

OH Gerrie Isabell-McCottrey

SHEA: Great. Now. So could we begin by you introducing yourself and telling me about you?

ISABELL-MCCOTTRY: [00:00:07] Okay. My name... My formal name is Geraldine Isabell-McCottry. Isabell is my maiden name, but I'm known as Gerrie, G-E-R-R-I-E Isabell-McCottry. And the Isabell is spelled I-S-A-B-E-L-L. McCottry is M-C-Capital-C-O-T-T-R-Y, and I was born right after Valentine's Day, February the 15th, 1952.

SHEA: Good year, good year. [Laughs]

ISABELL-MCCOTTRY: [00:00:41] It was a wonderful year, wonderful year. [Laughs]

SHEA: So how did you get involved with the Her Helm Project to start with?

ISABELL-MCCOTTRY: [00:00:49] My husband had suggested to someone who had come by the Seafarers Yacht Club that maybe they should talk to me because I drive our boat about 95 percent of the time. And so he thought it would be good for me to just be interviewed and get involved with that.

SHEA: Mm-hmm. So how did you become involved with boats and the water?

ISABELL-MCCOTTRY: [00:01:16] Now that's a very interesting story because my husband and I have been dating since March the 2nd, 1968, and I was just a child in high school, and my husband always loved the water. So he decided that he wanted a boat, so we went to Sears and Roebuck way back in the day and bought a 13-foot flat-bottom jon boat that he carried on our heads to the bay. And this would be down at Columbia Beach in Shady Side, and we had a three-and-a-half horsepower motor that we put on the back, and we would just cruise very close to the shore [laughs] in this boat out on the bay. And I loved boating because I loved him, and he loved boating, so I knew that even though I was kind of afraid of the water then because I wasn't a great swimmer, but I figured he wouldn't let me drown. And from the flat-bottom, we graduated to some old wood boats that we would take out on the bay and have fun. And once we had kids, we would take the kids out with us on the boat, and they loved it. They absolutely loved it. And so we just kept progressing, you know, trying to get better boats, and that's how it really started, you know, through my husband. It just trickled down to me. And I've always been one who wanted to know how things worked mechanically, and so when I was a little girl, instead of playing with dolls, I was

learning how to shift gears on a car. I wanted to know how it worked. How did that Hurst shift to that four-speed work? How did the clutch work? Because I've always loved cars. And so in school, we had to take home ec and sewing for the girls, and the guys would get to do mechanics and wood shop. Of course, I did what I had to do, and sewing is a great skill to have, but I always wanted to either be a mechanic to work on cars or be a mechanic to work on airplanes, or just anything that was mechanical. So when we got into boating, I said, "Well, I guess I have to learn how boating works," and everything my husband has done on the boat, I've always been there to assist him with changing the filters, you know, the impellers or whatever. It's just an interest I have always had about mechanics. And even with the boating, my husband rode Harleys for 35 years, and I would be on the back holding on, and I said, "I want to be on the front. [Laughs] I want to drive." And so we ended up... I ended up buying a Harley in my favorite color, turquoise. [Laughter] Learned how to ride from a female motorcycle group... I'm not going to call them a gang because a lot of them were professional women, teachers, accountants. But they all had the love of motorcycles, and they taught me how to ride. And when I

bought my bike called Sweetness, and my biker name was G-Force because I wanted to go fast. [Laughs] So, you know, I didn't keep it long, but it was on my bucket list of things to do, you know, before I leave this earth, getting the fast car... That's always been a dream. I've loved Corvettes since I was a little girl. When we... Just before we got married, I bought a '75 Corvette. Had a custom paint job put on it, and I said, "You know, when we get married, we don't need a limousine. We can take the Vette." And we drove ourselves. I stuffed my gown in it [laughs] and we drove ourselves to the reception. So like I said, mechanical things have always been a love of mine, and even to this day, I said when I retire, I want to be sure I have done those things that really mean a lot to me. So I've owned a Harley. I've owned four Corvettes. I have flown an airplane. So the only thing left on my list to do is fly a helicopter. My husband doesn't want me to do that, but it's something I want to do. So back to boating, once we started going up and down the bay, I said, "Well, you know, I really need to know how to operate the boat because, one, it's a love of mine to know how things operate," but two, it gives us additional safety on the water because if my husband has an emergency, I'm getting

