

OH 513 Phyllis Holtman

JENNIFER SHEA: Okay. This is Jennifer Shea. I'm in St.

Michael's interviewing Phyllis Holtmann as part of the Chesapeake Bay Maritime Museum's Her Helm Oral History Project. It is July 5th, 2023. Okay. Phyllis, could you just please introduce yourself?

PHYLLIS HOLTMANN: Sure. My name is Phyllis Holtmann. My last name is H-O-L-T-M-A-N-N. And I currently live in Annapolis, Maryland.

JENNIFER SHEA: Do you have a birthday?

PHYLLIS HOLTMANN: [00:00:38] Oh, yes. [laughs] My birthday, end of July, actually. July 29th, the year is 1956. So, I will be 67 years old in a couple of weeks.

JENNIFER SHEA: Great. Thank you. Can you tell me how you became part of the Her Helm project?

PHYLLIS HOLTMANN: [00:00:53] Interestingly enough, I work for a company by the name of Watermark, located in Annapolis, Maryland. It's a tour boat company. And one day I got an email from our, I believe he was our Vice President of Sales, telling me that he was going to forward an email from a woman named Kristin Rutkowski, saying she had sent an email to the company asking if they had any female captains, and that she'd like to interview someone in that

capacity. And so, he forwarded that email to me and said, "If you're interested, I'll be glad to hook you up with her and give you her contact information, and you can speak with her directly if you choose." And it started right there. And I reached out to her after I saw the email.

JENNIFER SHEA: So, how did you become a female boat captain?

PHYLLIS HOLTMANN: [00:01:45] Okay, a little bit of a long story. I'll try and make it as short as possible.

[laughs]

JENNIFER SHEA: You don't have to.

PHYLLIS HOLTMANN: [00:01:50] So, first of all I had no boating experience, whatever, growing up. The only time I was ever on a boat as a child, I was about 10 years old. My father said that he was getting a boat. So, I was so excited. Oh, we're getting a boat. I had no experience with boats. It turned out he sent in some labels from Kent Cigarettes at the time. And with X number of labels that he sent in, he received in the mail, a Styrofoam... About a, I'm going to say a six-foot sailboat, no sail, just a Styrofoam shell. And so, that was the boat that he was buying. Of course, I was disappointed. I thought we were getting a yacht. And that was the only experience I had, was sitting in a Styrofoam boat that came with no sail. So, he took a piece of wood and put it on this Styrofoam sailboat

somehow, and used an oilcloth tablecloth as the sail. And that was my experience as a child growing up sailing, I'll say, in one way or another. After that, that was the only time I was ever on a boat. It ended up sinking. So, we didn't have that boat for very long. And went about my life, grew up, got a job, got married, raised my children. And once my children more a little bit older, and in college, I had two daughters, I was long-term subbing for the Howard County school system for a total of 19 years, actually. But I was long-term subbing, and I had a fourth-grade class. And I found out the fourth-grade class was going to take a field trip to Annapolis, Maryland. So, that day, I boarded the bus with the kids and we... The field trip was taking a walking tour of Annapolis, and then going on to a boat, onto the Chesapeake Bay, which was very new for me. So, I walked behind this tour guide, and I kind of, as he was walking and the group was walking behind him, I said to him, "So, what is this that you do? Do they pay you to do this?" And he said, "Oh, yeah, we get paid. And we wear these colonial clothes. And we take the kids around here and then we'll take them down to the boat, and then they'll go on a tour of the Chesapeake Bay." I thought that was fabulous. So, I contacted the company, and I became a walking tour guide in Annapolis around town.

Did that for about four years. But every time I was walking around town, I would walk the kids from my tour down to where the boats were at the city dock. And I would look there and I'd think, "Those people look like they're having a lot of fun down there." So, at the end of our tour season, which was close to summer, I talked to the manager down there and I said, "Is there anything I can do down here?" And he said, "Well, I'll tell you what, college kids will go back to school. Would you like to sell tickets to the tours?" I went, "Yeah, I'll do that." So, I did that for a while. And then he said, "You know, Phyllis, we really need people to crew." And of course, my response was, "What does that even mean?" He explained what a crew person was. I said, "Okay, I'll try that." So, I didn't know how to tie a line. I didn't know anything about starboard and port and wheelhouses and man overboard drills, nothing. But I started crewing. And I ended up crewing so much that I accrued enough sea time to be able to qualify to get a captain's license. So, and I hadn't intended to. I was on a trip, and we were actually, it was a 90-minute cruise on one of the boats at Watermark, and a gentleman, I was up on the top deck, we were going under the Bay bridges at the time. And a gentleman said, "So, what do you do?" And I said, "I'm retired, I'm just

