been picking up and up?

PH: Oh yea, chicken neckers? Yeah.

JB: Yeah what is a chicken necker?

PH: What is a chicken necker? It means a one who comes and get what he wants and leaves.

JB: Ok, like a visitor?

PH: That is my opinion of him. He is only supposed to catch one bushel of crabs but he will take what he can get.

JB: So you said that there are, when you are out the water you didn't have a boss. So like how did it feel to work on the water? Was it like freedom or just to make a buck?

PH: I like it because it was outside, pretty days it was beautiful.

JB: What was your favorite part of the day?

PH: I'd go out in the afternoon, five or six o'clock was the best part of the day but you can't do that now. They have a set time they have to be done crabbing which we didn't. We would crab till dark but they can't now.

JB: When did all these restrictions come on?

PH: It must have been in the late 80's or early 90's because I wasn't on the water then. When I still worked I could crab till dark.

JB: When did you get off the water again? I know you said earlier.

PH: It was '83 or '85.

JB: Okay. Why did you decide to leave the water?

PH: Well it was medical reasons. My brother, he's blind now and I am going blind, it is a hereditary thing. I mean it broke his heart when he had to sell his boat but what we have working on the water progressed it.

JB: Sure okay.

PH: You are looking at the glare, you know, the sun off the water but I just thank God I've seen this long because he has been blind a long time now.

JB: Which one did you prefer working with your dad or your brother?

PH: My dad.

JB: Why?

PH: Siblings cannot get along. That's why I was so glad when the summertime came and I was on my own.

JB: Was he trotlining in one boat then and you were trotlining in the other boat then? You and your brother you split up.

PH: He would crab pot.

JB: Oh okay.

PH: And I liked the river.

JB: What did you and your brother normally fight about on the boat?

PH: Little stuff, I never done anything right. You know how they are they are the ones that are perfect.

JB: Yea, it is always the other person that seems to be perfect it is weird.

PH: That's the way he was. He still is today.

JB: He's still perfect? Oh I should meet him man I've never met anyone who is perfect before.

PH: He can tell you some stories. He is blind but he can tell you some stories.

JB: Around here I feel there is no shortage of stories.

PH: Yeah.

JB: In Rock Hall everywhere you go there are stories. Do you have a story that you normal tell? Do you have a story that you normally tell?

PH: The only story I have hon is the day we caught a local waterman in our nets. He had drowned and that I'll take it to my grave because that is an experience you will never forget.

JB: Yeah.

PH: When you are finishing and you look over and someone is laying in your net and it wasn't too nice.

JB: No.

PH: Because we had to get him in the bateau and we knew him. So he was a waterman but he should never had been out there that day it was blowing awful. He sunk the boat and he all drowned. And I just knew that morning we went out. Have you ever had a premonition?

JB: Yeah.

PH: Well going out that morning I just had cold chills. I just knew something was going to happen and it did. That's my ice maker thank God it is working.

JB: I thought it was for a second your refrigerator was going to break. I was like oh no.

PH: No, it was in the paper you know about the lone female on that fishing boat, I was the first one to spot him in the net because they were out there looking for him.

JB: Have you get a lot of press before the book came out about being the lone female on the water? Was it just-

PH: I never thought about it, you know. When she came to Rock Hall and was asking questions, I don't know who told her that the only one that they knew was me that done it year round.

JB: Are there other people like down in Tilghman, or out in Hooper's Island that do it? Smith Island? Are there any other females that you know of that do it year-round?

PH: Nu-huh [negative]

JB: Just you?

PH: I am the only one. You know around here they had a couple women that went out, you know, and cull oysters or something like that but I'm the only stupid one that I know of that went out there

JB: But it sounds like you liked it. It was fun.

PH: Huh?

JB: It sounds like it was fun for you.

PH: I enjoyed it.

JB: Yeah.

PH: 'Cause I was with my family, you know and then later on my husband joined us and he worked on the water with us.

JB: Ok so there were three of you on the boat then? Doing the...

PH: Yeah.

JB: Oystering.

PH: He was on the boat and so would Donny 'cause he would go out.

JB: How was it having all those family members out there?

PH: Fine.

JB: Yea? There were no spats of any kinds or?

PH: No, I'd take plenty to eat. When we got done, you know, a row we would stop and we had something to eat.