us home or to someplace where I can get help. So I needed to know how the systems operate, how to operate the boat, learning about the weather, the wind, the waves, and feeling comfortable so you can enjoy what you're doing. So my husband was very, very supportive of my learning. There was some opposition to women operating boats from some other captains because one even asked him, "Why are you letting your wife drive the boat?" And he was... Now, Benny was like, "Well, why shouldn't I? If something happens to you, what's going to happen? Is your first mate going to be able to handle the boat and help you out?" So Benny has been, like I said, very, very supportive. The biggest thing about boating was learning how to dock it because you're in close quarters, you're surrounded by other people's expensive investments, one, you don't want to hurt any of their assets. You don't want to damage your own. And then there's also the pride of knowing you can put a boat in a tight spot. And when I docked in Herrington Harbor, we had a Trojan 3-meter. I docked it and didn't realize that there were a bunch of women on the next dock over, and after I docked, they cheered and clapped. So that was very encouraging, and, you know, boating is one of those things and docking is one of those

things where, to me, everyone is different. I never take it for granted that I'm going to be able to do it. But I'm going to try.

SHEA: What's the biggest challenge in docking for you?

ISABELL-MCCOTTRY: [00:08:08] Reading the current, knowing which way the wind is blowing, and understanding your boat. Boats handle differently. I've driven other friends' boats and they all handle very differently, but in docking, you really... I mean, you really have to know where you're going to turn. Is the wind going to blow you this way, that way? And just... And me... With me, going very, very slowly. Some people try to do fast and furious. That's not me. Your...Your boat will tell you what it's going to do, and you can feel it, and the current, and every place is different, so I never take it for granted that I'm going to have an easy time docking.

SHEA: So who taught you how to handle a boat and all these nuances?

ISABELL-MCCOTTRY: [00:08:56] I would say my husband, but a lot of it is innate in me, just wanting to do it, you know. And it's so funny because a lot of my friends who are really first mates doing the lines and stuff are afraid to learn how to drive because they say their husbands will

yell at them, and I said, "Well, you know, your husband may be yelling. It's because there is an anxiousness when you're not in control of a big vessel. Your husband doesn't want you to do anything that's going to damage your vessel or do something that could harm someone else's." So there've been times where my husband has gotten very anxious and he's got to push me from the helm, and that was okay because you let it roll off. And I watch him, you know, the way he handles it because he needs to be comfortable with me driving, and there have been times when we have been out and I wasn't as confident as I am now, and he left the helm station and went below. And I'm like, "Oh my God, I'm here by myself. What am I going to do? I'm going to do this." And so now he stays on the phone, texting, talking, or he'll go downstairs in the cabin to do something. He is very confident in my handling the boat. So that's wonderful. [Laughs]

SHEA: So what kind of boat do you have now? Tell me about the boats you've owned. Was...Oh, was boating part of your family tradition growing up?

ISABELL-MCCOTTRY: [00:10:26] Not part of mine. I came... I was raised as a little country girl on the farm in Kenbridge, Virginia, which no one would know about unless

you were from there. [Laughs] It's a very small town that's about 12 miles west of Blackstone, 36 miles west of Petersburg, Virginia, and a 100 miles west of Richmond, Virginia. So no water. Just farmland. But Benny's family has owned property since the '50s in Shady Side, Maryland at Columbia Beach, so he was always around water, and his dad even owned a boat. I'm not sure what kind it was, but I know his mom never liked boating. His mom never liked boating. As long as the boat was on dry land and Pop was working on it, she was okay, but the minute he put it in the water, she didn't want Benny, her son, in the boat because she was afraid. So his dad loved it. He loved it. And that's why we started with the little jon-jon going out. And then his dad helped us buy this... Oh, it was a... I think it was an Owens or a Broadwater wooden boat, and his dad would always travel with us because that was his way to get back on the water, even though I would say Mom was very, very hesitant about it. So we had a couple of old boats. We even had an old Bayliner that we enjoyed an awful lot. And then we had this other little boat that we took the girls over to Saint Michaels on, and it didn't have an indoor cabin. We had bought some flotation devices that you would normally use in a swimming pool. It was 90

