

Interview Log

Interviewee: Andrea Jacquette

Interviewed and Transcribed: Julie Broadbent

Date: 8/8/2011

Location: Rock Hall, Maryland

Topic: Working, working on the water, waterwomen, family, sloughing crabs, soft shell crabs

Theme: Females working on the water

Comments: Sound quality poor. It was taped on the sloughing house so there is lots of running water in the background. It was also raining that day on a metal roof.

of CDs: 1

AJ: When they walk through the door they push out and they drop one in off...

JB: Yeah.

AJ: [unintelligible] last year I have a great big source for the pump and I have one pump that is actually outside of the tank and one that sits back out side of my house and there that raises up a huge forty pound but anyways...

JB: Forty pounds.

AJ: So I am trying to push it up to get it out of the tank and I have a twelve foot tank in the spring to hold my water. I am trying to hoist things thing up and it would get half way up and then slide. It only comes out a hole about this big and it is about this big around so you got to haul it but anyways Bobby came in and I was still out there he says "Andrea, what are you doing?" I said I am trying to get this pump out and I said it heavy I can't do it. He said, "How long have you been out there?" About twenty minutes, I can't get it out. He said, "Just wait next time, just wait. We'll be here eventually."

JB: So they come every day the guys?

Al: Oh yeah six days a week.

JB Okay.

Al: It is mandatory to take one day off and I am very fortunate they all my boys take Sunday off.

JB: Every single one of them takes Sunday off?

Al: Every single one of them. So Sunday is my cleaning day. That is when everything comes out, everything gets scrubbed down and cleaned up. So I only work a half day on Sundays so-

JB: How many crabs do they bring you normally during the day?

AJ: On the average about probably a thousand.

JB: A thousand crabs a day?

AJ: About.

JB: Are they separated out in the tanks by the day they are brought in or?

AJ: No, they are separated by ripeness.

JB: Oh okay got it.

AJ: The green eat ripe as soon as they start to shed. The green ones will eat them because they are not ready to shed yet. They still have to have more food to get fat enough to shed that's why they eat them. The ripe ones they have to be culled every day because they'll ripen up if they sit there in the tanks and they go ripe all the time.

AJ: Welcome back

[male voice]

AJ: almost-

[male voice]

[Part 2]

JB: So how are you separating these out?

AJ: Ripe and still green.

JB: Oh okay.

AJ: And I am starting from in there but I don't have enough room so I will have to move them to another box.

JB: Oh okay, got it. The crabs don't mind you tossing around that like?
[laughter]

AJ: If they do they've never said anything about it. [laughter] They are comfortable. If I'm handling them hard yeah I guess it is detrimental but really it's not that hard.

JB: They are hardy creatures.

AJ: Good job, thank you.

[Male voices - God damn they're good]

JB: So what are bucks again?

AJ: Bucks?

JB: Bucks.

AJ: Buck nakeds, they are the ones that hang up when they are shedding and they die.

JB: Oh okay.

AJ: You can rip everything off them and clean them and the only thing you have is meat them, no legs, no shell, nothing and basically that's all we eat. We don't eat soft crabs we eat bucks. Dip them in a little bit of pancake batter and deep fry them. They are crispy like potato chips.

JB: They sound really good actually.

AJ: They are really good, they are good. I mean they can cook, that's a good crab.

JB: Do any restaurants sell bucks or is that?

AJ: No, I have tried different places I don't know what the problem is with them. People that eat crabs have an aversion to them.

JB: Oh okay.

AJ: Don't ask me why but anybody who has ever tried them prefers to eat them to regular crabs, soft crabs. I don't see what the problem is whether it's the fact that, people said that if they weren't dead when we cleaned them. I think that is the aversion.

JB: Yea

AJ: But they aren't dead long, you know and then you just clean them.

JB: Yea, it's like any old meat.

AJ: Yea.

JB: Right?

AJ: Right.

JB: You don't eat alive meat.

AJ: Right, I mean it's not like they were sitting in the water for five or six hours and or whatever they are just, they die. Free meal.
[laughter] It's either that or throw them away.

JB: Yea

AJ: I'll send you some home if you want some so you can try them.

JB: I'm not a very good cook.