JB: My family should take notes from your family.

PH: Yea, a couple times out there in the fall it wasn't fun either. We lost the big boat, the anchor had drugged. We were trying to find her and thank God we found her and then one time we were out there about ready to go across the channel to get to our other row and my brother and I were out, saw that dad was driving the boat and I looked up there was a great big ship. Well I screamed to get daddy to turn the boat because if they had hit us they would have never know what would have happened to us. When you look up and you see five or six stories of a black ship that was scary.

JB: Yeah.

PH: And you'd be out there sometimes with the ice. You would get out and walk around the boat.

JB: The boat got iced in?

PH: Huh?

JB: Did your boat ever get iced in?

PH: Oh yea got stuck to shore and everything.

JB: Really?

PH: That ice gets thick in the wintertime.

JB: Yea.

PH: And I worry about him [Donny] when he has to go out in it. Of course back then our boats were wooden he has a fiberglass boat but it is still dangerous.

JB: Did you ever go down south to avoid the ice?

PH: We went down to Annapolis when it got real bad in the wintertime. One time we were frozen for eight weeks and when we finally got out there 2/3rd of our catch was rotten.

JB: Hmh. Where did you have your lines?

PH: Our nets?

JB: Yeah.

PH: Between Swan Point and Love Point.

JB: Okay. Are those the same spots your dad fished?

PH: Yeah.

JB: Okay.

PH: He had the same spot every year. When he died he left the marks you know to put the rig back out there but towards the end we just put everything back in and let it go down and dragged for it the fall and just put up rails and everything on then but he left you ,know the marks for my brother to look at and he was the first one to ever float an anchor rig in the springtime. I guess it was fun back then 'cause I was younger but now if I go out once a year that's enough for me.

JB: You don't go out anymore?

PH: Very seldom do I ever get on his boat.

JB: Not even for trotlining?

PH: I told you it's boring.

JB: That's true.

PH: Ugh it's not like it, the fun of it is dipping them, the challenge of catching that crab. They don't have a challenge now. Now it's boring. Up in eel pots a couple of times, he eels and I have only been out there once rock fishing and that was fourteen, fifteen years ago.

JB: So you normally caught blues that was your goal?

PH: No, we caught rock fish. It was, this was a fluke I called it.

JB: Picture day was a fluke? That's funny.

PH: No, blue fish.

JB: Oh really?

PH: My dad had worked on the water all them years and had never seen blue fish come up here like that. We catch four or five ton a day.

JB: Wow.

PH: And I mean they were like that.

JB: That's like three feet long.

PH: and we had to gut them. Huh?

JB: That's like three feet long. That's a big fish.

PH: Yea and you would have to cut them because they're scavenger, they'll eat anything and to keep them to get them to market you had to take the guts out of them. There were some in picture of me gutting them on the board. Yea we caught four or five ton a day. No, we mostly fished for perch and rock but in the springtime they started coming up here for four or five years then they quit. I guess they were just migrating to another place.

JB: They don't still come up here do they? Blues they don't swim?

PH: Not like that.

JB: You might catch one or two but...

PH: Yea occasionally they will catch one hook and lining but I don't think they would catch them in the winter. They wouldn't catch them in the winter time. They were, you know, springtime warmer fish.

JB: Yeah.

PH: No, we would load both bateaus and the big boat full of fish.

JB: Wow.

PH: Anywhere from fifteen to twenty pounders.

JB: That's a big catch.

PH: Mhm [affirmative] but we would get nothing for them.

JB: No one buys blues?

PH: Yea, maybe for cat food. We got eight cents a pound.

JB: Yea that's not a whole lot. What was a rock fish going for that day? Like what was it...

PH: Not much back then.

JB: No but it was more than eight cents a pound though.

PH: They make good money for rock fish now. If we got fifty cents we were lucky. That was big money. Of course it didn't take to live back then what it costs today so.

JB: After you sold your catch and you came home, what did you end up doing? Did you take your children back from your sister and mother and care for them the rest of the day? Or were you able to take some time off after working?

PH: No, we would have to gear net in and stuff like that. You always had to gear net, which I hated but their nets now are nothing like we had. They were anchor nets thirty-five yards.

JB: How have the nets changed?

PH: Huh?

JB: How have the nets changed?

PH: They drift now.

JB: Okay, you don't anchor them to the bottom.