degrees. We didn't have air conditioning. We blew up the little floats and we slept out on the deck of the boat, and... But by morning, they were all flat, [laughs] so the girls enjoyed it, but I told my husband, I said, "We can do better than this. We can do better than this." And that's when we bought the Trojan International, and we just loved that boat and kept it for about seven years. So I did a lot of driving on that, and even the girls. I would have the girls come up to the helm, and they would drive, and then we decided to sell it and get the aft cabin that we have now. We have a Carver 355 Aft Cabin that we got on my husband's birthday, and so I didn't say happy birthday to him. I said, "Happy life," [laughs] because that was going to be his biggest gift forever and ever. And that's the boat we still have to this day. It's a 1997, but it is... We have enjoyed it so much. It's in pretty great shape, and, you know, with a boat like a house, there's always something to do, so we have maintained it all these years, and it's just been a blessing.

SHEA: Where do you keep the boat?

ISABELL-MCCOTTRY: [00:13:35] The boat is actually right across the street at my cousin's house. My cousin has a great

pier and they have allowed us to keep the boat there since we bought it. We actually kept the Trojan there as well.

SHEA: That's great.

ISABELL-MCCOTTRY: [00:13:48] It's wonderful because we walk right across the street, load up the boat, and go out the small channel, and we're right on the bay in a matter of 10 minutes.

SHEA: So you're living right here in Annapolis, right? Yes.

ISABELL-MCCOTTRY: [00:14:02] Yes.

SHEA: Yeah.

ISABELL-MCCOTTRY: [00:14:02] We're in Annapolis for most of the part now. My husband says he'll never get me back to the city. [Laughs] But... And then he has a smaller boat. He wanted a fishing boat, so he has a 21-foot Center Console that he'll go out fishing with his buddies. And he's taking the grandkids out.

SHEA: So where do you like to go in the boat?

ISABELL-MCCOTTRY: [00:14:26] We go to Herrington Harbor south, which we love because the grandkids just love it there.

SHEA: I love the pool. [Laughs]

ISABELL-MCCOTTRY: [00:14:33] Yes. We always dock on B Dock, so we're right by the pool. We love going to Saint Michaels, and north, we have gone... We go to Baltimore,

Inner Harbor, Harbor View. We've also... We just went to Rock Hall, Haven Harbor, north. We've gone to Cambridge, Solomons Island. We basically stay in the bay. Some of our friends go to Norfolk, and some are actually going to Martha's Vineyard, but we never travel that far. We stay basically in the bay. Yeah, those are our favorite spots we hit every year. Every year.

SHEA: Do you have a boating adventure that you'd like to have that you haven't done so far? Someplace you'd like to go?

ISABELL-MCCOTTRY: [00:15:26] Actually no. I have always been one to like getting where I'm going quickly. Like, I don't know that I would truly enjoy a trip that would take me several days to get there. Although we are going to do a vacation cruise this year, but it's going to be to ports that are in the Northern Bay, Georgetown, Havre de Grace, Baltimore, and then we'll swing back by Herrington Harbor. But we... You know, everything that we've done has been a blessing and joyous. I can't think of anything I would like to do. Now, do... I do have a boating adventure that doesn't include our boat. We were... Our financial advisor had taken all his clients on one of the dinner boats that comes out of Annapolis, and we were cruising, I

think, down the Severn River, and I had departed from... The boat actually had a female captain, and we got to talking, and so she asked me would I like to come to the wheelhouse? And I said, "Well, of course." So that's where I went. And she said, "Do you want to drive the boat?" And I said, "Absolutely." So she let me drive the boat for a good part of the cruise. My husband is trying to find me, and he hears over the loudspeaker, "Benny McCottry, report to the wheelhouse." He didn't know what was going on. But when he got there and he saw me driving the boat, he said, "I should have known [laughs] this is where you'd be." And that was very exciting. So the captain told me, she said, "I can let you keep driving until we get back to the entrance, you know, to the harbor, and then I have to take over." I said, "No problem, but thank you for giving me the opportunity to drive a 100-foot boat." And she said, "And if you want to go to captain's school, I'd be happy to sponsor you." But at that point, I said, "Well, that's not something I'm going to do right now. I still have my kids and my grandkids and a lot going on." But that was very exciting.