doing this to have some fun, something to do." And he said, "Well, are you going to get your captain's license?" And I said, "No, I'm just, you know, I'm just crewing because they need crew. And I just think it'd be kind of fun." And then I went home that day. And I remember saying to my husband, "You know, maybe I'll do that because the company is giving me the opportunity to do it. So, I might as well do it. I'm never going to do anything with it. But I'll go ahead and I'll go through the process. Don't know what the process is, but I'll go through that." So, I ended up taking a class through the Annapolis School of Seamanship. It was a two-week long class, and then they gave us the exam, the Coast Guard exam at the end of the class. I qualified for... There are different tonnages of license and I qualified for a 100-ton license because I've worked so much as crew on 100-ton qualified vessels. So, I took the class, I took the exam, I passed the exam, and then you fill out paperwork to substantiate the sea time that you have that you can qualify for that. And I ended up getting my license. And I'll never forget the day my husband was bragging to someone and going, "My wife is a boat captain." I said, "Don't tell them that. Don't tell them that. I still need to learn how to drive a boat." Because what I realized was anyone can get a captain's

license. Anyone can get a captain's license, but you still need to learn how to drive a boat. So, being with Watermark, the company I worked for, I had the opportunity to shadow captains over time. I would just say, "Hey, can I jump on with this guy and try this boat? Can I do this? Can I do this?" And they were more than happy to give us any opportunities we wanted to drive boats. So, I started with a small little 25-foot tour boat. It would hold 22 people. I went from that to water taxis, chauffeuring people around Annapolis to boats, to their homes, to different restaurants. And then I thought, well, I need some kind of challenge. This is great. But I've never driven a big boat, I want to try that. So, I started shadowing on the *Harbor Queen*, which is our major boat in the harbor. And we have a sign-off process, a very strict sign-off process. So, I went through all those stages to do that. I got signed off on *Harbor Queen*, I was driving that for a while and I thought, wait a minute, that's not enough. Let me go over to another one. So, we have another... There's 12 vessels in the fleet. But another one, *Cabaret II* is the name of that boat, and I got signed off on that. And so, since that time, I drive *Harbor Queen* sometimes, I drive *Cabaret II* sometimes, I drive water taxis around town sometimes. And the possibilities that

I've... The opportunities and possibilities I've had are endless. I can go as far as I want. I can stop where I am now. But I never, ever, if you had told me that I would be doing this, I would have just shook my head and said, "What in the world are you talking about?" It was just something that I fell into, like I've fallen into things my entire life. [laughs] And it's just been so rewarding. And I still sometimes can't believe it, that I'm doing that. My goal is to, we have a little saying in our family, we call it the Holtmann curse, because all of us, my two daughters, my husband, and I, always feel like we have to be the best person at whatever we're doing. So, my challenge is always to myself to just keep improving. And where I'm going to go from here, I don't know. I have the flexibility and the opportunity to do as much or as little as I want. So, for right now, I'm just living a great life, working with the best people I've ever worked with in my whole entire life. It's a family and it's just given me the opportunity I never thought I would have. It's been amazing.

JENNIFER SHEA: So, Watermark is a family? Could you tell me about them?

PHYLLIS HOLTMANN: [00:09:19] It's a family in that...it was... it's a place where we all feel like family, I guess is a better way to put it. Most of us are all retired. There

are some younger captains but most of us are retired and we just have bonded together because our goal is to...

Safety, of course is number one. And our goal is to introduce people to the Annapolis area, talk to them about the Bay, talk to them how important it is, the ecology of the Bay, as well as just the town itself. The colonial history of the town is absolutely amazing since the 1600s. So, we bonded together as a family really, even though we're not a family. So, it's such a comfortable place. And so, supported. Everyone supports everyone else. And that gives you the confidence, at least it gave me the confidence, as not having boating history to do more than I would have thought I would do. I felt like I had that backing not only from the owner of the company, but from everybody, from management, to other captains, to crew, everybody.

JENNIFER SHEA: I was going to ask you who inspired you to do all of this, but...

PHYLLIS HOLTMANN: [00:10:29] I don't know that it was a single person that inspired me to do it. I think I just wanted to prove it to myself, that I could do it.

JENNIFER SHEA: That's interesting. So, driving all these different boats, are there any particular secrets to driving the big boats versus the smaller boats?

