

Interview Log

Interviewee: Sheila Strong

Interviewed and Transcribed: Julie Broadbent

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Location: Rock Hall, Maryland

Topic: Chester River Seafood, Owning a business, female, seafood industry, trotlining, growing up in Rock Hall, dating

# of Cds: 1

JB: Alright so it's Sheila Pierce right?

SS: Strong.

JB: Strong, okay.

SS: Pierce was my married name.

JB: Okay, did you grow up here in Rock Hall?

SS: Yes.

JB: Okay and how did you get into selling seafood?

SS: I started when I was twelve checking slough boxes like shedding the soft crabs for my uncle up on my grandparents' farm.

JB: Oh okay.

SS: Yes, so I was twelve, thirteen I spent the summers checking the soft crabs for him.

JB: So your grandparents where farmers but your uncle worked on the water?

SS: Correct, my whole family works on the water: my father, my uncles, and my grandfathers, my great-grandfathers, yeah.

JB: Do you have like a first memory of going on the water with your family?

SS: Yes, my grandparents owned, before they passed way, they owned Shipyard farm up here on route 20 and I can remember going out on Plankford in the Chester River up by Shipyard and watching crabs swim on the water, swim on top and we would dip them with dip nets. That was my first pretty much memory of it. I can remember being little, little and going out with my dad and my mom. We would go out on Sundays not really to work but to play around but really I really just started when I was young.

JB: What did you do on the water with your parents? Did you go swimming?

SS: Fishing.

JB: Fishing.

SS: Yeah, hook and lining.

JB: Oh okay.

SS: Just hook and lining, trotlining we did some trotlining. I was pretty much raised on the water.

[laughter]

JB: Did your dad focused on crabbing?

SS: My father focused on cat fishing.

JB: Oh okay.

SS: Back in the 80s that was a big thing. Yea cat fishing with hoop nets, hoop pots, yep. He did that for years. Once they shut down, when they put the rock fish moratorium back in the 80s my father focused on cat fishing.

JB: Do you remember what the community thought about the rock fish?

SS: When they closed it?

JB: Yeah.

SS: Well a lot of people struggled. I mean that was their livelihood. They had to find other things to compensate what they lost. My father, my grandfather used to catfish too so my father pretty much knew that part of the business. He did pretty well at it.

JB: Did your grandfather teach your father how to catfish?

SS: Yes, yes.

JB: Did your dad teach you?

SS: Well I never went with him catfishing. When he would load, he would load big tracker trailers with live fish. I used to help load the trucks. I used to drag the tubs up on the wharf then they would pick them up and dump them but I didn't per say go out with him cat fishing. That's the one thing I've never done that's weird but with the rock fishing and trotlining for the crabs I have done all that.

JB: Did anyone help your dad cat fish?

SS: Yea, he would have a mate and my brother later on started with my father.

JB: Your brother that works for the DNR [Department of Natural Resources] now?

SS: Yes, yes Jamie went to college at Salisbury State and got his bachelor's... don't know what the degree is. But he's been with the DNR [Department of Natural Resources] for probably eight years now anyways.

JB: Did he work on the water before?

SS: He worked on the water and then when Jamie, my brother started showing interest because the water was kind of like a struggle when he applied for the DNR position and got it. My father found himself being by himself on the water. He tried it for another year or so and it was starting to be struggle so then he applied for a job to be a captain at the Aberdeen proving grounds.

JB: Oh okay sure, over on the other side.

SS: Yep.

JB: Did you ever have a commercial license?

SS: I still do.

JB: You still do, okay.

SS: I've had a commercial license for years.

JB: What is your license? What is it for?

SS: I have the full license. I have the rock fishing and tent and the TEL.

JB: Oh ok wow. So do you go out in the morning?

SS: No, not now I don't. This is my job now with the retail and the wholesale.

JB: What do you do at Chesapeake Seafood?

SS: Chester River.

JB: Chester River.

SS: Chester River Seafood.

JB: Yeah.

SS: Well we buy crabs in the summer. I shed my own soft crabs. I'm still doing that since I was twelve.

We have the retail. We do that. We are mainly it's seasonal May through about October we are really busy with crabs and then we start oysters in

October and we are the only shucking house in Rock Hall that is allowed to shuck because we have a special license for it.

JB: Oh you do?

SS: Yep.

JB: Where do you, do you do them on the half shell for people to buy or do you put them in tins?

