

Interview Log

Interviewee: Larry Simns (LS)

Interviewer: Julie Broadbent (JB)

Rick Morlock (RM)

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Topic: Waterwomen, crabbing, seafood industry, working, fishing, Rock Hall

Transcriber: Julie Broadbent

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[Begin Interview]

JB: So today is August 9th. is it 8th?

RM: Yea, it's the 9th

JB: yea it the ninth, all day. It's Tuesday

RM: Right

JB: I'm back here at Rock Hall in Rick Morlock's house today. Mr. Simns
What is your full name?

LS: Arch W. Simns. That is W for William.

JB: And do you have a nickname here in town?

LS: Larry

JB: Larry?

LS: Yep

JB: Ok

LS: I was born 9/18/1937.

JB: Did you grow up here in Rock Hall?

LS: I was born right here in Rock Hall and grew up here

JB: What was it like growing up here?

LS: A lot of changes have taken place since then. I was born in a house here in Rock Hall I wasn't even born in the hospital. I had a midwife come in here and that's probably why I got brain damage, you know, she probably pulled me out wrong or something [laughter]. Well, there's been a lot of changes since, well you know, from the time I was born till I was six, you know, I don't have much... recall that but I used to go with my great-grandfather crabbing when I was about six or seven years old and we trotlined out of a rowboat and I rowed the boat while he dipped the crabs, and the crabs were thick enough and we'd catch a lot in a net when now you probably wouldn't catch any crabs rowing a boat. Crabs weren't worth anything then. Back in the early forties crabs were the

lowest form of work if you were a crabber you were the lowest form of watermen. Cause you didn't get much money for 'urn. Crabs weren't respected like they are now. People didn't eat them, a lot of local people ate them.

JB: Did you remember what the price per pound was when you were with your grandfather?

LS: We shipped a lot of crabs over to Baltimore and had to pay the freight on then and we didn't make the freight to ship them over a lot of the time. So they just weren't worth anything. So you got two dollars a basket you'd be lucky.

JB: Yea, a baskets is a bushel right?

LS: Yea, so the main important thing in Rock Hall was fishing, striped bass fishing. Everybody fished, you know, you either eeled fished in the winter time, or pound netted or hauled in the summer time. Hook and line in the summer time but back then there weren't many of them. But fish were the main thing we had more than stripped bass you had shad, perch and everything else the Lord needed and all that. You couldn't drive from here to Chestertown on Route 20 which is 13 miles. You couldn't go out there without passing two or three Hubbard's Pier trucks. Coming into Rock Hall and passing three or four heading out of Rock Hall. You never got on route 20 that you didn't run into two or three trucks. I'm talking about trucker trailers loaded with fish.

JB: When did you start commercial?

LS: Well you know I worked in the summertime on the water. Crabs and fished and helped seine haulers catch fish and stuff like that. When I got out of school, by then I got a boat and oystered and crabbed and then I fished for another captain in the wintertime and we caught tons and tons of stuff. We caught hundreds of bushels of oysters a day and loads of crabs still back even then even though crabs weren't the most important thing, the fish and the oysters were the most important and then clams. As the markets spread on the crabs and more and more people that can eat them, crabs got more important. The whole town revolved around the fish, fish and oysters mostly. We oystered in the fall, we fished in the winter for striped bass and we fished in the spring for shad and there were boats and trucks lined up all the time on Hubbard's Pier unloading fish. If we fished up the Bay we brought the

fish down in a pickup truck to Hubbard's Pier. Hubbard's Pier came right along about the time I was graduating from school 1956. Before that there was a little place there and they started buying and selling fish and then Hubbard's come along and bought the place and they started buying and selling fish. About that time everything boomed so it was just unlimited supply of product. As Edna told you, I'm sure she told you right. They really helped the town because they moved a lot of seafood and they did. They moved a tremendous amount of seafood.

JB: Do you remember any women working out on the water?

LS: What was that?

JB: Do you remember any women working out on the water?

LS: Yea, there were a few. Most time they trotlined or well we had one girl who worked with her father that's Patsy. She helped fish anchor nets and stuff in the spring with her father. Up and down the Bay there was a few scattered along. Some of them were oystering with their husbands and culled oysters for them you know during the fall and winter. Some of the trotlined for crabs and well Andrea she used to trotline for crabs herself. She had her own boat. Timmy's wife, Janet they all had their own boats and trotlined for crabs in the summer time.

JB: What did the commercial guys thing of the women being out on the water.

LS: They didn't have a problem with it.

JB: It wasn't weird or anything?

LS: No, they liked to look at them. [laughter] Those are pretty good looking girls when they were young, you know, and some of them clammed with their husbands or boyfriends or whatever they helped pick clams and stuff. There weren't a lot of them but there were a few of them that did it. It's not something that's women oriented because it's hard on women. You know there's a lot of lifting and stuff and it a little more than women can handle. The sun takes the toil on them. Most jobs on the water aren't fit for women to do. Crabbing and trotlining they could do that fine but rest of the other jobs were dirty and nasty and hard work on them. So it wasn't many women did that.

JB: So you're married to a Rock Hall woman?

LS: What's that?

JB: Are you married to a woman in Rock Hall?

LS: I married a whole lot of women in Rock Hall.

JB: Did any of them go out with you?

LS: Yea, my second wife went with me and the third wife helped shed crabs because we had a shed crabbing operation. So she helped me shed crabs.

JB: What did you second wife do when she was out on the water?

LS: She crab potted with me, she culled crabs for me.

JB: Did she help pull up the pots at all?

LS: Back then there weren't winders or anything that was too hard. Too hard for the women to pull up the pots up.