PHYLLIS HOLTMANN: [00:10:50] Not secrets, per se. It's a responsibility level that's very, very different. There's a lot of mentoring that goes into that. Because we have crew that works with us. Usually, there may be high school, college kids during the summer, have those jobs. And it really becomes... It comes down to mentoring these young people. So, there's a lot of management that goes into it as well. So, what was surprising, I guess, to me, is I thought, I'm out there driving a boat, and I'm just on the water, and I'm, you know, having the time my life. And that's true. However, there's such a safety component to that. I mean, we're trained in man overboard and fire on board and, you know, first aid and CPR and all those things in case of emergency. And we train, we're trainers as well, because we train the crew to, here's how you steer the boat, here's how you turn the boat, in an emergency, what are you going to do? If I fall over what happens then? And so, it's interesting, because we're able to kind of move these young kids forward. And I've seen a number of them get their own captain's license at 21 years old or so. So, the interest level on some of them is there. And it's neat to see that you've made an impact and gotten them excited about a career that excites you that you'd never thought you'd have.

JENNIFER SHEA: Have you found it challenging to be a female...

PHYLLIS HOLTMANN: [00:12:23] Very.

JENNIFER SHEA: Well, challenging, let's start with that, and then we can move on to the female captain part.

PHYLLIS HOLTMANN: [00:12:27] Yeah, challenging in a lot of ways. You're still dealing with people, but you're dealing with the elements. So, you know, there are challenges there. And I still find, even in the days that we're in, that men, specifically, in my experience, and sometimes women, but mostly men will be surprised if I've got those bars on and I'm the captain for the day. Many times, they'll come on board, and I might be standing next to a male bartender and they're assuming that he's the captain and I'm kind of just hanging out, maybe working on the boat. So, I find that surprising. And a comment that I had received a while back about a gentleman saying to me, "So, they let women do this?" And I found that to be interesting these days. I wouldn't have thought someone would still feel that way. But it was interesting. I just asked a couple of the guys the other day on the boats, I said, "Do people ask you how long you've been doing this? Because people ask me that all the time." And sometimes it feels like, and it might be just me reading into this because of comments I've heard in the past, but sometimes

it feels like somebody... It's always men. It's never women that ask me that. And sometimes I wonder if their feeling is, "Is she... You know, has she been doing this long enough to really be able to handle this?" And I wonder sometimes, because sometimes you get that feel from certain people. And other people just curious because they're asking a question. But it's an interesting question to me that I get a lot.

JENNIFER SHEA: Have you ever had to sort of put a gentleman in his place on the boat?

PHYLLIS HOLTMANN: [00:14:13] I think the only way I do that is sometimes someone will say something, or if I'm driving the water taxi, I'll pull up to someone's boat to let them off or get them on, and someone on their boat will say like, like, you know, "Be careful," or something. And my comment is always like, you know, "I got this. I've been doing this 11 years. I got this." And that's kind of how I stop the conversation from feeling like I've got to justify what I'm doing. Because I have the confidence. I've been doing this a long time. So, I feel confident in what I'm doing. And that usually stops somebody, and they'll say, "Oh, I didn't mean anything. I was just," you know, so that's kind of how I handled it with that comment. I say that.

JENNIFER SHEA: That's good. So, what boats do you... Tell me about what boats you enjoy the most.

PHYLLIS HOLTMANN: [00:15:07] I think, for me personally, getting signed off on a big boat was a challenge for me and I was saying, you know, we're mentoring kids and things like that. But me as a person, I think I enjoy when I drive a water taxi in town. And the reason I say that is it's more my personality. I'm a people person. I feel like it's the face of the company. And I guess I... That company has done so much for me, there's a place in me that wants to show the absolute best side of that company, because they've done so much for me. So, in return, I want that first impression that people get that are visiting, or even local people that take it, to see a welcoming presence, and a happy presence, and a confident presence. And that's what I want to... That's what I want people to walk away with. So, that's probably my favorite just based on my personality. Because as you can see, Jennifer, I like to talk. So, based off my personality. [laughs]

JENNIFER SHEA: Oh, that's great. Do you have any favorite memories of being out in the boat taking people around?

PHYLLIS HOLTMANN: [00:16:25] A lot of memories... There's a lot of engagements that happen on our boat. So, those are always neat memories for me. Or someone from another

country, maybe, will come on the boat, and I'll do a search on our Spotify or something to get their national anthem to play or something. And people are very touched by that. And I like doing that. Because it's enlightening for me. And once again, it's that welcoming presence, which I think is just so important for anybody visiting because you want them to come back again. So, those kinds of things, the engagements are neat. I'm an officiant, so I've done weddings on boats before. And that's always really cool to do.

JENNIFER SHEA: Wow.

PHYLLIS HOLTMANN: [00:17:09] Because I realized as a boat captain, you know, you think, oh, the captain of the ship is going to marry somebody. But you still have to be licensed to do that. So, I went, and I went online, and I got my officiant status. So, I've done a couple of weddings on the boats. And that's kind of a neat thing to do.