AJ: You don't have to be a very good cook to cook them.

JB: Just a little pancake batter and fry them up.

AJ: Just take pancake flour, pancake batter, and a little bit of Old Bay in there dip them in it, dry. They have to be dry then put them in a deep fryer.

JB: Huh

AJ: They are breaded. Basically French fried cooking is what it is.

JB: You would be amazed what I can mess up though.

AJ: Huh?

JB: You'd be amazed with what I can mess up. I have mess up like grilled cheese.

AJ: Oh my, you are bad.

JB: Oh I am really bad yea. Did you learn to do this from a family member or did you?

AJ: Yea, my grandfather.

JB: Your grandfather. So you did growing up and you out here and he taught you how to separate them.

AJ: Yep when we were growing up as kids I started dip netting.

JB: Uh-huh

AJ: Ok Well we started out dip netting as kids ok starting dip netting for the crabs and basically that's it once you know what to look for, you get it.

JB: So what made you decide to start the business of actually doing it?

AJ: Actually my husband was a crabber at the time and we actually bought it together

JB: Uh-huh

AJ: And he had overboard slough boxes and Saturday night he checked his crabs, culling crabs. We ate out Saturday night.

JB: And it kept growing and growing huh?

AJ: Yea and when this came along he did overboard at his parent's house and then when we got married kind of got out of it because we got into actually wholesaling crabs. Then this came along, the idea of how to do it this way, and it became a challenge.

JB: Uh-huh.

Al: I guess we had done it this way for about twenty years maybe.

JB: Twenty years yea.

Al: We actually did it, we owned where J and J's is?

JB: Oh, the seafood place, yeah okay.

AJ: We owned that at one time. I got pregnant with Gladys there was no way. When you are in that kind of business that's a seven day a week twenty four hour a day job you know. There was just no way I could raise her and do the store at the same time. It was just too much. What is the difference between what I am doing now is when I was working twenty four hour is I'm home.

JB: Yea you can do it right in your back yard, side yard.

AJ: And she the first couple of years she was born. Your windows open?

JB: Oh is it open? I think it is closed.

AJ: The first couple years she had her own box, she had her own box. She had her very own box. She was a shriveled up prune for the first couple of years. She played in the water all day long.

JB: Yea, I'm sure. She never got pinched by a crab or anything?

AJ: No, I because I kept one box I didn't put anything in it just her all her toys and stuff, inflatable toys. She lived in a soft crab box for a couple of years anyways.

JB: Did she ever get into this when she was like old enough to deal with crabs but not sitting in the tub by herself?

AJ: She is old enough to know she was probably six or seven. She knows it but she wouldn't do it. Hey Chuck!

[part three]

JB: Man, I hope it is nothing serious with the fire.

AF: Whatever it is. I would say it is a brush fire.

JB: Did you husband still out on the water is he still catching crabs?

AF: Actually five years ago he started working for a chemical company

JB: Uh-huh

AF: Hello

[Part 4]

AJ: Alright, I'm sorry.

JB: That's okay.

AJ: I mean this is what we do every day.

JB: No it's nice that people come in and hang up their Barbie dolls.

AJ: They find the weirdest crab in their crab pots they always bring it in to display it until the next weird thing comes in. Usually, 99 percent of the time, like usually I have something floating around the entire year. One year I had a little rubber duck, one year I had a troll, one year I had a horses of some kind all rubber. One time I had one of the little plastic soldier all summer long just floating around. No, he got off the water about five years ago. Physically we were talking about this Saturday, physically he could no longer do it. The help around here is so horrible and trashy you can't really depend on people anymore. The ones that work, work but other than that they get the drug money and they get the booze money they only work a few days. I'm not saying that is all of them because there are some that do work but that is one of the biggest problems here.

JB: Yeah.

AJ: I think these problems are almost everywhere.

JB: Were you sad to see him get off the water?

AJ: Yes, broken hearted it is [unintelligible] it's part of who you are. Yes and I knew it was coming but it didn't make it a whole lot easier and financially what he did, his main business was cat fishing and we had, they would import them cheaper then what we could catch them for.

JB: They would import them cheaper then what you could catch them and sell them? Catfish?

AJ: They came from Vietnam.

JB: I'm surprised.