SHEA: Do you think you'll do it someday, get your captain's license?

ISABELL-MCCOTTRY: [00:17:43] I had thought about doing it, but I don't know if I will now because what I'm doing now is fun enough for me, and I like it without having the responsibility of all the people on board a 100-foot boat. But I could do it. [Laughs] I had wanted to do it many years ago, but at the time, I didn't know if the expense of getting it, of getting it and maintaining it, would really be feasible for us. But from a knowledge standpoint, I want it now. So it's something I still... I may do it. I'll see.

SHEA: I wouldn't be surprised. [Laughter] So what do you love about driving those boats? What is it... I mean, you love the motorcycles. You love driving cars. But what do you love about driving the boat?

ISABELL-MCCOTTRY: [00:18:41] It is really a challenge, and I'm always up for a challenge. You're in control of a vessel that is being controlled by Mother Nature. It's not like driving on a road where you can see potholes and you can see way ahead of you. You never know what's going to happen on the water. There are crab pots galore just to get out of our channel, and so you're learning how to maneuver a vessel through obstacles that... Some you can see, some you can't see because you never know what's below

the surface of the water. So when you... When I'm driving, I feel like I'm in control of, like I say, something that is controlled by Mother Nature, and when we work in tandem, it gives you a great feeling of confidence. I remember once there was, I think... There were huge debris fields coming down the bay when they opened some of the... I think the dams up north, and some of the debris fields looked like they were the size of small islands. It was really something, and we were headed... We were going up the bay to one of our destinations, so driving very carefully around those debris fields, always looking, trying to see just below the surface was really a challenge, and we made it safely. All of us who went did, going and coming. And then there's, you know... I try to be a humble person and I really think I am, but there's always the gratification that there's other women who see you driving and say, "Wow, I wish I could do that. What do I have to do to learn how?" You know, am I an inspiration to those women? I think so. Am I an inspiration to my kids and my grandkids? I think so. And that's very empowering, especially for women and young girls.

SHEA: So if they were to ask you for advice, how to do it, what's your advice for women who want to become captains or

drive the boat, or your daughters, or your granddaughters?

[Laughs]

ISABELL-MCCOTTRY: [00:21:06] Oh, absolutely. Absolutely. Let me just say my... One of my granddaughters... I have two. The youngest one, I have pictures of her sitting in my lap or my husband's lap, driving the boat. And she couldn't see over the steering wheel, but she wanted to drive, and as she grew and sat closer to the edge of our laps, she was still driving. Now she stands up and she can see above the wheel, and she drives. When I'm underway, I don't care what electronic equipment I have. I always get my chart, and I give it to her when she's with us, and I say, "You can look at the GPS and see our coordinates. Find them on the chart and tell me where we are." And she can do that. So she's very interested in driving. And I think she sees it also as empowerment for her. So I would tell any young woman or any older woman who wants to learn how to drive, one, be very determined that it's something you want to do. Put your Teflon skin on because whoever's teaching you is probably going to yell at you, and they may say some things that they may regret later. But you just take it all in as advice. Let it roll off like you have Teflon skin, and you get right back in there and keep doing what you're doing.

Listen to the advice of those who have the experience.

There are times where my husband will tell me, "I think you should go here to dock. I think you need to pull here and do that." But I'm feeling the boat so I kind of do it my way. I'm listening because he gives great advice, and my husband is a superb captain and maneuvering the boat. But we do things just a little differently. You know, he drives a little different than me. I dock a little differently from him. But I would say, you know, just be determined, and don't give up. Get a tough skin and just do it.

SHEA: So you sound like somebody who's had some challenges [laughter] getting to where you are. So what were the biggest challenges to getting to the point that you... You're the captain.