JENNIFER SHEA: I was going to ask you, what is it about you that has made you a good captain like this? But I'm beginning to hear it. I mean, do you think there's anything special that makes you good at this?

PHYLLIS HOLTMANN: [00:17:39] I don't know. [laughs] That's kind of hard, because that's kind of like telling me

something cool about yourself. But I think... I think that my interest level's there. I think it's like anything else, you know, you go to school, or whatever, and you're taking classes. And if you're not interested in it, you're not going to do well. And I think my interest level is there. And my... I really think it's an interest level. I think you have to like what you're doing; you have to like it. If you don't, it's so apparent to people if you don't. It's so apparent. And I've seen it, you know, employees in our company come and go that just you know, they go there, and they're wonderful people, but it's just not their thing. And if it's not your thing, that's probably not the place for you. Not to say you don't have skills, but that's not your skillset. And I feel like this is a skillset for me, which I never... Like I said, I never would have ever imagined.

JENNIFER SHEA: So, in the 11 years you've been doing this, have you had some I don't want to say the word dangerous situations, but some situations that were more challenging than others?

PHYLLIS HOLTMANN: [00:18:54] I think challenging in that we're always conscious of everything around us. And I think the hardest part is pulling a big boat out of the harbor and there's kayaks and there's jet skis. And so, the challenge

I think is trusting and training... First of all, training the crew to help me with that, trusting that they will help with that as my second set of eyes. But you know, your eyes are always on... I feel like I'm my eyes are on everything all the time. So, at the end of the day, to be honest, it's exhausting. It's been mentally exhausting, physically exhausting, because you're on your feet or it's hot out and you're up there all summer. But those I think are the biggest challenges is just making sure that everybody's safe. The people on the boat are safe. My crew is safe. The people on the land coming by in the water are safe. That's the safety issue for me is the biggest.

JENNIFER SHEA: Do you all go out when it's blowing?

PHYLLIS HOLTMANN: [00:19:56] We do. Yeah, if it's a gale force wind or something that's... We won't do that. If it's storming really bad, you know, we don't. So, our operations people make that call, we can chime in and say, "Hey, I was just out there, and it's pretty rough," and they'll take our, you know, opinion and things like that. But for the most part, we've run, you know, every day during our season, pretty much.

JENNIFER SHEA: That can be challenging.

PHYLLIS HOLTMANN: [00:20:22] Yeah, it can be challenging. But that's where you learn, you know? I mean, it's those things that it's that horrible wind and trying to control the boat that that's what makes you who you are, I think.

JENNIFER SHEA: Yeah. I was going to ask you if there's anything new for you, next for you, in your boating life?

PHYLLIS HOLTMANN: [00:20:45] I don't know. You know, I'm just... I've never in my life been a goal setter. Ever. I don't know why. Never have. So, I never say to myself, okay, so my ultimate goal is going to be this, or next time, I'm going to do that. I just fall into things. I just am that kind of person. And I've done the coolest things just by falling into things. So, when you ask that question about what's my next thing? I don't know. I really don't. It's going to depend on how...what way the wind blows me really.

JENNIFER SHEA: Where the wind blows you.

PHYLLIS HOLTMANN: [00:21:20] Really, it will. It really will.

JENNIFER SHEA: Are there other female captains in Watermark?

PHYLLIS HOLTMANN: [00:21:26] We have one full time captain. She's fabulous. She drives every boat in the fleet. There are 12 altogether. So, she... Her goal was she wanted to drive every boat. She wanted to work full-time. That's not my ambition. I don't want to work full-time. I don't

want to drive every boat. But she does that. And she's an incredible person, too, as an example. She just has the calmest presence about her. And I remember asking her one time I was crewing for her and we're on the boat and it was nighttime. And you know, everything's different at night. Right? So, and I said to her, I said, "Do you ever get stressed out? Because you are the calmest presence," I said, "And you make it for crew very calm," because your crew wants to see you calm. If as a crew person, you see that captain stressed out, that's not a comforting feeling for you. You have to depend on that person. So, she actually said to me, she goes, "Oh my gosh," she goes, "The night before I do this, I'm just all stressed out and worried." And I said, "You would never know it." Because once she's in there, and that's kind of what we do, is once you're there, I mean, you have to be focused, and she is a fabulous example to follow. Fabulous. Fabulous. I have nothing negative to say about her. She's wonderful.

JENNIFER SHEA: Does she ever have any advice for you in being a female captain?

PHYLLIS HOLTMANN: [00:22:49] No. She tells me stories. Like she's been through things like I have, you know, where somebody is like, "Oh, I can't believe you're the captain," or, "Do girls do this," or whatever. So, we laugh about

things like that. I think, advice-wise, we really haven't talked about things like that. I just kind of observe a lot of things she does. And I might do one thing different or whatever, based on maybe what I've seen her do. So, she doesn't realize she's such a great example to me. I mean, I tell her, but I don't think she realizes what, the effect she's had.

