

OH 528 LewisCarter

BRENT LEWIS: So, my name is Brent Lewis. Today is April 13th, 2024. And we're here with Captain Lewis Carter to do a oral history for the Chesapeake Bay Maritime Museum's Waterman's Story Swap. First of all, Captain Carter, do we have your permission to record?

LEWIS CARTER: [00:00:18] Yes, you do.

BRENT LEWIS: Can you tell me when and where you were born?

LEWIS CARTER: [00:00:21] I was born December the 20th, 1946 in Edwardsville, Virginia.

BRENT LEWIS: Edwardsville, Virginia. Was that where your people were from?

LEWIS CARTER: [00:00:32] Right. Right. Yeah, they were. And we moved up here in 1953, lived on Kent Narrows.

BRENT LEWIS: When you say we, who is that?

LEWIS CARTER: [00:00:42] My family and most of the ancestors, they would come one by one to shuck oysters on Kent Narrows, you know.

BRENT LEWIS: What was your mother and father's name?

LEWIS CARTER: [00:00:54] My father's name was Lewis Carter. My mother name was Flora Carter.

BRENT LEWIS: Were they from Virginia?

LEWIS CARTER: [00:01:00] They were from Virginia also.

BRENT LEWIS: Did you have brothers and sisters?

LEWIS CARTER: [00:01:04] I had six brothers and sisters. I had six brothers and two sisters.

BRENT LEWIS: Where'd you fall in the line? Were you the oldest, youngest?

LEWIS CARTER: [00:01:14] I'm the third oldest.

BRENT LEWIS: Third oldest.

LEWIS CARTER: [00:01:17] Yeah. I had a brother older than me, and my sister lives up Grasonville. She's older than me.

BRENT LEWIS: Did everybody come up here when you, when your fam... when your family did?

LEWIS CARTER: [00:01:26] Ev... everybody came except my oldest brother. He stayed and he fished in Reedville on fishing boats and Louisiana. He fished down there for 20 years. And he was my oldest brother. He was born in 1937.

BRENT LEWIS: Did anybody in the family work on the water before you came up here?

LEWIS CARTER: [00:01:46] Oh yeah, they all did.

BRENT LEWIS: They all did. What did they do down there?

LEWIS CARTER: [00:01:50] They shucked oysters. Some of them caught oysters. They caught crabs on the great Waccamaw River that runs through the... that empties off the Potomac River. And my grandfather and my mother's brothers, they were watermen also.

BRENT LEWIS: So you're a generational waterman?

LEWIS CARTER: [00:02:09] I am, yes, sir.

BRENT LEWIS: Even before you?

LEWIS CARTER: [00:02:11] Yes, I am.

BRENT LEWIS: Members of the family. Did you know any of those older people, your grandfather, uncles, any of those people?

LEWIS CARTER: [00:02:19] Well, I would go down and spend summers with my grandfather. He was born in 1876.

BRENT LEWIS: Wow.

LEWIS CARTER: [00:02:28] And he lived, I guess he lived to be in his nineties. And mom would send us down every summer and spend the summer with him. I'd go fishing with him and all.

BRENT LEWIS: So he was born just a few years after the Civil War?

LEWIS CARTER: [00:02:42] He was, yes he was.

BRENT LEWIS: Yeah. Did he, was he a storyteller? Did he tell you guys things about growing up?

LEWIS CARTER: [00:02:48] No, we... he didn't say much about his back history life. I think he was old North Carolina when he come outta North Carolina. My grandmother was a Ball. There was a big family down there and she had 18 children. Mom was the second youngest.

BRENT LEWIS: Oh, that's amazing. Big families.

LEWIS CARTER: [00:03:09] It is. Yeah, it is.

BRENT LEWIS: So how'd y'all end? How old were you like eight years old when you came up here?

LEWIS CARTER: [00:03:13] Just about eight year. I started school to that old wooden school up at Grasonville, where... where the community center is now? It used to be old three room school that I started school there.

