

Stanley O. Davis Oral History

6 August 2018

[First audio file]

INTERVIEWER: This is Jenifer Dolde. It is Monday, August 6th, 2018. I'm here in Easton, Maryland at the Avalon Theatre.

And Stan, would you give us your full name?

STANLEY OWEN DAVIS, JR: [00:00:13] Full name, [Stanley Owen Davis, Junior?].

INTERVIEWER: That's right. You are a junior.

DAVIS: [00:00:17] That's right.

INTERVIEWER: And your date and place of birth?

DAVIS: [00:00:21] Thirteenth of April, 1943, Kittery, Maine.

INTERVIEWER: Okay, very good. And we do you want to talk about your life and the work you've done and your father and your early childhood as well. But I think that if we could step back and start by just talking about what you know about your dad's background, we'll start there. And let's just start with the basics as far as his birth and where he grew up.

DAVIS: [00:00:50] Well, I think the story really begins with his father, my grandfather, a guy named Henry Frederick Dilman Davis, who graduated from the Naval Academy in 1908, class of '08. And he was a career naval officer and nothing but a career naval officer for more than 40 years.

And so Owen's background has a great deal to do with having been a navy junior. And by the time Owen was born, which was August 25th, 1917, my grandfather had decided to be an engineering duty officer. He was, in other words, an engineering specialist in, well, what we would now call navy systems, design and implementation, building stuff. And so because of that, they were invariably stationed either in Washington, DC at the Bureau of Ships or one of the many towns then that had naval shipyards. And so in 1917, my father was born in Marblehead, Massachusetts, because my grandfather was stationed at the Boston Navy Yard. And later, a great deal of what Owen paid attention to, and much of his art, had to do with these various places where the Navy took him.

INTERVIEWER: Now, was he interested in art from a young age?

DAVIS: [00:02:54] He was. As a matter of fact, at some time when they were in Washington, and I don't have the precise dates, when he was 11 or 12 years old, he won a *Washington Post* art contest for kids. There used to be a children's section of the *Washington Post*. And they were a -- what he entered with was a bunch of pictures of sailing ships. And I actually could -- I think I can recover the dates on that. But they're all published in this children's section of the *Washington Post* for 1930-something.

INTERVIEWER: You've seen the images?

DAVIS: [00:03:39] Oh yeah, I have. In fact, my older daughter has a copy of the images. So somehow between -- I mean, the interest in boats and ships is pretty clear for a navy kid. And then he must have started drawing this stuff pretty early because that was the subject of this art that went into the *Washington Post*.

INTERVIEWER: So he was in -- were they in DC when he was born?

DAVIS: [00:04:10] No, they were in Boston.

INTERVIEWER: Okay, they were in Boston?

DAVIS: [00:04:13] At the Boston Navy Yard. So he was born in Marblehead, Mass, which is where they were living. And Grandfather was commuting in to the Navy Yard.

INTERVIEWER: Marblehead, then to Washington?

DAVIS: [00:04:24] I think so. Now, there's vague -- in the Navy, people are transferred much more often than they are in the army or the air force. And I will have to do further research to straighten out all these dates if we wanted to get really accurate about it. But Washington is very important. But among other things, they were out in California. I'm trying to pick the stuff that I know is related to art. They were out in California in the Bay Area back when there were a lot of derelict sailing ships still visible out there. We talked with Pete Leshar about

this back when we first started discussing this. And so the museum somewhere holds this poem that he wrote, a sonnet that he wrote, about a ship that's, you know, done and being torn apart by the wreckers but was once a glorious sailing ship. And another thing -- in 1927 to 1929, they lived in China, in Shanghai, because my grandfather was building gunboats, the ones that go along the -- you know, patrolling the rivers out there. And so another theme, there are examples of Owen's art which are paintings of Chinese junks. He was very interested in Chinese stuff all of his life, too. So those are just different from the bay story. But they're little pieces of what led him into this maritime theme, maritime whatever. Just because I'm thinking of it at the moment, during World War II, when he was a minesweeper out in the Pacific, he someplace, in someone of the harbors out there, discovered a wonderful little native sailing boat. And he found time to take the lines off this little sailboat because she sailed so well, and published an article in Yachting in 1946 on the characteristics of this little native craft that he found out in the Pacific. So it was just this enduring curiosity and interest and all that.

INTERVIEWER: It is fascinating. Is that something, you know, that just came instinctively? Or did your grandfather, did

he cultivate that in him? Or did he talk much about what it was like to travel all around? Was it his outlet, or was it difficult and that's why he turned to art? Or did he talk about what that time was like?

DAVIS: [00:07:34] Well, that's a great question. Some of it's got to be nurture, but a lot of it might be nature because my grandmother, his mother, was an incredibly artistic person and sort of a wild house decorator, you know, high fashion kind of designer, although she wasn't formally trained in any way. But she was very interested in art and I think must have been -- my guess is she would be the main one to have encouraged him because my grandfather was a workaholic. He just worked, worked, worked, all the time.

INTERVIEWER: What was her name?

DAVIS: [00:08:17] Her name was Hazel Grant Davis.

INTERVIEWER: And what was her background? Where did she come from?

DAVIS: [00:08:22] She came from New Jersey. I want to say Paterson, but it's not Paterson. But it's one of those, one of those towns. What the heck? One of those towns up around New York City. They were such nice places in the late 1800s and you know, maybe now kind of a little edgy.

INTERVIEWER: Was she well educated?

DAVIS: [00:08:49] I don't think she ever went to college.

They met in Philadelphia when my grandfather was stationed aboard the USS Olympia, which is still in existence at the Philadelphia Maritime Museum up there. And they met when she was somebody else's date and that guy had the duty. And my grandfather took her out. And the rest is history. But she drew things all the time. She just had a facility for it. Everything I ever saw my grandfather do was some sort of engineering drawing.

INTERVIEWER: But he did draw as well. That was required, that precision, yes. That's a certain --

DAVIS: [00:09:44] Well, right. And that -- well, you know, Owen was a blend of those two pieces because there was the industrial design part of his education and then the sort of pure art part, art illustration part of what he did. And I think you've seen some of those drawings that I've provided to the museum are highly detailed analyses of skipjack longheads and other design features that sort of show the engineering side. And then there's the art side. And he was really a combination of those two things because his business at the Oxford Boatyard Company was really boatbuilding.

INTERVIEWER: Well, so he was -- I'm trying to sort of wrap up his pre-married life and pre-art school life. Any other places of note that he lived in as a child?

DAVIS: [00:10:57] Well this, I think, is really most pertinent. And this leads into an area where there is a bunch of other research. While they were stationed in Washington after coming back from China, in the 1930s, he got involved in the Washington, DC Sea Scouts. And this is under this fellow named Fred Tilp, who was an admiral in the Chesapeake Bay. And there's a lot of stuff on him. And that really starts this interest in the bay, because Fred Tilp would take these scouts, these little scouts, down the Potomac and out into the bay and cruise the bay.

INTERVIEWER: Do you know what they were sailing?

DAVIS: [00:11:45] Well, they had a couple of catboats, big catboats, that they had gotten, probably New Jersey catboats they had gotten back then. And then of course they had a bunch of little dinghies. I mean, he basically -- this was out of the Corinthian Yacht Club which used to be right there where the Anacostia flows into the Potomac, right down there where the Navy Yard is. And they sail -- I know they cruised in some open boats, too. But there's got to be a lot on Fred Tilp and that whole business. That really set him off on the bay. I mean, without that, I'm

not -- you know, he would not have known what to do, I think, in the same way he did. What I've read about that Sea Scout troop back then, these kids really did some serious cruising, you know, week, two-week-long cruises with very primitive accommodations all the way down to the mouth of the Potomac and out into the bay.

INTERVIEWER: You said this was one of the first Sea Scout -- did they call them troops like they do with Boy Scouts? I know more about the history of Girl Scouting than Boy Scouts and Sea Scouts. But I know that that was the heyday for the --

DAVIS: [00:13:15] I think they're called a troop. But I found some stuff on it on the web. Now, I actually met Fred Tilp a bunch of times. And I actually went sailing with him myself back when -- this would have been in the 1960s. And he's published Fred Tilp books which describe this. There's a thing called *This Was the Potomac River*, 1978, *The Chesapeake Bay of Yore*, 1982, *Chesapeake Fact, Fiction and Fun*.

INTERVIEWER: I believe we have a number of those titles.

DAVIS: [00:14:02] You've probably got them all.

INTERVIEWER: We do. So they're worth looking at.

DAVIS: [00:14:05] Really, because Fred Tilp influenced many, many kids. I mean, he's really well known for having run

the Sea Scout troop. At one point, do you remember the -- you may be too young to remember. But there was a major celebrity named Arthur Godfrey.

INTERVIEWER: I know who he was, not directly, but yes, I remember the name.

DAVIS: [00:14:26] He was a big sponsor of that Sea Scout troop. He bought boats for them back then. And he was into -- you know, he really taught them the whole sailor thing of watch standing, keeping a log and telling sea stories.

INTERVIEWER: This connection, you know, this really just adds such more dimension to Owen's early history, you know, his family history but this aspect of it as well. And we can certainly do further research. And I can make use of yours on Sea Scouts. But it just makes it that much more rich to understand his influences. And this is not just somebody who on a whim said, "I think I'm going to start drawing boats."

DAVIS: [00:15:14] Right. It clearly grew over the years and drew in a whole bunch of his experience. And the Sea Scout business in DC, that's the last thing that happens before they get transferred to the Philadelphia Naval Shipyard. And up there, they were in quarters on the base. So that's where he begins to attend what was then called the

Philadelphia Museum School of Industrial Art. And that's now a piece of the University of the Arts in Philadelphia. So just got on the trolley down at the Navy Yard -- it's right on Broad Street -- went on Broad Street, and he started going to school and also to the PAFA which is where he did his watercolor stuff.

INTERVIEWER: Now, was this supported by his parents?

DAVIS: [00:16:06] Oh, yeah.

INTERVIEWER: If you think about the military dads, there was not pressure to be in the service or to have some --

DAVIS: [00:16:15] No, I really think they encouraged him on the art piece and the industrial design piece, both. That was sort of a balanced thing. And that's the way it wound up, too, in what he did, was just those two parts. His attendance at what's now the University of the Arts is easy to document. I actually, years ago, checked that out. The PAFA part I know is true because there was another woman in Cambridge, or a woman in Cambridge named [Anne Lloyd?]. She was married to [David Slagles?]. Do you know that big estate out around the boulevard? That's Slagle. And she was at the PAFA with Dad, boy, way back.

INTERVIEWER: It was still a formal program then?

DAVIS: [00:17:06] Yeah. So but what I imagine is, you know the Museum School of Industrial Art is the institution that

was built to support the 1876 Philadelphia Exhibition. It used to be on display in the Smithsonian there. And then, so that was the strong industrial design piece. But the PAFA piece would have been the illustrations. I mean, that's, you know, like illustrator central for just about anybody. So the two pieces got put together there.

INTERVIEWER: About how long was he in school?

DAVIS: [00:17:48] Well, four years. Well, it was 1936 to 1938. And it's when he completes that school that he gets this idea. I don't know how or why it happened. But he goes down to Annapolis looking for a skipjack.

INTERVIEWER: So he didn't know it was there. He just went in search of a traditional boat?

DAVIS: [00:18:13] Yeah. He was -- I don't know. Of course, he was very familiar with Annapolis. But I don't know what put him onto this. But I guess that's really the next part of the story. So somehow in Annapolis he becomes aware that a skipjack turns out to be an import skipjack. The only model the Smithsonian's got is of this skipjack that *Gertrude Wands* built down in Somerset County in 1899. And she was there, lying there in Annapolis. And he got the idea of converting this skipjack to a yacht.

INTERVIEWER: Before we get into that, did he talk at all about his art school time? Did he remember it fondly? Did he talk about teachers, people who influenced him?

DAVIS: [00:18:59] You know, I really can't recall.

