

OH 519 Vera Meredith

JENNIFER SHEA: This is September 14, 2023. It's Jennifer Shea, and I'm in the Village Hall in Claiborne speaking with Vera Meredith, Captain Vera Meredith, of the *Island Queen*, who... *II*, who is part of the Her Helm Oral History Project for the Chesapeake Bay Maritime Museum. Just talk about yourself.

VERA MEREDITH: [00:00:28] Okay.

JENNIFER SHEA: So Vera, could you just introduce yourself?

VERA MEREDITH: [00:00:33] My name is Vera Meredith, and I am a charter boat captain. And I help run the *Island Queen II* along with my brother.

JENNIFER SHEA: Where were you born?

VERA MEREDITH: [00:00:46] I was born in Easton, Maryland, and I'm... I grew up in Grasonville. And I worked on the water with my dad for a while, and then I worked as a administrator at... In Queen Anne's County school system. And I always go back to the water. In the summers, I would work on the boat with my dad. And my mom had a restaurant, so we would also work in the restaurant with her.

JENNIFER SHEA: Well, I want to hear more about all of this. But could you just tell me when you were born, so they have that for the record?

VERA MEREDITH: [00:01:24] I was born May the first, 1957. I am
66 years old. [laughs]

JENNIFER SHEA: Huh? Huh? You look wonderful. [laughs]

VERA MEREDITH: [00:01:32] Thank you.

JENNIFER SHEA: So you said your father... You worked on the
water with your father?

VERA MEREDITH: [00:01:37] Mm-hmm. My father worked on the water
for about 85 years. He worked up until about a week before
he passed away. He passed away at 91 years old. And he
got sick and went in the hospital. And he said he was just
tired. My brother and I took over the business, and we're
still carrying out his legacy and carrying out people on
the boat.

JENNIFER SHEA: Was that what he did for the 85 years? Did...

VERA MEREDITH: [00:02:10] He was in the Navy, and when he got
out of the Navy, his dad ran a boat. And when he got out
of the Navy, he took over the family business. And he...
They oystered. They crabbed. And he said one day, they...
That someone asked them where they could go fishing, you
know, take a boat and go out in the water. My dad said,
"Well, we'll take you out." And that's how it started.
And they started carrying people fishing.

JENNIFER SHEA: So where did he keep his boats?

VERA MEREDITH: [00:02:48] At Kent Narrows. He kept his boat...

His sister lived across the road from where he lived, and he kept his boat at a pier at his sister's house. And... Behind his sister's house. And the people would park in the parking lot beside the house, and they would walk over, and go down to the boat, and get on.

JENNIFER SHEA: Did he come from a boating family?

VERA MEREDITH: [00:03:14] He did. His dad had a boat, and his grandfather... His uncle.

JENNIFER SHEA: How did they all get into the boating industry?

VERA MEREDITH: [00:03:26] Because... I think because they lived near the water. And in Queen Anne's County, you're either a farmer or a waterman. [laughs]

JENNIFER SHEA: And that was his choice, or... [laughs]

VERA MEREDITH: [00:03:38] That was their choice.

JENNIFER SHEA: Ah, that's great. So is your family all still in Queen's Anne County?

VERA MEREDITH: [00:03:45] No. I have a sister... There were six children and my mom and dad, and I have a sister that sells real estate. She lives in Charles County. A sister lives in Queen's Landing. And my brother still lives on Kent Island. I have a brother that's a chef, and he works in Centreville. And I... Charter boat captain, and volunteer a lot of other jobs. And our children, my brother's grandson likes the water, and he goes out with

him all the time in the summer. He's nine years old. And my son went out with my dad a lot, until my dad passed away, and then he didn't want to do it anymore.

JENNIFER SHEA: Huh. Why was that?

VERA MEREDITH: [00:04:42] He was really close to my father. And after my father passed away, he said he didn't want it. But now he lives in New Jersey, and he does lighting and irrigation for apartments, and for buildings, and lawns, and all.

JENNIFER SHEA: Huh. So he's moved away from life on the water [both speaking-unclear].

VERA MEREDITH: [00:05:02] Mm-hmm. He still comes home in the summer a couple of times and goes out on the boat.

JENNIFER SHEA: So what inspired you to become a captain?

VERA MEREDITH: [00:05:13] I just love the water. I love... It calms your spirit to be out on that boat. And the... I enjoy the people, because my dad had a lot of elderly people that would come and go. We had one man that was in a wheelchair, and they would help him get on the boat, put his wheelchair on the boat. And they were... They're so happy just to come, even if they didn't catch any fish. The customer service, just helping of people. I enjoyed that.

JENNIFER SHEA: So how did you get your captain's license?