PH: They have just one big net in a box where we had twelve nets in a row at thirty-five yards. We never drifted, we always anchor fished but see when they put the moratorium on rock fish they banned all that.

JB: Oh okay.

PH: Anchor fishing.

JB: Yeah, why would they banned that one and not drift netting?

PH: Because the fish had a better change with the drift net. Anchor, you know, it's against the law to anchor fish because I know you heard about all the poaching that happened last year. Oh that was awful. And the rock fish were plentiful they didn't have to do that.

JB: Have you notice that people have been watching watermen more and more with what they catch and all the tagging?

PH: Yeah.

JB: What was it like, was there any was there anybody watching what you caught? When you were fishing?

PH: You would see the water cop ever so often. He would come aboard to see if you had anything illegal. They would check your oysters and stuff like that and your crab catch but very seldom did they ever come aboard you in the wintertime when you were rock fishing because there was no limit on what you can bring in. There's a limit now you can't catch over your quota.

JB: Right.

PH: But back then if we caught three tons we could bring them in but you can't today.

JB: Did you sell your catch around here?

PH: Right in Rock Hall.

JB: Did you sell to Hubbard's?

PH: Huh?

JB: Did you sell to Hubbard's?

PH: No, we sold to Evan's seafood back then and then when he got out of the business we sold to Jay Jacobs. He had a seafood business.

JB: Is that J and J down on the corner here?

PH: Nu-huh [negative].

JB: It is another one.

PH: No, none of them where in the business back then. There were a couple places down near the water where you could sell your catch but Hubbard's Pier and all them, they left here because of the... what do you call them? Yeah, that Rick [Morlock]?

RM: Oh yeah.

PH: Because of all the pleasure boats.

JB: Oh yeah, okay.

PH: If my father came back and saw Rock Hall creek he wouldn't believe it.

JB: Yeah.

PH: 'Cause see because you had your restaurant that you were looking at the menu.

JB: The Chesapeake?

PH: Yea, and you had Hubbard's Pier it was a restaurant and a seafood place. Hey Charlie!

JB: Hi, I'm going to stop.

PH: No Hubbard's and them didn't put Rock Hall on the map.

RM: Now you know Edna Marie [laughter].

PH: Yea right Rick [laughter] [dog barking]. Duchess!

Donny: Fusty and Simns made Rock Hall did they?

RM: Who did?

Donny: Edna Marie, Fusty and Simns.

RM: Is that who made Rock Hall?

PH: Yea that's who made Rock Hall.

RM: Edna Marie said it was all her.

PH: Bull, I was going to put another word in there but no honey I mean your old timing watermen made Rock Hall, not Edna Marie. She was, what do you call them?

RM: Prostitute.

PH: Huh?

RM: Prostitute.

PH: Penny pincher, she was something else. I can remember, I can see her now going around in the restaurant bent over. No Hubbard's and them didn't put Rock Hall on the map honey. Hilton Crouch, Irvin and all them did-

PH: Your old time watermen.

JR: Yea, she is pacing in a circle now? Hello.

Male Voice: How are you?

JR: I'm good yourself?

[non interview conversation]

[Part 2]

PH: That's her treat, you know, it's hard work for a woman I wouldn't recommend it for any woman.

JB: Did you find that guys didn't need as many...

PH: Huh?

JB: Did you find that the guy's that their heath is just better because they had a different shape?

PH: Well they are built really for picking up heavy stuff. You pick up a bushel of oysters that's heavy and then you would have to load them on the wharf and then put them in the vehicle.

JB: What did you find that your female friends on land, what did they do while you were on the water?

PH: What did they do?

JB: What did they do?

PH: They worked on land.

JB: They worked on land? Everyone had a second job?

PH: Yeah.

JB: What did your sister do?

PH: My sister?

JB: Yeah.

PH: Nothing.

JB: Nothing.

PH: She just watched my kids.

JB: Did she have her own children?

PH: No, never had any children, nope. She is a playful thing [Dutchess].

JB: Mhm [agreement]. Did you find when you retired from the water and then you starting child caring as soon as people started raising grandchildren here with you?

PH: Yea I raised my grandchildren because my daughter was a drug addict. The baby was sixteen months old when I took them. They were sixteen months, three and four and like I said they turned out good. I mean my granddaughter graduated from Frostburg State, she got a good job. My grandson is a paid firefighter in Howard County. My other granddaughter lives three houses up from me.