ISABELL-MCCOTTRY: [00:23:19] Yeah, it's just like driving a car. You know, you may take drivers lessons, or whoever's teaching you may take you to a big vacant lot, and you drive around. But you don't really learn to drive by looking at YouTube or just reading books. You have to actually get in the car, get on the road, and drive because no two situations or no two days will ever be the same. Same thing with the boat, even more so, because again,

you're on a medium that is constantly changing. You know, there're just all kinds of challenges in life, and I've just always been one to do it right, do it quick, do it fast, and don't give up. Don't give up, mm-mmm. Sometimes I have felt very intimidated. Oh, absolutely. You know, I first started driving because when you look at the distance that a boat is... Or the speed a boat is traveling, and it may be 400 yards away from you. When you first start driving, you still have the mentality of road travel, and you think you're going to get to this car real fast or it's going to get to you. But once you start driving and see... You learn the physics of how fast is this boat moving? Which way is it going? How am I approaching? How is it approaching me? I mean, there are a lot of different things that go on in your head all the time. And you have to look at your gauges on your boat. In the car, you pretty much look at the gas. "Oh, I've got enough to get where I'm going," and you drive. But on a boat, I'm constantly looking at the oil pressure. I'm constantly looking at the tachometer. I'm looking at the depth. So I'm looking at the GPS to be sure I'm on course. So there are a lot of things going on, and I love the brain activity that it generates. I really do. I just see it if some

disease is going to come at my brain, it's going to have to catch me because I'm going to be running. I do puzzles.

[Laughs] I love riddles. My girls are I do Wordle every day. We do puzzles every day, you know, online just so we can keep our brain going. And I do a lot of work between facility management for my church, data entry for all the contributions, the mechanical stuff that happens at church, all the events that happen at church, I handle.

SHEA: So what did you do in your professional life?

ISABELL-MCCOTTRY: [00:25:48] Oh my. [Laughs] The good, the bad, and the ugly. I have 40 years of experience... District government experience. I started out working for the city council when it was an appointed body in the District of Columbia. Once we got home rule, I worked for Marion Barry. Yes, yes, I worked on his committee of finance and revenue, and when he became mayor, he took his entire staff to be mayor. So I've worked as his executive assistant. I have worked as chief of staff for the control board when the district government was taken over. I've worked at GSA [General Services Administration], but it was called Administrative Services for the District. I was in charge of budgeting and accounting. I have worked in communications for the district. I was director of...

There was a division of finance and revenue where we processed all the tax returns manually before everything was computerized, so I had a lot of seasonal employees to do that. I finally retired... I went back to DC Public Schools, and I was director of employee services, and I retired in 2007. And what I said to myself was, "I want to retire while I still have mental and physical capabilities so that I can enjoy my retirement." So I had three years of retirement before the grandkids came. [Laughs] So I've done a lot of things in my professional life that have given me great joy. I've seen the good, the bad, and the ugly. But it's all been very, very worth it.

SHEA: How did you find time to go on the water with all of that? [Laughter] That's quite impressive.

ISABELL-MCCOTTRY: [00:27:49] Well, you know, you make time to do the things you want to do. My husband and I are very, very busy all the time, and we're totally blessed, and to whom much is given, much is expected. So in spite of all the things... I mean, we could just sit back and do nothing and just boat, but we believe in giving back to the community, to our church. With the Seafarers, we do a lot of...

SHEA: Who are the Seafarers? I was going to ask you about the Seafarers Yacht Club.

ISABELL-MCCOTTRY: [00:28:20] The Seafarers Yacht Club is basically a historic Black club that was founded back in 1959. You know, back then, there were a lot of marinas where boaters... Black boaters could not go, couldn't get gas, couldn't do any of that. Yeah, it was a tough time. So they formed their own group, and the Seafarers eventually bought the little schoolhouse at 301 Chester Street. It was a two-room schoolhouse, but they bought it. They have improved it dramatically. There's... It was an addition to it. They now have a beautiful pool in the back of it, and my husband was elected Commodore three years ago.

SHEA: Congratulations.