VERA MEREDITH: [00:05:52] I... After my dad passed away, I helped my brother a lot on the boat. And he has another smaller boat. So I told him I was going to get my captain's license. He said, "Oh, no, you're not. You've been talking about it for years." So during the winter, I studied, and I took my test in Delaware, and I got my license. It's been, what, about three years ago, I guess. And I got my license. And I sent him a copy of it. He said, "I can't believe it. I just can't [laughs] believe it." So if he has a lot of people on the big boat, I'll take out the smaller boat.

JENNIFER SHEA: Ah. So what... What... What is the trick to being a captain on a charter boat like that? How can... What makes you successful doing it?

VERA MEREDITH: [00:06:50] By being nice to the customers, they keep coming back. And we have the same people that come every year, over and over again. And they... Our boat is one of the biggest boats that are... That's down there. It's comfortable. We have a cabin. And if it's your birthday or anniversary, you go free, and I'll make a cake. [laughs] We had an old lady, Miss Hattie. And she's passed away now, but she would always sit on the right-hand side of the boat in the back in the corner. And her birthday was in August. We would always make her a cake for her

birthday.

JENNIFER SHEA: So how do you know when their birthdays are?

VERA MEREDITH: [00:07:36] We... I talk. They call me the FBI, [laughs] because I talk to everybody more than I should. But I'll ask them. A lot of people, they have identification bracelet on, or I'll say, Are you a diabetic? Or, Are you... Do you have health problems? And they'll let me know. And I'll say, Well, how old are you? Or when's your birthday? And with her, she told me when her birthday was, because she was... She's been... Had gone fishing with my dad for about 50 years. Every Tuesday, she was on the boat. And after he passed away, she continued to come, so we made sure we took care of her. And if someone got in her space, we'd let them know, Well, Miss Hattie has to sit there. She was 96 when she passed away.

JENNIFER SHEA: So how many... Tell me about the boat. What kind of boat is it, and...

VERA MEREDITH: [00:08:29] It's a wooden boat, and we have an inspection on Monday. The Coast Guard has to inspect it every year. And it carries... It's a 57-foot boat. We carry up to 46 passengers.

JENNIFER SHEA: Huh, that's a big one.

VERA MEREDITH: [00:08:47] Mm-hmm.

JENNIFER SHEA: Wow. And how do you know where to take people?

That's the other thing I've always wondered.

VERA MEREDITH: [00:08:54] Well, our dad taught us a lot of different places to go where he would fish, and we have a GPS on the boat, a fish finder, and also charts, compass. So...

JENNIFER SHEA: What was his favorite place to go?

VERA MEREDITH: [00:09:10] His favorite place to go was Long Point. It's a place on... In the Chester River. That was one of his favorite places.

JENNIFER SHEA: Uh-huh. I'll have to look for it. [laughter] So where do you take people? In the Chester, or do you come down...?

VERA MEREDITH: [00:09:28] Chester River, or in Eastern Bay near Bennett Point, or Wye River. Sometimes we go out across the Bay. Wherever we can find the fish. We had a lot of problems this year with the dolphins. Everyone did. The dolphins ate more fish than we could catch.

JENNIFER SHEA: That's interesting, because usually people go, Dolphins, good luck, but for you, that was, yeah, the opposite. I hadn't thought of that. So what is the most challenging thing for you about running the charter boat when you're the captain?

VERA MEREDITH: [00:10:05] It's a lot of work, the upkeep of the

boat. We had... You have to check the oil, the water, everything, every day, to make sure everything is working, and make sure the bilge pumps are working to pump out the water, especially with the wooden boat. And make sure... We check at least once a week to make sure there are no leaks. And I'm short, so I have to go down in the hull of the boat and clean it up before the Coast Guard comes, [JS laughs] because they don't want to see any oil or anything down there. So...

JENNIFER SHEA: What about docking?

VERA MEREDITH: [00:10:43] It's not hard to dock where we keep the boat. We pick up the people over near where the Jetty Restaurant is, and we drop them off over there. But when it's windy, it's a challenge, because the boat, no matter how hard you pull it over to the dock, the wind's going to blow you away sometimes. So we have to have... Be able to throw that rope and get it around the poles so that we could tie it up.

JENNIFER SHEA: So what kind of boat is the one you captain?

VERA MEREDITH: [00:11:18] The other boat that we have is a fiberglass boat, and it's easy. It carries 24 passengers. So when we take it out, usually I'll take it if we need it. If we don't, then I'll be the mate on the boat with my brother.

JENNIFER SHEA: Uh-huh. So how many days a week are you doing that?

VERA MEREDITH: [00:11:38] We go out seven... I don't go out seven days a week anymore, but my brother goes seven days a week. On Saturday and Sunday, we have two trips. We go out at seven, we're back at two. And the second trip is from three to about seven.

JENNIFER SHEA: Wow. How do you get your customers?

VERA MEREDITH: [00:11:57] By word of mouth. Mostly by word of mouth. And I think it was... We carry kids from Annapolis, like, what was it? Youth groups. We had a youth group from Wilmington, Delaware. We have a website. Well, it's on Facebook, Captain Tyrone Charters.