SS: Both

JB: Oh okay.

SS: Both.

JB: Who normally buys your oysters?

SS: Well we wholesale most of them but a lot of them go through here because we shuck them and sell them, big holidays. Thanksgiving's a big holiday for oysters and Christmas and New Year's so we sell a lot of oysters right through the store here.

JB: Did you start this business the Chester River Seafood?

SS: Yes okay, let's see how did this go? Okay. I am a single mother with two kids. I used to shed soft crabs, well I still do. I still shed soft crabs but I had to supplement my income and my boyfriend had actually brought home this showcase and I was like what am I going to do with this. And he was like I don't know put your soft crabs in it. Then we started banging nails and started putting up walls and then we got the health department involved because when you do all that you got to be proofed by the health department and then in order to make up what we lost with the permits and the health department stuff like that we just did the full boat. We did the wholesale and the retail steamed crabs. So we opened in June of '09.

JB: Oh okay you are still new.

SS: We are new but we are growing.

JB: How has it been going the first couple of years?

SS: We have been very busy. We've had a lot of support from the community, a lot of support. We are a little while away but we are busier than we expected to be so.

JB: Oh good.

SS: That's always a good thing now in this economy anyways but it is a lot of work over one hundred hours a week.

JB: [unintelligible].

SS: Yeah it's a lot of work .

JB: Do you find that growing up in this area it is find watermen to sell to you, to bring you the catch?

SS: Well, I know all the watermen. I'm a local girl, I've been here forty-three years so I mean, a lot of them knew me a lot of them were a little aaaah I don't know if I want to change because the old timers are set in there ways where they have sold for the other buyers for years and the first year we started I think we had three crabbers and then last year we had ten, twelve crabbers and then this year we had sixteen.

JB: Oh wow that is growing.

SS: So we are growing yes. So I think they showed a little more confidence that I was going to be around for a little while. There were a lot of people a little upset with us when we started because it is a market that you have to have broad shoulders to be in the seafood business because it can be a cut throat business but I treat my crabbers good and they treat me good. And it works out.

JB: Yeah, have there been other issues with other seafood stores in town?

SS: Yeah we have had some issues yea, yea. They did their best not to let us get a start but we got back in the ring and kept getting up.

JB: Did you ever think of before you started the business doing a job that was either off the water or going back on the water?

SS: Well I've waitressed I've done well let's see I've been a secretary, I used to work down at United Shell Fish as a keponge operator and I was always drawn back to the water. I just love this part of it. It is a choice that I was kind of, back in, ok back in 1994 my son had a near drowning accident out in Chesapeake Bay. And it sucks I had him for ten years after that. He passed away in '04. He was at one of my family member's house and he got out of the house and they found him in the Bay. I spent ten years in the hospital and when I got out of the hospital I had to decide what I was going to do to make money and how I was going to survive because I had him home with me for ten years. He had nursing. I mean he had nurses at home but I had to figure out how I was going to survive to pay the bills and I was drawn back into shedding crabs and he would come out here with me. When I'd start, he used to love being out in the crab house and listen to the water running and stuff but he passed away in '04 and then I decided I had to throw myself into something else so I started this business.

JB: And this just takes a little bit of your time during the week.

SS: Yeah, yeah.

JB: So your other children, do they ever help you out here?

SS: Yea well my son, he is thirteen and he started with a commercial watermen this summer hook and lining. He has it in his blood. He really likes to do it. I mean he gets over to the pond fishing. You can tell he's going to have it. He has the bug, you know the watermen bug. My daughter she comes out and helps me in the shop. She's ten but mainly she is my little busy bee with cheerleading, she is into cheerleading and swimming and all that stuff right but she'll be helping out here I know. You know you kind of look at the water business now and you look how it is dying and you wonder if you should you steer them away from this but if it's in your blood, it's in your blood. You got to make the best out of it. You have to give a hundred and ten percent to succeed in this you can't just slide.

JB: How do you think your life with dealing with seafood industry is different than your mom's?

SS: Well I brought my mom in here with me.

JB: You have? Okay.

SS: Yes, my mom retired. She was an insurance agent. She owned her own insurance agency for like thirty years and when I was getting ready to start this business she said, "Oh you know the economy and you're down here and you are so far out of the way. I don't know." I said, "Alright mom." When she was getting ready to retire I said to her, "Can you give me ten or twelve hours a week. Just come down and help me set up and this and that." She said yea. Well she is working about forty hours a week now but she loves it. She is good with people. She is good you know she knows seafood too because my father and her have been married for forty-four years so she knows seafood just as well as anybody.