JB: Did she stuff them with bait?

LS: Uh?

JB: Did she rebait them or anything like that?

LS: When you are culling crab you are pretty busy and that's all you get to do. I mean you are bent over a box picking crabs out and putting the baskets in you don't have time to do nothing else. She would help move the pots around when we had to do something like that. But that about all that's... my third wife was a big help shedding crabs because that's a full time job. Every two hours you gotta to check on them. Night and day so when I was in the Bay crabbing she would be taking care of the crabs, cleaning crabs, and like that and at night time we would take turn doing that, every couple of hours checking the crabs. You've seen what Andrea was doing. Right?

JB: Yea

LS: Back then we had boxes on the shore we pumped water from overboard. Andrea has a closed system which is better now but we just pumped water from overboard. My third wife she got locked in a cold box I think that's the reason I lost her. [laughter] we had these milk boxes. These little milk delivery trucks.

JB: Yea

LS: a green spring when I was a lunatic and we kept crabs in there. We plugged them in and it would keep the temperature at 40 degrees so it had a back door or a big door in the back which you wouldn't open from the inside. But it had in a door in the front so the driver could grab the milk, run in, and deliver it. So she went in the door with the springs on it and slid it open like that. And it closed on her and she couldn't get it open and now it's pitched black in there cause... no

light in there you could put your hand just like that and not see it. And it's 40 degrees so of course she is dressed in her summer because it hot outside so she aint got a lot of clothes on her. She is in there shorting crabs and it sprung closed on here and she couldn't get it open. And I'm out on the Bay so she was in there for a right good while and Charles, her ex-father in law, he was living down there on a boat and he saw the car parked there for a long while and didn't see nothing of her. So he walked around and heard her banging on the door and he let her out but I got a good cussing when I got home. So I blame that on that door. [laughter].

RM: That and other things.

LS: Yea that and other things too. Then I stayed single for a long while between that wife and my last wife. So I was 55 before I got married last time. I told her I didn't grow up until I was 50, quit drinking when I was 50 and that's when I started growing up. So with this wife she doesn't help on the water though.

JB: Does she have another job that she does outside?

LS: She used to work at the animal hospital. She was a receptionist at the animal hospital until she got fibromyalgia and she could ever know when she go to work and when she couldn't because when that hit her she shouldn't go to work. She hadn't worked since we've been married to tell you the truth.

JB: Did your first two wives did they have jobs outside of helping you?

LS: My first wife didn't. Back then, that's a long while back, back then we had two children. Well I got married before I graduate high school she was almost 16. I was 18. We had two children by the time I was 21 so she took care of children. So she didn't work or help out on the water and she didn't have a job either. Yea back then women stayed home and took care of the kids.

JB: this is... You got married '54 the first time?

LS: '56 well I got married the early part of '56

JB: Ok

LS: Wait a minute, let's see, I got married spring I graduated of '56, I got married about April of '56

JB: Ok

LS: That's when I graduated that year.

JB: So the first wife did help you with your pots? She culled crabs for you.

LS: The second wife.

JB: Oh your second wife. Did you like having her on board since the first one never came out?

LS: Yea it was alright you know, of course that marriage didn't last a long time anyways. She worked with me more before we got married then she did after we got married.

JB: Did you pay her for working before you got married?

LS: Oh yea

JB: Do people get an hourly wage working on the water?

LS: You get a share for working on the water. You take a share out for the boat and the rig and then you divide up the rest with whoever was working.

JB: Mhm

LS: The boat and the rig always get a clear third of what you take in and then you take out the expenses then you divide up with whoever was working including yourself.

JB: Did you have a large crew working with you?

LS: Well, when I was, second wife, I was working out of a small boat. So I didn't need anybody she didn't go all the time. A lot of the time I went by myself. Later on the crabs got a bigger boat then I had three of us on the crew. One was my oldest boy.

JB: Is he still working the water?

LS: My oldest boy is still works for me running the boat now when I'm laid up here. My youngest boy worked with me some when he was younger but he's in construction and my daughter she is a nurse practitioner and she's a head health officer in Washington College.

JB: Oh ok

LS: And she had two boys that are grown. The youngest of her boys got his captain license and he works for Larry on a fishing boat.

JB: Larry's your son?

LS: Yea, Larry's my son

JB: Ok, He's your oldest son?

JB: Is he a commercial fisherman or does he take like tours out?

LS: Right now he takes parties out.

JB: Parties out?

LS: Fishing parties

JB: Is there enough business to do that still around here?

LS: Yea, well business was a lot better its fell off a lot now with the economy but you know it he keeps it going you know.

JB: Mhm. So none of your children or grandsons are commercially fishing? They're not crabbing or fishing?

LS: No, both of Doll's, Doll's my daughter's name, some of her boys trotline part-time in the summer, you know, when there not working other jobs. Like a lot of other people do around here. You know they'll fill in but Grant, that the youngest one, he's got a charter boat license he's been running with Larry on a lot of boat. See you have to have a license captain to run people. Well, Larry he didn't pass the test but he could run the boat but Grant could pass the test but couldn't run the boat. [laughter] That's the problem with tests. They don't prove whether you can run a boat. If you are smart and know how to take a test you can pass the test but if you know how to run a boat but if you're not book wise is hard to pass the test.

JB: That's funny so the captain not the captain of the boat. The captain's really the mate.

LS: It's basically the way it is. I mean, Larry can take the boat and go anywhere but Grant I wouldn't trust him by himself to go passed the creek. But his got the license. [laughter] See that picture up there.

JB: Yea

LS: That's the kinda of boat that we crabbed out of when I talked to you about my second wife.