JENNIFER SHEA: The Chesapeake. Are there some special stories that you'd like to tell when you bring people out about the Chesapeake and its history?

PHYLLIS HOLTMANN: [00:23:36] I used to know... I used to know some funny facts. And I can't remember them off the top of my head right now. One of them was about how many bathtubs the Chesapeake Bay equals and I'm thinking okay, I'm just throwing this number out there, but it was like 8 billion and four bathtub full of water is the Chesapeake Bay, you know, that kind of thing. I like people to know how important it is to other states, surrounding states, and what that does to the Chesapeake Bay and the, you know, they're feeding into that. So, things you do up in Pennsylvania or somewhere is feeding into the Bay and that can pollute the Bay. So, we like to let people know about that. I think my favorite thing that I think is so interesting, I read an article one time because I'll

sometimes take a boat underneath the two Bay bridges, you know, and we'll go underneath there and I kind of spin the boat around and people take their Christmas card pictures and things like that. But one fact I read which was funny, it was a, what do they call them, the people that take the fee, the tollbooth people. It was a daughter of a tollbooth person from years ago when they first when the bridge first was built, and the first thing was 1952, I think the next '73, but anyway. So, she wrote this article and she said her mother used to tell her about all the people coming across the bridge, and it was a toll at the time, and I don't remember what the toll was, but people were coming and they didn't have the money for the tolls. So, they would go up to the toll booth and they would give them wristwatches, and flashlights, and tires, and cameras, and anything they had as an exchange for the toll because they had no money on them. And then so she was saying at the end of the year or the end of the season, they would take all the stuff, all the stuff people had given them that they had stored, and pawnshops would... They'd auctioned off to pawn shops. The winning pawn shop would take all this stuff and sell it, and then the proceeds would go back to the bridge to pay for the tolls that people had no money for. And I thought that was

fascinating. So, I always tell people when I'm on the tour, I'm like, "You can try that again. Don't know if it'll work these days. But it seemed to work in the past."

I thought that was fascinating.

JENNIFER SHEA: It is. It really is.

PHYLLIS HOLTMANN: [00:25:55] Yeah, I thought that was fascinating. Yeah

JENNIFER SHEA: That's fantastic. Anything else? These are good. [laughs]

PHYLLIS HOLTMANN: [00:26:02] I'm trying to think of the other fun facts. I think it's interesting that on Thomas Point Lighthouse, we go down there, too, there's a recording of ospreys, because they have so much bird excrement that lands on there, that the osprey call, if you go around the lighthouse, you'll hear the [osprey call sound] because it keeps other seagulls and things away to keep that lighthouse in better condition. So, that's kind of interesting to me. And just the fact that the lighthouse keepers used to be out there and run laps around the inside of the lighthouse just to be able to stay in shape, because they were there for weeks at a time, and things like that. And, you know, I learn a lot of things from people coming out there, you know, maybe people that fish a lot and stuff. I'm not a fisherman. So, I'll hear about the fish,

and, you know, what...when they're running and when this is this, which I find fascinating as well, because, you know. So, and there's a lot of... I've seen a lot of dolphins in the last couple years, and skate, which are like a stingray, you know. So, I see a lot of that kind of stuff. And it's nice to see that because what that tells us is the Bay is getting in better condition. If the dolphins are up there and there's food in that water, then that's a good thing. So, I think the rating of the Bay is C now as opposed to, it was C-minus a couple years ago. So, it's getting better. And that's nice.

JENNIFER SHEA: I always wondered if it was just the saline content was getting more, so that's why they were up here more.

PHYLLIS HOLTMANN: [00:27:29] I think it's the... I think there's more... They're doing more to clean up the Bay and the sediment and all that that has settled, like, especially up the Severn River and stuff, I think they're minimizing that and pesticides and stuff. And I think that also cleans the water. Yeah, yeah.

JENNIFER SHEA: Well, they're wonderful, the dolphins.

PHYLLIS HOLTMANN: [00:27:46] Yes. I know. They're so cool to see. They're so cool.

JENNIFER SHEA: So, what makes boating on the Chesapeake special, unique, different?

PHYLLIS HOLTMANN: [00:28:04] I think just, like, graphically, I just think it's very neat. I mean, the fact that it splits the state in half, I just think it's just such a neat body of water. I think it, you know... And of course, other bodies of water like this too. But commercially, it's used, recreationally it's used, and it...there's just so many interesting areas. You know, there's coves you can go in and swim. There's other areas I don't think I would swim. But there's just endless possibilities with the amount of shoreline. And I think that that's fascinating as well. I think that's really fascinating. It's so big.