INTERVIEWER: That's fine. I just want to make sure if he did that we --

DAVIS: [00:19:09] He always thought -- I do know this. He wanted more training but on both sides -- in the sort of industrial arts engineering side and on the art side. And he took some art course, art correspondence courses, and worked on them in his studio at home to improve his techniques. And there is an evolution of his techniques that you see in the art we've passed on. So whatever his -- I'm sure he must have enjoyed it. I know he had friends, particularly this Ann Lloyd. And she remembers him giving her advice. And so she must have been somewhat behind him in the PAFA course. But I don't have a lot of information on how it went there. But presumably the UArts records apparently are darn good. They had absolutely no trouble finding him right away. It was like one email and a couple days later the information came back.

INTERVIEWER: Well, please, let's move on because the *Gertrude Wands* story is a fascinating one. I just don't want to skim over the early history. You know, we all want an

image of what our parents were like at a certain age so we can understand the people that they became because we didn't know them anymore when they were that age. So I just wondered if you have any insights about what he was like.

DAVIS: [00:20:50] I think he was just very interested in all this and obviously motivated. And his parents, I mean, that's the bottom line. His parents were supportive. They bought into this idea. And I think a lot of people, a lot of those kids who were involved in art, particularly in Philadelphia, they had the idea that they could make a living at it and illustrate magazines and do stuff with industrial design. And they were convinced that they were capable of competing. And he tried to compete.

INTERVIEWER: Well, he made his own way.

DAVIS: [00:21:31] Right. My guess is that he was eventually -- well, he spent his life, you know, the whole time I knew him he was working on getting better at both sides of the action, better at the boatyard and better at wanting to have more commissions to design boats. And he wanted to expand his career as an illustrator.

INTERVIEWER: So went to Annapolis. Did you say who he purchased *Gertrude Wands* from? Or do you not know?

DAVIS: [00:22:13] I don't know. I don't know. Now, it probably is -- that could be discovered, too. There probably is some --

INTERVIEWER: In Lloyd's register it may very well say, when she was a working skipjack, who owned her. So we could probably try to trace that.

DAVIS: [00:22:30] I know that we know who she was built for, and it's [Branson?]. And this guy Branson down there in Somerset is a famous skipjack builder. But I don't know what else. So I know his plan was to convert the *Gertrude Wands* from a working skipjack into a yacht so that he could live aboard and sail the bay and paint the bay, paint the water, moon and the boats of the bay. That was the plan. And so the work to convert her into a yacht was done in Annapolis. I'm pretty sure of that. I know he was friends with -- there used to be a boatyard there belonging to Arnie Gay. And I think he was pretty good friends with Arnie Gay and you know, as usual made some friends and got some help for doing a project like that.

INTERVIEWER: He was hands-on with his conversion?

DAVIS: [00:23:40] Oh yeah, he did it all. He could build anything. And again, that must have been the School of Industrial Arts part. And I also remember his saying once that in California, while they were stationed in

California, the California shops, regular high school shops, were apparently just spectacular crafts places back in the '30s. I remember him saying they were not just doing hot rods. They were building airplanes, like light airplanes and gliders in California shops.

INTERVIEWER: In shop class?

DAVIS: [00:24:22] In shop class.

INTERVIEWER: Yeah. That's wonderful.

DAVIS: [00:24:24] So somehow between that and the industrial design school over there in Philadelphia and whatever else, he could never -- he could build a boat and did build a boat, a number of boats.

INTERVIEWER: So about what year was it that he purchased the boat?

DAVIS: [00:24:47] Nineteen thirty-eight.

INTERVIEWER: And do you know how long the work took?

DAVIS: [00:24:51] I don't. But my guess would be everything he did could be done within three or four months if he was spending all his time on it, because he didn't alter her structure significantly, of course. The main thing was to just create this enormous deck house midships from where the ordinary skipjack dog house is up to mast, just aft of the mast.

INTERVIEWER: You know what occurred to me? Had he been working while he was in school? Where did he get the money to buy the boat and do the work? I'm sure he did it on the cheap.

DAVIS: [00:25:35] Well, you know, it probably didn't cost much by even the middle class standards back then. My guess is his mother gave him the money. But I really don't know.

INTERVIEWER: Well, again, that speaks to their supportiveness of his plans and ambitions.

DAVIS: [00:25:57] It was regarded as a viable program. So no, I don't have any direct knowledge of that.

INTERVIEWER: So once the project was done, he set off?

DAVIS: [00:26:12] Set off to -- well, the story there is that her hailing port at that point was Cambridge. So he decided to sail first over to Cambridge, Maryland and while using the boat as a connection. This is the kind of thing he would do. I'm going to make some friends and figure out about the local scene. And of course, Cambridge was a really vibrant seafood packing, you know, the whole nine yards. You could see everything in the bay was exemplified right there in that one spot. And so he sailed her over there. And now it might be 1939. The exact timing of this

eludes me. But by 1940, he had met a local girl, [Margaret Richardson?]. And they decided to get married.

INTERVIEWER: Do you know how they met?

DAVIS: [00:27:20] No, except that she's a total native there.

I think that all of her friends became the crowd that he fell in with. And they all had something to do with boats and the river, you know, just the standard eastern shore kids, right, in Cambridge. And they were to the very end. I mean, all of his friends were natives of Cambridge, his close friends, their close friends. They're the same people they started out with, right until various just standard jobs. And they were -- I remember them quite well because I'm only 21 years older than my mom. It's a unique feature of my memory. I remember these kids when they were crazy, late 20s, early 30s. And they were a fun group of kids. They went down the river a lot, Trap Creek, especially. They liked parties. They just had a good time. And they were funny. I was fascinated by them. I would just, you know, hang out with the adults.

INTERVIEWER: So they were young? Some of them were also married?

DAVIS: [00:28:45] Just about all of them.

INTERVIEWER: And some of them had children your age?

DAVIS: [00:28:49] Well, yeah, again, just about all of them.

And my memories really of course, are post-World War II.

But they had all been in the war, every one of them. And they were just classic World War II junior officer-type guys

INTERVIEWER: Your parents married in what year?

DAVIS: [00:29:16] I know it was 1940. I don't have the exact date. But I could of course get that.

INTERVIEWER: I'm sure we can find that out.

DAVIS: [00:29:26] We can find that out.

INTERVIEWER: And then, he was called to serve?

DAVIS: [00:29:30] Well now, this is --

INTERVIEWER: Yeah, everything new leads to another story, doesn't it?

DAVIS: [00:29:34] Oh, yeah. Well, I don't know where he stood in the draft. He didn't consider anything other than going into the Navy for sure. And so Pearl Harbor happened in December '41. And they didn't -- well, first he had to dispose of the boat. So after having fixed this boat up and owned her for only three or four years he sold her. And she remained a yacht forever, by the way, right to the very end, and no significant alterations from what he had done to her. He got scheduled to go into the Navy via these -- you know, they had to expand dramatically, expand

the officer training establishments. So there's one at Columbia in New York at the university. And so he got scheduled into that. And it took a while before it -- I don't know what the timetable was, but he was scheduled. So meanwhile, my grandfather had reported for duty to the Portsmouth Naval Shipyard in Portsmouth, New Hampshire -- this is the Kittery, Maine connection -- which is really in Kittery, Maine. That shipyard is actually -- it's just right there. And it's across the Maine side of the Maine-New Hampshire line. And so he took Margaret Richardson from Cambridge, Maryland up to live with her in-laws. And they were able to stay in Portsmouth for a while until the time came for him to actually be sworn into active duty. And when he did, his father swore him in, in their quarters in the Portsmouth Naval Shipyard, Quarters C, and raised the hand. That made the *Navy Times*. That's just amazing. So Grandfather was the -- he was a really senior guy by then. If it hadn't been for the war he probably would have been retired. He'd been on active duty for like 40 years when the war started. The whole deal about Portsmouth is, if you know anything about it, is submarine construction. That's all they did, was build submarines. And they built a third of all the submarines built by the United States in World War II, built right there. And they were built by my

grandfather, who was the industrial manager of the Navy Yard. Out of the 20,000 people working there, 18,000 of them worked for my grandfather to build those submarines. And so I always like to say, well, my grandfather was a boat builder, too.

INTERVIEWER: That he was.

DAVIS: [00:32:51] And he was. So Owen headed back down to go to midshipman school at Columbia. And Mother stayed in Portsmouth. And it took quite a while for him to go through training, complete the midshipman school and go through training. So again, we're into 1942 now. And a little sidebar is that Mom wound up being pregnant with me in the Portsmouth Naval Shipyard, which is why I was born there. There's kind of a funny little story about that in that my father had gone off to the Pacific. But she -- finally, the night came, April 13th, 1943, when it was going to happen. My grandfather calls up the dispensary, the hospital, and says, "My daughter-in-law has to have this baby now." The duty officer says, "But sir, we have not completed the renovations in the new maternity wing. The place is still covered with ladders. Paint buckets are everywhere." Grandfather says, "Clear the decks. We're launching in 20 minutes," and so carted her, drove her over

to the dispensary. And that's why I was born in Kittery, Maine.

INTERVIEWER: You have that distinction of being the first --

DAVIS: [00:34:36] Being the first baby born in -- the building is still standing. It's no longer a hospital. So meanwhile, Dad goes out to the Pacific aboard a minesweeper. And his story of World War II is pretty much the Caine Mutiny. I mean, when you hear -- we did used to hear a lot of stories about this. There were some really weird guys in charge of these little mine force ships. And I guess they had a lot of adventures with the captain of USS Oracle, AM-103. And he did some art, because the skipper wanted to make that ship decorative and interesting. So there are paintings somewhere -- I don't know where they are -- because his combat art is collected. There's a bunch of collections of it. There's a place that collects it in the Navy Yard in Washington even today. So there's a bunch of minesweeper paintings somewhere in this world. I don't know what has happened to them.

INTERVIEWER: And that was something he did on his own? Or was he actually asked to do that?

DAVIS: [00:35:57] The captain asked him to do it. He just liked to -- that was one of his peculiar traits.

INTERVIEWER: Do you recall the captain's name? Did he say?

DAVIS: [00:36:07] No, I don't know.

INTERVIEWER: I'm sure we could find out.

DAVIS: [00:36:09] We might not want to know.

INTERVIEWER: Oh, really? There might be more to the story.

DAVIS: [00:36:13] But a lot of Herman Wouk's experience in writing *The Caine Mutiny* was very similar. They were up around Adak. They wound up in Tinian, Eniwetok, those campaigns out there. That ship was the first American ship back into the harbor at Eniwetok sweeping mines ahead of the force to go in the harbor at Eniwetok after they capture d the island.

INTERVIEWER: This was dangerous work.

DAVIS: [00:36:44] Oh, yeah. This is the place -- there was a place out there -- I don't know. Maybe it's Saipan -- where the remaining Japanese ran and threw themselves off a cliff into the water. He didn't tell that many war stories. But one of the things they were doing was pulling a lot of bodies out of the water and all that stuff. And of course, sweeping mines is very dangerous. As someone said once, I'll like minesweeping when someone figures out the answer to a simple question -- who sweeps ahead of the minesweeper? So he spent the war until 1944 on that ship. And then, another shipbuilding experience. He got transferred to a new minesweeper of approximately the same

class called USS *Tanager*, AM-385. She was being built in Lorraine, Ohio. This is my earliest memories, are moving to this little cottage by the lake in Lorraine, Ohio, while whatever it is steel company down the way built this minesweeper. So he was on the pre-commission detail for this minesweeper. The ship was built. They took her out of the Great Lakes through the canals and around into the Atlantic and down to Norfolk for training and workup.

INTERVIEWER: Was this the first time -- had he been home before that? You met him -- he met you, I should say, probably --

DAVIS: [00:38:27] Right, for the first time in 1944, when we moved to Lorraine, Ohio, to do this job. And the *Tanager* proved to be a big adventure because the war was nearly over. Now we're up to -- by the time this happens, we're up to 1945. And it was huge coming back to the Chesapeake. Mom was able to go back to Cambridge and all that stuff.

INTERVIEWER: Her family, so she was a Richardson. Anything in particular you want to note about her, her family, her parents?

DAVIS: [00:39:12] They're from -- well, her father's family were from Church Creek. And they're buried in the Richardson burying ground in Church Creek. And then some of them are buried over at the Trinity Church. This is

like all these people down there, right? And then her mom was an Evans from Smith Island.

INTERVIEWER: Okay. So what did her father do for a living?