JENNIFER SHEA: Captain Tyrone Charters? Okay.

VERA MEREDITH: [00:12:20] Mm-hmm. And I put up pictures every day of what the people caught. And especially the kids. They love to see the kids fishing. And they'll call and say, Well, can I come down or book a trip? And... But it's mostly by word of mouth.

JENNIFER SHEA: That's great. So where do your customers come from?

VERA MEREDITH: [00:12:40] From New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Washington, DC, Virginia.

JENNIFER SHEA: Wow.

VERA MEREDITH: [00:12:48] Maryland.

JENNIFER SHEA: That's great.

VERA MEREDITH: [00:12:50] Mm-hmm.

JENNIFER SHEA: I haven't done it yet. I'll have [laughter]

[both speaking-unclear]. So have you had any challenges being a woman captain? I mean, have people asked you about it, or...?

VERA MEREDITH: [00:13:01] They do, because they're not used to seeing a woman on the boat. There's one other woman that was a mate on the boat. I can't remember the boat that she went out on, but they just can't believe that a woman can do the same thing that a man can do. But I've had customers. One... A couple... When I take a couple of days off, Well, we knew you weren't on the boat, because the bathrooms weren't clean, or, We knew you weren't on the boat, because we didn't have our wipes. We didn't have our hand sanitizer. [laughs] [both speaking-unclear]

JENNIFER SHEA: And how does that make you feel?

VERA MEREDITH: [00:13:40] Good. [laughs] Because it makes me feel that I'm needed.

JENNIFER SHEA: It's wonderful that the family's business is continuing. So why does your brother stay in it?

VERA MEREDITH: [00:13:55] He sold insurance. He went to college, twice. [laughter] And he came out, and he sold

insurance, and he did some other... Taxes. And no matter what he did, always came back to the water. We all always get a job during the winter, but in the summer, we're on the water most of the time.

JENNIFER SHEA: So what are you doing these days?

VERA MEREDITH: [00:14:22] What am I...

JENNIFER SHEA: Are you still working, or are you just working on the water, or...?

VERA MEREDITH: [00:14:28] I'm still working.

JENNIFER SHEA: What are you doing?

VERA MEREDITH: [00:14:30] I work at Modern Maturity Center in Dover, Delaware, where they prepare Meals on Wheels for Kent County. And they also have a dining room where people... The seniors can come in and have lunch. And we also send food out to the senior centers, to the site. We prepare over 2500 meals a day. We also send out frozen meals to people that can't come out. But they deliver... They have volunteers that deliver the meals to their homes.

JENNIFER SHEA: They're made in Delaware, but they deliver to Kent County?

VERA MEREDITH: [00:15:11] Kent County, Delaware.

JENNIFER SHEA: Okay.

VERA MEREDITH: [00:15:13] Kent County, Delaware. It's all throughout Delaware. We go to Harrington, Milford, Dover,

Felton. So it's all throughout Delaware.

JENNIFER SHEA: Uh-huh. So how did you get involved with doing that?

VERA MEREDITH: [00:15:28] I needed a job for the winter, [laughs] because it was during COVID, and we could only carry out eight people on the boat. They had to be all spread out. So we had a short summer. So I said, I'm going to find a job. My brother, during the winter, works for a union where they are building up... I forget which island it is.

JENNIFER SHEA: Poplar?

VERA MEREDITH: [00:15:57] Poplar Island, where they carry the people to the island, and he takes the boat, carries the people back and forth. So he does that in the winter, up until about, what, April or May. So I started working there, and I go in at three o'clock in the morning, and I'm usually off at one. And I just cook the vegetables. I cook... And we have someone that cooks the starch, and we have someone that cooks the meat. But I love it, because when they come in, we're sometimes the only people that they talk to during the day, and that's the only meal that some of them get. So it just makes you feel so good to be able to be a part of that, to take care of them. It's a nonprofit organization, but they do so much to help people.

JENNIFER SHEA: That's great.

VERA MEREDITH: [00:16:50] It is.

JENNIFER SHEA: You sound very busy here.

VERA MEREDITH: [00:16:52] [laughs] I am. And then on weekends,
we cater. [laughs]

JENNIFER SHEA: So how did cooking become part of your life to
such a degree?

VERA MEREDITH: [00:17:02] When my... I'm next to the oldest.
My oldest sister passed away. And when my mom worked, she
had me cook dinner for everybody, because she worked from 3
to 11 at a restaurant before she got her restaurant. So
I'd have to prepare dinner for everyone when she went to
work, for my younger brothers and sisters. And I love to
cook. She taught me how to make bread, and cinnamon rolls,
and... And no one else wants to learn to do it. My sons
learned how to make the bread, but no one else does.

JENNIFER SHEA: So what...

VERA MEREDITH: [00:17:43] I just love to cook.

JENNIFER SHEA: And you love being on the water.