JB: Oh that's nice, she comes back and visits.

PH: Yeah.

JB: Nice. Did you guys ever have family reunions or anything get-togethers?

PH: Oh, yes we have had family reunions but it has been a while. It's not the same when the old folks go you know?

JB: Yeah.

PH: When mom died it just seemed like we drifted apart from our family, you know. I guess their the backbone that's what I would call it.

JB: Does that mean the backbone had been passed down to the next generation?

PH: What did you say?

JB: So the backbone of the family now since your parents have passed away...

PH: My mom and daddy's people worked on the water too.

JB: Yeah.

PH: I mean back in, I got one of my mother's father's oyster license, 1892, and they were three dollars.

JB: Wow.

PH: Three dollars was a lot of money back then but today the oyster to get the surcharge costs three- hundred.

JB: Wow that's a difference.

PH: But I saved all that, you know, for my son and so he could have some kind of heritage to look back on because like I said he is the fifth generation.

JB: Right.

PH: I was the fourth so he's the fifth and it's going to stop there because he don't have any children.

JB: Okay.

PH: She's [Duchess] looking for that little boy [Charlie].

JB: Where did he go? Where did he go?

PH: Yeah.

JB: Do you ever remember going out with your grandfather out on the water at all?

PH: No I didn't know any of them.

JB: Oh okay.

PH: They had died, you know, before I was born. I only knew one grandmother and I was six years old when she passed away. I didn't know any of them. 'Cause I know my great-grandfather, what was it back then Rick? They could lease an oyster ground?

RM: I think you could always in certain parts of Maryland.

PH: Yea because he had down to Boxes Point, Eastern Neck Island.

RM: Huh?

PH: My great-grandfather.

RM: Uh-Huh.

PH: See I didn't know any of them.

RM: Right.

PH: But he could work it and move them whenever he wanted too to get to them in the, you know, bad weather.

RM: Now were you are going into the 1800s?

PH: Huh?

RM: You're going into the 1800s or...

PH: He was born in the 1800s.

RM: Yeah, yeah.

PH: Because dad was born in the 1900s so it had to be in the 1800s that his grandfather...

RM: Yeah.

PH: So that makes me what? If it's dad's grandfather it's my great-grandfather.

RM: Huh? Yeah.

PH: Right?

RM: Right.

PH: But I know he could oyster down because he lived on Boxes Point.

RM: Right, was that a land lease just 'cause you were a land owner you were able lease it.

PH: What did they call it now when you?

RM: Lease.

PH: Huh?

RM: Lease.

PH: Yea he leased his own oyster bar.

RM: Was that because he owned the land or...

PH: Yeah he owned it, Boxes Point.

RM: Yeah.

PH: I'm telling her back in 1892 oyster licenses were three dollars.

RM: Right.

JB: A lot more people would oyster lithe license was still three dollars.

PH: Yea, and I know a lot of time, you know, when it was frozen over they would go and cut holes in the ice 'cause they knew where their oysters were and get them.

JB: Yeah.

PH: To make a dollar which they probably got very little for a bushel of oysters back then.

JB: While you were oystering did you go to the same bar or a different bar?

PH: Different bars in the river.

JB: Different bars ok, did you have to lease the bar you were on?

PH: No I didn't.

JB: It was free on the water?

PH: : What we got for oysters back then was eight dollars a bushel now it is thirty, thirty-five.

JB: Yea, so you and that the gentleman who walked in, he worked on the boat with you?

PH: Yea for a little while.

JB: What did he do? What did he help out with?

PH: Getting fish out of the nets.

JB: Oh ok, he helped anchor netting?

PH: Uh-huh [affirmative].

JB: Oh okay did you just have to bring someone on because there were so much fish coming through?

PH: Huh?

JB: Did you have to hire him because there were so many fish coming through that you had?

PH: No, we had a colored guy work with us when we caught that man that drowned and he got so much of the percentage at the end of the week whatever we caught. Yea.

JB: How did you find these people to work with you?

PH: Oh it wasn't hard, not in Rock Hall.

JB: Yeah.

PH: I mean people working for work, you know, and the colored man he was as nice as he could be. I mean when we got in he would make sure the boat was clean. He was very nice to have.