AJ: Ninety percent of catfish that you eat are imported.

JB: Huh

AJ: Ninety percent.

JB: Ninety percent, I didn't-

AJ: [Unintelligible] they pretty much put him out.

JB: Yea sure.

AJ: He did it [unintelligible] probably forty years.

JB: I'm sorry, His family did it for forty years?

AJ: He did.

JB: He did, wow.

AJ: He came from farmers.

JB: Okay.

AJ: They were getting, when he first started they were getting twenty-five cents okay?

JB: For catfish?

AJ: Catfish when he quit forty some years later he got forty-five cents a pound.

JB: What happened to inflation? Nothing, twenty cents difference.

AJ: Yeah.

JB: That's crazy.

AJ: You hear that.

JB: Yea that's not, you can't make a living off that anymore.

AJ: Petrol, maintenance, bait, bait went astronomical and then of course Delaware put the ban on the horseshoe crabs which was their main bait. So they had to send crab legs to New Jersey to get clam bellies out of Cape May. So really monetarily it wasn't justified either.

JB: Sure. Why didn't he go into farming if he came from farming family?

AJ: This area...

JB: The chicken's trying to come in.

AJ: That's what the gate's there for. [Unintelligible]

JB: I don't know if that one is alive.

AJ: Yes.

JB: It is?

AJ: Yeah.

JB: Is it just tired?

AJ: He is tired.

[Long break]

JB: [unintelligible]

AJ: We have family run farming and major corporations they pretty much do all the farming.

JB: Yeah.

AJ: It's hard to get back into it.

JB: You can't do it. You can't get back into farming if you are not...

AJ: You have to steal the mothers in the grounded [unintelligible]

JB: So the land you rent here, is that to a corporation or is that to an individual family?

AJ: It's a family but it's a corporation. The family is a big corporation.

JB: Oh that's too bad. So he couldn't get into that so he went into the water business and that kind of track?

AJ: At that time he could have stayed farming.

JB: Yeah.

AJ: But he loved the water so that's what he did. So there you go. We actually, well he actually sold their boat in January and that was the real like, that was never. Then we knew, you know, that he was never going back. So that was bad day.

JB: Yea that is a bad day when you.

AJ: A bad day. Who knows.

JB: Yea. Did you guys ever go out on the boat together and do some crabbing, trotlining?

AJ: Timmy crab potted.

JB: Oh he crab potted.

AJ: He idled in it. When his crew didn't show up I would be called out of bed and I can honestly say I'm not a very good mate. I am going to say yes, we women work really hard but the labor intensified stuff that they do we are not capable of doing.

JB: Yeah.

AJ: Physically we are not made for it.

JB: Sure.

AJ: Yea I would go and I would help the best I could but I was more of a hindrance than a help.

JB: What were your roles like what did you do when you were on the boat when you a hindrance?

AJ: He would basically do everything except for he'd catch the pot, pull the pot, dump the pot, and then hand it to me and I got to stuff bait it and shove it back overboard and cull the crabs out, in between early, early morning, throwing up. I don't get, I have motion sickness but I don't get seasick from the actual rock of the boat I get seasick from the smell of the buggies that they use for bait. Between that and the fumes from the diesel those things makes me sick.

JB: Got it.

AJ: So it would take me a good half an hour to get myself straight. And once I did that then I was good to go for the rest of the day.

JB: Yeah.

AJ: But never to fail that I would get out there and as soon as I got to work, over the side.

JB: That's just more crab bait isn't it?

AJ: Yea I bet but as for cat fishing I never did it. That is something that is very labor intensified and I knew that I would be in the way for that. I would go because they sold all of their fish to the live market. Trucks came in and took them to the pay lakes out West and I can sit up on the boat and write down the numbers as they were weighing the fish and putting them on the truck but that's as far I got to catfishing.

JB: Do you take care of any of like the booking keeping or anything like that or do you kind of do all that?

AJ: I do all the bookkeeping.

JB: You do all the bookkeeping.

AJ: Yea, I have always done all the book keeping.

JB: You used to work at a bank right?

AJ: Yes but I retired after twenty years. I could go back right now and have a cushy job I guess but I'm not much on walls they have a tendency to close in so and I didn't and one of the other major factors was that

when we worked I don't care what company you work for. Big small whatever your life is supposed to be that company.