DAVIS: [00:39:34] He was a railroad man. He was the Pennsylvania Railroad agent who closed up the station in Cambridge. He was the last one. He took the records out, closed the doors, and at age 60-something they moved him to Seaford. He wasn't going to quit. And he had been working for the railroad since before World War I. So he had so much seniority they couldn't get rid of him. And then he tried to drive, just to commute from Cambridge to Seaford, which was pretty interesting since he never drove an automobile over 30 miles an hour ever.

INTERVIEWER: Because he's not really that far. But if you're driving that slow --

DAVIS: [00:40:16] No, but if you're driving that slow -- and the road's just the same now, right? It's not much change. But he did go over to Seaford. And he actually liked it because they were getting the computers and punch cards. And he was kind of a little mathematical whiz. He was a very clerical guy, you know, green eyeshade, facts and figures on freight out of Cambridge, which of course Cambridge was doing that. I think people now don't realize they were doing a huge business out of Cambridge because

the world's largest packing company was there. The seafood stuff was coming, you know, from the boats. A lot of people don't realize those tracks went across Maryland Avenue, right, and over, and stopped down there by the waterfront and onto the refrigerated cars went the oysters headed north and all that stuff. So her father was the guy running the freight business for the Pennsylvania Railroad.

INTERVIEWER: So a pretty prominent guy. Just curious as we talk about -- and had she had opportunities to -- did she go home to Cambridge or not until they got transferred to Norfolk?

DAVIS: [00:41:32] She did go home quite a bit. And of course, he could get her tickets on the railroad. Now, her mother was also a working woman, which was pretty unusual in those days. She was the -- well, in my memory, I mean, she started at the bottom, of course. But she was the supervisor of night operators at the Cambridge telephone exchange, which is right there next to the Richardson --

INTERVIEWER: My mom worked there for a while.

DAVIS: [00:42:07] Did she? Well, check it out. My mom didn't retire until 1967. And at the time, she retired she was one of the oldest, longest -- I think she started working there in 1903. And she got the super diamond pin from AT&T. It's like the oldest --

INTERVIEWER: What was her first name again?

DAVIS: [00:42:30] Mattie Evans Richardson. And I have a story about that that's probably not relevant. But it's just something I have to put on the record because I've always thought it's the coolest thing. Of course, she was up there every night. And she was my babysitter during the daytime. Everybody else was out working. So whenever she would take a position -- did you ever go up into the telephone exchange? You know, Cambridge was one of the last -- well, at the time Cambridge switched to dial, which was very late, like 1962, it was the largest all-operator telephone system left in the whole Bell network. As you'd imagine, there's a lot of phones in Dorchester County, relatively speaking. And they were running that with four or five women on these patch panels -- you know, put in your plug and all this stuff. So very often my Evans grandmother, Mattie Evans, would take me up to the telephone company. That was where I was doing the babysitting. They'd put me on one of those panels so I could play with the switches. And the other things she would do is she would always have her phone and our phone in Cambridge on her panel. So sometimes her babysitting service, later on she would babysit by phone. So if I wanted to get in touch with the parents, I'd pick up the

phone. My grandmother would immediately say, "Number, please," because she had to follow the form. And I would say, "Well, Mom-Mom, where are they? Just a second. I'll try Libby and Bill Edmunds, or I'll try the Hilders or whatever." And she'd just roam around town trying to figure out where they are. But the best thing was, at Christmas she would always take the duty up there at Christmas so that the younger married girls could go home to their families. I think there was just probably she and one other person, older person, at the telephone company in Cambridge on Christmas Eve. It was about 8:00 or 8:30 she would ring our number. And I always picked up the phone because I knew who it was. And she would say, "Well now, Stanley, you'd better get into bed right away. I just talked with the long distance operator up in Wilmington. And Santa just passed over there. He is headed down the shore right now."

INTERVIEWER: Wonderful story.

DAVIS: [00:45:14] So that's what was buzzing, you know, in the telephone business in Cambridge.

INTERVIEWER: I had no idea it lasted that long.

DAVIS: [00:45:22] Oh yeah. And the strange thing from the technology standpoint is when we'd go up to the city to visit relatives, where they had this strange dial thing on

their phones, I thought we had the more modern system. After all, it was voice-actuated. You just pick up the phone and say the number and didn't have to crank this thing around, sticking your finger in the little holes.

INTERVIEWER: Not that anybody could listen to what you were saying anyway.

DAVIS: [00:45:51] Well, there's that, of course.

INTERVIEWER: I grew up with a three-party line in the '70s.

DAVIS: [00:45:54] Well, that's right. And that lasted a long time, too. Even after there was dial there were the three-party lines, went on and on and on.

INTERVIEWER: Well, that's an interesting aside. I think it was worth telling.

DAVIS: [00:46:08] That's just a little aside, a little bit of eastern shore history. The telephone company was a big deal over here, as you know.

INTERVIEWER: But that also lets me know that your grandparents or your mother's parents were central to that community as well. And your father and mother became part of that community.

DAVIS: [00:46:24] Well, that's right, why he went back to it. He loved Cambridge and all the people there. He never got out. They never stepped out of that crowd, really. And that leads us nicely into kind of the last World War II

event, which is especially appropriate because do you know right now there's a liberty ship? A World War II liberty ship is sitting alongside the deep water pier.

INTERVIEWER: SS *John Brown*. I saw lots of my friends posted pictures of that. That's fantastic.

DAVIS: [00:46:54] That's right. It's really great. Well, the war ends. And they start releasing these reserve officers from active duty. And pretty soon, Owen wound up being the commanding officer of the USS *Tanager*, AM-385, at the age of 29. And so the other thing that had happened was, the fleet schedulers had no idea what to do with all these ships. There were just thousands of these ships all over the place. So they were open to suggestion. So Owen says, "Well, I want to make a port call up in Cambridge, Maryland." And they got it. So on, I don't know -- again, the date is available. It was, of course, big news in *The Daily Banner*. And it may be one of the last real navy ship visits to Cambridge. In 1946 he brought the *Tanager* up the bay and to, you know, Mom's hometown, and moored alongside that Long Wharf, and open ship, visit ship.

INTERVIEWER: Not everybody has that kind of power.

DAVIS: [00:48:12] Not everybody, no. And it sounds like a big deal. But the truth was it was easy because you have to do a certain amount of steaming anyways. It's just like

aircraft, flying an aircraft. And he just made the suggestion. The fleet scheduler said, "Well, sure. It's just up the bay here." And being a small -- those minesweepers are not that big, very easily could be handled by Cambridge. So that happened. Now, an interesting aside about this is, as [Cici?] likes to say, "USS *Tanager*," she says, "My grandpa's ship is a movie star." Now, if you ever saw the movie --

INTERVIEWER: *The Usual Suspects?*

DAVIS: [00:49:05] *The Usual Suspects*, with Kevin Spacey and a bunch of other guys, there is a ship in that movie that is the *Tanager*. And it says -- you get to see the word, her name on the side and everything. And she plays a major role in the movie. Well, she appeared again in my lifetime several times, in my navy career several times. During the Vietnam business I was on an LST home ported in Long Beach. 1971, I detached to the ship to go to duty in Washington. And while I was standing on the gangplank, at the gangway, waiting for transportation to LAX, in through the breakwater comes this white ship with a coast guard stripe down one side that says W-885. And I'm looking at that ship and I said, "That's an Auk-class minesweeper." Well, the ship proceeded on by us and then turned down towards the coast guard station. There it was. It was the

Tanager. Of course, I had first set -- you know, if I hadn't had to make the plane at LAX I would have gone down there and said, "Well, I set foot on this ship back in 1944." So she was converted to -- there's a whole story about the *Tanager* that's just amazing. The coast guard acquired her from the Navy and basically completely rehabilitated this ship so that she was like an automobile that had undergone a frame-off restoration. And she operated for years out there on the Pacific as the Coast Guard's West Coast training vessel, and then was bought by a private citizen up in Washington State and then just fell on hard times and knocked around and finally wound up being a prop for this movie and one other movie. But *The Usual Suspects* is a very well-known movie. And in the movie they burn her a little bit. They set fires. But you get -- there's a big chase scene and a gun battle that goes on all through the passageways of *Tanager*. So that's kind of just a little colorful, crazy thing.

INTERVIEWER: It is, and how it intersected with your life more than once.

DAVIS: [00:51:37] No, that's right. There's also a model of her which used to be in the engineering building at the naval academy and is now -- the last time I saw it, I wound up being stationed at the Naval War College in Newport for

a while. And when I went into the wargaming building for the first time, there was the model of the *Tanager* sitting right there. It's a great big model, you know, one of those huge navy models. So yeah, the ship sort of followed me around. And it was a trip to be sitting, you know, in DC, I think, watching television or something when I saw this *Usual Suspects* movie. And I'm looking, and I think, oh my God, here she is again. Now, she's gone, sent down to Mexico for scrap. But you know, another colorful piece of the story.

INTERVIEWER: Very much so.

DAVIS: [00:52:34] So back to --

INTERVIEWER: So yeah. So where were we leaving off? So I was interested --

DAVIS: [00:52:36] Now we're done with World War II.

INTERVIEWER: Yeah, we're done with World War II. So we're back to Cambridge?

DAVIS: [00:52:40] Back to Cambridge. And he had met a couple of other people who were interested in boat building and boat repair facilities and the future of yachting. And one of them was a guy named Kennedy Brown. I don't really know where he was from. But he was one of his navy buddies. And they decided in 1947 -- so he got out of the Navy late 1946. 1947, they decided they would go down to Florida,

and we did. We took the train from Cambridge out to the main line, and went down to this little town called Fort Lauderdale. And he and Kennedy Brown and some other guys had the crazy idea of we're going to create a yacht yard here. And there's going to be a marina here. Well, they were too soon. It fizzled. And then, so by 1948 we were back in Cambridge. And he got a job with the boat yard, the Oxford Boatyard Company. And I really don't know. I just wasn't really conscious of what projects were going on until the early '50s. Then I sort of became aware, something more aware of his job. Then the Korean War breaks out. And he fully is expected, because they needed a lot of minesweepers, he fully expected to be called back to active duty for Korea. I remember the parents talking about that all the time. And he was able -- I don't know to the extent to which he used his father's influence to do this, but it's possible. Anyway, he helped the Oxford Boatyard Company get navy contracts to build whaleboats and crash boats. And he went up to -- he did all the negotiations, went to DC, worked with the Navy department because he knew his way around and had the contacts to do it. So for that reason, they geared up to produce navy boats right down here on the treading. And they did. They built a -- this I remember looking at. They built an

assembly line that went -- I don't know if you recall this, all the wooden buildings. But there were huge building sheds. They were a large, really pretty a large boat-building operation there. And I think he designed this assembly line. This is, you know, again, shades of what his father was doing, except on a smaller scale. And you know, these whaleboats would move along, or the workers moved along. I don't know which, but eventually they'd come out on tracks at the end of one shed. And there was a ready-to-go whaleboat for delivery to the Navy. And the same with these crash boats which were some other contract. But they were a powerboat, the very yachty-looking little powerboats.

INTERVIEWER: Did he talk about developing that sort of system for it? But he was the guy with those skills, is what you're --

DAVIS: [00:56:25] The skills. And he did the negotiations in DC to get him the contracts. And it was very important because people needed work. They were still doing, just in addition to the yacht business, which was, of course, not recovering rapidly in the '40s. It took really until the -- I mean, Dad was -- Owen was dead before the business really revived to the extent that it's anything like it is now. But so that employed a lot of people in Oxford.

INTERVIEWER: Yeah. Just that methodology and that, as you said, assembly line-type construction seems fairly innovative.

DAVIS: [00:57:07] Yeah.

INTERVIEWER: And certainly, did that help him rise to the higher level at the yard? Or was he --

DAVIS: [00:57:14] At that point he was probably the number three guy, at that point. And then eventually, he got to be the number-two guy under Price and Sinclair. But the thing is, it went south in the long run because the war didn't last very long. So it was only two or three years' operations. And then their contract got cancelled. So then, they --

INTERVIEWER: Let me -- did you want to pause or anything to take a break?

DAVIS: [00:57:43] No, I don't need to.

INTERVIEWER: Okay. I just want to give you that opportunity.