JB: Ok got it

LS: That old fellers named "Fusty" Thomas. And he's the first one I went drift fishing with we spent all of the Christmas holiday with him on his big boat named the Lucky down in Annapolis fished down there winter fishing, me and him boy and I've shaded fish with him in the spring of the year when I wasn't in school.

JB: Is he the one who really taught you how to do everything you know how to do on the water?

LS: Well, a lot of people taught me a lot of stuff. I had uncles, grandfather and great grandfather and uncles and I learned a little bit from each one of them, you know, different times. I had an uncle who was 84 running fishing parties. I had another uncle I crabbed with in a boat like that. I had my own eel pots and a little boat and I hung around Eastern Neck Island and he would pick me up in the morning to carry me down to Eastern Neck Island so I could fish my eel pot but to pay him back I steered his boat when he fished his crab pots and then when he was culling crabs and getting ready I would fish my eel pots Then he brought me home and that's just the way we did back them. We worked things around you know.

JB: Yea

RM: The entire town supported each other in trying to make a dollar.

LS: And the whole town helped raise all the kids, you know. When I rose up soon as it was light up I got out of the house in the summer time and my mother didn't know where I was at but someone in Rock Hall knew where I was at they kept you out of trouble and they called and told your parents, you know, or they would kick your behind themselves so you didn't get in trouble. But we were always out on boats and stuff. But the whole town raised all the kids I mean if you got in trouble someone's parents would jump into you about it and no one would get mad at them about it so they watched out for you, you know. If you got in a bad jam or something someone was always watching over you. So you wouldn't be going on.

JB: Was there a particular family that you hung out with more than others growing up here?

LS: Anyone having to do with fishing I hung out with and anyone who was a waterman I hung out with See Fusty was brother to my Uncle Luke who was married to my father's sister so almost all of us are related some way, you know. So everyone looked out for everybody and many times when you were real little. Any time a fisherman would take you on his boat you went even if you weren't going to get paid you went because you wanted to be on his boat with him and you learned while doing all that. We

all hung around the shore and Captain Lonnie Hubbard who was the old man of the Hubbard family. He was fishing pound nets before they had Hubbard's Pier. I used to go out with them to fish pound nets and stuff. Not to get paid but just to go, just to learn something. It was kinda hard student you gotta go to work but you weren't going to get paid. And you were tickled to death because there were ten other boys on the shore waiting to do the same thing. You were tickled to do it. And that's how we learned. We helped out, weren't a whole lot of help, we were too little, but we would hold the line and hold something for them and at the same time we learning just by observing.

JB: Did any of the girls in your grade want to go out on the water at all?

LS: No

JB: What were they doing instead?

LS: I'm just trying to think. When you were young you didn't pay attention to girls. I don't know what they were doing. When you got older I knew what they were doing but it wasn't fishing [laughter].

JB: That's funny.

LS: Girls just being girls you know. They were babysitting and doing stuff for other people. I didn't see many of them hanging around the fishing piers and stuff.

JB: What did your daughter do growing up? Did she ever go out on the water?

LS: Not too much no. She'd go out crabbing a little bit, trotlining just for the fun of it but she didn't. She'd go out with me some time just to see what we were doing oystering but she didn't work at it. She didn't go out and work.

JB: She didn't like it too much?

LS: Well, you know, back then girls just weren't into that kinda stuff you know. They weren't expected to do it and they just weren't into doing that. I'll tell you it's a dirty job. You'd think working on the water you think would be clean but most almost every job we got working on the water is dirty. You pull up the bottom and you get moss and growth and sewerage and you see stuff that grows on it. You got all that stuff. And if you are oystering you pull up the bottom it all muddy and it's splashing all over you. If

you are fishing nets you got sea nettles all over you. Crab pots are dirty and sea nettles, grass, and stuff so it all dirty they stinking and stuff. It ain't a real clean job, I mean everyone thinks it's a romantic job but its dirty nasty job most of time.

RM: It's either 1000 degrees or 2.

LS: Yea it's either has hot as the dickens or as cold as the dickens. Only certain people can be watermen and the first thing you have to learn to be a waterman and you learn it at a young age. You have to learn to put your senses aside you're feeling cold, you're feeling hot, you're feeling being dirty, you're feeling being tired you put all that aside. If you can't do that you won't make it on the water. You have to be able to blank it out cause you work sometime you're so tired you can't hardly stand and you work three hours... three days and night without sleep. Not too many people can do that you have to be special to do that. I mean, there's people that can do that and people who can't do that and you don't necessarily have to grow up the water to do that you can adopt to it. Only one in 20 people can adapt to it maybe 1 in 100 maybe, you know. I tell story I used to spend a lot of time with Uncle Josh who's the one who I went fishing parties with...

JB: I'm sorry what's his name, Josh?

LS: Josh Thompson he was married to my mother's sister and my mother had bad knees and stuff so she was in and out of the hospital a lot. So she was in and out of the hospital I would stay with my uncle. One of the first thing he taught me and back then you slept in a cold bedroom. If you had a pee pot which everyone had a pee pot in the bedroom because there wasn't indoor plumbing. When you woke up in the morning there would be ice in the pee pot. I mean it's that cold in the room. You didn't heat your bedrooms you know it was too costive. You had a coal stove or something down stairs you never heated your bedrooms and the first thing he told me from a very young age. Couldn't sleep with your stockings on and you slept with your feet outside the covers and your hands outside the covers see you get used to being cold, get used to your feet being cold and your hands being cold. And that's how you slept and they were cold like I said there would be ice in there. And that's how you got used to being in the cold weather. Ain't nothing worse than

having cold feet or cold hands when you're trying to work. You can't ignore that you ain't going to make it.