BRENT LEWIS: Was that was during segregation. So that was right. African American school.

LEWIS CARTER: [00:03:31] Right. That's, that's right. Yeah. It was.

BRENT LEWIS: Like first grade through...

LEWIS CARTER: [00:03:34] First grade to sixth grade.

BRENT LEWIS: How far did you go in school?

LEWIS CARTER: [00:03:39] I didn't go that far in school. Quit school. Went right on oyster boats when I was 15 years old. Captain Charlie Bryan carried me. He taught me how to cull oysters when I was 11. That was around 1957 somewhere.

BRENT LEWIS: You all lived in Kent Narrows at the time.

LEWIS CARTER: [00:03:57] Right.

BRENT LEWIS: What was Kent Narrows like when you were a boy?

LEWIS CARTER: [00:04:01] Kent Narrows was full of oyster houses. Shell piles, oyster shells and shanties and all. Ain't too much you can say about Kent Narrows. [laugh] That's what it was.

BRENT LEWIS: Tell me about the shanties. What were... where did you all live?

LEWIS CARTER: [00:04:16] We lived right where the Hilton Hotel is now. It was a row of shanties along the road there and all.

BRENT LEWIS: You were a little boy.

LEWIS CARTER: [00:04:27] I was a little boy. Right.

BRENT LEWIS: And you and your siblings were with you. Did you all have different shanties that you lived in or they were all packed in one or...

LEWIS CARTER: [00:04:37] They were all packed in one. Most of those shanties had three rooms. Some of them had four. Some of them didn't have but one.

BRENT LEWIS: Right.

LEWIS CARTER: [00:04:44] And when they would catch afire, it would burn them all. I seen a lot of fire down there. People you know.

BRENT LEWIS: People, I've read newspaper articles from that time of fires where children died.

LEWIS CARTER: [00:04:57] Right. They did.

BRENT LEWIS: People died in those fires.

LEWIS CARTER: [00:05:00] Right. A lot of them did. Because they would use those old kerosene stoves and they would flare up, you know, and without you knowing, you in the bed asleep, you know. And this is on fire, you don't know it, you know.

BRENT LEWIS: Do you know who owned those shanties that you all lived in?

LEWIS CARTER: [00:05:16] Well, the ones that owned the oyster houses owned them. So my family worked for Captain Herman Thompson, he owned a...the row. And that was Captain Alex to the right of him. And Harvey Roof[?] was to the left of him and right on down, you know, and you go across the track there. That was Harris', Mr. Holton Harris and all those had oyster houses.

BRENT LEWIS: Is that what your parents did? Worked in the oyster houses?

LEWIS CARTER: [00:05:41] Mom did. Mom worked in skimming. My father carried shells for 120 shuckers. Kept my [unclear], there he did. He would come to the school bus and get me and my brother before I get away. [laugh]

BRENT LEWIS: [laugh]

LEWIS CARTER: [00:05:56] And he would carry me down there and keep me till about 11 o'clock trying to get them out, you know.

BRENT LEWIS: So what would you do? You'd carry the, carry the shells?

LEWIS CARTER: [00:06:06] Oyster shells. He'd carry them up, brought up on a pile. The shell pile was just about up around the roof of the oyster house, it was so high. And they put them all up and they would stay there till that spring and they would move them and carry them back a [unclear] and plant them. Transplant them. Oh yeah.

BRENT LEWIS: I got a question about, so where Ferry Point Park is now, and I asked Jason Ruth this too. There's a boatload of shells out there towards...

LEWIS CARTER: [00:06:33] Where is it at?

BRENT LEWIS: If you go north, it's not on the side of Redeyes. On the other side where the exploration center is like that little pocket of land that's kind of shaped like a u. It's right in Narrows I think, it's called Ferry Point Park now. I don't know how long it was ever called that, but that whole strip of land, if you're heading out into the Chester River, it's mostly piles of oyster shells. Do you know if you guys place them out there?

