

OH 497 LamontWright

BRENT LEWIS: My name is Brent Lewis. Today is June 12th, 2023, and I'm speaking with Captain Lamont Wright for the Chesapeake Bay Maritime Museum's Watermen's Story Swap Oral History Project. Lamont, do me a favor, tell us your full name and your date of birth and if you have any nicknames.

LAMONT WRIGHT: [00:00:20] Okay, my name is Lamont D. Wright Senior. I was born October the 21st, 1958, and my nickname when I was coming up was Plug.

BL: How'd you get that nickname?

LW: [00:00:34] When I was in high school, I was fast on the track and field. So that...one time I won a race running a hundred meters, and the guy called me "Sparkplug," so he said, he's like a sparkplug, and that...ended up calling me "Plug" for the rest of my...up to this day, they still call me plug.

BL: And we have permission to record this interview, obviously?

LW: [00:00:58] That's correct.

BL: Where are you from, Lamont?

LW: [00:01:02] I'm...originally, I was born and raised in Batts Neck, but I've been a resident of Grasonville since I was 10 years old, so I've resided in Grasonville, Grasonville, Maryland.

BL: Tell me a little bit about the family you grew up in, your parents and siblings.

LW: [00:01:20] Well, I was raised by my mom and dad, and we were raised in Batts Neck, and it was three families that lived in one house. My aunt was the oldest of the sisters, three sisters, and all of the kids, so it was like grandmama's house, you know what I mean? It was my aunt, but it was like grandmama's house, so they all raised us. So I was born and raised in Grasonville, you know, with all my brothers and sisters, and you know, all the three families, we all lived in the same house on Batts Neck Road.

BL: Family still close, all that, those extended family?

LW: [00:01:57] We very close. I love the fact that this family thing was so close, and my mom is...she's 89 years old, she's still here today, God bless. You know, so, and she'd make a phone call and say let's get together, within 15 minutes, everybody's there. You know, that's just the power she has amongst the families.

BL: What's your mom's name?

LW: [00:02:20] Shirley Wright.

BL: And, your dad's name?

LW: [00:02:23] My dad's name is Montro Wright.

BL: And how many siblings do you have, brothers and sisters?

LW: [00:02:29] I have four brothers living, two deceased sisters. It's four brothers still living.

BL: And what was your childhood like? Well first of all, let me ask, what are your oldest memories? What do you remember when you look back as a child?

LW: [00:02:47] Well, I remember like coming up in Batt's Neck, it was like, two sections of town, we were called the Uproad and the Downroad crew, and we just had a little competitions running, football, basketball, so the Uproad played the Downroad, you know. So it was, it was like a lot of fun down there, but once I moved to Grasonville, then I started exploring and getting into sports and stuff more, so.

BL: How old were you when you moved to Grasonville?

LW: [00:03:15] I was 10.

BL: Ten, and Batt's Neck is here on Kent Island. It's a neighborhood down on Romancoke Road. Traditionally African American, but transitioning now.

LW: [00:03:30] Now, yes.

BL: The neighborhood is changing.

LW: [00:03:33] Yes.

BL: You guys have been in Grasonville since you were 10 years old?

LW: [00:03:37] That's correct.

BL: What was it like growing up in Grasonville?

LW: [00:03:41] Grasonville was a whole different area from Batt's Neck. It was kind of secluded in Batt's Neck. But once I got to Grasonville and we were going to school back to Centerville, so it was a much broader, wider range. And I started playing Little League baseball with the guys from Grasonville. Then you know, I just started meeting more friends, and I just got into sports a little bit more, as well.

BL: Sports was big for you growing up?

LW: [00:04:10] Yes, very big.

BL: You mentioned that track was big for you. What other sports did you play?

LW: [00:04:16] I was...played basketball, played track. I played a year of football, but kind of got a little injury, and that was my...I didn't want to get hurt no more, so I stopped playing football.

BL: Are there any coaches that stand out in your mind from those days?

LW: [00:04:31] Yeah, actually my track coach Mr. Nasbit when I was in high school. Um, basketball coach also Mr. Gandy, he was a...and Richard Thren, he was a coach. But Mr. Gandy mainly, he was another coach with a lot of

inspiration and you know, it was just, both of them still,
I think about them all the time.

BL: You went to Queen Anne's County High School?

LW: [00:04:56] I did.

BL: And what year did you graduate?

LW: [00:04:58] '77.

BL: So, your dad, Captain Montro Wright, we've talked to him.
He's noted now as the oldest continually working African
American captain on the Chesapeake Bay. Did you have other
family members who worked on the water?

LW: [00:05:18] I did, my uncle, my grandfather first of all was
a waterman out of Batt's Neck. He's the first one who ever
really took me out on the boat. I was no more than five to
six years old at that point, and we used to go down Papa
Landing way down down Romancoke Road and go out, and he
used to crab. So I used to go out with him; that was my
first experience. Yeah, as far as going out on the water.

BL: What was your grandfather's name?

LW: [00:05:45] Alexander Bordly, they used to call him Mr.
Moody.

BL: So that was your...Mr. Moody?

LW: [00:05:50] Yes.

BL: That was your mom's dad?

LW: [00:05:52] That was my mom's dad.

BL: And so he was technically kind of your first mentor working on the water?

LW: [00:05:57] As far as working on the water, that's correct.

BL: How did he catch crabs? What method did he use?

LW: [00:06:02] He used a trotline. So we used to go out and set the trotlines, and then go down and learn how to dip them.

BL: Was that a lot of fun for...

LW: [00:06:11] It was a lot of fun, but it was an art to it, to dipping the crabs, is coming up on the trotline, cause once they break that water, they see you, you really got to flip that dip net to catch those crabs.

BL: So explain to us how a trotline works.

LW: [00:06:25] Well, a trotline could be anywhere from probably a thousand feet long, and two buoys on the end, in which the bait is tied probably every 25, 30 feet, I'm not exactly sure how they tie it now. And, you put a roller off the side of the boat, and you take the stick, and you put the roller out, and you put the line on the roller, and you just drive all the way straight down the line, and as the roller goes by, the crabs come out the water, and you dip them, put them in the basket.