JB: That explains why your second wife didn't want to be in that cold box for so long.

LS: That's why she left me.

RM: You got to focus on making the dollar and whatever it takes to make it.

JB: So since my thesis is about women, this is going to be a weird question.

LS: I have bad hearing.

JB: My thesis...I'm dealing with women of Rock Hall which is why I keep bring it back to the women in your life. I'm wonder...if there are not too many women that go on the water then why did Patsy go on the water? Do you know?

RM: She was really close to her dad.

LS: It was a close knit family, it was a big family, a close knit family. I think she went with her father to try and look out for him a bit. She was tough and you know she enjoyed it and there's just someone who was tough enough to do it but not many.

JB: Why were they like odd or weird in Rock Hall if they were the only ones doing it why weren't they unusual?

LS: I don't know it was just accepted if they wanted to do it, it was fine.

RM: It was just a fact of life.

LS: I mean a lot of women, years ago like Andrea and Sheila and them they geared net. They gear netted in the winter time for fisherman they would do a lot of stuff on shore. I mean a lot of women would make crab pots and gear nets and do that kind of stuff but wasn't a whole lot of them worked on the water. Just for the reason it is nasty and either cold or hot. Wives want to be pretty and clean, they don't want to be dirty and nasty looking. It takes a special person to do, that it takes a special man to work on the water so it takes an extra special woman to do that. You have to have your mind set to do that. You have to block everything out, block all your senses all your feelings out to make it work.

JB: Did any of your wives help gear net or make pots or anything like that?

LS: Some of them helped make crab pots I didn't have any gear net. My second wife, she did help me with the shad nets. Shad nets you had to take out everyday and pull it out on the rack and mend it and take the knots out and put it back up and she helped me do that.

JB: Did you have to ask her to help or did she step in?

LS: She stepped in and done it. That's when she was in love with me. When she wasn't in love with me, she went other places.

RM: A lot of girlfriends went clamming didn't they?

LS: A lot of girlfriends liked clamming yeah. Clamming was a good clean job. It was a little bit hard on your back cause you bent over picking clams but it was clean water it wasn't muddy water. Clams were clean. It was relatively nice job-

RM: It was fun.

LS: and women were pretty good picking clams because they are pretty fast with their fingers and stuff. So it was more women when clamming probably than anything else but I don't know any that clammed on their own they always went with their husband or boyfriend or something.

JB: Is that how you guys dated, you took them out on the water?

RM: Took them fishing in the evenings, clamming.

LS: That was our line "you wanna go crabbing with me?" Get out on the boat and that's how you made out with them.

JB: They can't get away from you there huh?

LS: Talked them into going clamming with you or something you had all day to talk to them.

RM: Right. A lot of the social life though was boating too. In the evening you went out and had a picnic on the boat or hook and line fishing or go to another port and go up to a bar room or something.

JB: Who did the bookkeeping in your household?

LS: Most women did the bookkeeping.

JB: So they knew how much you caught each day and kept those records of where you sold and poundage?

LS: They kept your records for you, paid the bills and all that other stuff you know. All we wanted to do is work and catch stuff we really didn't worry about how much we got for it we worried about catching the most. But whoever caught the most we were doing alright. We thought

about it and worried about it but didn't do much about it we just caught it. Money you can do whatever you want with it.

JB: Did that ever get you in trouble?

LS: No, never had much trouble with the wives financially. I am sure some people did because if the women didn't have enough money but I've been pretty fortunate. I'll tell you my third wife, we were separated and divorced and I still let her handle the money. She paid the crew off and kept the record and kept the money, and the checking account and could take out what she wanted but she never abused it. That's unusual right there but that's the way it was. But, you know, we don't like bookkeeping.

RM: No paperwork.

LS: Yea'll bring the money home and put it in the bank and then she took care off.

JB: Did you mom take care of your dad's money?

LS: Well, probably to some extent, you're going back to another area now. Where the men the head of the household and they took care of everything but the household bills and everything my mother took care off and the business bills and stuff my father took care of.

JB: So it was different when you were married?

LS: It was different back then. Of course, no women worked my mother and my aunt-in-law and all them never worked they just raised a family and of course it was a fulltime job because, you know, washing the clothes and cleaning the house and all that took because you don't have the equipment that you got today. Hanging the clothes out on the clothing line and all those type of stuff. It took a lot of energy to raise three kids and that's all they did. They never want out to work.

JB: And that's changed you think because of some of the technology that's come along.

LS: Technology and the economy. The war changed a lot of that. A lot of women went to work in defense plants and stuff like that to get through the war and that got people depend on two incomes and family. See I come along way after the war ended, you know, the war ended '45 I think it was. So as a kid I remember when war ended. My father was fire chief in the Rock Hall volunteer fire company and when the war came to the end he drove around in the fire engine and stuff I thought. Riding around so I

was about I was about 9 or 10 years old I guess riding on the fire truck. I never will forget this I think it is old lady Killen went around a hullabaloo. Big fat women would come out there she had this great big iron ionized washtub and a great big wooden spoon and she would beat on the washtub. Beat that washtub right until there was a hole. I never will forget that. People were out on the yard hollering and making noises and stuff. I remember her, big fat woman, great big woman and this big wash tub just like that. And a great big wooden spoon she was beating on that thing.

JB: What's that? Four feet in diameter? That's a large washing tub, yeah.

LS: I guess her clothes didn't get washed that week cause that thing leak after that.

JB: At that time when you father was working at the fire department was there's a women auxiliary group? That helped them out at the fire department raise money?