JB: Did she ever go and help your dad out on the water at all?

SS: No, she pretty much left that to him but like I said my brother did and I helped out but my mom is pretty much like the office type.

JB: Got it. Did she keep the books in your house then?

SS: Yes, yes she did all the paper work and all.

JB: Go it. The paper work has changed a lot right?

SS: Oh my God you have all these DNR. You have to, well we are a check station for the DNR for rockfish so you have to report every day. You have to go online every day and report if you bought any rockfish and the quantity every day and then you have a daily log for crabs and a daily log for fish and then you got an oyster log that you have to keep. Oh what else, you have your personal daily catch limits that I have to report because I hold a TFL license you have to report them. You have to report through the business there is a monthly report too so it is all these reports. It is a full time job just to keep up with the paperwork

but then of course you have the health department too. We have more than the local health department we have the state health department because we shuck oysters so the state health department comes in. So it is a lot.

JB: So does your mom help you out with the books then?

SS: She hasn't, she is probably gonna have to start because we are growing. I did start Quick Books because everything was pad and pencil up to this year and then I started the Quick Books thing.

JB: Mhm. Hello. Goodbye [laughter]. Wow so it's a little bit of everything you do. Do you don't go out then and fish for oysters?

SS: No.

JB: So that reports smaller.

SS: Every now and again we will go out trotlining. We just can't get away from here. I mean this business you have to be here 24/7. We do go away in March. We'll take a week off and we'll leave and go away in March because March is pretty much done with everything. It is the end of the rock fish because you can rock fish gill net up to the end of February. So the first week in March we take up out of here and try and get some R and R and then get back in the ring again in April but I love it. I love the business. I mean it is sad it is such a struggle but I love the business.

JB: What kind of boat do you have?

SS: Chris and I just bought a work boat from a guy who used to crab for us and he passed away last year, Lewis King. I don't even know what size it is. It's like 42, 40 foot boat and we have a couple of just bateaus, small boats. We have a Privateer but we don't really get to go out much anymore. We're all stuck here.

JB: Who is Chris?

SS: He is my boyfriend.

JB: Oh okay.

SS: Chris and I have been together four years.

JB: And he is the one who bought you the display?

SS: Yea he is the tall dummy that walks around here. [Laughter] Just kidding he is the big guy over there.

JB: So was it his idea then because he bought you this?

SS: Yes, yes he was trying how to figure out how, he has two businesses he has a grass cutting business, lawn care business and he had a diving business where he would clean the bottoms of boats. Then he would oyster in the winter time and we've gotten so busy now that he has turned the lawn care business over to one of his employees to do that and he doesn't do his diving business anymore because he is so busy on the wholesale part of it. He does the wholesale I do the retail, which it works out so much better that way, that it's not both. Yea, it was his idea because he knew I was going to start panicking because I was single income with two kids but it has worked out.

JB: So we are going a little around and around your kids, how would you feel if your son became a watermen?

SS: I would support him.

JB: You would?

SS: He'd have to have to give 110% but I would support him. I mean it is a dying business and everyone says oh I don't want my kids to do that. It is his choice. I'll support him in anything that he wants to do as long as it is good you know but I mean he has an advantage because I have a seafood business. So he has an advantage when he gets older if he wants to sell if I am still here. You know he'll have market because I am already established. So he'll have a better advantage then a lot of people would that are just starting out.

JB: What would you say if your daughter got a commercial license and started working on the water?

SS: I can't see her doing that. She's a lot like my mom she is more bookworm, you know. More, I'm not going say delicate because she is as hard as nails because she's been raised there are nine boys on this block and she's been raised around it but she's not delicate but she's kind of, she would focus more on schooling and stuff like that. I could see her as a secretary or something. She could probably do my books a lot better than I can. Shoot. Anyways I will support them whatever they want to do. Then Chris has two boys; one of them went to Paris Island, he is in the marines. He left August first and we go down the end of October for his graduation and then he has another boy that's twelve.

JB: Oh okay.

SS: A six pack, six of us. [Laughter]

JB: Do you see many kids now your son's age or the boys in your family. Do you see them working on the water those children?