BL: So as you say, it's fun and it's an art, but it's also a way to make a living. So it's very important to learn not to miss those crabs as they come up, right?

LW: [00:07:06] Exactly, exactly. You'll learn. And especially from the old folks, so they used to get on you a little harder than like today, yeah, so.

BL: They were, grandfather was a little tougher?

LW: [00:07:16] A little tough; a little tough.

BL: [laughs] Now where did he live? Did he live in Batt's Neck?

LW: [00:07:21] He also lived in Batt's Neck.

BL: So where did you guys work out of when you were little and working with him?

LW: [00:07:27] Right down, Route 8 down Romancoke Road. All I remember, they used it call it Papa Landing, and there's a landing down there on the left, a little ways past the airport. I forgot though.

BL: And he has a boat?

LW: [00:07:39] Yes.

BL: It was his boat that he worked out of. Was crabbing his primary...

LW: [00:07:44] That was his...that's all I remember him doing.

BL: Wow, and so do you have...was your dad already a waterman when you came along, or was that something that Montro got in as you got older?

LW: [00:07:59] Nope, he was always a waterman, but I didn't go. He was the waterman out of Kent Narrows, so until I got probably seven or eight, then I started going with him on the boat; they had a small boat. But he used to do seasonal work. He oystered, he crabbed, you know like that, and then later on he got into clamming with the clam rig.

BL: Did you work with him on those jobs?

LW: [00:08:21] I did, I did. After I was about seven to eight, we had to get up and go out on the boat, mainly weekends, but once we got into the older years, and we still had to go, and then he'd have us back in time to go to school, so it was crazy back then.

BL: So crabbing, oystering, clamming, you learned all that?

LW: [00:08:42] I learned all of it.

BL: And you worked at all those jobs?

LW: [00:08:47] I worked at all of them from...

BL: Which of those did you like best?

LW: [00:08:51] Well, I liked clamming, but the older I got, the back couldn't take that clamming, because you bent over all the day picking them off the conveyor belt. So I'm going

to say, I like oystering, but it was too cold in the wintertime for me, so that kind of turned me against it. So I'm going to say crabbing was the...I enjoyed crabbing more.

BL: Did you have mentors other than your dad and your grandfather?

LW: [00:09:19] I did. My Uncle Andrew used to take me out crabbing as well. So that was my dad's brother, Andrew Wright.

BL: And so those three men were your primary mentors in the seafood business?

LW: [00:09:32] Well I had another uncle named Captain Dick Bordley, he...he got into fishing, you know, first. My dad did this, but my mom Dick Bordley got into fishing, and that kind of persuaded my dad to mainly do fishing, and that's what I really enjoyed. But Uncle Dick Bordley, he was the one who took me fishing first.

BL: So, we'll move into that, because I definitely want to move into the head boat work. Did you have any other jobs though off the water? Did you work other jobs?

LW: [00:10:05] I did; I did. I actually, from working on the water from a young age, from like seven until I got out of high school. I became a correctional officer in 1980, in

Anne Arundel County. So I went to Anne Arundel County, and I was a correction officer there.

BL: And how long did you do that job?

LW: [00:10:27] Twenty-six years.

BL: How did that compare to working on the water?

LW: [00:10:34] Well, it was a great job, you know what I'm saying, but after a while, twenty-six years, I just felt it was time to get out, but I wasn't really ready to retire. [laughs] I was still forty-seven years old when I came. So I came back home to Queen Anne's County, and then I started working at Queen Anne's County, at the sanitation department, and I became a building inspector.

BL: You were working on the water all at the same time?

LW: [00:11:07] In all the time I was working on the water, all the weekends, all the way through. You know, so I did two or three jobs the whole time, almost all of my life.

BL: Where'd you get that work ethic?

LW: [00:11:19] I kind of seen my dad just had that work ethic, but after being young, and we had our own money like coming up in school, I just always wanted money, and it was never enough; it was never enough. So I mean, I did so many things, you know, as far as making a dollar. I just worked, worked, worked. So that's kind of where I got it from, from my dad.

BL: And so your uncle was the first guy you knew personally who moved into the fishing boat business. How old were you then?

LW: [00:11:58] I was probably, at that time, when I started fishing, probably eight, nine, at that point.

BL: Going out with your uncle?

LW: [00:12:08] I was going out with my uncle, eight, nine maybe 10, maybe 10, somewhere in that neighborhood.

BL: Kind of the beginning of the head boat industry here in our county?

LW: [00:12:17] Yes, yes.

BL: And that's currently, what you do you for a living?

LW: [00:12:23] That's currently what I do now.

BL: And so you've been fishing for 40-plus years.

LW: [00:12:33] A little more than that. [laughs]

BL: A little more than that, and when did you first become a fishing boat captain?

LW: [00:12:44] Well, I used to go, after my dad got his boat, you know, he got a boat in the '70s, and I was still in high school. And I started going out with him, and being his mate on this boat. And then I just worked, worked, worked until I went to the detention center, and when I turned 21, I moved to Washington DC and I worked at the detention center from 21 until...and all throughout that

point right there, I worked on the water with him. I went to school in 1999, and I got my captain's license; I got my 50-ton. Now I've upgraded to a 100-ton. So I got my...I've been a captain since 1999.

BL: Tell us what a head boat is, and how a head boat works.

LW: [00:13:35] Well a head boat is a bigger boat that carries more than the seven-plus. You know, because the charter boat carries maybe seven, six to seven people. A head boat, the head boats around here carry up to 30 passengers a day. They're a little larger boats, and they call it a head boat because each person paid by the head. You know, so it's a fee for each person to go out on the head boat, so it carries a lot more people than just a six-passenger charter boat.

BL: And, as opposed to a charter boat, you guys are going out that day, and people just show up.

LW: [00:14:15] Mm-hmm.

BL: What if too many show up?

LW: [00:14:18] Well, we've had that happen before too. Most of the time, 90 percent of the people will call. They just don't come, because they've already been through the experience of coming and not being able to go. But once you reach a capacity, somebody else will have to take them, you know what I'm saying? So, we've had 30 people get on,

they come, and reason why we call it the head boat because they just walk up, like the first come, first serve, and you get on, up to the 30 passengers that you'll allow to carry, so.