JB: So there were four of you out on the boat?

PH: Yea me, my father, my brother, and the colored man.

JB: Okay.

PH: The guy who walked in here he would come mostly in the springtime or something when the fishing is better.

JB: Did you dad ever say anything to you about wanting you to be the next generation of fisherperson out on the water?

PH: Well, I guess he just figured it was going to happen you know and when my son came along.

JB: You just knew it was going to happen?

PH: Mhm, yep.

JB: How did early did he get on the water? Your son?

PH: Huh?

JB: How young was he when he went out on the water the first time?

PH: Donny?

JB: Mhm.

PH: How old were you Donny when you used to go with dad?

Donny: I don't know, middle school.

PH: Ten, nine or ten.

JB: What were able to do out there with him?

PH: Trotlining.

JB: Trotlining when there was a winder?

RM: Dip the crabs and pull the line in.

PH: Yea pull the line in.

JB: No winders back then?

Donny: No.

PH: But you learned a lot.

JB: So when you got on land, what did you do for fun?

PH: Fun?

JB: Fun, yeah.

PH: Oh we went to dances. They had dances here every weekend about. Not anymore.

JB: What were the dances for? Where were they?

PH: They would have them up at the firehouse. I guess it benefited the fire company. Of course once a year they had a watermen's dinner and dance.

JB: Did the children ever come with you or was it adult only?

PH: Adult.

JB: Adult only. Were both you and your husband a member of the watermen's association?

PH: I was I don't know if he was back then or not to tell you the truth. I belong to the Kent County Waterman's Association.

JB: Yea. Did you get, Your husband's name is Charlie?

PH: His name was Charlie.

JB: Did you get your husband into the watermen's business?

PH: Yes, he used to work in the marina painting boats but then he went to work with us and he would trotline in the summertime. He would in the morning and I would go in the afternoon. That's how we did it.

JB: How did you convince him to go out on the water?

PH: I don't know to tell you the truth. I guess it was just feeding him because when we were, dad was still alive every day when Charles would get home from work, this is when he worked at Southern States, we would go hook and lining. Take supper out there and go hook and lining every day. It was like he drank and smoked and slept water, the water business and it was just something dad loved to do and I liked hook and lining too that was fun, real fun. We went out there one night just me and dad, I don't know whether if Danny was with us or Brown but he had thirteen crabs wasn't catching nothing didn't even have a bite. Dad said well we will wait until the tide changes. Well when the tide changed we caught one right after the other, hundred and eighty some pounds off thirteen crabs.

JB: Wow.

PH: 'Cause we sold them, dad sold them.

JB: You didn't keep any to eat?

PH: No, we had that. You could fish anytime you wanted 'cause in the summertime I did I forgot to tell you that but dad and my brother both run fishing parties.

JB: Oh okay, sure.

PH: They both had and when I would go with dad as a mate and when he didn't have a party I would go with Ronny my brother and I would get paid so much a day. Of course the fish were part of the tipping you know because you would have to take fish off the hook for them and all that stuff. I liked that, fishing parties, that was fun.

JB: What do people do on fishing parties? I mean obviously you take them out and they hook and line fish.

PH: It was six in the party, we were allowed six and they paid for their bait. Daddy would get the bait and he had the fishing rods which were like two dollars for each rod and for the soft crabs and he would take them out from five in the morning till twelve at lunch time and then the second party would go out from two till dark.

JB: Oh okay.

PH: That was, I enjoyed that so you had to you know cast the rod and catch the fish.

JB: Did a lot of people who went on the parties have any idea how to fish at all?

PH: Some of them did and the dirtiest people you had on the boat were dunkers.

JB: A dunker?

PH: Mhm, Amish.

JB: Oh okay.

PH: They are dirty people they would spit on the floor. My dad would ask them, "Do you do that at home?" I think that is dirty you know spitting on the floors because you take pride in what your boat looks like.

JB: Sure. Did they take them out on the work boat or did you have another boat for the fishing parties?

PH: We used the same boat.

JB: The same boat.

PH: We cleaned them up in the springtime they were like brand new when we took them we kept it spotless. Yep, they used the same boat for you know fishing parties and winter fishing.

JB: Yeah, when your boat was up to be painting, did your husband do the painting since he was familiar with it?

PH: Yeah, he would have to sand them down and put a prime it put the final coat on it.