VERA MEREDITH: [00:17:49] I do. My two favorite things.
[laughs]

JENNIFER SHEA: So your mother had the restaurant.

VERA MEREDITH: [00:17:53] Mm-hmm.

JENNIFER SHEA: And your father had...

VERA MEREDITH: [00:17:54] And my father had the boat.

JENNIFER SHEA: ...the boat. And you love them both. Uh-huh.

VERA MEREDITH: [00:17:57] Mm-hmm.

JENNIFER SHEA: Do you have... If you had to love one more than the other?

VERA MEREDITH: [00:18:02] I think I... I... I don't know, no.

JENNIFER SHEA: [laughs] That's not a fair question.

VERA MEREDITH: [00:18:07] No.

JENNIFER SHEA: No, I won't ask that. [laughter] So... But you did tell me that you're preparing for a family reunion for 200 people?

VERA MEREDITH: [00:18:18] Two hundred people. It's next Saturday the 23rd.

JENNIFER SHEA: Wow. And where will they be coming from, your family? To...

VERA MEREDITH: [00:18:27] We have family in New York, New Jersey, from Maryland, and Virginia. So we're all going to get together to... A lot of cousins. So we're all going to gather. And then the... I think we're going to give a... Outdoor prizes, and the oldest relative is going to get something, and the youngest relative, because we only get together for funerals or weddings. So we thought we'd have one, a reunion, this year, even though our parents are gone, a lot of our relatives are gone. So we're going to

all get together, and eat, and talk, and we asked everyone to bring pictures of a grandparent or a great-grandparent, and we're going to have them all displayed. And whoever guesses the most who they are are going to get a prize. So...

JENNIFER SHEA: So how long has your family has gone back in the Kent... On Kent Island?

VERA MEREDITH: [00:19:36] The 1800s.

JENNIFER SHEA: Wow.

VERA MEREDITH: [00:19:38] We had... Our great-great-grandfather, Benjamin Meredith, owned a farm on Kent Island. What's the name of the road? Off of Newtown Road. And we did research. My brother bought the property, and he researched it back, and he found out that Benjamin Meredith owned the property, and that it was a farm. But he bought the house and remodeled the house, and he rents it out now. But he said he's going to move back there, because it's right on the water, and live in it.

JENNIFER SHEA: That's wonderful. So where did they come from to Kent Island?

VERA MEREDITH: [00:20:18] Some of them were raised here. They were born here. Yep, because my grandfather was born in Chester, Maryland. And Benjamine was born in Chester. And he had 14 children. And I told my... When we were looking

up the family history, John... My son's name is John. He said, "He had a son named John." And I said, "He sure did." [laughs]

JENNIFER SHEA: Was there anything interesting you discovered in your family history on Kent Island?

VERA MEREDITH: [00:20:51] My son went to the African American Museum in DC. He and his girlfriend went one day. And he found my dad's... What was it? The Selective Service card, when they had to sign up to go in the service. And my dad was 18 years old. He was born in '26, so that was... And he said they had the card displayed in the museum, and he thought that was great.

JENNIFER SHEA: That's wonderful, Vera. [VM laughs] I'm going to look for that next time I'm there. How did it get there?

VERA MEREDITH: [00:21:32] I don't know.

JENNIFER SHEA: Wow.

VERA MEREDITH: [00:21:33] I don't know. Mm-mm.

JENNIFER SHEA: That's very interesting. So what was it like being an African American family growing up on Kent Island?

VERA MEREDITH: [00:21:46] My dad tells us stories about how hard it was, because he went to... Where did he go to? I think he went to Boston to get a boat. And they drove up there, and then someone drove back, but he brought the boat home. And he said that when he stopped to get fuel, they asked

where the captain was of the boat. And he told them, he said, "Well, I'm the captain of the boat. It's my boat. I own the boat." He said they wouldn't... They couldn't believe it. But there aren't a lot of African American captains now. There are not as many as there used to be. I think there... My brother told me there used to be a hundred, over a hundred, and now there may be 20 on the Eastern Shore.

JENNIFER SHEA: Wow.

VERA MEREDITH: [00:22:37] So there are not that many.

JENNIFER SHEA: And they're all in Kent Island, or are they spread out a bit?

VERA MEREDITH: [00:22:41] They're... They mostly leave from Kent Island.

JENNIFER SHEA: Yeah, that's what I thought.

VERA MEREDITH: [00:22:44] Yep, from Kent Island. Yeah.

JENNIFER SHEA: So Vera, how many female Black captains are there, African American captains?

VERA MEREDITH: [00:22:52] There's only... My sister-in-law was one. She passed away. And I am. I think there's one other in Queen Anne's County. Yeah.

JENNIFER SHEA: That's very special. [VM laughs] That's quite wonderful. [laughs]

VERA MEREDITH: [00:23:11] Mm-hmm.

JENNIFER SHEA: So how long do you think you're going to continue doing this, or what's your next boating project [both speaking-unclear]?