BL: How many days a year do you go out on that boat?

LW: [00:14:54] Oh my god, I usually start in the middle of May, like May 15th, and I'll go 'till September 15th. So I'll go all the way up, and throughout that period, I, sometime you may miss 10, 15 days out of that period from May to September.

BL: That's a lot of work.

LW: [00:15:19] A lot of time, a lot of work.

BL: What do you fish for?

LW: [00:15:23] We bottom-fish, mainly for perch, spot, croakers, we catch a rockfish every now and then, a catfish every now and then. But mainly bottom-fishing, no big target fish like rockfish and things like that. We just mainly bottom-fish.

BL: And you fish out of the Ke...or the Queen Anne's County Slips at Kent Narrows.

LW: [00:15:46] Mm-hmm, mm-hmm.

BL: And where do you go to fish? Where do you go fishing?

LW: [00:15:52] We have been as far north, I'm going to say, we fish from like the Key Bridge North-South all the way down

to the mouth of the Choptank River which is probably close to 20 miles down the river. I'm not going to say out, because you still see land the whole way, so, but it is a 20-mile trip, one way to get to the...to Choptank River to fish. Sometimes we have to go there when the fish, you know, the fish just come down south first.

BL: And, how do you get licensed to be a captain?

LW: [00:16:38] Well, that's, that's a good question. You have to go to school now, and I went through a course called a charter captain's course in 1999. It's a 12-week course, and a couple of weekends, and after the 12-week course, you can sit for your exams, and there's four exams you need to take, and if you want to do the towing endorsement, then that's an additional exam. So that's what I did, went to the charter captain's course.

BL: So a very serious process?

LW: [00:17:10] Yes.

BL: And, do your watermen's skills help you as a...as boat captain?

LW: [00:17:17] As getting my license, I was pretty much knowledgeable about almost everything, there was a lot of terminology that you thought you knew that you did not know as far as book knowledge, so, and there's some things that you're going to go over in taking a course that you'll

never come across again. But it's things that you need to know in order to obtain your captain's license; you have to know these things. You know, just like the charting and plotting. I've been on the waters, like I said, for almost 60 years, almost 60 years, a little over 55 years. And I know this Bay, any Bay that we...I don't need a chart to cover this Bay, you now what I'm saying? And now we have the technology where the GPS and all of that stuff, but even back then, we used a compass and go from point A to point B. But I know the bay, so...but the charting and plotting is one of the main courses where a lot of people have trouble with, as far as obtaining a captain's license, but we don't really need that. We not going out, out, outland, so you really don't need, you know, the charting and plotting. Well you need it; you need to know the skills in case something happens, but we don't need it as far as direction, put it that way.

BL: Because you're experienced?

LW: [00:18:35] Yes.

BL: And, who are your customers? Who goes out on the boat?

LW: [00:18:40] Oh my goodness. I have customers come as far north as New York, Delaware, all Eastern Shore Maryland. And you go across the Bridge [Bay Bridge], Annapolis, PG[Prince George] County, Virginia, I mean, Waldorf, most

of the cu... 90 percent of the customers come from afar. Hardly any local customers go fishing, I guess cause they live here, you know, the same way with seafood, you know, but. Most of our customers come from Philadelphia...at certain parts of the season, like if you're catching spot, say for instance you're catching spot, and they're your main fish for this season. You're going to have everybody from up north, it's...the spot is an up-north fish, so if you start catching spot, the Koreans and the...and the people from up north going to come here way more than you can take, cause they love that spot fish. Now the western shore, on the other hand, they'll take any kind of fish, the perch, the spot. But mainly the people from the north, if the spot fish ever come in and they come in in any amount or size, you're going to have a run over every day because they just love that spot fish.

BL: Word gets out quick too, it sounds like.

LW: [00:20:01] A good word gets out fast.

BL: And networking. Have you made good friends and met people over the years that have touched, you know, your soul?

LW: [00:20:10] Actually, it's good that you asked that question, because I have a lot of friends from the boat where I go to Philadelphia and have lunch and hang out with friends, I mean, personal friends. I...they have been to

my house. Same thing with the western shore. Actually, I got involved with a lady from the boat, you know, years back, 20 years ago, you know that I met. Very nice friend of mine, you know, so. I mean, you meet a lot of nice people. And I have a lot...I met a lot of professional people that I'm still in contact with, you know like, I've taken out, you know, singing legends like KC and Jojo, I've taken out their father, I've taken out Dixie Hummingbirds, some of the main singers, Mr. Ira Tucker, his son, Ira Tucker Jr. who was...Mr. Ira Tucker was Stevie Wonder's godfather. So, I've been out with all of those, I call them living legends, cause you know, I've...good friends with them, phone numbers, call them, talk to them, normal people. You know, you would think the way... you know, very good people.

BL: That's awesome, man. Athletes?

LW: [00:21:30] Well, I mean, I've met a few athletes, a few professional singers, you know, that come on the boat. A couple basketball players. I've had a couple basketball players that were stars from Georgetown, and they went on to NBA, and this guy like 6'11" and he has to bend over all day long, you know, he comes fishing, he have to stand up front, cause his head hits the roof, but it's crazy how they're just normal people.

BL: It sounds like it's really informed your life.

LW: [00:22:06] Yes.

BL: The connections you've made have been a big part of your life.

LW: [00:22:09] Yes.

BL: Let's talk about boats. What was your first boat?

LW: [00:22:15] My first boat was *Off the Hook*. My only book was *Off the Hook*. I've never had a boat...I've always worked with my dad up until that point, because I was always working. You know, I had a job. But from childhood, just working in the wintertime, and we were forced to work; it wasn't no option, you know what I'm saying? You had to get up and go to work. My father made us work, which was a good thing. But it was just cold out there, like in oyster season, it was so cold, you know, some days, we went out in ice where they had to put ten in front of boats, at the same my father built boards, and hung them over the front of the bow, and the boards helped, so the ice wouldn't cut the boat and go out, you know, as well as I used to dive for my father, started scuba-diving for my father part-time, and he had to cut his way through to get out, and then, you know, that, all that stuff, it was amazing, you get out there, and ice, you come up from

diving and see the ice, and where I'm going, you know, it was amazing.