JB: Yeah.

PH: Paint the bottom.

JB: I've never painted a boat it sounds labor intensive for an entire month.

PH: Really?

JB: Yeah.

PH: Well see they are easy to take care of now because they are fiberglass.

JB: Yea they aren't wood anymore.

PH: Yea, all you have to do is wax them and paint the bottom. You have to do that. Put the water line on. It was a lot of work with the wooden boats 'cause we had the two little boats, twenty foot bateaus two of them and then two big boats. It was a good month's work.

JB: Mhm, yeah.

PH: Because you have to come up on the railway, you know.

JB: Did you use the railway down by the water? The same one that is there?

PH: Yea, Rock Hall Marine Railway that is what we used.

JB: Did you get a discount because your husband used to work there?

PH: No, he didn't work there, he worked up in the Tolchester Marina.

JB: Oh, he worked up at the Tolchester Marina? Did he grow up up there then?

PH: Huh?

JB: Did he grow up in Tolchester?

PH: No he didn't grow up in Tolchester.

JB: But he worked up there?

PH: When he married me he moved to Rock Hall because he was from Chestertown. He started, you know, working up there at the marina but I guess he fell in love with the water.

JB: How did you meet him?

PH: In a bar. In a bar.

JB: Up in Chestertown?

PH: Mhm, yep.

JB: Did he work in the marina up? Up there in Chestertown?

PH: Huh?

JB: Did he work in a marina up in Chestertown?

PH: No, he was a security guard back in them days, 1968, he just got out of the service too. He was in the army.

JB: Did he go abroad while he was in the army?

PH: Huh?

JB: Did he go abroad?

PH: He was in Germany. He wanted to go to Vietnam but they didn't send him there.

JB: Really?

PH: Germany, yeah. 'Cause that was back in the Vietnam era.

JB: Sure yeah. That's a career change going from the army to security guard to boat painter to watermen.

PH: Right.

JB: Did he have any experience on the water before he married you?

PH: No but he was a high school graduate, you know, but no. When I met him he had been a security guard in Betterton because that was a big time thing. You know in the summertime they had dances and all that down there and then he went to work for Southern States, driving a truck.

JB: Okay.

PH: And when he married me, he moved to Rock Hall, that's when he started working in the marina and I think that's what killed him, all those bad fumes and everything. I mean he drank but he didn't drink enough to kill him.

JB: Yeah.

PH: And he died from psoriasis of the liver 'cause all those paint fumes go right in skin. Did you know that?

JB: I did not know that.

PH: Yeah, and they didn't wear masks a lot of the times. He died when he was 56.

JB: Oh, that's young.

PH: Yea it's young. I mean I'm 67 now and he was the same age as me. It's been eleven years.

JB: While you two were dating or before you got married, did you ever take him out hook and line fishing?

PH: Yeah.

JB: Or trotlining?

PH: Oh yeah, took him out fishing.

JB: Started to get him warmed up to the water early.

PH: Yeah, because he knew what I did for a living so.

JB: Did he thing that was cool, what you were doing for a living or interesting?

PH: Yea he did back then but not now I don't think it's cool. It ages you the sun.

JB: Mhm [affirmative].

PH: The cold weather.

JB: If you were to go back and not work on the water what would you do?

PH: I guess I would do it all because they have it so easy now. Right Rick? Got everything to do for you, you know, you got winders. They've got it made on the water today.

Donny: No we don't.

PH: Except for wintertime, then you have it rough. Last year they closed it down because of those poaches.

JB: All fishing they closed down.

PH: Yea they closed it all down to correct all of them. Gave them the last three days of the season and it blew a gale. I wouldn't of, they couldn't give me a million dollars to go out there, not blowing forty, forty-five miles an hour but they had to do...

JB: Yeah.

PH: Because it was over.

JB: Yeah.

RM: Patsy, are you going to help me set poles down this spring?

PH: Yeah.

RM: Okay.

PH: You got something to pump them down?

RM: Shoot.

PH: We had to jump them?

RM: I'll jump them.

PH: Get on them and jump them. Now have you jumped them?

RM: Yeah.

PH: Well we got a set down the shore. I hated that. Jumping those poles, I never got on it.

RM: Yeah, it ain't that easy.