DAVIS: [00:57:46] I'm probably better on a roll.

INTERVIEWER: Okay. Let's keep going.

DAVIS: [00:57:52] Then, the trick was, how do we salvage this investment? And so they got busy and designed yacht conversions for the Navy whaleboats and this crash boat. And the whaleboat conversion was a sailboat. And I think he did that. I think he did the drafting and you know,

basically conceived of the design. But I'm not completely sure. You know, there are other important designers at Oxford at the time.

INTERVIEWER: Now we don't know where those designs are? You haven't looked for them? I mean, it's worth looking into. That's why I'm just asking.

DAVIS: [00:58:34] It is. But I don't know where any of the boatyard stuff has been kept. It would be an interesting thing to do. But I do recall that one of them, one of the whaleboat sailboats, was bought by Burl Ives, who then sailed her -- he was down in Cambridge and came down to Cambridge and was alongside down there by Long Wharf and played his guitar sometimes for people. Anyway, so just, you know, more weirdness, classic eastern shore stuff.

INTERVIEWER: Well, by this point in time you're how old?

DAVIS: [00:59:14] Okay, so well, in 1953 I was 10.

INTERVIEWER: So you're fairly aware of what's going on.

DAVIS: [00:59:23] Pretty aware of what's going on. And I've got some pictures that reference this. During this period now, from 1953 until his death in 1958, he's working like crazy in the boatyard and coming home in the evening and doing this art. So about 19 -- well, I don't know what the early example we have, probably 1954 or '55, somewhere in there. He gets this job, and I suspect probably through

connections, you know, with -- through the yacht connections -- to try illustrating for the *Skipper* magazine. And so then these dual tracks just go on right to the end where he's doing stuff at the boatyard and trying to expand his career as an illustrator, marine art. In particular, there is a famous, very famous, marine artist named Gordon Grant. And he wanted to be the new Gordon Grant. I recall his saying that that was his target.

INTERVIEWER: When he was at work in his studio, did you go in and out? Did he want to be by himself?

DAVIS: [01:00:48] Absolutely. I was in and out all the time.

INTERVIEWER: Did he show you what he was working on?

DAVIS: [01:00:53] He did, and something of how he was doing it, although not -- of course, like many young people, my interest would wax and wane. But he did, and he used the lovely Margaret Davis as a model for some of those illustrations where a woman was a part of the picture. I can remember her posing in the studio various odd ways so that for a while they would create these drawings. He could do the figure drawing thing. The whole normal art repertoire was there.

INTERVIEWER: And I noticed -- and I think I mentioned this before -- Cici remembered that he fits into a definite --

there's a definite genre or a style of that era that you can see. Whether it's a school or not, I don't know. But there's children's book illustrations from that era that very much resemble his work. So he was definitely tapping into something that was going on.

DAVIS: [01:01:50] Yeah. And they're basically pen-and-ink line drawings but with a lot of shadow. And they were evolving into -- there's actually a name. I've discovered recently, I think since the first time we talked. There's actually a name for this. It's something like [grieze?]. I'll have to look it up. But there's a name for what he was turning into as this -- instead of the lots of fine ink lines, it was becoming this kind of gray-black gouache thing that actually is a style. But I think the best thing we have, one of the best things we have from that period that's a part of what -- of the collection, is the actual magazine cover for the 1955 boat show where we have the actual magazine framed. And then we have the original art for the cover. It's pretty spectacular.

INTERVIEWER: Yes. Wherever we can see that process that he went through from sketch to gouache to the printed drawing is really very revealing.

DAVIS: [01:03:05] That's good. Now, on that cover, again, it's just too bad to have lost some of these things. But

there used to be a page of little proposed magazine covers, like what you would call a thumbnail today, and a whole page of them that he sent up to Annapolis to the skipper headquarters. And they went around and circled this one. One other thing -- for that cover, he included some -- he always was ready to do bay boats, skipjacks and bugeyes and stuff. So I think several of these thumbnail options he gave them were combinations of modern Chris-Crafts or powerboats but then with a bay boat, work boat, somewhere in. And they -- I remember distinctly they said, "No, no. This is the boat show. So we don't want any skipjacks." And so that's why that thing is as it is, because they want just, you know, modern powerboat, modern sailboat. And in the drawing, if I recall, there's a big powerboat in the foreground. And then in the back you see a modern sort of Sparkman & Stephens sloop or yawl cruising along the bay. But so that was typical. He would interact with those guys in Annapolis over, what do they want for the story? And for the stories where the author was accessible, like Joseph Whitehill, who was living in Trappe, and others, he would just interact directly with the author of the story.

INTERVIEWER: In person?

DAVIS: [01:04:49] In person. And I remember Joseph Whitehill in particular because Whitehill sent him a letter saying

it's so nice to work with an illustrator who actually bothers to read the story.

INTERVIEWER: So did they help him cultivate these relationships? I'd be interested to talk about some of these connections. I didn't make a note of them. I mean, Ed Nabb was a local guy, and Adrian Conan Doyle. How did they make those connections?

DAVIS: [01:05:19] I suspect that they were making those connections to get those stories, because some of them were big, right, like Adrian Conan Doyle, CS Forrester.

INTERVIEWER: So the editors at Skipper were making those connections?

DAVIS: [01:05:36] Yeah. And they're well -- you know, oh, okay. Skipper, the publisher was Bunny Rigg, backed by Carlton Mitchell, who was a real -- who was the owner and skipper of the famous Bermuda Race winner *Finisterre*. That crowd up in Annapolis was plenty well connected. And so he was just one of their -- I would say there were, like, three illustrators for the magazine. But in the '50s he got to the point where he was getting most of the big stories, the Joseph Conrad story. And we, of course, got examples of almost all that stuff.

INTERVIEWER: Well, we have a complete run of the magazine. So even if you find other --

DAVIS: [01:06:25] And you've got them, yeah.

INTERVIEWER: So I know you've become very adept, even when they're not signed, of identifying his style. But sometimes -- you said a lot of times he would put his initials. You could see the initials.

DAVIS: [01:06:37] Almost all the time. There are some exceptions. But he was doing the stories. Well, there are several categories we've seen. That's why I gave you those particular magazines, because if you just started the Skipper collection you have just got an endless amount of looking. There's no way to --

INTERVIEWER: Well, there really was a discrete period in time, though. It was started in -- what was the earliest period?

DAVIS: [01:07:05] I would say '54 or '55 to his death on January 12th, 1958. But so he was illustrating stories by noted authors. He was illustrating -- there are a whole series of things that I think are called article heads, or column heads, because the *Skipper* has a bunch of repeating columns. Something for the Jersey Shore, *Florida News*, they were covering the important activity up and down the inland waterway. Inland Waterway was one, and others. And for each of those columns there was a nice little drawing at the top of them. And he got to the point where he was responsible for almost all of them. There were a few

exceptions. And then there was a repeating -- the book section of the magazine, there was an illustration that was called *The Skipper's Bookshelf*. And there was an illustration above that. And on that, that's an example of one that isn't signed. But we have the tracing. So yeah, so that art was just -- he was excited by the progress in the art game.

INTERVIEWER: Do you know if it paid very much?

DAVIS: [01:08:33] I know it didn't pay very much. My guess is, it would have been -- well, again, we're talking 1950s here. But I would say it was, you know, in the hundreds of dollars for one that was actually published. And many hours went into them.

INTERVIEWER: But your feeling is that he was building a career. He was trying to get his name out there on the side.

DAVIS: [01:09:05] Yeah. And a guy did come to our house once. I haven't thought of this. I remember his name still because it was so strange. His name was Mister Daddio, which my mother thought was incredibly funny because it was like Daddio was sort of a thing that kids in her generation used to say. Mister Daddio came to our house for dinner. He had come down from New York to do something at the boatyard. I don't know what it was. He

came for dinner. And he said, "You know, Owen, you're good enough. I think you should come up to New York." That was a big moment. He really thought hard about that. But he didn't. They didn't want to leave Cambridge. They didn't want to leave the eastern shore. And I think he probably suspected he wouldn't have -- it would have been a tough go to go up against the people who were doing stuff in New York.

INTERVIEWER: That's a larger ring of admission.

DAVIS: [01:10:03] Yeah. And I think during that period he made the classic comment about, you know, it's better to be a big fish in a little pond than a little fish in a big pond, something like that. I think he was just really happy with the way things were going, with the whole yachting scene. And the magazine was very popular, as you know. It went on and on and on into the '70s. But nothing happened. He didn't live to see the year of popular art that people could buy or yachting. That whole thing happened after 1958.

INTERVIEWER: But did you feel secure growing up?

DAVIS: [01:10:52] I did feel secure, very secure, until January 12th, 1958. Somebody asked me what did I learn from my father's sudden demise? My answer is I learned that anything can happen. So after that, I wouldn't say we

were real secure except that his father stepped in, my grandfather. Those Davises lost both their sons, their only two children, one at age 40 and one at age 32.

INTERVIEWER: So if I may ask, did you mention it was a congenital --

DAVIS: [01:11:35] We have no idea.

INTERVIEWER: Oh, you don't know?

DAVIS: [01:11:36] They didn't bother to do autopsies in Cambridge, Maryland back then. But it had to be a stroke.

INTERVIEWER: His brother died first?

DAVIS: [01:11:44] Yes. His older brother was -- like, this strong engineering strain in the family. He was working at the Navy research lab on radar. And his wife and family never took any action about it. But they're almost certain he wound up being microwaved. He just sicked up like that and died in a few days right towards the end of the war.

INTERVIEWER: I see. So there was not the same kind of incident?

DAVIS: [01:12:23] No, it wasn't. It didn't apparently have anything to do with that.

INTERVIEWER: And I mean, not to bring up something that I'm sure is difficult. But do they know what happened to your father even in general? Was it heart related or a stroke?

DAVIS: [01:12:37] Since that time I've asked people, and it has to be either a stroke or a heart attack, some kind of embolism or something. Nothing else will kill a young man that fast. So there's really no explanation about it except that my own brother died in similar fashion at the age of 50-something. So there may be a problem within the family that crops up now and then. So it was -- Margaret Richardson Davis became a widow at age 32. But she was a very popular girl. And then my grandparents came down and did all the arrangements, arranged -- because they knew DC. Mother really didn't know who to call about the Arlington or any of that. My grandparents arranged everything for the funeral at Arlington, and particularly my grandmother, who had sort of a plan for all this in her head, obviously. So they are buried about ten yards apart in Arlington National Cemetery in identical matching tombstones, right inside the Schley Gate. And the one thing I do remember from that period was, I was pretty upset about it. And of course, you know when people die, we all learn this when we get older, but one of the things, it's like birth, right? You start cleaning. People clean. So we're out in the garage, out at Lodgecliffe, cleaning out, sweeping out the garage. And I said to Grandfather, "Grandfather, what are we going to do?" Of course, stoic navy grandfather says,

"We're going to carry on." I remember that. And indeed we did. And that's one reason I know my grandparents so well. They really stepped in. Those Davis grandparents really stepped in. And of course, the Cambridge grandparents lived right across the street.

INTERVIEWER: So you were living at Lodgecliffe?

DAVIS: [01:15:02] Yeah.

INTERVIEWER: Oh, okay. Somehow I didn't pick up on that.

DAVIS: [01:15:05] Right down from -- there's the other Richardsons out there, Willard and Sarah and Dawson.

INTERVIEWER: And Dawson.

DAVIS: [01:15:12] Dawson was in my class in high school. And then my Richardson grandparents were living right across the street from us there on Lee Drive.

INTERVIEWER: But you stayed there for a while?

DAVIS: [01:15:29] Yeah, until my grandfather started, basically started making decisions about the training of these grandchildren. So he concluded that maybe a little bit more was required than Cambridge High if things were going to work out the right way. So he sent me for a year to the Bullis School up there in DC.

INTERVIEWER: So I'm sorry. We skipped over this. There's you. You have a sister?

DAVIS: [01:16:02] No, just a younger brother and me and my father. And then, the only other really close person close to us is my first cousin, who is the son of a guy named Fred Davis.

INTERVIEWER: Fred was your father's brother?