BL: How long did you do that, Lamont?

LW: [00:23:19] I dove for three years, and that was enough for me.

BL: Yeah, well what got you into it?

LW: [00:23:25] Well, everybody was getting into it at the time, you know, so my dad was just like, getting older, and didn't want to hand tong, you know, so I just got into diving. I was a good swimmer, and I went to school, got my license to be a scuba-diver, and I just started diving, but it was too many obstacles down there for me.

BL: Right, the weather, it's dangerous.

LW: [00:23:53] Man, you know, after, one of the guys drowned, you know, and that was enough for me, I...and then...

BL: Keith Nash?

LW: [00:24:00] Yes.

BL: When Keith Nash drowned?

LW: [00:24:02] Yes, that was enough for me. I ain't been back to scuba diving. I've been snorkeling, but I haven't been diving since, cause I've had a couple, you know, scares down there, you know, so I know what it's like, and that wasn't worth it to me.

BL: Do you remember any of those scares specifically?

LW: [00:24:18] I do. I remember well, when we first started, we were diving with tanks, where when the tank run out, you come up and change tanks. That was the first couple years you start, you know, doing it with a tank. After that, everybody went to a compressor where you had a 100-foot hose connected to your backpack. We made a rig up where it was just connected to your backpack, so you had a 100-foot hose, and the captain could see, you know, your bubbles, and see like where you were, but you could stay down there, there was guys like Pinchy and Glenny White back when I was diving who never came up until they were finished catching their whole 50-bushel limit. Me on the other hand, I got to come look at the boat, make sure everything's still up there and all of that. You know, you get delusional down there, you know, so I always had to just pop up, just to see, the boat's still here, and all of that, you know, cause I've been down for three hours before, something like that, but not much longer than that. Them guys could stay all day. And that 100-foot hose got caught in the wheel. Course, the captains used to pay attention to it, but with the tide and the boats and the drifting, and sometimes you may swim the wrong way, and the hose got caught in the wheel, then it started snatching me, you know, you just feel that wheel turn, every time that wheel turn, it

snatch, you snatch, you...thank god it was 100-foot hose, and I was far enough away where it didn't snatch me up that fast, but I always dove with a knife, and the first thing I'd do was, if you could grab it, but you panic for a minute, and you spin around and try to grab that hose, so you could get ready to cut it just in case, you know. But eventually, captain would realize that you know, he was tangled up and you have to stay down there and get it out, but that kind of stuff right there is unbelievable, cause if you had ever got pulled up to the blade, you gone, you know. There's a lot of scares.

BL: Plus you can't really see under there that well, right?

LW: [00:26:13] The visibility is terrible, and if you don't swim into the tide, you'll never see anything. It's just like, hey, when you first hit the bottom, you could see, so you kind of sit there and map your way out, like I'm going to go here. Then you do your hand in the sand, see which way the tide going, and you just, swim into the tide the whole way, instead of just trying to go here, go here, go here. It's an art to everything you do, but that most certainly was the art.

BL: How do you find the oyster rocks to start pulling them off? Like do...you guys have the sound the rock, and then you dive, how does that work?

LW: [00:26:50] Well, most of the captains know exactly where those oyster beds are. But they did use a sounding pole, and when he feeled those shells, he would hit. Now sometimes there'd be shells, but most of the time, those oyster beds, they just knew where they were. Those old captains just knew where all the oyster beds were, and back then, they were plentiful.

BL: And then you just go in and swim and kind of harvest them by hand?

LW: [00:27:14] Once you go in, you'll see them. That's why you wait a minute, let it clear up for a second. And then you just start picking them up. Now they had some homemade traps where they were like those steel milk crates, and there was a rope in them, and the rope went through. So when you pulled a rope, it would pull the top down tight, so you could open up the milk crate, you just pick them one by one. Some people use one hand, some people use, set the crate in front of them and use two hands, but you could...in order to see, you had to keep moving, so you just keep bouncing the crate with your knee, bouncing the crate. It's unbelievable to learn how to do that, you know?

BL: And you kind of have to teach yourself.

LW: [00:27:50] You kind of teach yourself. Ain't no teachers down there to tell you, you know, go this way, go that way, pick up this, move that, and you just look and say, well, got to get them in the basket, and then that's what we did.

BL: Were those productive days? Did you catch a lot of oysters diving?

LW: [00:28:06] Oh well, you could catch, back then, it was 25 bushel per man, so two men on a boat, you could catch 50 bushel.

BL: Did you meet your catch...

LW: [00:28:15] I've caught 50 bushel a few times, but that wasn't my daily goal.

BL: Right.

LW: [00:28:20] You know? Now some of them caught 50 every day. That was not my daily goal. It was just too much pull... and I was a young, physical fit athlete man thinking, and the ones that, I mean, that didn't look like they were...could do that type of work, were the ones that caught all the oysters. I'm like, how? You know, if you ever went down there and experienced it yourself, and you look at somebody that done an excellent job doing it, you look at them and like, how do you do that? What do you do? And they just laugh at you, nobody never tell you their secrets of what they were doing.

BL: So you mentioned Glenny White as one of those guys, and Pinchy.

LW: [00:29:00] Mm-hmm.

BL: What was Pinchy's real name, do you...

LW: [00:29:02] Henry Pollard.

BL: And he recently passed away...

LW: [00:29:05] Yes.

BL: ...I just heard that last time.

LW: [00:29:06] Yes.

BL: So, he was a...exemplary diver.