ISABELL-MCCOTTRY: [00:29:05] So... And anything that he does, I'm going to be totally supportive. He was a programmer. He retired as an administrator in the Department of Recreation and Parks in the District. So programming is his thing. So since he became Commodore, we do a lot of activities, and he knows that whatever he proposes, I can pretty much organize because I also was certified as a certified media professional. [Laughs] Which I... Because

I can plan events. I can fundraise. And so he wanted to have paint and sips. We have jazz shows. We do a Mardi Gras, which is the major activity, and I'm actually coordinating now the Mardi Gras for 2024, and we're doing a dinner concert that's going to be in October. We're bringing in a nationally-known recording artist to do a concert. But everything that we... Everything that he does, I support 100 percent.

SHEA: So how many members of the Seafarers Yacht Club do you have?

ISABELL-MCCOTTRY: [00:30:19] I think there may be 85 or 90 at this point. There are different levels of membership. Resident members are members who have boats. There are associate members. We have... And we even have social members. If you just want to come and join our club, you don't have a boat, but you like the boating environment and atmosphere, we have a lot of social members as well.

SHEA: Are there other African American yacht clubs on the Chesapeake Bay?

ISABELL-MCCOTTRY: [00:30:48] I believe so. There's a Seafarers Club of Washington DC. There are the Neptunes. There... I believe there's a sailing club, Universal Sail. But we're not exclusive to African Americans. We do have

other members of other races. You know, we're expanding. But it's all a love of boating and giving back to the community. The Seafarers have a charitable arm, which is the Seafarers Foundation, and they run a summer program for disadvantaged youth. It's a two-week program that's going to start fairly soon. I believe it starts in July. And as a component of that, the foundation also established a Sea Scout troop, the first one in Maryland. Kind of surprised that there wasn't one. And in three years from its inception, it won the flagship designation for Maryland Sea Scout Troops, and a lot of that was thanks to our Vice Commodore, Derrick Cogburn.

SHEA: Congratulations.

ISABELL-MCCOTTRY: [00:31:52] Yeah, but the Seafarers are doing a lot of great things. They're doing a lot of great things.

SHEA: Thank you. I didn't know that. [Laughs] That's very nice. You've been boat... Oh, what kind of boats do... Are they using for their Sea Scouts?

ISABELL-MCCOTTRY: [00:32:09] They have a number of sailboats.

SHEA: That's... Okay, sailing too.

ISABELL-MCCOTTRY: [00:32:12] And powerboats. I think one is called... *Another Victory* is a powerboat, and it's amazing

that in addition to the two-week camp that will be mostly at the club, a third week is being added as a sailing camp for a week, and I think it's limited to 10 slots. But the kids learn all about navigation. They learn about tying knots. They learn the rules of the sea and they play chess. Every day, we have a master chess player come in, and the kids learn... I mean, they... And they really learn how to play chess. It's... And they swim, swim every day. They learn how. If they don't swim, they learn. They get into different classes. They all learn how to swim, so they all learn a lot about the water being on boats and in the water itself. It's great.

SHEA: So why chess? I think that's a great choice, but...

ISABELL-MCCOTTRY: [00:33:12] Well, you know, chess... I don't play well. My kids do. But chess teaches you discipline and strategic thinking, and that comes in in every phase of life, teaches you patience, like I say, and determination, and just critical thinking. But it's wonderful because a lot of times, you know, you think kids are going to be noisy. When they play chess, you don't hear a thing. They concentrate. They... Yes, and it's wonderful to watch. It's wonderful to watch them.

SHEA: That's great. We'll be... Before we started, we were talking about the Chesapeake Bay because you've been in the water, on the water in the Chesapeake for many years now. Have you noticed changes in the Chesapeake Bay? Is there anything striking you, either culturally or physically?