SS: That's funny because the class that he's in. He's in eighth grade there are probably four or five that I can name off the top of my head that do work with their fathers and stuff like that. They do go out. Can I get that?  
[telephone rings]

JB: Yeah, please.

[Part 2]

SS: Brodie, he's probably got four or five in his class that work with their fathers so his in a group of little watermen there. So he is really the only class that shows an interest in it.

JB: Kids around him like a year older or a year younger?

SS: No not really just the ones in his class, one of the fathers clams. The other one the boy's uncle, he crabs a lot and then the another boy his father crabs so they are all like old watermen they're are all old salties.

JB: I can see the guys now.

SS: Yeah, yeah.

JB: Does he get up, at you now, at 5 o'clock in the morning?

SS: If he is supposed to get up and go to work yea he does. Yea he does. I mean I am going to push my kids to work because you have to in this business. Like I said you have to give one hundred and ten or you are not going to make it. [Phone rings]

[Part 3]

JB: I love this little thing you just push record and then it just starts up. Are there any girls in his class that want to go out on the water at all?

SS: I am trying to think who is in his class. No, I can't really, there are a lot of boys in that group. I mean there are not many girls in that age group. There are a lot of boys cause now my daughter's age there are a lot of girls but my son's age for some reason everyone in Rock Hall had boys and then when my daughter everyone had girls so but no I don't know of a lot of little girls that fish. There is one little girl that comes down with her father when he is crabbing. She helps bait the line and stuff like that but not many of them.

[Phone rings]

[Part 4]

JB: Back to recording

SS: Okay.

JB: Do you have many, do you see many women out on the water today commercially?

SS: No.

JB: Is there anybody?

SS: There are a couple that go out but I mean I don't think they are making a living at it. Most of them are doing what I do like with the retail parts of it and all but there aren't many. I can't think of any.

JB: Why do you think that females don't go out on the water, they start the businesses?

SS: I don't know like I said it is a struggle. I myself wouldn't want to get up at four o'clock every morning six o'clock is enough. I don't know there just isn't a lot of women that do it anymore. I can remember being young and a lot of women that used to go out and do stuff like that.

JB: What did they do out there?

SS: Mostly trotlining. Yea I did it too. I set peeler pots which they catch the shedder crabs, they catch the crabs that are getting ready to molt. I did set peeler pots one year out in front of Rock Hall and I caught so much hell from the rest of the watermen because I set inside their lines and I was over the line and they would so mad because the DNR would not come and write me a ticket for me being over the line because I told them I said well I'm a woman, I don't know. I did that one year I did very well at it but like I said I am in shore all the time because of this business.

JB: Are there other women that have like peeler crabs pots?

SS: No.

JB: Or sloughing plants?

SS: Yea, my aunt she has a sloughing house up the road there up on route 20. Her and me are the only ones that do it in Rock Hall.

JB: Is that Andrea?

SS: Yeah.

JB: She's your aunt? I didn't know that.

SS: Yea Jim Bob is my uncle. That's the one I started with, with the peelers with shedding soft crabs when I was ten, twelve, eleven, twelve years old.

JB: Did you and her work together at all?

SS: No not much like I said I checked well I did work for her when she had Annie J's. I would work out there but I have been around the water forever though. I'm here there and everywhere I worked at Ford's, I have worked at I and J's and I have worked and E and E's. So I have been everywhere.

JB: Do you ever go out on the water for fun?

SS: Yeah.

JB: Hook and lining?

SS: Yea actually we did a couple of weeks ago. We went out just to sit and relax but right now we just don't have time to do that. Once we got older, the kids get older and maybe they show interest in taking more responsibility with the business maybe we can get to do stuff like that. We are actually building the business for them so hopefully like I said they'll show interest. She'll do the books and Birdie will be out of here I hope and not out on the water but if he chooses to do that and brings in the product I will support him either way.

JB: How do you feel about him going out on the water? Who does he go out with?

SS: Termite, Bob Coleman.

JB: Yea sure. Did Termite come and ask you?

SS: Well actually he asked him one day. He said, "Do you want to go fishing?" He said yea because he sees him over the pond fishing all the time and then one day turned into, "You want me to go the next day?" because Termite saw that he was really was interested in it and that he was pretty good at it. So it turned into an everyday thing. They did real well this summer. I mean he made some money because he wanted a pellet gun and I told him I am not buying you a pellet gun if you make enough money you can buy a pellet gun. He did.