LW: [00:29:12] He was exceptional. He was another reason I stopped diving. He played a lot on the water, so just say for instance, he used to have funny...it was funny to him, but it wasn't funny to the person he caught off guard. Now, I distinctly remember one day that the boats were close together, so 200 foot ropes make 200, you know, circles, so he got a hundred, I got a hundred, I'm down there picking up oysters, picking up oysters, and all of a sudden this great big hand, now underwater, your hands are 25 percent bigger than they naturally are. And I'm picking up oysters, and all of a sudden, this hand grabs my hand, and I freaked out. [claps] Straight to the top I go, right. So, when I came up, we had a ladder on the side; I never even touched the ladder. How I got on the boat, I don't

even know. But I didn't know what it was or who it was. All I know, is something grabbed by hand. Didn't even look, didn't know it was him. Didn't know it was a monster, or what it was, I was gone. So, at any rate, when I got up, I...it took me like five or ten minutes before I could even take my mask off or breathe or do anything, you know, and my dad, was like, what's wrong; what's wrong? And I just sit there, you know, I was getting myself together. And then, I say, something grabbed my hand. And then I was like, I got a big dagger on the side, but...didn't even think, didn't even know I had the dagger, didn't even know what I had, I was gone, you know, so I was just sitting there thinking like what in the world just happened? And then dad said, "well got to be Pinchy, the only boat close." And I said, "I'm going to kill him." [laughter] I might not be able to say that, but I did say that, I said, I'm going to get him. I'm going to get him. And dad was, "just leave it alone." I said, "ell I can't go back in that water." So he had to bring me in that day, you know, and all of that stuff. It just, it wasn't worth it to me, I mean...

BL: Not at all.

LW: [00:31:04] It was funny to him. You know, it was like, I...that wasn't funny to me, cause I could have had a heart

attack right then, you know what I'm saying? But you don't expect nothing underwater, nobody but you. You don't expect nothing at least, and he grabbed it, like grabbed it. But I don't know how I even got my hand away, but I didn't see nothing else; I was gone.

BL: Did you give him hell for that?

LW: [00:31:28] Oh man, me and him had it but you know, Pinchy was a big dude, and a physical, muscular dude, so I said I was going to do everything 'till I walked up to him, and then everything turned right into ice cream. [laughter]

BL: Oh that's funny, Lamont. So tell me about *Off the Hook*. When did you buy *Off the Hook*?

LW: [00:31:48] I bought *Off the Hook*, let me see, I bought *Off the Hook* in 2010. So this is my thirteenth year with *Off the Hook*, and I had been seeing this boat down Cambridge at one of the docks, right at the bridge, Gateway Marina for years, and it just sat there, sat there, and I just kept looking at it, it's like, my dad was to say, well I'm going to retire in a couple of years, and you can just take this boat, but he's still fishing to this very day; that was 13 years ago. So I went and bought *Off the Hook* and it took me a year to get it certified and prepped up enough to get the Coast Guard approval, you know, to run it, and I got it certified for 30 passengers. And I've had it ever since.

BL: What are the specs on that boat? How big is it?

LW: [00:32:33] It's 52 feet long, 13 feet wide, and like I said, the original documentation papers, it was licensed for 49 people up in New York. But I changed it to 30 people; I wouldn't even think about trying to certify a boat for 49 people. So I changed it to 30 people, and that's where my certification was, 30 passengers, two mates, and a captain.

BL: Obviously, your dad's been a big part of your working life. What about your family, your wife and kids? Have they been supportive? Have they been a part of your career?

LW: [00:33:15] Well, yes, my kids have been a big part of my career. Actually, I have a lot of kids. I have 11 kids. I have seven sons and four daughters. I have four sons that worked on the boat with me from time to time. They...like alternate right now, and one of them is in school to get his captain's license, and I'll be glad when he finish, you know he...actually he's finished the class, he just got to go take the set for the test. So, they had been a big part. On the other hand, my wife never, you know, really was a boat person, an outdoor person, you know what I'm saying, but you know, I'm divorced now, so, she's not a part of it at all, but other than that, the kids, they love it, they love it, and I mean, they work with me,

they work with me, the same way I work with my dad, so it's like three generations still, you know, at it at one time, it's...

BL: They...your...kids grew up in the business?

LW: [00:34:21] Well, my kids are city boys, so...and...and I tried to explain to them that everything ain't for everybody. You know, it's something that you grow up in way back from childhood, and neither one of them did until...well, the one that's in school, he started when he was about 12. He's twenty-nine now. But he was from Buffalo, New York, so he just came in the summer, every summer. He would come and he'd work on a boat, and he'd stay all summer and he'd work on a boat, you know, so. But he'd work with me, and then now, you know, he was working with my dad and me, and now he works with just me.

BL: Do you see him taking over the business? Do you see that [unclear]?

LW: [00:35:02] I got two of them, it's a possibility that they are going to take over the business. I got two of them, they are going to take over the business now.

BL: Like you say, it's a generational legacy...

LW: [00:35:12] Yes.

BL: ...from your dad to you...

LW: [00:35:14] Yes.

BL: ...to the next generation.

LW: [00:35:16] Yeah.

BL: What do you remember as your best career days ever? Or, counter, worst days? Do you remember good and bad days, or...

LW: [00:35:31] I do, and as a waterman, and a boat captain, when you go out with 30 people, and you have a bad day fishing, it's very stressful, because some captains, it don't bother them, they just say oh, it's a...it's a...I take it personal, I take it real personal. Everything I do, I try to do the best and a hundred percent in everything I do. And so, I'll just wrack my brain trying to figure, where can I go, what can I do? And to...walk out of your cabin and have 30 set of eyes looking at you like, what we're going to do, cap? You know, and then you're trying to figure, where can I go? And you go another place, and there's no fish, and you go another place. It's...those days happen. I can't get it in my head that those days happen, cause I'm...I take it very personal. And, but some captains just, "oh well, it's another day, it happens." I take it...I look at it a little different. So those...those days are very stressful, headaches and all kinds of things for me, you know. But some captains...

BL: Because you feel those people are paying good money, they expect a certain...

LW: [00:36:40] Yes, exactly.

BL: ...even though, we...you know in your heart, you can't make the fish...

LW: [00:36:47] That's right.

BL: ...get caught?

LW: [00:36:48] They know it's fishing. Some customers understand that, some don't. But the thing of it is, we rely on repeat customers. So they've been there before, and they know, but all of them are so spoiled now, where there were days when everybody catch 100 fish. 100 fish was like the normal for a person to catch. So now, they come and, "we used to catch...", that's the part, that's when they start getting to you. I know what we used to do, but they're not there now like that, you know, so...but we rely on repeat customers, and if you don't do good, you're not going to...they not going to come back.

BL: So you take those hits personally when it's not a good day out there?

LW: [00:37:32] I do, very personal.