DAVIS: [01:16:22] Right. And his son is also Fred Davis. And we were closer to being brothers than cousins because these Davis grandparents just took us all under the wing and decided to be real involved in the children of their two missing sons.

INTERVIEWER: Fred stayed in Cambridge as well?

DAVIS: [01:16:49] Well, Fred, his mother is from Arlington. And but Fred was in the Tilp Sea Scouts because he grew up in Arlington, Virginia. And after his mother died, he was the only child in a huge family named Lockwood. They were from over just across the Potomac, at 5750 North Glebe Road. And they had been there forever. They'd been there since way before the Civil War. And Fred -- finally all these people, his mother and these aunts and his grandmother, all these people died. And Fred was convinced by the lawyer to sell this property, Glebe Road, where there are now something like 50 houses. And then he took the proceeds from that and moved over here to the eastern shore. And because we had had him over all the time to

join all the fun on the river and stuff, he bought this place right down by Jim Richardson's called Monsieur's Folly, I think. He bought that house. It was in incredibly run-down condition. But Fred was a Virginia Tech grad in industrial arts. And he was a builder. He could build almost anything. And he acquired, in the late '50s -- I mean, excuse me, around 1970, '69, '70, all this happened. Maybe it was 1970. He acquired a great following. It was sort of a hippie commune down there with --

INTERVIEWER: With Jim Richardson as well, yes.

DAVIS: [01:18:50] With Jim Richardson, absolutely, and Janie. And he set about -- I've already provided you with some stuff on that. He set about building a skipjack at Jim Richardson's boatyard. And he did complete the boat which still exists, the *Charlotte Foster*, named after his mother. So that's sort of another whole story right there.

INTERVIEWER: Well, it does show the whole family connection.

DAVIS: [01:19:16] But that does show the involvement, yeah.

INTERVIEWER: Absolutely. Well, we got a little forward here in our story. But I know you mentioned your father worked on designing booths for the boat shows.

DAVIS: [01:19:33] Yes.

INTERVIEWER: So what can you tell me about that experience?

DAVIS: [01:19:35] Okay, let me see if I have something here.

Well, this -- no, that's not it. The boatyard was constantly trying to get into the production boat business because people were building these little outboard boats that sold well in large numbers. And again, I think this has to do -- they were set up to do a production because of that Korean War thing. So they could have run off a lot of boats if they had gotten one that was really popular. So this, I brought you this. This, here's a piece of a found one. That boat, the *Indian Landing 20*, was built, among other places, at the Oxford Boatyard Company. And their one designs, they're about -- they're very similar to a Lightning. Now, I just happened to find this on the web, by the way, on eBay. And I bid on it recently and won it for the collection. And we had one of these because they couldn't sell them. They built a huge number of them, and then they had all these left over. So Dad finally bought one. So this is a picture. There's a picture of our *Indian Landing* down at Trappe Creek. There's Owen sailing the *Indian Landing*. And here she is in the back yard at Lodgecliffe.

INTERVIEWER: So not a good seller?

DAVIS: [01:21:14] Not a good -- well, I think she was --

INTERVIEWER: It is a lot like a Lightning.

DAVIS: [01:21:16] They're very similar to a Lightning.

INTERVIEWER: It's a great boat, a very popular boat. Maybe it wasn't different enough.

DAVIS: [01:21:21] Well, the reason why this comes up, the question arises when you talk about the New York Boat Shows, I am not confident. But I believe the designer of this boat -- well, first off, he was a local guy. I think he was from Baltimore. And I think his name was [Speer?]. I don't know how to find -- recover. But he was one of the guys around here designing boats and trying to make this happen. So you're so good at just getting us through exactly what I have. I went down to the -- remember I told you there's an Oxford Boatyard ad that Owen did at the Oxford -- that Cici took to the museum at Oxford three or four years ago. And I went down there yesterday. They're not exhibiting it. So here's the point of contact. They'd be more than happy to share it.

INTERVIEWER: Oh, great.

DAVIS: [01:22:26] That boat, the boat that's in this illustration, the hull is very similar to this *Indian Landing 20* except she's bigger, like 23 or 24 feet, has a cabin, and is called a [Cruisican?].

INTERVIEWER: You mentioned that, yes.

DAVIS: [01:22:44] Right. And that's your counterpart, such as it is, at the Oxford Museum.

INTERVIEWER: So it's an advertisement for that boat?

DAVIS: [01:22:54] It's an advertisement. It's framed like all the rest of the stuff. And I'm sure if they don't -- I talked to one of the docents who's been there for 35 years. But he's saying, "Well, I know it's back here somewhere in storage." Of course, this is what I'm thinking. Oh well, here we go again.

INTERVIEWER: Well, at the very least, get a copy of it or maybe even a scan of it. I don't know if they have the ability to do that.

DAVIS: [01:23:18] Well, yeah. And it is itself a print. It's not an original. But the point I'm getting to is that one they took to the New York Boat Show. And Dad built a model of it about this long, rigged, full rigging, stand up this high, for display at the Oxford Boat Show because they didn't want to spend the money to ship one up to the armory in New York or wherever the heck the boat show was back then.

INTERVIEWER: Do you know if that design sold any better?

DAVIS: [01:23:58] I don't think it did.

INTERVIEWER: Tough business.

DAVIS: [01:24:02] It was a tough business.

INTERVIEWER: Well, who knows how many designs, you know, among all boatyards, were conceived of and what was actually manufactured in large numbers.

DAVIS: [01:24:14] Well, right, especially at Oxford. They kept trying because the boatyard has always been in the hands of somebody who had a little bit of money. At this point it was Ed Brickle. And so they were willing to try some stuff. And they did, time after time. Now, another one I don't have any material on at all was a powerboat, an outboard motorboat, Clinker-built, about 15 feet long, maybe. And Dad designed her, designed the type. And you know, of course, Ed Nabb was a world-famous powerboat guy from Cambridge, lawyer. And Ed Nabb came up to the boatyard, and they tested this boat. And the whole thing was you could not capsize this boat. You could go to full throttle, a 35-horsepower Johnson, turn the wheel as hard as you want to the right, but you -- and she had this little kind of triangular section aft so that she would get up on a plane. But it looked like a sort of a Clinker-built utility boat. So they set themselves up to build that. And they built a number of them. And there used to be one in somebody's yard, right back of [Hugh Wright's?] house in Cambridge, down there on School Street somewhere. One of those guys had one sitting back there. I don't know

what could be -- somewhere you would think that there would be a collection of plans and stuff from the boatyard.

INTERVIEWER: There might be. I mean, there's a Facebook page called -- I presume you're not on Facebook?

DAVIS: [01:26:28] I am. I do the Facebook for my old folks' village.

INTERVIEWER: Good. My mother doesn't want any parts of it. It's called -- I think it's "Cambridge Memories; Share Yours" or something like that. And I post things on it every once in a while. I pay attention to it because I'll get things that are relevant to the museum but us also personally. And it might be worth, you know, sharing some things on there, either one of us, and seeing if people remember or know anything about it, especially if you have details like so-and-so on School Street had this. You'd be surprised who comes out of the woodwork and say, "Oh yeah, he had that boat. And then he sold it to so-and-so." You know, it can be an incredible crowdsourcing kind of resource sometimes. And sometimes you don't get anywhere. But it's usually nothing ventured, nothing gained.

DAVIS: [01:27:14] Well, talking with this guy at the Oxford Museum yesterday was good prep for this because I started to think about things. Now, one of -- I don't know how relevant this is, or possibly irrelevant, but Owen, one of

the things about Owen is, for whatever reason, he was quite a liberal.

INTERVIEWER: Yes. You mentioned that. I wanted to get those stories down as well.

DAVIS: [01:27:41] And it started -- oh, I know what it's related to. It's related to those Sea Scouts. That Sea Scout troop, you look it up. It's on the web. One of the things about that Sea Scout troop was it was integrated. It was integrated in 1935 or 1934. So Tilp was an enlightened guy by --

INTERVIEWER: Where did draw the membership from?

DAVIS: [01:28:09] Well, I believe they were largely just like Grandfather. They were government one kind or another, DC, interested in boating. And they were, you know, from the Virginia side of the river in the district and the Maryland side. And so there was an incident in World War II aboard the Oracle. Somehow there was a black crew member who got promoted to chief. And some of the chief petty officers, maybe most of them, did not want him to move into chief's quarters. And my father made him do it at considerable expense, emotional expense, but made it happen. Now, when he got to the Oxford Boatyard Company, I was talking to this docent over there the other day. Almost everybody remembers Jimmy at the Oxford Boatyard Company. You know,

I was passing through some airport slightly after Jimmy died. And you know, usual, I went over and picked up some of the boating magazine. And in *Sail* or one of those I opened it up, and there was a whole In Memoriam to Jimmy at the Oxford Boatyard Company. It's in one of those --

INTERVIEWER: What was his last name? Do you remember?

DAVIS: [01:29:30] I can't remember. But it's well known. I just, for some reason -- Dad, as soon as he was positioned to do so I don't know exactly when, he was making something like 25 cents an hour. Dad was able to get his salary increased and got him a pension. And Jimmy remembered that. The last time I saw Jimmy, which was sometime in the '90s, he remembered me. He was very quick about personalities and people, and considerate, thoughtful. And he came over. We talked. And he said, "I'll never forget what your father did for me at the Oxford Boatyard Company." And he was a strong friend of Downes Curtis, too. And of course, they worked on -- you know, he was the go-to guy on a lot of sails.

INTERVIEWER: Was there repercussions? Or did anybody sort of fight him on that?

DAVIS: [01:30:37] You know, not really because, first off, Cambridge people are pretty jolly, you know? And it was like, that Owen Davis, he's got some funny ideas. He's a

great guy, cheerful, lots of fun, all that. But he thinks some of these people are just like people, or just people. It was that kind of thing. They just laughed it off. And he was never obnoxious about it, never. It was just, he had this idea in his head that people deserved fair and equal treatment, which was just a little bizarre back then.

INTERVIEWER: At the yard itself, obviously he was fairly high up. But there was not really opposition there either.

DAVIS: [01:31:18] No, and probably even less because, after all, you know, those people, those are the New York-Philadelphia crowd that was hanging out there back then and owning the place and all that. These were big-city people at the boatyard.

INTERVIEWER: So those who were running it, though, weren't necessarily locals?

DAVIS: [01:31:39] They were. But the owners and their guests, they maintained a lot of really, you know, gold-plater-type yachts back then, Bermuda Race-type yachts. And so I suspect -- I don't know, but I suspect a lot of the clientele would not have been crass enough to get into something like that. And of course, Jimmy was a huge figure in the boatyard from early on, even way back then. So I like to say that I'm the son of the only man on the eastern shore who voted for Adlai Stevenson against Ike

Eisenhower, which is true because the little kids at the academy school in that election wore their -- everybody was wearing an "I Like Ike" pin except me. Yeah, so that was something that his friends just -- he made it work. And you know, it's a misconception anyway that everybody in Cambridge was of that, you know, was fundamentally a racist point of view. There were lots of people in Cambridge trying to affect change way before it got unloaded on the town. And you know, I think it's an untold story. This I get from the Smith Island side. Watermen have always worked together. It's completely different culture from the plantation thing, right? There's black skipjack or workboat skippers as far back as you want to go. And they work together, and they're just fine. And I think that has its roots in the British Navy where those people who were seamen back then, British ships were this rainbow of colors. The ships were all over the world. And they acquired crew members from everywhere. So they were perfectly used to working with every race and creed. And I think -- I don't know if it's -- I've never done an investigation of it. But these grandparents in Cambridge became very close friends towards the end of their lives, with a black family named Latimer, [Benny Latimer?], who had a lawn service, was sort of the primary lawn service in

Cambridge. And they had him over all the time. They did all sorts of things together. That's got to be -- that's not the plantation mentality. That's one thing. And people, it's not that Cambridge was filled with people who didn't know anything. There were a lot of people in Cambridge who knew -- professionals. And my grandmother's brother, the only boy in the family, in a family of six or seven kids, you might have heard of him. His name is [Sleepy Evans?]. He was the high school athletic coach. He was the athletic department at Cambridge High. Before that he was the athletic department at the junior high school where the Board of Ed has their offices now. And one of the things that happened while I was still in high school at Cambridge High was Sleepy invited -- and this was amazingly controversial and dangerous, even. He invited the Mace's Lane High School basketball team to come over and sit in the bleachers and attend the Cambridge High School game. That was a brave thing to do. So for some reason, one of the reasons Owen fit in, it all fit. He was -- and yet they didn't have to be preachy. He was never preachy about it or anything. It was just, they were taking their own path and not into discrimination in any shape or form. I think you get a different view of the problem if you start from that standpoint.