LS: It was an all-volunteer fire department. My father wound up being a barber started out as kids because he hurt his back so he figured he better get a job on the shore. Before that he worked on boats and stuff. So he went to work with a barber in town and he bought him out so he was the town barber. And the barber shop was right outside the fire company so he was the first to the fire trucks, you know because the red cross would fine. But men took care of the volunteer fire department. It's wasn't like today with women do the EMT jobs and all that they didn't have none of that back then.

JB: Did women help out at all raising funds for the fire department?

LS: They helped out when there was a cook out or raise money or something like that.

JB: It wasn't a formal club or auxiliary or something like that?

LS: I think they had a ladies auxiliary in the fire department that cooked food when they had a function and they still have that.

JB: Were there any other ladies groups, auxiliaries or clubs in the town here?

LS: They had the Eastern Stars that was the wives of the Masons. The wives of the Masons are called Eastern Stars. They had a group and they helped raise money and stuff for the mason and most of the men in Rock Hall were Mason at one point in time. My father used to teach catechisms

to the new ones coming along. I don't know if you know what a Mason is but they are really good people and they helped out in the community a lot and stuff but almost every waterman in Rock Hall was a Mason.

JB: Were the famers Masons too?

LS: What?

JB: Were the farmers in the area Masons too?

LS: Yea a lot of farmers were Masons too.

JB: What did the Eastern Stars what really did they do to raise money?

LS: What did they do to raise money? Most time it was around food, cooking food, having cook outs having dinners and stuff like that. See there wasn't nothing to do for entertainment like there is today. There weren't a bunch restaurants around, there weren't a bunch of nightclubs around. So I think the firehouse would have a dance once a month and they raised money by having a dance. So everyone in Rock Hall went to the dance, you know, they had a few named bands. They had a fire hall with a great big dance floor, one of the best dance floors around, so they would have well known bands come in and have dances about once a month. Everybody would wait until then to go out and then you know the churches would have cook outs to raise money. You know, the fire department would have a cook out to raise money. The Eastern Stars, you know, would put together a cook out to raise money. So people would go to those types of things because there wasn't another place to go and they raised a lot of money doing that and it gives people something to do and place to go.

JB: Is there anything like that now that people do here?

LS: Yea there is a little bit of it but nothing like it used to be. There are plenty of other things to do there are restaurants and nightclubs. There's plenty to do so special occasions they will put something together and do something like that but it's not as frequent as we used to do it back then.

JB: Did you have a favorite one you waited for every year, special event?

LS: What?

JB: Do you have a special event you wait for every year to come on?

LS: Now?

JB: Yea

LS: No

JB: Then?

LS: Yea, we waited for all the special events. I mean we had one dance night in a month that was special and then we would have a New Year's dance was a big occasion on New Year's Eve at the firehouse. Stuff like that. I mean they still have those things now but there not as important not as many people don't attend them as used to be.

JB: So when you were growing up everyone went in the town and now maybe just a few older people go or?

LS: Well now I guess it is tough but you know the older people stay home and the younger people go but it's not the same as it used to be back then. I mean that was a get together for the whole town back then stuff like that. You think Rick?

RM: Yea, It totally different. You used to really look forward to that stuff.

LS: Yea that's all you did once a month. You would like to go out every Saturday night and have something to do but there was nothing to do and you really couldn't afford to do it anyways.

JB: What were the dances like?

RM: They were a ball. The ones I remember.

LS: Yea they were a lot of fun. They had good bands. I'm trying to think of some of the name bands, good name bands that played good dancing music, slow dancing music. I mean I'm talking about a dancefloor that's bigger then this house.

JB: That's a large dance floor.

LS: Yea well this building up here that's not a firehouse anymore, on the right up here. The whole upstairs was a dance floor and a kitchen on one end and the rest of it a dance floor hardwood, nice hardwood floor and the nicest dance floor around and you put table around the edge and you had a dance floor that you could put 200 people up there dancing at one time.

JB: Wow

LS: I mean it was a big dance floor and everybody danced because the music was good and everyone danced.

RM: Did you know people from Kent Island would come up for different times. They came from all over the place, you know friends.

LS: And we put on a watermen's dinner, once a year, the Watermen's Association would put it on and we have like 380 people you know in the firehouse.

JB: And that would all be was watermen and watermen's wives.

LS: We served food and then we pushed the tables back and have a dance after that and we still do that once in a while now. Now we don't do it every year, we do it every other year or something it not as big as it used to. We had a wait list to get tickets because you could only have so many people in the building. So we would sell out pretty early and there would be a wait list if anybody dropped out of people waiting to get in.

JB: That sounds like fun, those should come back

LS: It was a fun life. It was. I mean we worked hard, really worked like dogs but we played, we played hard.

RM: We had a ball. I would like to have all the shoes. You would buy a brand new pair of shoes to go to the dance and get drunk and kick your shoes off to dance.

LS: And lose them.

RM: And then you went home without them. And next weekend you had another dance so you had to get a pair of shoes.

[laughter]

RM: I'd like all the shoes we left up crossed up.

LS: Drunk you'd forget them.

JB: Was there a good bar here in town?

LS: There was bar on every corner, a gas station on every corner, a church on every corner.

RM: Well, we have 1,2,3,4, six or seven churches. 1,2,3,4 probably six bars.

LS: At least six bars.

RM: At least six bars.

LS: And a dozen gas stations. Now we only have one gas station in town. We have a couple of churches in town, only got one bar in town. These bars made money because when we worked we had money to spend and when we got on shore we played hard and we spent our money, you know, in the bars and we kept our bars hopping.

JB: Where's the one bar now?