BL: Have you ever...I know one situation where you guys had a close call weather-wise. You had a party fishing out in the Chester River and a storm came up.

BL: Can you tell us about that day?

LW: [00:37:49] Yeah, I was on a boat with my dad that day, and we were just looking, I mean fishing. A beautiful day. All of a sudden, you hear this rumbling, and I'm like, dad, what is that? Like [whirring sound], he said, oh it's probably Aberdeen or something. I'm like, I didn't know Aberdeen. Within five minutes, the wind came up so strong, it's just like all of a sudden, and it just like...everything started flying, people life rafts was coming off the top of the boat, the people was howling. So dad got the anchor up, and he tried to head up into the wind. You know, and the people were screaming and hollering, but the life raft blew off. And it was pouring down rain, and hailing, and I kind of got to the front, so I'm getting the life jackets down to give to the people. But the boat, when he turned around to get the life raft, the boat got caught in like a wave, and the...on my dad's boat, his top is attached by steel poles, versus most of the boats, like Captain Price, and Captain Durl, and all them boats, their boats are attached with wooden poles. It made a big difference, because it blew the tops off of Captain Price boat, Captain Durl's boat. It blew the whole top off. The funny thing about...well it's not funny, but the thing about it like Captain Price boat, when his top

blew off, all of the lifejackets are stuck up under the top of the boat, of the top. When it blew it off, it blew all the lifejackets in the water. And this lasted no more than five to seven minutes or something like that. But my dad's boat was...got caught up in a wave as he turned around, and it was leaning on the side so much that, and it was just picking it up and dropping it like a...just like a toy. Boom, boom! And the boat was leaning so far over that I'm looking right at water, and I'm like, throwing lifejackets to people. And then within a couple of minutes, it just disappeared, and I looked up, and I screamed, and I said, "Dad, look at all those people!" They were lifejackets floating in the water, but from afar and the visibility was just coming through, I thought it was people in the water, you know what I'm saying? Not knowing what boat it'd come from, but I didn't even know the damage to what extent it was, but when we got in, everybody's tops, the boats was tore, but nobody got in the water off of no boats, so...

BL: That's miraculous.

LW: [00:40:27] Yes.

BL: And scary.

LW: [00:40:29] That was the scariest thing ever, I've ever experienced.

BL: Partly because it came up so quick?

LW: [00:40:35] I mean, we didn't have time to get in. Didn't have time to go in. And we were right in Chester River, not even ten minutes from the Channel. We didn't have time, nobody.

BL: And you had a full boat of people.

LW: [00:40:46] Full boat of people.

BL: I bet they were freaking out.

LW: [00:40:49] It was people in the bathroom. It's so funny that, the people left everything. When we got to shore, those people jumped off the boat, they, the coolers were still there, at...they left the fishing rods. I don't even know if they even got in their cars. Them people's gone, I've never experienced nothing like that. But the strangest thing was there was one gentleman I'll never forget, used to come fishing every week. And like I said, my dad had those steel poles, and he had his arms wrapped around one of them poles so tight, it took me 15 minutes to get him loose from that pole. He was stuck right there like holding that pole. And then I looked, there was two people come out the bathroom, and I started saying, don't go in the bathroom, don't go in the bathroom. You know, something happen, we got to get off of here, you know what I'm saying? But I did everything in the world as a mate, but loft, I was throwing lifejackets, but we were leaning

over so far, I threw some of them right in the water trying to throw them to people, you know? I was pulling them down and throwing them. But his top didn't break loose, so it acted like sail; it acted like a sail. Once it got over, that wind was catching it. Boom, boom! I've never experienced nothing like it, ever.

BL: How long ago was that, Lamont? When did that happen?

LW: [00:42:01] Oh man, I'm going to say, probably 15 years ago maybe, I don't remember what storm I was, or what hurricane, or tornado, whatever they call it, twister came through. It was at least 15 years ago.

BL: Have you ever seen anything else weird out there, anything unexplainable, anything that you experienced that you really didn't have any explanation for?

LW: [00:42:30] I never had nothing else really, really...well I did have an experience out in the ship channel, out near Baltimore Harbor, near the Key Bridge one day when a big ship came by, and I never seen it coming in. You know, my dad radioed, "Do you see that wave?" And I'm like, no, and it was like, no more than 200 yards from me, so by the time I got my anchor up, and I turned around, he had already got his anchor up. But this ship was going so fast, and it was a wave probably 12, 15 feet coming right at me. And I'm sideways at the time, so I did get my boat up enough to

turn the wheel to the right, hard right, and the wave hit me from the back, and it just pushed my boat down where I just floor to wide open, not knowing what was going to happen, you know, but that wave came over the back of that boat, and everybody on the back got soaking wet and got knocked on the floor, but...with the scuffle holds on the boat, most of the water just went right back out instead of like swamping us, but I didn't have a clue, I was scared to look back.

BL: Wow.

LW: [00:43:35] That was the only two experiences I've had in my career, but that was scary. On the other hand, my dad had circled around, and he ran straight into the wave, and you could see his boat go up, look like Deadliest Catch. And I saw that, cause we were...he was to the side of me when I looked...you know, I was just wide open trying to get away. And his boat was like that, it was...hit that wave and went straight up like that, and then, poom! But...

BL: Wow, sometimes your instincts kick if even if you don't think about what you're doing.

LW: [00:44:06] If I hadn't a got that anchor up in time, and it takes a while to get 100 or 150 feet, I ain't going to lie now, I mean it were...winds up on the...if I hadn't got that anchor up in time, it would have turned me over.

BL: Wow.

LW: [00:44:20] It would have turned...it...that was no doubt in my mind, that was the biggest wave, I've never seen nothing come from a ship. So those two experiences was the only things that I recall.

BL: Have you, and this is the last question in this section, but I wanted to ask if you ever, in all your years of working on the water, ever found any artifacts or anything interesting things, dredging or tonging or anything?

LW: [00:44:46] I've seen a couple bottles, you know, when I was diving, but Dad didn't want you sending that stuff up there, you know what I'm saying, he wanted oysters, he wanted oysters. I never fooled much. He found some stuff on the clam rig, but I never did. I know Uncle Andrew did as well, but.