JB: Sure.

AJ: So basically there are things more important things to me then my job and that one of the major reasons you know you bank. At that time we were working six days a week and they want us to go to meetings every night and then they wanted you to go out and every time we went out to dinner they wanted you to talk banking with whomever you were with. That was my time.

JB: Yea what was your role at the bank that they have you?

AJ: VP.

JB: Oh wow okay that's why they wanted you.

AJ: And everything you did was scrutinized because you were professional and you were supposed to act in a professional way. Not that I didn't but there's a time for fun and a then there's a time for work and when I was out I think that and when you go out people don't want to talk business. They are out, they are to socialize to have fun. They don't want to talk business and that was one of their main priorities when I worked at the bank was you talk business.

JB: Did you work for the bank before you were married is that?

AJ: No.

JB: Okay.

AJ: I started at the bank after we got married and worked with him on the side.

JB: What with all that free time you had?

AJ: With the free time I had.

JB: Oh gosh, you were a very busy lady.

AJ: I try and stay that way because you'll find out as you get older if you sit down it's hard to get up so you just keep moving. And then you don't have to worry about getting stiff cause you are steady going but when you do sit down, you sit down, and you are down and out.

JB: Why did you decide to work in a bank instead of just going out on the water and doing soft crabbing stuff?

AJ: Because of what my parents and my grandparents were involved in I couldn't get involved in. My father, when he retired was a tugboat captain but before that he fished he had a commercial charter

business. There was nothing in there for a woman. My grandfather seine hauled that was no place for a woman. So I started fooling around with Jimmy that was it you know. I had to have a job I had to work so that was the opportunity.

JB: You saw an ad in the newspaper and you applied?

AJ: Actually my uncle worked for the bank and I knew, he told me that they needed employees so I worked.

JB: How old where you when you got started at the bank?

AJ: Seventeen.

JB: Seventeen. How old where you when you got married?

AJ: Twenty.

JB: Ok where did you meet Jimmy?

Al: Same school.

JB: Oh okay.

Al: His mom drove the school bus. We went to the same school, involved in the same sports. We are a really small, teeny, tiny, town and like I said his mother and father drove the school bus. So we saw him on the school bus when his mom and dad picked us up. We went to the same school until we graduated. We did the same sports in the school. We got band in the same teeny tine community. Sat on the same parking lot when you, you know, go out on Friday night you sit on the same parking lot. The cars would pull up and we would all sit. We grew up together.

JB: Is that what there is to do for fun on a Friday and Saturday night? Hang out and maybe drink?

Al: Shot the breeze. No, we didn't drink.

JB: No?

[Part 5]

[Unintelligible]

JB: See these two are together can you [unintelligible]

Al: Yea they wouldn't know who they are. Old people put names on them. Everybody has their basket and they come in and put the lid on their baskets then we know whose they are.

JB: Is that Buffalo?

AJ: Beeffalo.

JB: Beeffalo.

Al: There is a Buffalo in Rock Hall but this is Beeffalo.

JB: How did he get that nickname unless that is his real name?

AJ: Beeffalo, no, I don't know who named him.

JB: Yeah.

AJ: Well, I don't know who named him. Everyone in Rock Hall must have a nickname.

JB: What is your nickname?

AJ: Mine is Annie Day.

JB: Annie Day?

AJ: Jimmy's name is Jim Bob.

JB: Jim Bob?

AJ: From the Walton's.

JB: Oh okay from the Walton's got it that makes sense. Someone just said it to you one day and you got a nickname.

AJ: Yep that's basically it [unintelligible]

JB: That's what everyone in Rock Hall does.

AJ: My generation, the new generation no you're not going to see that. You are not going to see that because they don't have and this is terrible to say but kids coming up the day, most kids coming up today don't have.., they have parents that can support them. So they don't have to go out and work. They don't have the gumption they don't have that. I don't know what it's called.

JB: The drive, the motivation.

AJ: They don't have it.

JB: Yeah.

AJ: Yeah they don't have that you have to be seriously motivated in a business like this. You know in my life time, I'll see the end of it.

JB: You think you are going to see the end of it?