SS: Three quarters done. I am having an interview.

JB: She is going to be famous.

Male voice 1- Chris?: That's right; she's a rock star [laughter].

Male voice 2- I've seen you somewhere before but I can't remember where I'd seen you.

Male voice 1- Chris?: She's the brains I'm the muscle.

JB: I've been here the last three days.

Male voice: Yea but where are you from?

JB: Ohio.

Male voice: Ohio. Have you been around here before?

JB: Not in this particular place?

Male voice: Been to Hooper's island? Cambridge?

JB: I work down in St. Michael for the summer.

Male voice 2: Oh yeah.

JB: I worked for the museum down there. I went out fishing once here I went out with Rick Morlock one morning.

Male voice 2: That's where I know you from.

JB: Oh okay.

Male voice 2: I used to oyster with him. I remember you from there.

[Part 5]

JB: So your son goes out with Termite. Do you ever get nervous with him out there?

SS: No, not with Termite. No, he is one of the best around.

JB: Is he?

SS: Yeah he is one of the best watermen around.

JB: How do you become the best?

SS: Well he just is a respected watermen. He gives a 110 percent that is how you become respected is ones that give 110 percent. Brodie's grandfather is a respected watermen, Don Pierce is my son's grandfather, it is in his blood too.

JB: Does your son ever go out with your father or your grandfather?

SS: With his father? No, his father is having issues. He's bipolar so, he was a watermen but he's got a boat but it is a bad situation. He has failed as a watermen.

JB: Alright. I was thinking about getting a cheerleader out on a boat. I am sorry that is completely unrelated but seeing a little girl out on the boat. Wouldn't that be cute? Cheering. I can totally see that happening.

SS: She's got a competition Saturday actually in Salisbury for cheerleading.

JB: Do a lot of little girls in this area they do cheerleading that's the big sport?

SS: No not really this is like Kent county cheerleading squad and her and another little are the only little girls from Rock Hall that are doing it.

JB: What do little girls in Rock Hall do for fun then?

SS: I guess soccer and stuff but like I have seen some do that she swims for Washington College she has been doing that for five years since she was four. Yea, yea.

JB: Hello.

Male voice: hello.

SS: This is my uncle.

JB: How are you?

Male voice: This is your book?

SS: I am doing an interview.

Male Voice: An interview?

SS: Yeah and you are on recording.

Male voice: Which interview is this too?

JB: This is for my school project.

Male voice: Oh.

JB: I'm learning what women do in Rock Hall.

Male Voice: She sleeps a lot.

JB: Yea, sounds like it she has nothing to do during the day, nothing at all.

Male voice: [unintelligible]

SS: She's got to type everything you say so just get out of here.

Male voice: She is contrary as hell, I'll say that.

JB: So what do you think is the most popular thing that you sell out of here?

SS: Well we sell? Well the river crabs.

JB: The river crabs.

SS: Yeah.

JB: To a lot of tourists that come along?

SS: Uh-huh, May through, well once Memorial Day hits it's a lot of tourists but we have a lot of locals support too. A lot of the locals come down and get a dozen or so. Yea and then once we get this time of year we get oysters that we sell but most of it is crabs and soft crabs. People come down because they know I shed my soft shells. So they'll come down and get them because they are a little bit softer because they are not transported in.

JB: Oh okay. Do you eat a lot of crabs?

SS: I tell you I don't eat as many as I guess I really could because I sometimes I go in the house and sit down and think oh I can eat a crab and then there gone but sometimes I'll grab a claw every now and then but I don't eat them.

Male voice: Good luck.

JB: Good-bye.

SS: Every once in a couple weeks. Now Chris eats them all the time. He eats them every day. He eats up the profits.

JB: So how do people who are watermen, do you think they eat a lot of things they catch?

SS: Yea they do. A lot of them will bring in a basket of crabs they'll ask to get it steamed so they eat it at night. If they're fishing they'll bring the fish here and we'll clean it for them but yea they do they live off what they catch.

JB: Cleaning fish? That gutting it and scaling them?

SS: Yeah.

JB: They don't do that themselves?

SS: Well some of them do. Actually I just taught my son how to do it. Yeah.

JB: Did he get a kick out of that?