BL: [00:45:02] We're going to move into some more general questions. How do you think...have you seen a difference in the environmental impact on your industry? Has the environment changed in a way that you've been able to see in your career?

LW: [00:45:22] Yeah, it's like now, what's happening now, I do know for a fact, and I'm not a scientist or I'm not anything, I know the water salinity has changed drastically here, in the Chesapeake Bay, for more reasons than one.

For one reason, we have dolphin here now, and we're catching fish that we've never caught before here in the brackish waters, so to speak, right? So, a dolphin, to my knowledge, is an ocean fish, and most days, not on a daily basis, we're starting to see 50 to 100 dolphin swimming around in Chester River, not just out on the Bay, they're up in the rivers now. So, it's something going on with the water, and you can see the difference in the amount of fish you catch. I don't know what it is, I don't know if it's the oxygen, I don't know how they survive, I don't know, can't explain, I don't think anybody's concerned about it or worried about it, but I know there's a difference; there's some difference.

BL: Something has changed.

LW: [00:46:29] Something has changed.

BL: What don't people understand about the Maryland/Chesapeake Bay seafood industry, or working on the water, the general public, what don't they get about it?

LW: [00:46:41] I just think that the politicians or whoever, and I mean, I put it like it is, don't really care about the Maryland seafood industry where, Maryland has the best seafood there is. You can get crabs from down south, Louisiana, wherever, they don't have the Maryland taste. But if we don't do anything and get some studies done here

in the Chesapeake Bay, it's going to dissipate, and everything's going to be gone, the whole Bay, they don't want you do this, they don't want you do that. The clams are failing, the crabs are failing, the fish is failing. I mean, it's something has to be done, because this is people's livelihood as well, and besides that, it's the seafood industry, all these seafood restaurants around here, they not going to make it on southern seafood. They not going to make it on, cause a crab taste like, it don't taste like a Maryland crabcake. You can...I mean anybody from here know that, you know that, I know that, people from other places, the tourists, they don't know that. But they...it's going to fail; it's going to fail. You got to have fresh Maryland seafood, it's the best. I mean...

BL: So the industry is in a precipitous place, it's...the future's kind of iffy, it sounds like?

LW: [00:48:01] Yes it is, yes it is.

BL: What would...how would you describe your life working on the water? Has it been a good career?

LW: [00:48:12] It's definitely has been a game-changer for me. I mean, there's no job in comparison, as far as financially, and making a career, and making a good living, there's no job, nowhere near comparison to, you know how it can change your life, you know, being a captain. I mean

it's a great, great living. It's almost unbelievable, you know, what you really can do.

BL: A sense of independence?

LW: [00:48:45] Yes, and that's the best part. I can go and come when I get ready. If I don't feel like it today, I ain't going today, I go back to bed, but with the type of money and the relationships with people, and stuff, you're going to get up and go, regardless of the money, you're going to get up and go, cause you look forward to seeing certain people on certain days, and you got certain people that come, like every Friday, this person comes, so conversation with him is like on a normal, if he don't come, it's like, what happened to him? What's wrong? You make a phone call, you okay? You didn't show up today, you know it's like, it gets personal, and it's things that you notice on the daily.

BL: You want to be there for them...

LW: [00:49:26] Yes, yes.

BL: ...as much as yourself?

LW: [00:49:28] Yes.

BL: Let's move on a little bit. I want to spend the last few minutes talking to you about your music. What place does music have into your life?

LW: [00:49:40] Well, I've been blessed and fortunate, and given a gift by God to be a singer. And I've used my gift, back in the day, to serenade thousands and thousands of fans, thousands of fans. And I come to the point when I started, having the good jobs, and being blessed by God to change over and started singing, mostly in the churches around here, and I use my gifts and talents now to help with these small churches with their choirs, the music ministries. So, to this very day, I run from...on Sundays, and now that it's fishing season, all of this going to change, and the people are going to really see the difference in this. Because, I get up and go to church at 9:30 at one church, and I direct the choir at this church, and at 11 o'clock, I'm at another church in Grasonville, and I direct the choirs and change the music ministries. And then at one o'clock, I go to Easton and do the same thing on Sunday. So my day's like run, run, run, run, but this is a gift that I've got from God, and I use that to help these ministries. And the people look forward to, and I'm not the greatest singer like I used to be, but I know the music, and know that the music ministry is one of the main ministries in the church that people don't even realize that it sets the atmosphere, and it gets the spirit going,

and you know, so it does a lot. But singing is a gift that I have, and I use it, I use it.

BL: If you were going to put together a playlist to go out fishing, what artist or songs would you make sure speak to you about the Bay, and working on the water? Is there any artist, or music that speaks to you particularly in that regard?

LW: [00:51:53] Well, I really don't have a certain type of music that I enjoy. It depends on my crowds. So, if I have older gentleman, which I have some older clubs, and hunting clubs, and all of that, older gentlemen, I put on the old Southern music, the old blues music where it tells stories, and I just get a kick out of them whistling and singing and singing along. And I have all that music on the boat; I have so much music on my boat, as well as Sirius XM. But, I have CDs that I've downloaded and made, and I...particularly people, I have a book, and I just pull out one CD, and they just...you...just to see them just rocking, and singing, and whistling, and then if it's a young crowd, then I got music for them which, you know, that's their thing, so I really don't have...I like the soft jazz-type music where it just serenades me, and it's the serenity of being out on the water that I love, and most people just sit there and just whistle and you just

look at them and they just rocking to the music, and I got 16 speakers on my boat, so it's...music's even in the bathroom.

BL: So music plays a big part on your...if I...if we were to go out fishing with you?

LW: [00:53:20] It's going to be music. And if I don't play the music, they going to ask for the music, so it's just a part of my boat. They expect that good music. They say Cap, if we don't catch one fish, you got the best music in the world. So that's the compliments that I get, you know.

BL: That's awesome man.

LW: [00:53:37] Yeah.

BL: Do you have any other thing in your life, like music that inspires you that plays into your career at all? Any other hobbies, anything like that?