JENNIFER SHEA: It really is.

PHYLLIS HOLTMANN: [00:28:48] Yeah, because if you look at the United States map, I mean, other than like the Great Lakes, I mean, look... You know that body of water is so big. I wish I could remember how many bathtubs full of water, but I just can't recall that.

JENNIFER SHEA: I wish you could, too. I'd like that.

[laughter]

PHYLLIS HOLTMANN: [00:29:01] I'll have to look it up.

JENNIFER SHEA: It'd be just great. You already said...answered this question, is what do you want people to know about the Chesapeake and it's... I think you've...

PHYLLIS HOLTMANN: I just want people to treasure. It is a treasure. It's an absolute treasure. And people need to remember that. And you know, things you throw away and pesticides you use in the water, or on your lawn and stuff, that all goes in there. And if we want to keep using it and enjoying it, we just have to be mindful of that. It's like anything else, you know, in our environment. I mean, we have to be mindful of so many things. And that's one thing people need to be mindful of. They really do. And so, when we take... We take a lot of big school groups out and we're stressing to them constantly as part of our speech when they're first getting on the boat, you know, just, if you have trash, don't throw your trash overboard. And, you know, in the past people have done that and, you know, you see something floating around and it's just so unnecessary and that's what we try and stress, is just keep the trash on the boat, keep the pesticides, you know, low if you can and just remember what a gem this is. It's really a gem. It's a gem.

JENNIFER SHEA: Do you think the kids hear you? I mean, is that a message that's...?

PHYLLIS HOLTMANN: [00:30:13] If I had to guess, [laughs] I would say no. For the most part, I mean, they're not there to learn anything, they're there because they can be out on the water. And a lot of them, first time on a boat, last time they'll ever be on boat, really, from where they're coming from. But I think the teachers here, I'm hoping the teachers stress it when they go back and talk about it with the students. And hopefully, when they're older, like any of us, I mean, you start to appreciate things more and hopefully that'll kind of get in their head and at least they'll remember for when they're older, hopefully.

JENNIFER SHEA: Why do you think people take tours in Annapolis? And why do they want to go out on the boats?

PHYLLIS HOLTMANN: [00:31:01] I think a lot of people aren't exposed to water. I mean, we have so many people that come from the Midwest, and they're not near any body of water. And they will have heard about it for the most part, I find. But they want to see... You know, they're thinking... First of all, when I take them out of the harbor, they think we're going to the ocean. They don't realize the ocean is, you know, another 120 miles up, you know, down the Bay to get to Norfolk or wherever, where it joins. So, they don't understand the geographics of it. So, it's interesting to me. So, they'll say, you know,

"Are we going out on the ocean?" No, we're not going on the ocean. And we're going to be on the Severn River, and then you see the Bay, or we might go out on the Bay, depending on what cruise it is. But I think it's an eye-opening thing, because they're not used to being on the water, they have no frame of reference as to what the Bay really is, whether it's part of the ocean or not part of the ocean. So, I think the people taking the tours, I think they want to... They've heard of the Chesapeake Bay, they may have seen on the map, oh, this looks kind of interesting. But they don't...they don't get it separates our state. They don't get, you know, you go north, and you go up to the canal, and you can get out to the ocean that way, or you go south. And I think they just don't understand the number of lighthouses on the Bay. You know, it's all those kinds of things they find fascinating, I think.

JENNIFER SHEA: I still do. [laughter]

PHYLLIS HOLTMANN: [00:32:25] So, do I.

JENNIFER SHEA: So, in terms of your legacy here, so what do you want future female boat captains to know about you and about being a female boat captain?

PHYLLIS HOLTMANN: [00:32:47] I would say as time goes on it's probably going to be more accepted. But I think there was a part of me when I first started that one wasn't sure if I

could be as good. I really think that, that that was in my mindset at the time. And I realized that I feel like I'm as good. I feel like in some cases, I'm better than some of my male counterparts. And that was eye opening for me. And...and that sounds very conceited. I don't mean to be. But I think I had to get to the point myself, and I think women have to get to the point themselves, that if you have that confidence level, and not a cocky kind of confidence, but a knowledgeable confidence base, I think you have to understand that you can do this, that you need support, I think in the beginning to help you to understand that you can do it. And I guess, I don't know if I'm answering your question, but I think had I not had the support of my male counterparts and female operations managers and things like that, I think it would have been more difficult. But once you get that support and you get a couple of attaboys every once in a while, that's enough to kind of make you feel like, I got this. I got this.

JENNIFER SHEA: So, do you have advice, any more advice?