SS: Yea well he came here on night with five perch that he caught and I told him because I didn't really want him to cut up a rock fish because they are so expensive, I told him when I get some perch and I'll let you cut them up. Well I never got any perch in so he got his five and he's out here. I'm like. "What are you doing?" He said, "I am teaching myself how to fillet a fish" because he used to sit and just watch me do it. And I said ok so he scaled them and he fillet them and he brought them in the house and he said, "Well are you going to cook them for me?" I said, "Yes I'll cook them for you now." And he did a pretty good job for being his first time. I'm out there going oh my God don't cut yourself because he has a fillet knife he's like "Mom I am never going to learn if you don't

let me do it." But he did it he did well. There were a couple of bones in it but he did well.

JB: So you didn't teach him how to fillet he just learned by watched you?

SS: He just watched yea he would watch and rock fish are expensive and I mean I can't give one to him to cut up like I said I would give him a perch or something. He would sit. There is another boy back there that fillets and he does very well and he would sit there and watch us. Watch us fillet them and pretty much just taught himself that was the first time he done it and I though pretty good job for his being his first time. There was meat to eat anyways.

JB: Did you learn by watching too?

SS: Yea my father gave me a few fish to practice on. Of course like I say rock fish wasn't that expensive back then but yea pretty much taught myself. Same thing watched my father do it and just learned from there. I mean I use an electric knife Brodie used a manual just a fillet knife just to start because I am not ready to give him the electric knife yet. I don't want him with no fingers missing.

JB: That's one way to start the water business.

SS: No, no but I have good kids, very good kids, knock on wood, so far very good kids.

JB: So how many people do you have working here?

SS: Well we have one boy, Chris, does his lawn care and then he comes and helps us out here on weekends here and then my mother and then Chris and I. And then every now and then we'll get someone to come and put the crabs away for us.

JB: So really it is only four people with one part-time.

SS: Yeah.

JB: So, it's you and Chris that basically who own the business.

SS: Yes.

JB: It's a co-partners kind of thing.

SS: Yep. I actually own it but he helped me start it. I can't say any more we'll say fifty-one, forty-nine. I have fifty-one he has forty-nine I still have to pay taxes on it so.

JB: And is this your property?

SS: Yes.

JB: That's your house out front?

SS: Yes, and Chris has a house up the road there but we pretty much I mean we lived together here.

JB: Why did you decide to put it in your backyard instead of putting it in town?

SS: Because I own the building and rent is out of...takes your whole profit. If you don't own your building you've got so much overhead.

[Doors opening]

JB: Hello. He thinks he's funny.

SS: Yea, he thinks he's funny-.

JB: So walk me through the process so a watermen puts up and how do you find a watermen by the way?

SS: The ones that have TFLs, the official fishing license.

JB: Ok got it. So they pull up with their catch what happens when they show up?

SS: They pull in then we check them in. We write them an invoice, write them a receipt, pay them and see them tomorrow.

JB: Do you buy anything that they bring up?

SS: I mean anything that legally legal you know crabs. If the boys catch a few fish and bring them in or something, yeah. Anything that is season that you are legally allowed to buy we buy it from them.

JB: So even if they bring in like one or two perch one, or two rock fish.

SS: Yeah.

JB: A couple bushel of crabs.

SS: If they are legally allowed to have it we will buy it.

JB: Are there any watermen here in Rock Hall you know that specialized in only one type of fish like only catfish or...?

SS: No, everyone pretty much does all of them. Nevits is a check station, J and J's is a check station and we're a check station. So everyone pretty much does rock fish, perch, catfish. Catfish is a big thing because like I said my father does that a little bit and Chris has just started fooling around with it a little bit. Him and my father will be cat fishing here in another week or too.

JB: Did Chris start cat fishing because of your father?

SS: No, well he went with my dad a couple of time. My father started wholesaling or selling us his catfish and Chris saw an opportunity that he couple possibly make a little bit of money off of it if he went on his own because we already send we send most of fish to New York market so instead of paying the watermen then you know I'll go out and catch my own then we will have that much more of an income but him and my dad just kind of play around with it. It's not that this is my job kind of thing. Dad does it just because it is in his blood like I said and you know he is a patrol boat captain right now but he still has to have, it's a fix. He has to have the fix that he is one the water so.

JB: That seems common around here.

SS: Yeah.

JB: You have to be around the water.

SS: Yep.

JB: Are there any big festival that go on the water around here?

SS: They have watermen's day that is around the 4th of July around the 4th of July. I haven't been able to go the last couple of years because that's one of our busiest weekends. My mother, my father and me used to run it.