VERA MEREDITH: [00:23:15] Probably forever. My dad used to tell us that if you stop working, and you sit around, and you do nothing when you retire, that your bones and your muscles will tighten up, [laughs] and you won't be able to do anything at all. So as long as I continue to love what I'm doing, I'm never going to stop. No. My brother told me a couple weeks ago... I can't remember what we were doing. He said, "You're going to have to start taking vitamin B complex, because you're forgetting, and you don't remember." I said, "Well, you don't remember, either, because I told you about a group that was coming, and you didn't write it down, and you forgot about it." [laughs] So, but I love it. I do. I love to cook and I love to go out on the boat. Yeah.

JENNIFER SHEA: Well, it's... You're right. As long as you can do what you love.

VERA MEREDITH: [00:24:11] Mm-hmm.

JENNIFER SHEA: So is there something special about going out on the Chesapeake that you like to share with some of your customers?

VERA MEREDITH: [00:24:27] I tell them, sometimes... My dad used

to tell us about how when he went out, especially when he crabbed or oystered, you could see the bottom of the Bay. And now, the Bay is clean... Is getting to be cleaner than it used to be, but it's got a long ways to go. Yeah. And the fish, they would catch so many more crabs and oysters and fish than what we do today.

JENNIFER SHEA: That's interesting. But seeing the bottom of the Bay, I never heard that.

VERA MEREDITH: [00:25:04] Mm-hmm.

JENNIFER SHEA: You said Kent Island has changed a lot, too.

VERA MEREDITH: [00:25:08] It has changed a lot. So many more houses and people.

JENNIFER SHEA: It used to be more rural?

VERA MEREDITH: [00:25:18] It used to be more rural, and everybody knew every... Everyone knew everyone. You knew your neighbors. Now we've got a lot of people from Baltimore and DC, and different places, moving to the island.

JENNIFER SHEA: Has it changed the tenor?

VERA MEREDITH: [00:25:36] I didn't...

JENNIFER SHEA: Has it changed the whole atmosphere there?

VERA MEREDITH: [00:25:40] It has changed it. It has. Yeah.

JENNIFER SHEA: I think that's happening every place right now.

VERA MEREDITH: [00:25:45] The people aren't as nice as they used

to be. [laughter]

JENNIFER SHEA: I think that's happening everywhere. Oh, I forgot to ask you this. So what's your least favorite part of taking a charter out?

VERA MEREDITH: [00:26:01] Cleaning up when we come in.

[laughter] Because we have to clean the bathrooms. We have to mop and scrub the floor, the bait boards, the buckets, and clean it up. During COVID, oh, it was... We'd have to... Everything I had was bleached up, I mean, all my clothes, because we had to wipe everything down in bleach. The rails, the seats, everything had to be wiped down in bleach when the people got off, when they... Before they got on in the morning. We had to make sure everything was clean. We even wiped the cushions on the inside of the cabin to make sure no one got sick.

JENNIFER SHEA: Uh-huh. Are you doing that again?

VERA MEREDITH: [00:26:44] We're doing it. We still wipe everything down at least once a day.

JENNIFER SHEA: Right. I've heard that people are, sort of, going back to some of...

VERA MEREDITH: [00:26:51] Mm-hmm.

JENNIFER SHEA: ...some of that. Do you have a favorite memory of going out on the bay, taking a charter out or going out with just your dad or your brother?

VERA MEREDITH: [00:27:14] I do. When we would... We would go out, we'd always have a family trip where everybody in the family, all our brothers, sisters, our kids, and everyone would come, and we'd go out at least once a year. We'd all take food. And we'd go out... I think we went out one year around the Fourth of July, and we all just ate. We sat out in the middle of the water, and we watched the fireworks. My mom never liked to go out on the boat that much, but she would go at least once a year for the family gathering. And we'd all just go out, the end of the season, like, maybe... Not the end of the season, but when it was slow, a slow day, we'd go out.

JENNIFER SHEA: Well, that's wonderful.

VERA MEREDITH: [00:28:01] Mm-hmm.

JENNIFER SHEA: Where did your father buy the boat? It just struck me that...

VERA MEREDITH: [00:28:07] He... The one that we have now he bought in Virginia. He went to Montauk, New York, to look for a boat. [laughs] And that was the longest ride. I thought we were going to the end of the earth. And then he... It was Deltaville. That's where he bought the boat, Deltaville, Virginia. Yeah. Mm-hmm.

JENNIFER SHEA: Well, that's interesting. Did he have any challenges buying the boat?

VERA MEREDITH: [00:28:42] Not really.

JENNIFER SHEA: Good.

VERA MEREDITH: [00:28:44] Not really. It's gotten a lot better,
a lot better.

JENNIFER SHEA: Yeah. I was just wondering if, from what you
said, he had...

VERA MEREDITH: [00:28:51] Yep.

JENNIFER SHEA: ...had a difficult time.