Ai: I think so.

JB: How long do you think it will go on?

AJ: The way that it is now?

JB: Yea like what you are doing right now.

AJ: I think the next thirty years it will be gone.

JB: Oh wow okay.

AJ: And I am saying in my business in my lifetime I will see it.
[Unintelligible]

JB: No.

AJ: Because no one will eat them by the time I reach ninety, if I am sane enough even to know what is going on by the time I reach ninety, it will be gone. There may always be a water business it won't be a water business with independent watermen there will be some big corporation [unintelligible].

JB: Mhm.

Al: That's a sad thing because they have so much pride in what they do

JB: Right.

Al: Like I say, Gladys knows this, the ins and outs of it. She can, I worked for a little over six weeks down at the town office doing accounting work for them. [Unintelligible] and I thought I am going to take six weeks off so see if she survives or not. By the end of the six weeks she finally got it but she won't do any longer [laughter] and she did it and did a very good job at it. She didn't care for it because it is a lot of physical work and a long day. [Unintelligible] grow up and do this.

JB: Woo it is really coming down.

[Part 6]

AJ: Grow up to do it, no.

JB: No.

AJ: I want her to know where she came from.

JB: Yeah.

Al: And what her great- great- grandparents did. I want her to know that and I want her to be able to do it but I don't want to have as a job. She is very intelligent, where she got it from is no clues there. She is very smart and I want her to get a big cushy job somewhere and to take care of her parents when we get older and can't work. That's what I want her to do she already knows that. Two years ago we put a new roof on our house. This is how smart she is, so we are looking at, don't put this on there.

JB: Ok I will stop it, hang on.

[Part 7]

AJ: So anyways, what's next?

JB: Well I have a question for you, since you are talking about how sassy women, women around here are a breed of their own aren't they in Rock Hall you have these sassy, like I met your mother on the other day.

AJ: Oh my God! How many times did she say the F word?

JB: I haven't even counted yet. But she is a pistol man and everyone I've met around. Is there something in the water?

AJ: It is just the way we were brought up because I don't know. We are a different breed I will give you that you know that like if we left here and went to Tilghman's if we left here and went to Smith Island you went to the smaller places like we are and then I don't know if we are sassy but we are very outspoken, very much outspoken and I don't know why other then we're alongside of our men and I guess we are trying to compete to be their equal that is the only thing I can think of.

JB: Yeah.

AJ: And because the male part of the family is out working and there is so much, not only that we have to do for them but on the other hand, when you are a watermen's wife you not only have the water business all day long but then you have your home to come home to and have that to attend to and you still have the watermen's business too. It's a two time job, a two 24 hour job in one day and I think maybe we are a very strong breed. I don't know if you'd call us a breed but the husbands' are gone and the woman plays the husband or the father and the mother because the husband's gone, he is working. So maybe that's why but yea and we are going to tell you right out whether we like you or we don't. We ain't hemming and hewing about it you know right from the get go we either like you or we don't like you. So here we are.

JB: Perfect.

AJ: My mother is a firecracker, I will tell you she is a firecracker.

JB: Yeah, she is great though man, Miss Shirley, I can hang out with her any night of the week.

AJ: How many beers did you drink? How many beers did you drink because I know the first thing she offered you.

JB: Yea I only had two.

AJ: You're lucky she didn't have you falling down when you left.

JB: Well I had to drive home that night so I was good to go. I was with your brother Scratch too, man I was driving around with Rick and I just

let the three of them talk. Man the stories those three can tell. I don't know how much of it is true but man they are great stories.

AJ: Probably 10%.

JB: Is true?

Ai: Is true probably 10%. if you are talking about my brother probably 10% because he definitely multiplies everything by 100% and he is a wonderful person don't get me wrong but they always say he couldn't tell the truth if his life depended on it. You know but people know that is how he is and he is just accepted the way he is.

JB: Yeah.

AJ: Would you like something to drink in this cup that just fell on the ground?

JB: I'm okay, thanks.

AJ: [unintelligible] may have froze hard.

JB: I'm ok thanks. I actually had this big soda as I was driving up here.

AJ: [Unintelligible]

JB: Well thank you for your time I appreciate it.

AJ: You're welcome.

JB: This was great.