LW: [00:53:54] Well, music is the main thing, but it's the...it's the thing that I do for kids, you know, so as well, I'm a school bus contractor in Queen Anne's County, and I do things with the kids on the bus all the time, like I just had a pool party for the...for the young kids on the bus, you know, so I do things like that, you know, just to see the smile on their face, and their parents happy, you know, I just do things with the kids, and I like to see people...I'm blessed, man I...I'm blessed, and I like to

see, you know, everybody else happy, and a smile. Some kids have a bad day, you know, I talk to them, like a psychologist and their parents, they appreciate that, they tell me, they send me gifts, they...you know what I'm saying, as being a, you know, a bus contractor, so I do all that stuff, man.

BL: You have 11 children, how many grandkids?

LW: [00:54:43] Seventeen.

BL: Seventeen.

LW: [00:54:44] Two great-grandkids.

BL: Ever take any of them out?

LW: [00:54:48] The grandkids?

BL: Yeah.

LW: [00:54:49] I've taken a lot of the grandkids out. They love the boat. They can't be out there all day, some of them, so what happens is like, when I come in at two, sometimes six or seven of my kids will meet me at The Jetty and grandkids, that's where we load from, and they'll just ride to the gas dock, and they get a kick out of that little ten-minute ride, go get fuel, and I ride around in a big circle and take them back, and they just love it. But to be out there all day, you know, little kids, they young, and it's hard for them to be out there for, you know, 'till two o'clock in the afternoon.

BL: But family's been important on both sides?

LW: [00:55:26] Oh my goodness.

BL: Your parents raising you, and then the...your kids and grandkids have been a big part of your life, it sounds like?

LW: [00:55:35] They...I'm telling you, I have four kids at my house right now, neither one of them live with me. They've been there all weekend, so they're still there when I just left, you know, so we come together, and we do a lot of stuff. I do a lot of stuff with my kids.

BL: A lot of love.

LW: [00:55:50] A lot of love, nothing but love.

BL: That's awesome, man. One last question, is there anything that I haven't asked you that you'd like to share, or anything that's popped in your mind, like once we moved on from a question, anything that you've thought about since we've been sitting here you'd like to share?

LW: [00:56:06] No, I mean, I've just been reminiscing over the whole thing, you know, it's like when I do an interview, or do something, I have little flashbacks from the beginning to the end to...to today. And I just, you know, I like doing this, and I just sit back and just think about the whole thing and where I come from to where I'm at now, it's just a blessing; it's just a blessing.

BL: It's important to you as a person, and it's...I also see it as being important for the community to kind of understand what you guys do.

LW: [00:56:36] Right. They...I don't think they quite understand, you know, what we do, as far as...offering that...as being a boat captain, and being one of a few Black captains on the Chesapeake Bay, offering that service to them, it means a lot, and I get a lot of compliments, and a lot of...I'm inspired by a lot of people, a lot of them inspired by me, I can show you texts and stuff about young groups from DC and I take the kids out almost free, so they can get out the inner cities and come and go on the boat, like in the afternoons, and the guys...man, if I could just be, just a part of what you are, and the things you're doing in this community, as well as, I'm offering schooling to some of the young Blacks to be charter boat captains, so the legacy can continue, you know? I started that out of my pocket. And now, I've joined in with a young lady Biamani Black, the Admiral of the Chesapeake, Vince Leggett from Annapolis, and we've raised a lot of money to send kids to school to get their captain's license, just so the legacy can continue. Those are the type of things that God has blessed me to have the vision

to see and to keep going, so, I really...you know, I'm just blessed man, so I try...I just got to share, you know?

BL: Did you have any superstitions?

LW: [00:58:10] No, I really don't. I don't believe in stuff like that, man. I'm a godly man, so I really...I just have faith in God, and I believe that...what I believe, you know, I don't worry about things like that. Everything is preordained, so what's going to happen is going to happen, as far as, in my life, or as far as anything I see, but...

BL: [00:58:33] So let's wrap up this way then. What's this season look like for you? What does this summer look like for you in your business?

LW: [00:58:42] Well, if I go on the amount of phone calls I get, it's going to be a beautiful summer. But to be honest with you, seeing the dolphin this early in the season, I think it's going to be a problem for us to fish, the amount of fish that we catch, like I said a little earlier, I think there's something going on with the salinity, and that has something to do with the fish staying south, versus coming up north. I'm not sure which direction it is, whether the salinity is lower, and it's more freshwater, or if it's more saltier water, but one way or another, it's something going on in the Chesapeake. And if I'm going to based it on the amount of dolphin that I see

on a daily basis, we're not going to have a chance, because between the bluecats, the snakeheads, and the dolphins, they going to eat the Bay up.

BL: Because they consume so much of your potential catch?

LW: [00:59:44] That's correct. A dolphin can eat 30 to 40 pounds, one dolphin, of fish a day.

BL: So that may be another way that the public doesn't understand how something like that can affect your business, because you know, on social media, online, people are posting pictures of the dolphins all the time, it's very beautiful, it's very cool, but the effect that their presence has might not be all positive.

LW: [01:00:12] It's not positive, not whatsoever, because you can be catching fish, and as soon as you see those dolphin come in, [clap], just like a light, somebody cut the switch off, the fish stop biting, and you got to go, you got to go. You can be on them, you can be catching fish just as fast as you hit the bottom. And when you see them dolphin come, and they come right up, 20, 30 feet from the boat, they just surround you, they just eating up everything, and it's a fact; it's a fact. So, I...I'm optimistic about what the season, the end will be. It's going to...it's not going to be like I would like it to be; I'm praying it will be, and maybe it will be. But I'm very doubtful.

BL: So that's a challenge that you're going to be facing this summer?

LW: [01:01:01] Yes, definitely.

BL: And in your career, there's been a lot of challenges?

LW: [01:01:06] Exactly.

BL: You have to be adaptable?

LW: [01:01:08] That's right.

BL: All right, man, thank you very much, again Lamont, again, I really appreciate you taking the time.

LW: [01:01:11] No problem, thank you, thank you. I'm glad to help, I'm glad to be here.

BL: And this will...the Maritime Museum will have this, so people will always have access to this then and...

LW: [01:01:20] Mmm, okay.

BL: ...it means a lot to them and to us...

LW: [01:01:22] Yes.

BL: ...that you took the time to do this.

LW: [01:01:24] I really appreciate it.

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