VERA MEREDITH: [00:28:53] Yeah. My mom, when she first got her
restaurant, she... We had some people come in, and they
ate and all, and then they said, "Well, tell the owner the
food was really good." And my mom said, "I certainly
will." So I asked her. I said, "Why did you tell them
that? Why didn't you tell them you were the owner?" She
said, "Because some people won't come back if they find out
that I own this restaurant." And she told me. She said,
"Let them think you can't afford the bread until they
realize you own the bakery." [laughs]

JENNIFER SHEA: Well, that's very good.

VERA MEREDITH: [00:29:38] And I told my son that a long time
ago. And he said... And I said, "Do you understand what
that means?" He said, "Well, my mama said it meant to keep
everything to yourself, and don't tell them what you're
doing and let everybody know what you're doing, until you

get what you want." And I said, "She did, but she also meant that, you know, everyone doesn't have to know what you're doing, but they'll understand..." They... I know those people realized that, Well, she's the owner of the restaurant. Her last name is Meredith. It's Meredith's Seafood Restaurant.

JENNIFER SHEA: Yep. Well, that's interesting. I like that saying, yeah.

VERA MEREDITH: [00:30:21] Mm-hmm.

JENNIFER SHEA: There are some good ones. There's another one about how behind every successful waterman, there's a successful woman. [laughs]

VERA MEREDITH: [00:30:29] Mm-hmm.

JENNIFER SHEA: It's the same kind of...

VERA MEREDITH: [00:30:32] And she would watch. When he was out in the storms, I remember, Mom would stand by the door and watch and wait, because the... We didn't have cell phones back then. You only had the ship-to-shore radio and the home phone. And she would sit and wait. And she said, "I hope he's not out there fishing in this storm." But he would always anchor down and stay put until the storm was over.

JENNIFER SHEA: Have you ever been out in a storm?

VERA MEREDITH: [00:30:57] I have. We were out when... It's

been, I don't remember how long, but we were out there... It was before my mom passed away... For the earthquake. When we had that small earthquake. And we saw a big wave come up, and then it started like something was beating up under the boat. And my dad said, "There must be a earthquake somewhere close by." I said, "How can you tell?" He said, "Because we're not on land, but the ground under the water is making the water beat up under the boat." And when we got in, there were no phones. There were some damage, like with stuff falling off the shelves and all, and cabinets. But it wasn't that bad.

JENNIFER SHEA: Yeah. Here it was... In Washington, the cathedral... They lost... Had some things fall off the cathedral when it shook.

VERA MEREDITH: [00:31:54] Oh, my.

JENNIFER SHEA: Yeah. That was really something.

VERA MEREDITH: [00:31:57] Hmm.

JENNIFER SHEA: So what advice do you have for future female captains? I mean, if a young woman came up to you and said, How do I become a captain? Or, What should I know about being a female captain?

VERA MEREDITH: [00:32:18] I would advise them to go out on the boat as much as you can, because you have to have so many hours before you can become a captain. So I'd advise them

to go out on the boat with someone and learn as much as you can about the water, and the boat, and the rules, and that will make it a lot easier to get your license. A lot easier. They have a course now where you study. You take a class. And the class was for six weeks. You take the class, and then at the end of the class, the Coast Guard gives you a test, and you get your license. But they're making it harder and harder every year. My dad said when he took his test to get his license, it was 20 questions. I think now it's maybe four or five sections with... You have to get 80 percent on one part, and I think the lowest you could get is 75 percent on another. So they're making it a lot harder to get your license. But that's good, in a way, because you have to make sure the people that you carry out are safe. Yep.

JENNIFER SHEA: Is there anything you could tell a future female captain about how to handle male attitudes?

VERA MEREDITH: [00:33:45] [laughs] [clears throat]

JENNIFER SHEA: Any advice like your mother's? [laughter]

VERA MEREDITH: [00:33:56] You just have to be firm and let them know that you know what you're doing, that I [claps] am in charge [claps]. This is my boat. I am in charge. Yeah.

JENNIFER SHEA: That's good advice for everything. You know?

[VM laughs] So what would you like people to know about you

as a captain working on the Chesapeake in the fishing charter business, your family business, as the fifth generation?

VERA MEREDITH: [00:34:32] Mm-hmm. That I love what I'm doing, I love people, and that when you come out on the boat with us, it will be an enjoyable trip, very enjoyable trip. Because we try to make them feel like family. We do. If there's anything they need. I know there's one man that comes out with us all the time. And when Mr. Joe comes, I always make him a cake. And there's another man that loves Coca-Cola, so as soon as he gets on the boat, I'll go in my cooler. I'll get him his Coca-Cola. And that makes him feel like they're part of the family. They know that we think about them. We're going to have what they want when they get on the boat. We're going to take good care of them. So...

JENNIFER SHEA: So why is that important to you?