INTERVIEWER: Well, you get -- yes, it's many dimensions and many sides to the story. And they all need to be told when you're thinking about any aspect of history. The gray area, the subtleties, that's where story and oral history plays such a valuable part, is we're able to show some of those variations from the single -- we seem to want single narratives in history. And it doesn't work that way.

DAVIS: [01:36:51] It's a much, much more various tapestry than that. Well, I was present in a Jim Richardson episode on this. And this was after the great race riots started. And I'm one of those guys who came back from college and was stopped at the foot of the bridge and was able to enter the town at the roadblock, the army or National Guard roadblock. I could identify my address as being Cambridge, so I was allowed in. So I was present a lot, for a lot of what went on. At some point, I always went down to Jim Richardson's whenever I was home because I wanted to see the project he was working on, like the Dove. Was it the Dove? I remember all that. And then, of course, when he finally built the Jenny Norman, I would want to see how the boat was coming along. And I was down there one day. And there was a black man down there a lot who on and -- rather old guy, but who on and off worked with Jim. And somehow, while I was there, [Ginerva?] came down there. And the

subject of what some black people were doing in Cambridge came up. And Jim was kind of angry about, you know, fires and this and that. And he made a remark which would now be interpreted for sure as racist. But Ginerva said to him, sort of by way of scolding, he said, "Why, Jim, you know you don't really believe that. Why, Captain Dan here is your best friend." Jim says, "Well, Captain Dan ain't like one of these guys. He's just a black man."

INTERVIEWER: Or a man who happens to be black.

DAVIS: [01:39:00] Well, that's what he meant. But he's just a man who happens to be black. And he was a, you know, former dredge boat skipper. So there was a lot going on. You could understand if you were in the middle of it. My impression of a lifetime of experience -- because I've been -- I went through a period where I was getting branded at a certain extent because of the difficulties in Cambridge by people at school in the northeast. And you just -- they wouldn't -- and this may be still true. There's a certain type of person who simply will not sit still for the subtleties of the situation. It's like, no, you know, label and condemn. And for us, when you grow up at the edge of two issues like this, you see that it's a richer, much more complicated situation than it's ever painted.

INTERVIEWER: And sometimes it takes some distance from it, you know, going to the outside, going away to school. That helps with that. Not that people who live there all their lives aren't capable of it, but I think that does help. And that kind of true for me as well. Do you have other stories from being at Jim Richardson's boatyard? It is not particularly related to your dad. But it would certainly be of interest to us.

DAVIS: [01:40:41] Well, one of my favorite stories -- and I don't know if we've ever really verified this. But one day I was down there, and it had rained. It had been a rainy season. I must have been on spring break. And there were a lot of puddles. You know how the road is down to their house. There were these huge puddles everywhere. And while I was standing there watching Jim do something -- he would always talk to me while he was working on something -- a black Cadillac, or possibly a Lincoln, came down Richardson Drive or whatever it's called now. And in the car were four ladies. And the car had New York plates on it. Now, I assume they were going over to see Fritz Kreisler or something. Anyway, they'd gotten lost and made the wrong turn. So they pulled up in front of the boatyard, rolled down -- well, an electric window went down, which of course was a big deal. And they asked

directions. And Jim, you know, is a very courtly guy, removes his hat and walks over to these ladies, considerate. "Can I help you find your way?" And they get the directions they need. And then one of them in the back seat says to Jim, "We hear you eastern shore people have webbed feet." Well, of course, it was very rainy. I mean, there must have been just, you know, rain puddles, giant puddles, swamp, you know, everything. All the sea-level stuff was going on. We hear you eastern shore people have webbed feet. Well now, in one of these mud puddles, maybe five or six yards behind Jim, was a Richardson kid. And it might have been Jimmy.

INTERVIEWER: Jimmy Brighton?

DAVIS: [01:42:40] I think it was Jimmy Brighton. But I'm not absolutely certain. Anyway, without batting an eye Jim said to the lady, "Well, just a minute." He turned around, went over and picked this kid out of a mud puddle, and of course he didn't have his shoes on, and held the child against his chest with the feet sticking out about waist-high, walked over and planted these two feet on the window of this car and said, "Well, Madam, as you see, it's only between the first and second toes." I love that story. And of course, these women just were gaping like, oh my God,

it's really true. It's really true that eastern shore men have webbed feet.

INTERVIEWER: That's a good response, though. So you mentioned -- so did you see the hippies there? Because I have an interest as we begin our Dove project -- I think I might have mentioned this to you at the museum -- of interviewing people who were involved with the first one. And we have pictures from Robert de Gast of, we think, some of the hippies who worked there. Do you have any particular remembrances of that time period?

DAVIS: [01:43:50] Oh, yes. Well, of course, there was essentially the queen of the hippies, who was Suzanne Hardy.

INTERVIEWER: I don't know what her maiden name was.

DAVIS: [01:44:03] I'm trying to -- I don't think I can remember.

INTERVIEWER: Harding or Hardy?

DAVIS: [01:44:06] Hardy. But it wasn't Hardy then. I don't know what her --

INTERVIEWER: So she stayed in the area?

DAVIS: [01:44:12] Oh yeah. She's around.

CICI: Yeah. Her son, her youngest son, Lewis, owns Composite Yacht, right on the Talbot side of the Choptank. He's a boat builder.

DAVIS: [01:44:26] And Suzanne is this tall, willowy, very much right for the part. And then, so there were a lot of little kids. And then there were at least a dozen other people, guys and some women, more guys than women. Some of them were craftsmen. Some of them knew enough about farming to plant a vegetable garden over there. There was about 100 acres around that house. Some of them did a little plumbing, a little electricity. And Janie and Jim were living over in the house, too, were part of that scene.

INTERVIEWER: So did they just sort of all camp out wherever they could find a space?

DAVIS: [01:45:26] Yeah. Of course, there were a lot of rooms in that house. I mean, it was a big house. But no one today would live in it in its condemned condition. I mean, the toilets didn't work very well. Of course, they didn't work very well anyway because the water was right up to -- but yeah, so they played music. Suzanne and the ladies made these great big meals, communal dining. And they were fun. And they were playing Creedence Clearwater and Willie Nelson.

INTERVIEWER: And this is the mid-'70s?

DAVIS: [01:46:16] It's the early '70s, yeah. I would say -- well, Fred finished this boat and launched her over at

Jim's in, I think, 1972. And then there was -- I attended -- of course, I was in and out. I was stationed in Washington at the time. But I just loved to come over here and lead a different life for a few days.

CICI: DeShane, I guess, was what Suzanne's maiden name was.

DAVIS: [01:46:54] You know, I may not have even known at the time. But some delightful things happened there, I'm sure many more than I know about. But when Fred finished this boat, the *Charlotte Foster*, she's a three-sail bateau and skipjack hull, and the three masts are the standard yacht configuration. He moved her out of the shed and floated her over to, you know, the backyard of his house and then finished her right there in the backyard. Then there was big launching party, which I attended, where -- his family was these Arlington Lockwoods. They were filled with really ladies with incredible longevity. And he had a 100-year-old aunt who came over and wrote a poem. The lady read this poem for the *Charlotte Foster* in honor of his mother. They pushed the boat back into the water and then, you know, oysters and a crab feast and all this stuff. So that kind of thing. My fondest personal memory is, they would sit at a big table in the dining room and be, you know, 16 or 18 people at this table. And it was just sort of the wonderful, crazy environment, and Suzanne and other

women and some of the guys putting together all kinds of food. And once, I took my -- he invited my Richardson grandparents down there. He would go and see them because he knew them as a child. They were still living in Lodgecliffe. And my grandfather -- this is the railroad guy -- was fond of saying, "Well, there was a time when I could get oysters as big as my hands." And Fred had, out in back of that house -- because, I don't know if because somebody had dropped them there on purpose or what. But there was a little oyster bed out in back of this house. And when my grandparents came through the door, he got handed oysters as big as his hand from this little oyster bed that they were harvesting just not too far offshore of Monsieur's Folly.

INTERVIEWER: Well, it certainly sounds like it was a fun era. And it's good to get some of those names and know that she's still in the area. I would like to talk to some of the people that were working in that era.

DAVIS: [01:49:48] Well, one of the names -- there were some local people. And then there were a bunch of people from the Washington area. But one of them was another Fred. I almost thing was there someone in my life named Fred Asplund? And he was a very good guy, local guy, Dorchester County guy. And he helped Fred. Several of them helped

Fred work on this boat. And I think I pointed you to this website where Fred's widow has posted really this interesting sequence, construction sequence, on the Charlotte Foster.

INTERVIEWER: Well, let's get back to your dad a little bit. So I think know the answer to this. One of the questions I have is, did he really ever get any critical recognition, at least in his adulthood, for his work? But he really, he died too soon.

DAVIS: [01:50:48] I think so. Well, he was known in the bay area. He was very well known almost anywhere on the bay where people were doing boat stuff, and of course the magazine.

INTERVIEWER: But he wasn't in any other magazines that you recall or that you knew about?

DAVIS: [01:51:09] Well, in the design, that brings us to the bugeye rig sharpie.

INTERVIEWER: Yes. That's on my list, too.

DAVIS: [01:51:18] So he conceived of a low-cost boat, which was -- that was the theme post-war, and something you're able to do yourself. And this is true of skipjacks, right? Skipjacks take off because, as I think someone actually said this, any house carpenter can build one. Well, he created a design out of a sharpie, from a sharpie hauler,

that's even easier to build than a skipjack because there's no dead rise. There's just absolutely flat bottom. And he worked on it a lot. And in this mix with Jim Richardson was Howard Chapelle, of course, who was from down there, too. And Chapelle encouraged him a lot. This is a very nice-looking boat. And so after quite a while, he of course had a complete set of plans, which I think you now have. And the design was published in literally all the major boating magazines -- *Rudder*, *Yachting*, and the *Skipper*. And there was a tremendous response to this design because it looks -- you know, it would be a low-cost, it was a low-cost boat.

INTERVIEWER: Do you remember when this came out?

DAVIS: [01:53:13] Nineteen forty-eight.

INTERVIEWER: Okay. I think I have that somewhere else. But I can check out issues of those magazines.

DAVIS: [01:53:18] I think it's -- I'm almost certain it's 1948. Yeah, I did find the reference. You know, there's this index of boat designs published in *Rudder*. It's maintained up at Mystic. And I think I sent you -- we know the exact issue for that one. But it was also in *Yachting* and the rest of them. And people liked the looks of this boat. It was very popular. Now, it turned out -- then he

built the boat at Jim Richardson's. And we have a picture of that, photo of that.

INTERVIEWER: Very cool. Is that one of the ones? Okay.

DAVIS: [01:54:00] Yeah. I think I sent you the digitized version, but I don't know I --

INTERVIEWER: I did catalog most of those things, maybe except for the most recent two.

DAVIS: [01:54:11] Anyway, so then he really had to work with that design a lot to make it really right. And by the time he got the boat right, he would have had to go back and revise the plans. And at that point I think he was just so caught up with the boatyard business that he just didn't have time to make the boat right. So I doubt that -- that's the only one that was ever built, so far as I knew. Yet, it was years and years later, a decade later, way after he was dead, we would still get people inquiring about those plans.

INTERVIEWER: So he tweaked from the plans that were published. But those tweaks or those modifications never got made?

DAVIS: [01:55:05] Never got back into the plans.

INTERVIEWER: And the boat itself?

DAVIS: [01:55:10] Got sold to a guy from Texas, was shipped there on a truck. And I don't know whatever happened to it.

INTERVIEWER: And that was sort of the inspiration for you to start talking about your father and his approach to boat design?