JB: You used to run it?

SS: Yea we used to do the commentary and we pretty much set it up and yea. Everybody called us that wanted to know question about it. They still do but it's like well we're not there. It is a docking contests were everybody, they cuts loose. I'm glad not involved anymore. It got a little stressful.

JB: How did your family become in charge of that?

SS: Just being watermen and we volunteer for everything. We just do if there's a crab feast or something we used to when we didn't have this business we were everywhere we volunteered for this and that but now it is kind of hard to get the time to volunteer.

JB: When you were growing up was your mom part of like any clubs were volunteering was important for?

SS: Yea what did she do? She was PTA, she was my homeroom mother. She brought the homeroom mother cookies. Yea she did volunteer a lot for the school she made sure her kids came first too. My brother and I turned out ok. I haven't had a very, less see. I've had a pretty rough road the last fifteen years but now my life's wonderful I mean I learned a lot, I learned a lot. I mean it's you know I've had two failed marriages but I mean hopefully, I'm not saying I wasn't part of the problem but I mean it was circumstances there, like my son's drowning accident. My first ex-husband couldn't handle that and then of course my second ex-husband like I said was bi-polar. You play the hand you are dealt in life.

JB: Are you ok talking about your ex's a little bit?

SS: Yeah, fine.

JB: Did either of them work on the water?

SS: Both of them.

JB: Both of them.

SS: Yeah, my first husband was from Deal Island and like I said after my son's accident he couldn't pretty much handle it. So he went back to Deal Island and I came home where my family was because I knew I had family support here because Luke was 24/7 job. He was continuous care. There was no sleeping and it was in and out of hospitals and my husband couldn't handle that and my other two kids' father we're just divorced for three years. I don't know if it was the stress of the water or what it was but he started having manic episodes and the he ended up staying in a psychiatric ward for a while and I couldn't handle it.

[Phone rings]

[Part 6]

JB: Are accidents on the water common around here?

SS: There've been a couple, you know, there's been a couple. After my son's accident there was a lot more focus on water safety. I did a couple of things around the community that to promote to get kids to learn how to swim at a very young age. I mean my daughter has known how to swim since she was two and my son too, my oldest son, but it was just a terrible tragedy. I had a lot of support from the community then but I mean like I said I spend ten years in the hospital.

[Door opening]

JB: Did the accident happen down on Deal Island?

SS: Yeah.

JB: Is there a community pool around here that you can learn to swim in?

SS: Yes, they just put up a new community center up in Wharton.

JB: Is that where your daughter learned to swim or did she learn?

SS: No, Washington College.

JB: Washington College. Is there a big swimming program at the school?

SS: Yes, Well yes there is one at the high school.

JB: Is there, is it a private team that she is on then at Washington College.

SS: Yes, it is a swim team.

JB: They compete all over the state.

SS: Yea, yea she likes doing it. Summer time is hard for me to get her there but my cousin takes her because her daughter swims too but it is something I really wanted her to be involved in. I mean water safety it just happens so fast you know and anything can happen very fast when my oldest son had his accident it was February and the river was froze and he fell through the ice.

JB: How did you meet your first husband?

SS: He was oystering up here.

JB: Oh he was?

SS: Yes.

JB: You met him out on the water?

SS: Well I didn't, he was staying up here he could come up from Deal Island but it seems like a lifetime ago.

JB: Why did people come up here to oyster?

SS: Because there wasn't many down there at the time now there's more are more down there then there are up here but they used to come up here from Smith Island, Deal Island they all used to come up here and catch oysters because there weren't many down that way. But now I think there are more down there then there are up here.

JB: Did you guys go on dates?

SS: It was so long ago I can't remember it was a part of my life I don't want to.

JB: Do you and Chris go on dates now?

SS: Oh yeah.

JB: Where do you guys go?

SS: When we have time we go out to dinner at Watermen's or somewhere. I don't know if him and I if we ever get married because we've both been married before and it works better this way. It seems to anyways we have been together four or five years something like that.

JB: Nice.

SS: Yeah, Probably wait until the kids get old and grey then we'll decide.

JB: Do you think I missed anything in our talk about...

SS: No.

JB: About working on the water or what you do here?

SS: No.

JB: Perfect. Well thank you I really appreciate your time.

SS: I hope you get an A.

JB: Thanks.