LS: Oh Maggies cocktail lounge, I'm surprised you didn't take her around there last night [laughter]

RM: I didn't know if I could talk her into it. Jimmy Heggs sees her every time she comes into Rock Hall.

LS: Oh really?

JB: I actually might have run into him today too. [laughter]

RM: I am starting to think you are looking for him.

JB: Well you know I can't help it.

LS: You know Jimmy Heggs he is my stepson, he is my second wife's son

RM: Well we are talking about his boy. I keep calling him Jimmy.

LS: Oh Zeke's boy. That's boy's father is my stepson.

JB: Oh ok, everyone in this town is related then.

RM: Yep I'd like to have all my shoes back and of course I bought only the best to like a 100 a pair.

JB: Was there a clothing place in town to buy stuff like that?

LS: In Rock Hall when I was growing up we had three clothing stores, one furniture store, two hardware stores, and six grocery stores.

JB: Six grocery stores.

LS: All gone now. Right here in Rock Hall you never left the town. You didn't go to Chestertown to go anywhere. Everything was right here. We done everything was right here.

JB: When did that start to change? When did it turn...

RM: Rock Hall failed when the fishing ban went on

JB: The rock fishing ban?

LS: The fishing ban ruined Rock Hall. There was a whole seafood complex that sold out for condos and sailboat marine. An ice house that sold out for a parking lot for restaurant. All the fish houses got sold out.

RM: Now prior to that the little mom and pop stores were falling by the wayside and people got transportation and people started going to Chestertown and Dover.

LS: Cars got better roads got better people started traveling more and the mom and pop places started drying up.

RM: And we are talking about a grocery store about the size of this living room.

JB: For the tape was it the size of the living room?

LS: Some of them were a little bigger then that but They were little mom and pop operations.

JB: 20x20 no, I don't know 30x30.

LS: When you went through the town, you went through Main Street?

JB: Yea

LS: Ok all of those town were either grocery stores, drug stores, or clothing stores, all on the first floor and people lived over top of them and a there was a post office right in the middle of town and people lived over top of it too but most of those places that are stores had people who owned them lived over top of them.

JB: What year did this change really get noticeable -when all the stores disappeared?

LS: Well the biggest change was the rock fish memorandum before that it gradually changed. You didn't notice it as much you know it was gradual change.

RM: Our little stores supplied like hunters and fishermen and the hunters coming fell by the wayside too. Cause that industry wasn't was it was.

LS: What happened there is Eastern Neck Island had five or six gun clubs on then that I worked on as a teenager I worked on when I was a kid.

JB: I'm sorry what are those?

LS: Gunning clubs and those gunning clubs were for rich people

RM: Shooting ducks, geese.

LS: There were a couple of grocery stores that catered to them. They bought all this exotic stuff for the reach people who wanted it and then along comes the federal government and buys Eastern Neck Island and makes a federal game reserve out of it. Chased all those people away and we lost all those jobs down there guiding. And the grocery stores started hurting after that because they didn't have the extra income, you know, from the rich people coming in to gun.

RM: Our one clothing store was like a hunting outfit store, you know really nice expensive boots, nice shirts and they all, they held on though until the owners retired but...

LS: Died off or retired but they were getting so that they weren't making a whole lot of money out of it.

RM: We had June Henry's.

LS: That was a five and ten cent stores.

RM: He had boots.

LS: He had everything.

RM: Alongside of him was George Name Buyers.

LS: That's the main grocery store for the hunters.

RM: Yea

LS: And they had meat. Doug's Drug Store that's still operating.

JB: That's the ice cream place right?

RM: Yea.

LS: You went across the route you had old man Klines. That was a clothing store then when you went up the street you had Robbs Rods grocery story and you had John and a beer joint and pool hall and then you had, where Rock Hall Inn was, that was Joe Thomas restaurant and beer joint and barber shop and then you had the building next to it that used to be the American store and then the next one was what you call the old lore fishing. It was Tause's at that time, it's a bar. And then down on the other side of the street there was... the Parson's boys had a grocery store and then there was another grocery store then that was Casey Down's grocery store right there.

RM: And a hardware store, Stangers.

LS: Then you had a hardware store and then you had Riding Mowers on the side of the movie hall. It had all kind of stuff and that's basically where you went upstairs at Christmas time. It was closed the rest of the time. Christmastime they had all these toys up there and they wouldn't let you up there except for close to Christmas time and they had all these clothes and utensils and stuff for home but upstairs they had these toys for Christmas.

JB: Did people every hang out on Main Street and just chitchat after church maybe walk around or do anything like that?

LS: What was that?

JB: Did people every hang out on Main Street and just like stand there and chitchat or talk?

LS: Well when we were young we went to Boos and then we hung out on day dirt corner. I used to set up pins in the bowling alley. On Saturday night everybody hung out there. The rest of the time we were working. But Saturday night everyone hung out in town, Main Street. People even the men would hangout on the corner talking and stuff and as we got older then we hung out at the bars.

JB: Did everybody kinda hung out at the bars; men, women, farmers, watermen?

RM: Everybody

JB: Everybody

LS: Everybody hung out at the bars I mean church people didn't hang out in bars. But All us young guys did some of the older one too. We kept the bars going really good. We tore a lot of them too.

RM: We got to tell her about you and Glenny. Going out to the club that night.