DAVIS: [01:55:33] That's right. When I was at the war college in Newport, which is probably the least -- I had more free time there than I have ever had anywhere else. And so I started to see if I can assemble the story. And I did get it in a form where it could be published. And Wooden Boat published it in October 1980 and then published it again in a coffee table book. And it's a very personal story. And I just decided not to hide any of the difficulties. I didn't make it look like it was easy because it wasn't. That was when I -- you could say that marks the beginning of my effort to archive what Owen Davis did manage to achieve in 40 years of being a -- and interrupted for a substantial amount of time by World War II. And now, that was not -- you know, he was doing other designs at the boatyard. And then, he took on some freelance projects. And one of these was built by Jim Richardson. Cici will bring this photo which, you know, you can keep as long as you like. But this boat was called -- for some reason, I don't know why, it was called Fiesta, the name the owner chose. And it was an interesting example of Owen and Jim Richardson interacting, because she

was only 30 feet long. But the client wanted standing headroom in the cabin and a lot of room. So again, I think this is the kind of thing -- you know, Owen was pretty clever about this. What he basically came up with is what you would now call a wide-body yacht. If you think about skipjacks, they've got a lot of beam to them. What you have to do if you want the standing headroom in the cabin and have the cabin not be super-ugly, is you've got to raise the freeboard. So *Fiesta* was not only beamy but had a lot of freeboard. And this is the art and design in my mind in combination. Her boxiness was cleverly disguised with a whole bunch of moldings and horizontal lines that made the boat look good. And when you see the photograph, which I'll get to you, she looks -- that picture was taken on her maiden voyage under sail. That's a great shot under sail by a professional photographer named [Scott?] who was one of the relatives of Jim Richardson who lived down there on the place. I don't know if you ever met any of those. But as this boat was -- as Jim was putting this boat together and following the plans, he kept calling Owen up and saying, "God, this boat is so ugly-looking." He just could hardly bring himself to -- and I remember one conversation where, you know, one of these classic, "I design them; you build them" conversations. Just stick to

the plans. It's going to come out all right. They had that discussion over and over again, like how can this boat possibly look good? But there were some things about it that actually influenced the look of Jim's boats. The cockpit comings, if you look when you see this boat, and the port lights and the cabin are repeated in almost all Jim Richardson boats after that. That was very early on. And then, another -- I sent you a narrative on this wonderful figurehead for this boat that was never executed, which at the end of the longhead Dad had drawn this beautiful -- because the boat's name was *Fiesta* -- this Mexican donkey with buck teeth and ears laid back so that it looked kind of like an eagle. But none of that came to fruition. But the boat sailed really well and was very, very roomy. And it was a big success.

INTERVIEWER: But again another one-off, one boat built? Plans no longer exist that you know of?

DAVIS: [02:00:43] No. I wish.

INTERVIEWER: But we do have a photograph of her?

DAVIS: [02:00:45] We have a photograph of her. And the boat was around. I saw her up in Chestertown sometime in the '90s. And she had been all taken apart. And somebody had, you know, lost the concept. You really should -- it was just not good looking without these moldings and the

various things that disguised her. So I don't know what happened to her. But I did talk to the owner. And I told him this story and the importance of getting the appearance of the boat right. But that's an example of one of very few, except for, I think, the Dove project. I mean, Jim, it's not true that Jim only worked by eye and half models. He knew about plans. And that's one example of a skipjack yacht that was designed from the ground up and executed by him.

INTERVIEWER: That's good information. You mentioned that you think, in addition to what you've donated to the museum, that you think a few friends and people in the Cambridge area may still have some of his works, drawings, even watercolors, perhaps?

DAVIS: [02:02:17] Yeah, and watercolors. People who I know had -- Eldridge Wolfe, Doctor Wolfe, had a bunch. Hugh Wright had a bunch. The brick house, there's a big brick house at the foot -- well, on Hambrooks Boulevard -- that's rather new, actually, right down on the water. I don't know what those people's name were. But they had the last watercolor he ever did, which was of a -- that was a commission he got down at Dividing Creek or down at Trappe Creek.

INTERVIEWER: Oh, it's a commission to paint her a boat?

DAVIS: [02:03:08] She said, "I want a picture of a skipjack. And I want it to be in gray and green." And he concocted this beautiful, you know, green sunset with gray clouds and with the sun behind the skipjack. And she's running down the river in light air. And the sails are all gray, of course, as skipjack sails really are. It's really quite a good painting. I don't know what's happened to it.

INTERVIEWER: Well, you know, if we plan some kind of exhibition, it might be nice to put out a call, even for items to be loaned to us. I don't have anything specific on our schedule yet. But we'll try to gather that kind of information.

DAVIS: [02:03:55] Oh, great.

INTERVIEWER: And once people know we have it, they may be compelled to -- and if they're looking for a home for it, they might be compelled to think of us.

DAVIS: [02:04:03] Well, that's right, because -- well, these paintings, I mean, they've got -- oh, and there are some on the West Coast in my brother--

END OF AUDIO FILE

[Second audio file]

STANLEY OWEN DAVIS, JR: [00:00:00] -- brother's family, which they do not want to part with. But I've told them that eventually the one thing you mustn't do is cut those paintings loose on the West Coast because on the West Coast they're just a \$100 oil painting. Nobody knows what the heck they're looking at, right? They have to come back here some point and be in context to be meaningful because watercolors are not -- paintings are not particularly valuable right now. And that's a recipe for losing them, right? So there's some out there. And there are some in the Washington area and some in the Baltimore area.

INTERVIEWER: Well, as I said, you never know once word gets out. One of my hopes is to take all the information you've gathered, plus our interview, and do a feature article for our magazine that has a big log, you know, mostly distributed through our membership. But still, the word may get out. You never know.

DAVIS: [00:01:03] That would be wonderful.

INTERVIEWER: Have we hit everything?

DAVIS: [00:01:12] There was something I just thought of. Oh, there are oils. I was just telling [Cici?], when I was at the war college, I convinced my mother to donate a painting to the War College Museum in Newport. This is a painting

of a famous, once-famous, incident at sea involving -- I would say, from the 1870s or 1880s; I don't know what the exact date is -- involving the wreck of the USS *Saginaw*. She was a navy vessel in the era of steam and sail. So she had a coal-fired boiler and propeller, a propeller, but then was a full-rigged ship. And the *Saginaw* was wrecked in the Pacific on a reef. And it's one of these great sea adventures of the 19th century. They took the gig, which was maybe a 30-foot longboat kind of thing, and salvaged enough from the wreck to deck over this gig and rig her as a kind of a schooner. And six or seven of these guys sailed that boat thousands of miles in open Pacific to get to the coaling station in Midway. And the *Saginaw* crew was then rescued. Well, he painted a picture of this. This is an example of -- you know, that must have been a famous Navy story back in the 19th century. And it's well known. It's well documented. It'll come right up on the web if you ask for it. So for some reason I was looking at the war college site. And they had a display of this picture and a note on it saying that the war college has lent this picture long-term to the Museum of *Saginaw*, Michigan. So that painting is sitting in *Saginaw*, Michigan. It's an oil. I made a mental note. I've got to call them and tell them, if you want to look at the rest of this guy's work,

it's down here at the Chesapeake Bay Maritime Museum. So that's one oil. And then there's another oil of a really great Chinese junk painting that my brother's family out in Washington State have got.

INTERVIEWER: Now that's a bit of a departure for him. Did he do those in school, his studies?

DAVIS: [00:04:05] I think they're right after art school it would have been, you know, or maybe even in art school. Do you have a copy of the Chinese junk?

CICI: Yeah, I have copy.

DAVIS: [00:04:15] The watercolor, too. There's a watercolor of a Chinese junk. This is sort of the Chinese theme.

INTERVIEWER: Well, here's the thing, you know, although sometimes people don't want others to know what they have. If the family is interested in at least sharing digital images of those for just as reference and that we might be able to use internally potentially for an exhibition, even if it's just for reference purposes, you know, that's beneficial as well, even if it's just to keep an open dialog with them. I know our curator has been -- these things sometimes come to fruition when people are looking for a good home for them.

DAVIS: [00:05:01] Absolutely. He did things in oil. Cici's got a great picture of the ship's cats on the *Gertrude*

Wands. This is one of the -- oh yeah. Here's Owen and some of his pals sailing the *Gertrude Wands*. These two, this is the *Gertrude Wands* before she was converted to a yacht. And then, some of these, a couple of these I sent you.

INTERVIEWER: And he took --

DAVIS: [00:05:48] These were taken by some friend of his or whatever. There's some more *Gertrude Wands* someplace. I don't know where. And I sent you these great action shots.

INTERVIEWER: Well, these are all good. Hard to know where they are, but nonetheless --

DAVIS: [00:06:16] Yeah, I think it could also -- another possibility is Gibson Island because a friend of his who actually had a connection to Cambridge kept a boat up there. These, I wasn't sure what to do with these. Some of these old photos, you know, various people around Cambridge like this kind of thing. But this is the kind of stuff they were doing. This is the sand bar down at Trappe Creek. They'd put these tables up, these kids, you know?

INTERVIEWER: Actually, that's fabulous documentation of --

DAVIS: [00:06:56] This is Bill Edmunds and Libby Edmunds, whose name is [Trice?]. You know the big huge Victorian house at the corner of Locust and Belvedere? It's up for sale right now for, like, half a million bucks. It's this

mammoth Victorian house. That's her dad. Her dad was a famous lawyer in Cambridge, Judge Trice. And Libby and Bill were two of their best friends.

INTERVIEWER: If you're passing these on to me, we should try to get some -- I need to get some identification on them before (overlapping dialogue; inaudible).

DAVIS: [00:07:27] Okay. I'll send you whatever I've got on that.

INTERVIEWER: Well, just even the people in them.

DAVIS: [00:07:34] Here's two more. These are the originals of the one. I've sent you the framed thing.

INTERVIEWER: What I started to say is we have an exhibition called At Play on the Bay and documenting, you know, the way that people recreated on the bay, which sometimes you can get through snapshots and sometimes you don't. It's actually fairly unusual.

DAVIS: [00:07:57] Well, that's kind of interesting because this is basically -- well, there's a picture right there. All those boats are at Trappe Creek up on the sand bar just like they do now. And there you can see someone sitting in chairs up on the sand bar and of course, making a picnic. Now, also down there was the JD with me, with our family and Jim Richardson, Janie, all these people, just with the mizzenmast stepped forward and the mizzen. That's all. No

jib. And a big canoe like the JD is perfectly safe with a little rig like that. And we'd sail from Jim's house right over to Trappe Creek. I was like a big sort of a fruit dish. I mean, it was just amazing, all these little brown kids, and watermelons and just packed with all this food. We'd just go across to Trappe Creek. And that went on in the summer all the time. That was the one big deal. And the other thing was, I did ask, because I was an ignorant little kid, I did say to Dad once, "Now, why is it we don't have a really nice yacht like that?" And he said, "Son, the shoemaker's children have no shoes."

INTERVIEWER: Good response.

DAVIS: [00:09:39] It was a really good response. But really we did because back then the boatyard had a utility boat, a tow boat, called the *Virginia*. I will never forget her. And she was a wonderful late 1920s Clinker-built cabin cruiser with a huge bigger engine, a diesel engine bigger than -- probably one of the ones bought on the navy contract, and then towing bids aft. And she was basically the boatyard's tugboat. She was painted blue. And in huge letter across both sides it said "The Oxford Boatyard." And that was our -- we very often -- of course Dad just had the use of the boat. That was our yacht. We would take the boat and take the *Virginia* down to Dividing Creek when

she was available and the timing worked out and run her up on the beach, just the classic -- as an old amphibious ship sailor I can tell you we were doing it just the way you do it. You go in, you point your bow at the strand and drop your anchor over aft and run your bow up on the strand and make that line fast. And your stern doesn't string around. Let's see. Also down there were Willard and Sarah Richardson and Dawson. As a matter of fact, their boat, which I don't know if you ever saw their boat, was called Sawilda -- Sarah, Willard and Dawson. The Sawilda used to be in the creek right there, which we used to call Richardson's Ditch, at Lodgecliffe. And Willard bought that boat from the Oxford Boatyard. She was for sale. And one night Dawson was over at our house for dinner. And Dad came in the door before we were seated. And somehow just in conversation he said to Dawson, "Well, is your father going to buy the Buddy?" And he was like, "What are you talking about?" And he said, "Oops, I probably shouldn't have said anything." But he did.