VERA MEREDITH: [00:35:25] Because I treat them the way I want to be treated. If I went out on that boat and someone was rude, or mean, or made me sit in one spot all day, [laughs] I wouldn't come back. And we want them to keep coming back, so we have to treat them like family.

JENNIFER SHEA: So has this summer been? Have you had a good season?

VERA MEREDITH: [00:35:50] We have had a good season. We have.

JENNIFER SHEA: When... How long does it go?

VERA MEREDITH: [00:35:56] We'll probably go... I probably won't, but my brother will probably go up until after Thanksgiving.

JENNIFER SHEA: Wow.

VERA MEREDITH: [00:36:04] We have a group of Russians that come every year on Thanksgiving Day. And they go... They'll go out in the morning until around noon. And they bring him all kinds of food. And they come a couple of times a year, but they always come on Thanksgiving Day.

JENNIFER SHEA: So how did you connect with this group of Russians?

VERA MEREDITH: [00:36:30] I don't... I... Well, a couple of them came and went fishing, and they just came down to see if they could get on a boat. I don't know if a boat left, or we were... We're always the last boat there, because we don't want to leave [laughs] anybody on shore. So they got on the boat, and then they... A couple of weeks later, they brought some of their family. And now they come a couple of times a year. Every year, they come and they go out with them, because he knows that my brother will take them out on Thanksgiving Day. Yep.

JENNIFER SHEA: And then he comes for Thanksgiving dinner late?

VERA MEREDITH: [00:37:08] Mm-hmm.

JENNIFER SHEA: Uh-huh.

VERA MEREDITH: [00:37:10] Yep.

JENNIFER SHEA: Well, that's quite a tradition.

VERA MEREDITH: [00:37:12] Mm-hmm.

JENNIFER SHEA: Is there anything else that's a tradition in your family's charting...charter business?

VERA MEREDITH: [00:37:18] Not really. Just the family trip that we do every year. Yeah.

JENNIFER SHEA: Uh-huh. Well, now you'll have the 200-person picnic. [laughter] Will you take people on the boat?

VERA MEREDITH: [00:37:30] We had a party on the boat a couple of years ago. We invited a lot of our family, and one of our cousins played music, and everybody brought food. And I think maybe a few fished. But we just went out, and we had a good time for three or four hours, and then we came in. Yeah. But it's too many to go out on the boat this time. I think we had 45 people on the boat, so this time, we're going to have it inside.

JENNIFER SHEA: So do you like fishing?

VERA MEREDITH: [00:38:05] I do. I do like to fish. The group that we had yesterday, we fished off the back of the boat. It was a couple of people from Modern Maturity. And one of the guys said, "I can't wait to get back to tell them how

many fish you caught. You just caught more fish than anybody." I said, "But I've been doing it since I was five, so..." [laughs]

JENNIFER SHEA: So what's the trick? How do you get so many?

VERA MEREDITH: [00:38:29] I just... I don't know.

JENNIFER SHEA: No tricks? No secrets?

VERA MEREDITH: [00:38:34] No tricks.

JENNIFER SHEA: No secrets to...

VERA MEREDITH: [00:38:35] No secrets. No secrets.

JENNIFER SHEA: Oh, dear. [laughter]

VERA MEREDITH: [00:38:38] No secrets. My son, when he was younger, he went out all the time with my dad. And when he was younger... I think he was maybe seven or eight years old. He stood behind... Beside this old man, and he said, "This little boy's going to tangle up my line all day long. I can see it now." My son never opened his mouth. He filled that man's cooler up and shut him up. [laughs]

JENNIFER SHEA: So, Vera, I love your email address. It's mamavera. [VS laughs] Why did you choose that?

VERA MEREDITH: [00:39:12] Because that's why my boys call me.

[laughs] They call me Mama Vera. And at work, they call me Miss V or Miss Vera. I mean, even though a lot of them are older than me. That's what they call me, yeah.

JENNIFER SHEA: Uh-huh. Does it...

VERA MEREDITH: [00:39:30] My grandchildren call me Mama Vera.

JENNIFER SHEA: Mama Vera? Anybody call you Captain Mama Vera?

VERA MEREDITH: [00:39:37] [laughs] Sometimes they do.

[laughter]

JENNIFER SHEA: I like that one. So is there anything we...

You'd like to talk about that we haven't hit today, or brought up yet?

VERA MEREDITH: [00:39:52] No, I don't think so.

JENNIFER SHEA: Anything you'd like to pass along to posterity, to the future?

VERA MEREDITH: [00:40:01] Whatever you want in life, you have to work for it. You have to work for it. Sometimes we'd want to go out, especially my brother, and my dad would say, Why are you going to take off from work to go out and spend your money when you'll have lots of days off where you can go and spend your money? So... But he instilled... Both of our parents instilled work ethic. Not that we don't enjoy life, but you have to work for what you want. You'll have plenty of time to enjoy life and go wherever you want to go. I used to take my kids, when they were younger... I have friends that live in St. Louis, Missouri, and we'd take a road trip every other year to go visit them. And they loved it. We'd take our time, and stay in hotels, and they'd have to stop at every rest stop, get souvenirs or

whatever. But they talk about it to this day, how every year, we would take a vacation. And that's important. You have to have time to rest.