[laughter]

LS: Oh yea well. Glenny was, he was president of Kent County Watermen's Association. He was a friend of mine. Well, back then watermen were very important in the county so the politicians came to me and said we need someone from the watermen's association to run for county commissioners. So I self- appointed Glenny to do that without his knowledge and I talked him into it. [laughter] He won but while we were campaigning, we spread out. We were going to Chestertown bars beside Rock Hall bars. We were all over the place you know. So while he was campaigning one of the girls in Chestertown made him a superman suit. I don't know how it started but we kidded him about superman or something back then he said he was superman. And she said "If he'll wear it, I'll make him a suit". I said "we'll make him wear it well if we get enough drinks in him he will wear it". So she made him a real authentic looking superman suit except the chest was a little low. So we got him in Chestertown at a place called Driftwood that we all hung out in. So we got him in there, got this suit and gave him a handful of martinis and one side of Driftwood was a restaurant and they had swinging doors there and then was a bar and a little dance floor so we had him in the restaurant part. We got him out of the telephone booth with a superman suit on and put a chair in front of the swinging doors and got him to run and jump up on the chair and jump through the swinging

doors and land in the middle of the dance floor. And said "Did I hear someone call for superman." Well that went over real big.

So then we decided we were going to make him tour around Chestertown so we put him in the back of the pickup truck and he's leaning in the cab. I'm riding around Chestertown and his cape is flopping in the wind. He was waving at everybody and so we went to a couple of white bars. One funny thing we went to Bud Hubbard's. Bud Hubbard's is where a funeral parlor is in there right now Toll's funeral parlor but it was a hangout for everybody. And we had this politician that was promoting Glennys. He was a republican but he would promote Glennys because you had to be a democrat to win. And he was a lawyer in town who got drunk and partied. When Lorry got drunk he worried everybody to death, he worried us to death. So Glennys anyways, Glennys went in with his superman suit. Here was this fellow his name was Park Raison He was a, you know, he was big lawyer.

JB: Sorry, do you know how to spell his name?

LS: Raison, raison like you eat, Park Raison.

JB: Huh ok

LS: Hi son is now a commissioner. Didn't have a...Anyways he's sitting back there with a couple of high people with the republication selection committee and he's talking about supporting Glennys in the election and here comes Glennys through the door in a superman suit. So right way Glennys zeros in on Parks because Parks was always worrying everybody to death, so Glennys's gonna worry him. Parks is saying, "Fly away boy, fly away, fly away, get away" trying to get him away from there. He didn't want him to embarrassing him you know, so we got him away from there.

There was a bar in Chestertown where all the blacks hung out called Uptown Club. Well we knew the owner because he was an old state staff committee with me. His name is Charley Grays it was his place, he ran it. He had a couple of henchmen that hung around him like bodyguards. So we called over and I said, "Charlie, Charlie I'm going to bring superman out there." And he said, "Who is superman?" and I said "Glennys" and he said "Oh yea bring him out here." He was trying to get Glennys elected to, you know, and so we get out there. Well in these black bars have all these alleyways so they have a chance to go out the backdoor if something wrong, the law comes in or something. So when you

go in and you come down this alleyway and there will be a couple of guys sitting there worrying everybody whose coming and stuff. So we go in and I let Glennny go first. Of course by now he thinks he's superman.

RM: He thought he was.

LS: Yea he really thinks he is superman. [laughter] so he's going in, marching in, cape flopping and everything. These two guys are watching him out there. One of them smoking a joint and he said when he goes by, he just keeps going inside when Glennny's going past. He said, "Isn't that superman Larry?" "Oh yes I believe it was. " Isn't he supposed to be tough? Let's shoot him to thing he tough he is." [laughter]. I am in between him and Glennny so I get down. Glennny has turned the corner and is in another alleyway and so I get in there with Glennny. He is going right in the middle of the floor and says did anyone call for super man and they all carrying on. If you had ever been in black bar back then, you know, it was pretty wild. Here are two white crackers going around there and one of them in a superman suit. I asked one of these guys standing outside. I said "Where is Charlie at?" He says "my name is Marvin." I said "Yeah I know but where's Charlie's at?" He said "I say my names Marvin", and I said "Ok Marvin, Where's Charlie at?" "He is sitting back there in the office." He wouldn't tell me until I called him by name, you know. I said "Will you go get him? He said, "Yea I'll go get him" And by this time Glennny is in the middle of the dance floor with all these black people around him and whose that guy there.

We had a black boy here named Hotdog. He worked with us all the time, you know, he worked as the crew members all the time his name is Hotdog. He's out there he is drunk. Hotdog walks up to Glennny and looks him all up and down and said "Glennny is that you? And he says "yea" and he said "You'se superman aintcha?" He said, "Yes indeed I am Hotdog." "How long you've been superman?" Glennny said "all my life." He said, "The good Lord knows I've never known it" and walked right on off. I just about fell to the floor. Well he said, "The good Lord knows I've never known it" walked on off. By that time Charlie comes out and clears a table makes a bunch of blacks get up from one table and tells us we can sit down. I am trying to think about what else happened there. Two or three things happened there in the middle of the dance floor and

then some of the black women wanted to dance him and of course that was a no-no, back then. They got rid of us pretty quick then.

JB: Charlie kicked you out for dancing with black women?

LS: Huh?

JB: Charlie kicked you out for dancing with black women?

LS: No, no, you just didn't do that. So when they came after us we got out of there.

JB: Did a lot of African Americans work on the water with you?

LS: Huh?

JB: Did a lot of African Americans work on the water with you?

LS: Not so many now because not much money is being made but a few still do it. There were a lot back then. We worked side by side. Back then you are talking about segregation you didn't go to a restaurant with them. They didn't drink out of the same fountain that you drank out of. Didn't use the same bathroom didn't use the same anything. It was pretty bad you know but when they worked with us we treated them as people I mean, you know we were all the same. And then when you got as shore it was all different. I mean when we were on the shore working on stuff it was all the same but when we got away from the shore it was all separate.

JB: Where there any black business here in Rock Hall?