PH: But daddy had a colored a working with him and the pole broke when he was jumping it and he fell overboard and drowned. Daddy said that was the worst thing he ever had to do was go back and tell his family.

RM: Oh I bet.

JB: What is jumping the pole? What does that mean?

PH: Well see in the springtime we set nets down the shore and we use poles to put the net around. And you would have to get on it and jump it down in the mud so the pole wouldn't go, you know.

JB: So you had to stand on the pole and jump?

PH: I didn't get on the pole.

JB: People did.

PH: My brother did not me.

RM: I didn't like that Pat if got salt bottom that pole went quick.

PH: Huh?

RM: That pole went a long ways in salt bottom.

JB: That seems dangerous. I can see you just on one leg and you would go about four inches down. I'd feel like a gymnast up there, jumping around.

PH: That's why you have to cut them every year Rick because they dry rotted.

RM: Yeah.

PH: That pole's going to break.

RM: They still do.

PH: I guess Ronny still has that thing you put around the pole.

RM: Jump stick.

PH: Yeah, to get on it and jumped it down.

RM: Oak stick with two pieces of chew, yeah.

JB: Do you remember when the oyster ban went into effect?

PH: Huh?

JB: The oyster limit. Do you remember when the oyster limit went into effect? Do you remember when the oyster limit and ban went into effect?

PH: It wasn't when I was on there.

JB: No, You could catch as many oysters as you wanted? There was no limit or anything?

PH: Oh it was fifteen bushel, but you didn't catch fifteen bushels hand tonging back then.

JB: How many bushels could you catch hand tonging in a day?

PH: We would catch eight or ten.

JB: Oh ok, that's a good number and you sold them for eight dollars a bushel?

PH: For eight dollars a bushel. That was a good day's work.

JB: Yea. Well thank you I appreciate you talking with me.

PH: Oh it's been a pleasure because I haven't talked to anybody really since Lila [Line].

JB: Really?

PH: Mhm [affirmative].

JB: No one's been down? I know you talked to well I'll stop...

[Part 3]

PH: I forgot about that, picking in the picking house.

JB: Where is the picking house around here? Was it in town?

PH: It's closed up now. It's down the creek. You didn't show her that Rick?

RM: What's that, mom?

PH: Where Louis Cane had his picking house?

RM: It's not there any more.

PH: Huh?

RM: [unintelligible]

PH: 'Cause she asked me if I ever picked crabs for a living.

RM: It's not there anymore.

PH: The building is.

RM: Well it's just a vacant building.

PH: Yeah, no he's dead.

RM: Yeah, I heard that somewhere.

PH: Did you hear that? Yea he's dead.

JB: I think it is crazy you pick thirty to thirty-five pounds in the morning it seems like.

PH: Becky's picked in a picking house, she leave?

RM: Yeah.

PH: She picked in Crisfield.

JB: Mhm [affirmative].

PH: Oh yeah.

JB: When you were working on the water was there a picking house in town that you sold your crabs too?

PH: Yea sold Tori had a picking house I sold to. Me and Charles and Donny would go down there and pick. He was a good crab picker.

JB: In your spare time after working on the water?

PH: Yeah.

Donny: You weren't working on the water then.

PH: Huh? No, I wasn't working on the water then I'm sane, but you were.

RM: She's met Wayne.

PH: Huh?

RM: She met Wayne.

PH: She met Wayne?

RM: Yeah.

JB: Yeah.

PH: Yeah, he owned a picking house. We picked down there.

JB: Why did you decide to go into the picking business?

PH: Huh?

JB: Why did you decide to go into the picking business?

Donny: It was for extra money.

PH: Just because it's natural.

JB: Yea, you have to work, do something.

PH: Yea, like I told you a dollar and a quarter a pound.

JB: Are you in full retirement now or do you do something else today?

PH: Huh?

JB: Do you have a job today or are you now fully retired?

PH: I am retired, right Rick. [Laughter] I pick crab meat for my friends I don't pick for no restaurants or nothing like that so.

PH: Huh?

---Unrelated conversation---

JB: Are you still active in people who work on the water now? Do you go to watermen's association meetings?

PH: No, no indeed. Like I said they have so many restrictions on them. We had, I mean, we would have to go to Annapolis and try to fight bills and all that kind of stuff. But that's why you have a president of the watermen's association.

JB: Yeah.

PH: To fight for you.