PHYLLIS HOLTMANN: [00:34:23] I can say that generic don't let anyone tell you no. My advice would be just make sure you love it. Because if you don't love it, and this goes male, female, if you don't love it, it's going to show right

through, and people will figure that out. So, you've got to love it. You've got to love it.

JENNIFER SHEA: Does being on the water shape your life?

PHYLLIS HOLTMANN: [00:34:55] Absolutely. It transformed my life. Because I hadn't... Like I mentioned, I had no experience.

JENNIFER SHEA: That's really interesting.

PHYLLIS HOLTMANN: [00:35:04] I cannot imagine not being near the water. And when we go on vacation, you and I talked a little bit about that, I mean, we go to places on the water. I mean, we go on a cruise, or we just... My parents retired in Myrtle Beach; we're going down there. They're deceased now, but my husband and I are going down there in September. I think to myself, I'm trying to go on vacation here from my job, and I never do go far from my job. So, it has completely transformed what I feel is a healthy lifestyle for me and my husband. For sure, for sure. It's so... I can't even think of the word. It's so freeing, I guess I would say. It makes me feel free. It makes me feel free.

JENNIFER SHEA: It becomes a part of your blood.

PHYLLIS HOLTMANN: [00:35:57] Absolutely. Absolutely.

JENNIFER SHEA: And your spirit.

PHYLLIS HOLTMANN: [00:36:01] Absolutely.

JENNIFER SHEA: Well, I'm going to just ask this question, which is sort of similar to what I've asked before, but do you have any advice to pass along to future generations of boat captains, men and women?

PHYLLIS HOLTMANN: [00:36:25] I think, just love it. Just love it. If you don't love it, don't do it.

JENNIFER SHEA: Do you see any changes in the Chesapeake lately? Other than getting slightly healthier?

PHYLLIS HOLTMANN: [00:36:55] I don't. I mean, I see people being more conscious of it. So, that's good. But that's what I see.

JENNIFER SHEA: Yeah, I think I see that, I'm just not sure I see a lot of people who don't know how to boat well out there.

PHYLLIS HOLTMANN: [00:37:10] Exactly. That's the downside of being a boat captain, is seeing the other people that don't know what the horns mean, or what you're trying to say. And that's a little bit tough, but that's part of the job.

JENNIFER SHEA: What do you do about that?

PHYLLIS HOLTMANN: [00:37:25] Well, we always look at ourselves, as we're the... You know, everybody's on the water, all these boats and us and everything. We're the professionals, we've been trained. So, you err on the side of caution. Kind of like driving, you drive defensively, same kind of thing. So, the jet skiers, and the kayakers,

and the paddleboarders are out there. And many of them look at it like, oh, I'm just exercising on my paddleboard, and they don't realize that once they're on the water, they're a vessel and kind of have issues there. So, it's just a matter of, we have...we have to be the... We have to work at a higher level, you know? And so, that's really what it comes down to is, there's everybody out there and everybody absolutely has the right to be on the water, we just have to be a little more careful and just watch for the ones that don't know right from wrong, rules of the road on the water, that kind of thing. So, we just have to be mindful of that. And it happens every day. And you get used to it, but you don't want to get comfortable with it, but you do get used to it.

JENNIFER SHEA: Do young ladies ever look at you and sort of ask you about being a boat captain?

PHYLLIS HOLTMANN: [00:38:45] Yeah, absolutely. A lot of times a mom or a dad will have a daughter, young, usually 10, 11, or 12. And I'll hear them and sometimes I'll hear, "See her? She's a boat captain." And many times, women will say something like, "I'm so glad you're the one driving. I'm so glad there's a woman driving here." So, I hear a lot from women. I think women... You know, women back women. So, many times, they really...they want to see that

because they're not used to seeing that. So, that's kind of cool because many times, you know, like I said, they'll say something to a daughter like, "See? She's a boat captain. She can do it. You can do it." "I wanted my daughter to see you doing this." So, that's really cool. That's really cool.

JENNIFER SHEA: Okay, your daughters. Have they come out with you? What do they think?

PHYLLIS HOLTMANN: [00:39:40] You know, it's interesting. I always wonder whether my daughters are embarrassed sometimes. I know that sounds silly. But my one daughter especially that you and I've spoken about a little bit, I never know how to read her sometimes because I'm so out there and for a period of seven years in my offseason, I managed an ice-skating rink and I learned how to drive a Zamboni, so I would drive the Zamboni around this ice. Well, I think she kind of looked at me like, oh my gosh, Mom, like, what are you going to get into next? So, there's been times where I wonder sometimes, but then I'll talk to her and she'll say, "Everybody I work with thinks it's so cool that you do that. And I'm so proud of you." So, it's funny, because I think honestly, both of my daughters just say to themselves, "Oh, my gosh, what's she going to do now?" And my husband saw a street cleaning

machine going down the street the other day, and he looked at me and he goes, "Well, you haven't done that yet." So, I think they wouldn't be surprised if...if I retire from this if I start driving a street cleaning machine, [laughs] or some other kind of piece of machinery. So, you know, as far as my daughters think, I think they're proud. I'm sure they're proud. But it's a funny kind of, "Yeah, there she goes again."