LS: No, there were a couple of black businesses up in Edsville they had a couple of bars up there. No there weren't any black businesses here.

[phone rings]

Part 2

JB: Alright I'm going to ask the same question again because I probably won't use the last recording so you met your first wife in high school. You met your second wife at a bar where did you meet your third and fourth one?

LS: Well I knew them all anyways I grew up with them you know. But the third one she was working in the restaurant in Driftwood. I got hung up with her and she had a few kids four and six years old, when I got hung up with her so.

JB: Was she married once before?

LS: Yea.

JB: Did you know her husband?

LS: No, he was from away from here.

RM: So in other words if you didn't go in the bar would you still be with the first one?

LS: Probably [laughter] Probably would have

RM: Oh my.

JB: The first one didn't go into the bars with you?

LS: No.

RM: Tell Julie about when they cut the oyster limit from 100 bushels to 30 bushels. All the women raising hell.

(1.19) LS: We had so many oysters out here and we had a law that said you could only oyster in your own county. So we protected our oysters pretty good so we had a big crop of oyster out here and nobody else could oyster on them. So they had a disease come on to the lower bay that killed all the oyster all the guys from Smith island so anyways they didn't have a place to oyster so they wanted to get on our bars. So they got a lawyer and when to court and got the country ballet laws. Saying you could oyster anywhere in the state of Maryland if you were a Maryland resident. Well when they did that everybody just flocked up here and that killed the oyster bar so the state was trying to sort this all out they passed they put a regulation in that you could only catch fifteen bushels a day. Well you catch fifteen bushels in about an hour. So we had been working from dark to dark or sunup to sun down every day six days a week. Never knew what it was to get ashore to and get off the boat before it got dark and all of sudden we got into the dock cleaned up, equipment fixed, everything done by 8 o'clock in the morning and we didn't know what to do with ourselves, there wasn't money in our pocket. Wasn't used to being on shore where there is nothing to do. So we by lunch time we were in the bars and by dark we were drunk [laughter]. I mean we were raising hell. Some of women called down to the department and said you have to take the restrictions off because if you didn't everybody in Rock Hall would be divorced cause all the men were in the bar all day. Finally the limit was raised a little bit that helped a little bit but it was a pretty wild time around here the year until that was sorted out cause we just had too much time on our hands and we didn't know what to do with them. We never had that much time on our hands before in our life. We always worked from

dark to dark and that just the way we did and when we couldn't we got all our equipment fixed up and everything there wasn't nothing else to do. We just went into the bars and partied for the rest of the day so it was pretty wild.

JB: What year was that?

LS: That was in '69 or '70 or '71 right in that area, right there.

JB: Did the women complain when the fish ban was on too?

LS: When the what?

JB: When the fish ban came on?

LS: no, cause we didn't have the money and we didn't have the time to do that. We were too busy trying to make it work.

[Cell phone rings]

Part 3

LS: Pound net fishing and they had a big black fellow on there named Jody Graves, and I think he had another black fellow on there too, they had a big crew. He took those boys along the Patuxent with all kinds of stuff. Well also it may be because you couldn't eat the same restaurants as blacks you couldn't drink out of the same fountain as blacks you couldn't walk on the same side of the street as black but what happened on the bay you sat down and ate lunch with the black guys and most time we shared lunch with each other, you know. As a kid I never really thought about it. I just took it for granted you know.

JB: Uh-huh.

LS: It was just the way of life I mean everybody accepted it for the way it was. Blacks did this whites did that and they didn't do it together except when they worked. So as a teenage I got drafted to go get examined to go into the army and it was about twelve of us left in Rock Hall to go over to Baltimore to get an examination. Well half of us were black and half of us were white and we went over to Baltimore they dumped us out on the street. And we had to wait for a bus to carry us out to Fort Halbert which was going to be three or four hours. And they gave us these tokens to get something to eat with. So we went into this place like a cafeteria to get something to eat and they wouldn't serve us because we had black boys with us. So we went to another and had the same problem.

And you know I got to thinking something aint right here, you know here we are we are about ready to get ass blown off together and we can't eat together. Of course I had ate with black men on the boat and had a black colored women come in and clean the house two or three days a week help cook and ate together. I don't think I don't understand I was ornery as hell back then I had too much testosterone in me. So I say come on boys we are going in here we are going to eat in here. And the black boys are getting scared "no, no, no, we don't want to cause no trouble." I said "no it will be alright" so I went in there. I said "There are twelve of us that want to eat." I said "You take these tokens?" and he said "Oh yea we get a lot of them. But we can't serve them." I said, "Oh yea you are going to serve them." He said, "We will serve them out back." "No we are going to sit in here and you are going to serve all twelve of us." "Oh no I aint" and I said "You might as well call the law now because we are about to have a lot of trouble in here" [laughter] and the black boys are scared to death because they think the cops are going to beat the hell out of them, you know. I talked to the guy "How many of these tokens to you get in here a year for the servicemen." "Oh we get a lot." "I'm going to tell you something if you don't take these twelve token and serve us you won't ever get another one. Because when I get out of Fort Halbert I am going to raise hell because you wouldn't honor these tokens" and we wound up sitting in that restaurant eating. And the colored boys though I was some kind of hero after that. But I had grown up with those boys. We worked on the boats together and stuff and ran into one them another day I can't remember his name, coming out of the post office. He always remembered that and he said something to me the other day about it. It was kinda funny, you know after I had thought about it because before that I just thought it was ok but after that I had never thought about all that mess.

JB: Great well thank you, I appreciate you spending so much time talking with me. I really do appreciate it.

LS: I hope you got enough. I don't know.

[end of interview]