INTERVIEWER: Dropped a little hint?

DAVIS: [00:12:17] The boat had the name *The Buddy* and got renamed Sawilda. The only other thing I have that might -- this is Rosalie Evans, my grandmother's sister, on a little crabbing skiff. That's probably up at Cedar Grove. You

know where Cedar Grove is? There's like a little resort up there at Cedar Grove.

INTERVIEWER: It's a little skiff.

DAVIS: [00:12:49] But it's just kind of a neat picture.

That'd be, what, 1930 maybe.

INTERVIEWER: Right. And she was sort of part of the group as well?

DAVIS: [00:12:59] No. She just was a relative that just happened to have this picture. She lived on Glasgow and worked at Craig's Drugstore until she was 92 or 93 years old.

CICI: Yeah, I remember her.

DAVIS: [00:13:16] Cici remembers her really well. And she was really pissed when they told her she had to retire because it was her life at Craig's Drugstore.

INTERVIEWER: I'm sure my mother probably -- my mother still goes to Craig's.

DAVIS: [00:13:29] I'm sure. She probably knew Rosalie. She was married to one Hurley, a guy named Hurley. But that's kind of a neat picture.

INTERVIEWER: It sure is. Where did you get Oxford Jack?

DAVIS: [00:13:47] Oh, that was after we moved back here. We had a brief foray into the skipjack business. You know Curtis Applegarth. Well, you've got Spat down there. And

then there's the [Yankee Peddler?] sitting there in Oxford. Well, there was another one, a better one, really, than either of those, called Oxford Jack. And we bought her back in the late '80s, early '90s, and went quite a way to fix her up into something, then had to move onto something else. So we did have a skipjack for a while.

INTERVIEWER: Very cool.

CICI: Yeah.

INTERVIEWER: Well, if you're -- I'd like to stop if it's okay with you and make some notes on some of these pictures.

But I thank you very much for all of your time.

DAVIS: [00:14:40] Well, it's a great pleasure.

END OF AUDIO FILE

[Third audio file]

INTERVIEWER: Let's begin again and talk about your work and your research that you've done on skipjack yacht conversions and maybe why you feel that *Gertrude Wands* may have been the first.

STANLEY OWEN DAVIS, JR: [00:00:13] Well, the main resource I relied on was Pete Lesher's article. And it is an article, if I recall correct -- I'm forgetting things a lot these days. But it's an article about the history of bay boats that have been turned into yachts. And he mentions there's one from the late 19th century, one of which is a schooner, I think. Into the 20th century, he mentions a couple of bugeye yacht conversions or maybe even a bugeye built to be a yacht. But neither in his article nor anyplace I can find on the web is there a skipjack yacht conversion that predates the 1938 conversion that Owen did to create this yacht. And it's pretty significant because, really, most of the yachts that were built subsequent to that were skipjacks. They weren't bugeyes or any of these other complicated things to build them. And the whole idea was you can do this for relatively little. And so it's entirely possible that he was the first guy to ever make a yacht of a skipjack. And I cannot find any reference to anybody. It's very unlikely that anybody did anything like

that during the war even. It probably was quite a -- it wasn't until after the war that -- you'd have to even see where the idea came from of building these three-sail bateau yachts like of the kind Jim was building. There was another guy involved, and it has a Cambridge connection, was Van Dyke. You know the name at all, [Trip Van Dyke]?

INTERVIEWER: I went to school with a Van Dyke, but I don't know if it's the same family.

DAVIS: [00:02:17] There is a younger sister, maybe. But Van Dyke is from the Van Dykes of Philadelphia, okay? But he came down here. And he designed a few yachts in the 1940s and '50s, after World War II. But they weren't -- unlike these others, which really look like bay boats in that there was very little bright work, they're painted all white, you know, they've got all the -- his designs made them look more like yachts -- you know, varnished rails, no knight's heads, you know, a more standard yacht-type balustrade, that kind of thing. So really, I don't know how much work has been done on any of that. But there are really several different schools of thought going on to bay-related yachts back then. And people were trying this and that. It's all a piece of an important part of bay history, I think.

INTERVIEWER: Oh, I think so. And whether the conversions happened when they reached the end of their functional life -- so bugeyes went out of fashion as working boats sooner. And so maybe that's one of the reasons that the skipjacks were being converted.

DAVIS: [00:03:36] Well, I know the famous round-stern bugeye, I think I gave you a picture of her, of Sally Bramble, used to be sitting in that yard. She was made into a yacht at some point. But that was very recently. I met a guy who was the last guy to own the *Gertrude Wands*. And unfortunately I don't know -- I actually had some contact information on him. But he told me the whole story of her ending. He found her up in Maine somewhere. Somebody had gradually -- and bay boats have gone up there and stayed before. So she was up there still looking exactly like that, no modification to anything Owen did. He said that he and three or four guys -- and this was in the '70s or '80s. And they were a crew of hippies. They knew nothing. And he said, "I can tell you one thing, Stan. That was one hell of a boat, because we took her--" They took her out to sea in the Atlantic and sailed her all the way back down to the bay off shore. And they didn't know what they were doing. They had bad weather. And she just kept going. Then, they sailed her all the way down to the Caribbean and

basically ran out of money and booze and whatever else and just left her down there. And she's just, wherever she is, she's just, you know, a wreck down there, was left as a wreck down there in the Bahamas.

INTERVIEWER: In the Bahamas?

DAVIS: [00:05:19] Somewhere in the Bahamas. So that's the end of the *Gertrude Wands*. Now, I am sure that's never been published. And he was kind of somebody like maybe a refrigerator repairman-type guy.

INTERVIEWER: Now recently did you get in contact with him?

DAVIS: [00:05:44] I'd say early 2000s. And he saw that picture of the sailing across the bay. He saw a copy of that. And that's what put him onto it.

INTERVIEWER: Oh, he contacted you?

DAVIS: [00:06:01] Well, yeah.

INTERVIEWER: Interesting. Great story.

DAVIS: [00:06:07] That's the story there.

INTERVIEWER: That's the story. All right, I'm going to stop it again.

END OF AUDIO FILE

[Fourth audio file]

STANLEY OWEN DAVIS, JR: [00:00:00] And Owen designed and executed the boatyard's booth.

INTERVIEWER: So going to the boat shows, where did you say those were again?

DAVIS: [00:00:11] Baltimore and the DC armory and the Baltimore armory. And for this special effort, they did not go to the New York Boat Show every year. That was rare. And that's why they went to so much trouble to build this model. And they were trying to launch that.

INTERVIEWER: And you said that was a family outing? So what would you all do, just peruse and go around the boat show while he was busy, I presume?

DAVIS: [00:00:39] Mm-hmm. And this was awful, almost embarrassing story. The year after he died, we went. Mother and my brother and I went and you know, as usual, just walked around and looked at things. Oh, we would also stop off at the *Skipper* magazine booth, too. That was the other thing. They were there at all those shows. And I remember stopping to talk to people at the *Skipper* both and stopping to talk at the boatyard booth. And at the boatyard booth they recognized me. But at the *Skipper* booth they didn't. I said, "I'm Owen Davis' son." They said, "Oh my goodness. You're the third person who's

stopped by and said that," because my mother and my brother were also wandering around during some sort of crazy nostalgia thing. They went up there.

INTERVIEWER: Well, I hope they were kind after that.

CICI: What about that TV show from Baltimore that came down?

DAVIS: [00:01:44] Oh God, yeah.

CICI: Because we tried to find this. And I got really far with him but then kind of didn't. So maybe the maritime museum would get further.

DAVIS: [00:01:55] Thank you. This is what --

INTERVIEWER: No, you've remembered a lot.

DAVIS: [00:02:01] She's -- this is important. In the 1950s, you know, Baltimore made this huge effort to be a modern port. It was one of the world's first highly-automated, containerized port. And it was this giant project. It went on for years to just -- and Baltimore, for a long time, I don't know if it still is, was like the second-busiest port in the whole -- second-biggest throughput, you know, all connected with rails to everything. During the time they were doing that, Channel -- was it Channel 2?

CICI: I can't remember.

DAVIS: [00:02:41] I'm pretty sure it was Channel 2. One of the TV stations in Baltimore, there was an effort to explain to the taxpayers, because a lot of taxpayer money

went into this, that this benefits the entire state. We're going to build this huge container port. We're going to be the best in the world. And they sent film crews all over the state. And they sent a crew over here. This would have to be 1955, in there somewhere. Anyway, they showed up at the Oxford Boatyard. And Dad came home one night and said, "Well, I'm on TV." This was really early TV. And at that point, I think it was spring. So there were just yachts all over the boatyard. And they basically just shoved a microphone in his hand he said, and pointed the camera at him and said, "Tell us why the port of Baltimore is important to this business." That was really the theme. Why is the port of Baltimore important to you? And he -- of course, we watched it on television. He made a very wonderful and cogent statement about, "See this sloop over here? Her sides are Philippine mahogany. That Philippine mahogany comes here through the port of Baltimore. See this, this one and this one?" And that film, a great deal of that film, Cici went up to Baltimore.

CICI: So what was the show called? The show was called Port of Baltimore.

DAVIS: [00:04:26] Called Port of Baltimore.

CICI: So I called. I Googled the crap out of it and found a couple clips on YouTube. And they were posted on YouTube

by the Baltimore Museum of Industry. So I called the curator of the Baltimore Museum of Industry. And he said that they do have every single canister. But not all of them have been digitized. And that's kind of where we left it. And I gave him my number. And I said, "Well, if you ever digitize all of them, I'm looking for one that was shot in the Oxford Boatyard between--" we guessed it was like between --

DAVIS: [00:04:58] Jen, if you could get that film, oh my God.

INTERVIEWER: Well, maybe it's something that we strive to get because that's what people expect. But there's such another dimension. Can you imagine to see him?

DAVIS: [00:05:10] It would be incredibly emotional for me to hear his voice.

INTERVIEWER: Yeah, I bet.

DAVIS: [00:05:15] We often talk about this. These kids nowadays, they're going to have this complete electronic package that allows them to see, in full-motion video with sound, their ancestors. If we could recover that, that would be huge, wouldn't it? I mean, we want to look at the boatyard. It's a live look at the boatyard in 1955.

INTERVIEWER: That's incredible.

DAVIS: [00:05:41] I'm so glad you said that.

INTERVIEWER: There were a variety of episodes. And each one was at a different location.

DAVIS: [00:05:46] Mm-hmm.

INTERVIEWER: So even if they don't have it digitized, they should know whether they have it digitized because hopefully it's by episode.

CICI: Right.

INTERVIEWER: You said they have all of them or all but a few?

DAVIS: [00:05:55] All the canisters.

CICI: He said they have all of the canisters containing the original film. And I think I can probably find the links for you on YouTube. And they digitized a handful, mostly having to do with episodes that covered the port itself because they're the Baltimore Museum of Industry. But he said they were all there. And I was like, "Well, if you ever digitize them, please call me."

INTERVIEWER: Well, or we could say --

CICI: "Give us the canisters."

INTERVIEWER: Well, yeah, or, you know, we want to use this for this purpose. It's still yours. We'll look for the funding to get it digitized. I'm not sure if it's the format, but some of these are pretty sensitive.

DAVIS: [00:06:33] Well, yeah. I mean, it's obviously the old dangerous kind of film, right? But there may be -- and we

don't know how they have those canisters indexed or anything. But it may not be hard, you know? I would imagine it said on the outside of the canister they would -
-

CICI: He was so cooperative. I think I sent him an email, and he called me.

INTERVIEWER: Good. Was this fairly recently?

CICI: It was probably, like, three or four years ago, maybe two years ago. He called me, like, after, you know, 24 hours I sent him an email. So he was very responsive and interested that I knew someone that had been in it. So that was cool.

DAVIS: [00:07:08] That would be huge. Yeah, so there is TV of Owen.

INTERVIEWER: That would be something.

DAVIS: [00:07:13] That would really be something. Thank you, hon, thank you. This is --

INTERVIEWER: Yeah, absolutely.

DAVIS: [00:07:20] Yeah, that's really important.

INTERVIEWER: I'm going to stop it again.

END OF AUDIO FILE