JENNIFER SHEA: They don't share your passion for the water?

PHYLLIS HOLTMANN: [00:41:05] They like being on the water. My one daughter... Well, they actually both worked for the company for a period of time. My one daughter crewed for the company, the other one sold tickets for the company. So, they've had exposure to the water, and they enjoy it. But it's not a passion that they had to, you know, do that kind of thing. I mean, they were both very career-focused and were going to be in corporate America and that kind of thing. So, that wasn't their passion.

JENNIFER SHEA: That's funny. The Zamboni, here we go. Did you ever buy your own boat?

PHYLLIS HOLTMANN: [00:41:34] We had a boat for a couple years. We had a boat we shared with another couple for a couple years. I had nothing to do with the boat. I mean, I would lay in the sun, that was about it. But honestly, things

would break down and, you know, our engine broke down, it was vandalized one time, and the couple that we bought it with had a golden retriever puppy, and it chewed the seats and so they all had to be replaced. I mean, it was funny because things that happened, we were like, this is not... You know, I'd rather drive a company boat, have them pay for the fuel, have them do the maintenance on it, and I just go out and do my thing and then come back home. So, as far as doing another boat, I don't think we would. I don't need to. I feel like I'm on a boat every day, that's good enough.

JENNIFER SHEA: Terrific.

PHYLLIS HOLTMANN: [00:42:22] Yes.

JENNIFER SHEA: And then in the offseason, you can do the Zamboni, so it's frozen ice. It's frozen water.

PHYLLIS HOLTMANN: [00:42:28] Yeah, offseason I haven't been... I stopped doing that after a while, because the seasons just lined right up with each other, and I felt like I never got a break. So, now in the offseason, we'll go away somewhere or something and just relax. A lot of people will do boat deliveries and things like that. And I don't have an interest in that. At that point in time, I'm ready to just kind of be on the land for a while. Still next to the water, but on the land.

JENNIFER SHEA: Right next to the water. That's great. So...boy, I could talk to you endlessly. But I will ask you, is there anything you'd like to add to this conversation, about your story that we haven't touched upon? Anything else we should know about you and your experience that would be important?

PHYLLIS HOLTMANN: [00:43:23] I just...I just think people need to be open minded to... And not that goal setting is not important because it is, and some people are like that, and I respect that because I kind of wish I was, but I think if nothing else, I think people need to understand that these blips that come in your life are opportunities. And just if you get this little inkling of something, or you get exposure to something, if you're able to do it, just give it a shot. You don't have to pursue anything that you don't want to but just always, always, always be open-minded, because you...like I said, you just never know what's to pique your interest, what's going to be a success, or what's going to be a failure and point you in another direction. But I think it's so important to just not pigeonhole yourself into something to the point where you're not at least open to seeing other possibilities. That would be, I guess, my... That's my story. I mean, I'm just...

JENNIFER SHEA: It's wonderful the way you followed opportunity,
which is terrific. Just terrific.

PHYLLIS HOLTMANN: [00:44:40] Yeah, I really do wish I were a
goal setter, but my life wouldn't have been as fun,
honestly. For me. For me, it would not have been as fun.

JENNIFER SHEA: Who's saying you're not following goals? It's
just, you became a captain.

PHYLLIS HOLTMANN: [00:44:51] Yeah, I guess that's kind of a
goal. [laughter]

JENNIFER SHEA: I don't have a captain's license.

PHYLLIS HOLTMANN: [00:44:57] Yeah, I guess that's kind of a
goal. But I just think I've been so fortunate to just have
a... I think my dad probably had an influence on me in
that way because, you know, he would take us out in the
garage when he was working on the car and make us sit on a
stool and watch us...watch him replace a muffler or
something, so that if it happened when the car broke down,
we would know what to do. And so I... I think he kind of
had that in us were just, you know, just keep your mind
open, always look for different opportunities, you know.
So, I think that he was probably the greatest influence on
me. He's deceased now and there's many times I really
wish...

JENNIFER SHEA: That he could see you now?

PHYLLIS HOLTMANN: [00:45:39] I do.

JENNIFER SHEA: Yeah. That's wonderful.

END OF AUDIO FILE