ISABELL-MCCOTTRY: [00:34:07] The most immediate change is the depth of the water. The water is rising. When I look at the docks and I look at the tide as it comes in, the tide comes all the way up the ramp under some of the houses down by the pier. I can look out at the rocks. As we sit here, you can see how some of the rocks are exposed, but then other times they're almost covered. So the tide increasingly is rising. When you're out on the boat, one of the things you notice is the crab pots. Some days it almost looks like the bay has measles, there are so many pots, so many work boats, which is a good thing. This particular year, I think we've seen less boats out than we would normally see, and I think it's people still getting back from COVID. You know, they're ready to get back out on it, out on the bay. So maybe it's... They're still getting their boats in order. People are feeling a little more confident about traveling to marinas because they know they're going to be around groups of people. But, you

know, for the most part, it's still just an enjoyable view, even from here or being on the boat. It's just wonderful to see the sailboats going under the Bay Bridge. It's also wonderful now we're seeing more of the cruise ships that are coming out of Baltimore, coming down the bay. At one point, you could see tankers lined up for miles because they were waiting to get into Baltimore Harbor, and so I'm sure that was affecting the supply chain issues that we were having. But to see them lined up was a good thing. It just meant that, you know, it was taking them longer to get into port. But I don't know. The bay is just a wonderful creation of nature. It absolutely is. I'm sitting here looking at... I think a dinner boat crew is coming down now. There's a bigger boat that's... That's moving a little fast for a dinner boat. That's probably just one of the yachts that you can rent out of Annapolis to go to Saint Michaels.

SHEA: Have you ever gone sailing?

ISABELL-MCCOTTRY: [00:36:32] You know, I have never been sailing. I have never been sailing because I have always loved speed and height. [Laughs] And so when I see people cruising, you know, it may take us 45 minutes to get to Herrington Harbor, and we have some sailing friends that

says it takes them hours to get there. I'm not sure that my mentality could tolerate going six miles an hour, seven miles an hour for a long period of time. I don't think so.

[Laughs]

SHEA: Well, might have to try it at some point. [Laughter]

ISABELL-MCCOTTRY: [00:37:06] Might have to try it, yeah.

Everybody says I should. I mean, I... Sailboats are so beautiful, and as a matter of fact, the Seafarers held their first regatta last year. And the next one is planned for September, I think, 23rd, 24th of this year. So we do have sailers in the club, and most of them say, "You would really enjoy it if you did it." So it's something I might try. It's something I might try.

SHEA: Well, given the way you like to make things work, you'll love it. That's all about...

ISABELL-MCCOTTRY: [00:37:37] A lot of work.

SHEA: A lot of physics, a lot of...

ISABELL-MCCOTTRY: [00:37:39] Oh, okay. Okay.

SHEA: You might enjoy that. Do you have a favorite tradition from the Chesapeake? Is there anything?

ISABELL-MCCOTTRY: [00:37:55] You know, I actually don't. No, I just look forward to the boating season. You know, that... You know, it seems as soon as we shrinkwrap the

boat, then you just say, "Okay, how long is it 'til we can take it off? [Laughs] And just get out and do a... You know, a shakedown cruise just to get going?" I don't think we have a tradition, per se.

SHEA: It was just interesting, comparing Western shore sense of the traditions versus Eastern shore. It was just something I've been looking at. So I guess one of the big questions, since [laughs] you are clearly a role model in many ways for many different women, what do you want future female captains to know about you?

ISABELL-MCCOTTRY: [00:38:56] Oh, gee. Well, that I was always very much in love with boating, and I can say I attribute that to my husband because we have been together... We're going to celebrate our 48th wedding anniversary on July 12th. We've been together for 55 years.

SHEA: Wow.

ISABELL-MCCOTTRY: [00:39:22] And his love of boating, as I said before, has trickled down to me. And you know, if you put your mind to something, you can do it. If you've... If you have someone that you really care about, it's great to support them because I never would have been into boating were it not for my husband because my family was never exposed to boating. But once you find someone that

you really care about, and you care about their happiness... My husband's happiness is my priority. Boating makes him happy. I will support boating because that keeps him happy. But I would want future captains to just know that you can do it, and you can love doing it in spite of the challenges that will come at you, because they will. If you boat, there will be challenges from nature. There will be challenges mechanically with the boat. I don't care if it's a brand new boat [laughs] or it's an old boat, every boat's going to have challenges. But if you put your mind to it, you can enjoy the challenges because you feel very, very accomplished when you've overcome the challenges.

SHEA: So what do you tell your granddaughter?