JENNIFER SHEA: So what's your vacation coming up? What are you going to do?

VERA MEREDITH: [00:41:21] [laughs] I... Well, I didn't take one this year. Usually... My daughter runs an in-home daycare, and she has twins, a little girl and a little boy. They're 11 years old. So we took them to Ocean City for a day, and they love antique stores and consignment shops. So we did that. And then one day, we went to... They rode the ferry from Bellevue to Oxford. We got our ice cream. And we just sat in the park and relaxed, and then we went home. She lives in Hurlock.

JENNIFER SHEA: Oh.

VERA MEREDITH: [00:42:01] In Hurlock, Maryland.

JENNIFER SHEA: So how many children do you have?

VERA MEREDITH: [00:42:03] Just the three.

JENNIFER SHEA: The three, the two boys and one daughter?

VERA MEREDITH: [00:42:05] Mm-hmm, mm-hmm.

JENNIFER SHEA: That's what I have, too. [VM laughs] Good number. And do they like the water, going out on the water?

VERA MEREDITH: [00:42:15] They do. Well, my oldest son, John,

goes out maybe once or twice a year. Tyrell, the youngest one, could live on the boat. That's the one that went with my dad all the time. And my daughter may go once in a while. But the grandchildren love to go out on the boat. They love it.

JENNIFER SHEA: Are you teaching them how to do this now?

VERA MEREDITH: [00:42:37] They know how to fish, and we let them steer the boat when they're on the boat, to get the feel of it. But they love to fish. My grandson is very competitive. He has to catch more than he did the year before. [laughs]

JENNIFER SHEA: So you're the fifth generation.

VERA MEREDITH: [00:42:59] Mm-hmm.

JENNIFER SHEA: So... And your brother is the fifth generation. Do you think there's going to be a sixth generation running...

VERA MEREDITH: [00:43:05] I think so.

JENNIFER SHEA: The Meredith's charter... What's the name of the charter company?

VERA MEREDITH: [00:43:08] It's... The boat is the *Island Queen*, and it's Captain Tyrone Charters.

JENNIFER SHEA: Captain Tyrone Charters.

VERA MEREDITH: [00:43:15] Mm-hmm.

JENNIFER SHEA: Okay. And that was your father?

VERA MEREDITH: [00:43:17] That was my brother.

JENNIFER SHEA: Your brother.

VERA MEREDITH: [00:43:19] My brother changed it. It was... My dad had *Island Queen* Charters, because the boat was the *Island Queen*, and my brother changed it to Captain Tyrone Charters, but the boat is still the *Island Queen*.

JENNIFER SHEA: The *Island Queen*, yeah.

VERA MEREDITH: [00:43:34] Yeah.

JENNIFER SHEA: So you think there will be a sixth generation running it?

VERA MEREDITH: [00:43:36] I think so.

JENNIFER SHEA: Who?

VERA MEREDITH: [00:43:38] His grandson really likes it, and my son does, so even though he's not doing it right now, I think he will.

JENNIFER SHEA: And what's he doing now?

VERA MEREDITH: [00:43:49] That's the one that does the lighting and irrigation.

JENNIFER SHEA: Oh, yeah. But he might return to the water?

VERA MEREDITH: [00:43:55] I think he will.

JENNIFER SHEA: Uh-huh. The one who cooks?

VERA MEREDITH: [00:43:59] The one... My son that cooks, no.

[phone rings] No, he won't. He won't. I don't think he will.

JENNIFER SHEA: I can just stop this. So you think there will be a sixth generation?

VERA MEREDITH: [00:44:12] I think so.

JENNIFER SHEA: Okay. But do you think it will stay at Kent Island, or do you think it will go elsewhere?

VERA MEREDITH: [00:44:18] It's going to stay there. I think it's going to stay there, because now, we carry out... A lot of the customers my dad had, we're carrying out their children and their grandchildren, because one young man brought his daughters on the boat last summer, and he said, "I used to come with my grandfather and my father." And now he's bringing his children.

JENNIFER SHEA: So this is all part of family heritage.

VERA MEREDITH: [00:44:44] Mm-hmm. Yeah.

JENNIFER SHEA: And actually, that fits in with what you said about trying to make everybody feel like family.

VERA MEREDITH: [00:44:52] Mm-hmm.

JENNIFER SHEA: That's very special.

VERA MEREDITH: [00:44:54] Yeah.

JENNIFER SHEA: Yeah. Anything else you'd like to add?

VERA MEREDITH: [00:44:58] No.

JENNIFER SHEA: Well, thank you very, very much.

VERA MEREDITH: [00:45:01] And thank you.

JENNIFER SHEA: I appreciated that.

END OF AUDIO FILE