ISABELL-MCCOTTRY: [00:40:47] Oh, my granddaughter. My grandkids, they all love boating, but the one that likes boating the most, I just tell her, "You need to know how to operate whatever it is you're in or on. Understand how it works. Understand why it works, and then you can enjoy it more." And she is that type of person. She's 11 years old now and she is almost a social activist, but she loves the boating. She's like, "Grandma, when can we go? Can I drive?" And there's so many "Nos" that kids will face in

this world. Whenever I can tell my grands yes, which is most of the time [laughs] as grandparents do, I tell her yes. "Tell Grandma what you want to do and I'll help you do it. If you want to drive the boat, come drive." And she actually drove us through crab pots with coaching, so she's learning, and she will be a future captain. There's no doubt in my mind. She'll... I'll teach her how to drive a stick in the car because I love a manual transmission, and a seven-speed in the car, we have now. She actually has a little electric car. She can drive it backwards. She can parallel park. She is phenomenal with understanding how mechanics work. And so I know she's going to be a good captain on the boat.

SHEA: Well, that's great.

ISABELL-MCCOTTRY: [00:42:13] Without question.

SHEA: So is there anything else about your boating life, your boating organizing life, this wonderful life you're living that we haven't talked about that you'd like to tell us about?

ISABELL-MCCOTTRY: [00:42:31] Oh, well, let's see. Probably the most important thing is because we have a boat, we like to take people with us when we go places. You know, when you boat, you're going to live in close quarters, so you

need to take people you can get along with. But we love to share our boating experiences with people, and almost everywhere we go, there is somebody else on the boat with us, another couple, maybe two couples, or the grandkids because it's such a wonderful lifestyle to have and to share, and many of our friends will never get the opportunity if we don't provide it or share it. So my good girlfriends and I, we'll go to lunch because they haven't had the experience of going to a restaurant by water, and it is totally different when you drive across the bay, say, go to Livvy's, dock, get off, and have... You know, have lunch. I just think it is an experience that if you can share it with someone, you should share it because not everyone will have the same blessings or opportunities, you know, that you do. So... But that... Mm-hmm, yeah.

SHEA: So one last question, although this is too much fun. Do you have a favorite memory of being on the boat?

ISABELL-MCCOTTRY: [00:44:05] Oh, I have so many. [Laughs] And I say that because our grandkids have gone with us on so many trips, on so many trips. Just to see the joy on their faces... If they know they're coming and we're going on a trip, I mean, they're running here. They know how to get on the boat. They take their seats. You know, they're

ready to go. I'm trying to think. The best memory? Other than them being on the boat, when we got the Aft Cabin, the structure of the boat was totally different from the Trojan, and I thought to myself, "Hmm, this is going to be a real challenge to try to dock this one," because you can't always see the back of your boat. The first time I docked the Aft Cabin, I was so proud of myself. I went to the jeweler and bought a necklace. [Laughs] I bought a diamond necklace that looked like a boat wheel, and that I remember. [Laughs]

SHEA: That's great.

ISABELL-MCCOTTRY: [00:45:17] Yeah. But it really has been a lot of fun. [Dogs barking] It really has. Like I say, and it's an experience that's even more fun when you share it with people, mm-hmm.

SHEA: So how does it feel to be a role model?

ISABELL-MCCOTTRY: [00:45:32] You know, sometimes you never really think of yourself as a role model, but, you know, if my grandkids are happy and my girls both, have [unclear], if they're happy, oh, Momma's happy. [Laughs] Momma and Grandma's happy. And then the wives of many of our boating friends are now taking steps to get at the helm. You know, you don't want to be the one to always throw the line. You

know, show your husband that, you know, you can operate that boat too. You own it. You might as well know how it works. So many of them, you know, they'll drive it open water, and they feel good about it. And so I'm like, "Yes." So with that aspect, you know, it feels good.

SHEA: Thank you.

ISABELL-MCCOTTRY: [00:46:21] It feels good.

SHEA: Thank you. Anything else?

ISABELL-MCCOTTRY: [00:46:25] Can't think of anything right now. [Laughs]

SHEA: That's okay. Great, thanks.

END OF AUDIO FILE