LEWIS CARTER: [00:06:55] I don't know. Because the ship, most of the oysters we catch now, they go to Virginia. You know, and I, over the couple, two or three years, or down at the PT Hamilton, they get the shells back, you know. And I imagine Jason Ruth keeps his, and also, you know. But back in the day that shell piles was all over Kent Narrows and they would transplant them in the spring. Carry them back and plant them back parcels all, and during the spring, watermen would harvest them and put them on local oyster bars. That's how they did that.

BRENT LEWIS: To grow more oysters.

LEWIS CARTER: [00:07:31] Right, right.

BRENT LEWIS: I have one more question, if I can. Absolutely. Speaking of the Narrows, going back there, you had mentioned the tracks. You remember the railroad much?

LEWIS CARTER: [00:07:39] I do. Yeah, I do. Yeah.

BRENT LEWIS: That's fascinating.

LEWIS CARTER: [00:07:42] Yes. I known it.

BRENT LEWIS: Then south of that Wells Cove, because you were right, you said you were right near the Hilton?

LEWIS CARTER: [00:07:47] We on Wells Cove Road, that's where we lived at.

BRENT LEWIS: Do you know any story as to why? I heard, I always heard there was a well there, and that's why it was called Wells Cove.

LEWIS CARTER: [00:07:56] I, I think Wells Cove is the name of the cove behind the Jetty. It was 40, 50 work boats used to tie in that cove when I was a boy. From Grasonville and Queenstown, they tied the boats there. All the Kent Island tied right down there. Slip there.

BRENT LEWIS: Any idea where the name, well, like the Wells name came from?

LEWIS CARTER: [00:08:15] Not really. I don't, no, no more than the cove itself. That's called Wells Cove. That's the name of it.

BRENT LEWIS: You've really seen a change down there, not only with the growth of the Narrows, but it seems to me the lay of the land is somewhat different. Right.

LEWIS CARTER: [00:08:30] Right. Right.

BRENT LEWIS: How did that change has, has, was that changed through dredging or in your time?

LEWIS CARTER: [00:08:39] Well, the, the land, mostly the Kent Narrows now is covered with boats, you know, for sale and restaurants. And most of the restaurants that's there now, were oyster houses at one time, you know.

BRENT LEWIS: So that was the big business down there where the shucking houses.

LEWIS CARTER: [00:08:55] Oh, shucking oysters.

BRENT LEWIS: The processing plants.

LEWIS CARTER: [00:08:58] It was, I remember 13 oyster houses on Kent Narrows. Some say it was more...earlier, you know. But I remember 13 of them. And I used to run from wharf to wharf wheeling oysters when I get outta school, for a quarter, 50 cents or whatever they gave me.

BRENT LEWIS: From the boat to the packing house?

LEWIS CARTER: [00:09:19] Right. I run from wharf to wharf, catching boats, wheeling to make some money, you know. And I used to tell those captains, "I'm gonna catch out tomorrow, Cap." And they all, "Oh Lewis, you ain't going, you've been telling me that." So I told Captain Charlie Bryan that, and one morning I showed up on a Saturday. He didn't have no market and him and Billy Benton was sitting in the truck talking. He, he said, "Aw if it ain't Lewis showed up. He said, "We're gonna go soon as it lighten up." And I went out there and he said, "Lewis, where are your gloves?" And I pulled out a proper brown cotton glove. This was in December. He said, "Oh my God, they ain't no good to you." And he looked around in the floor and found a rubber glove froze to the floor and he beat it

out. He said, "Put your left hand in this and cull." And I did. And I culled all day long. I did. I think they probably [unclear] twice they did. And on we sold to a market boat in the evening. Back then, the old market boat would come up alongside you and you'd sell to them. You know. And this was about 1957, somewhere around there.

BRENT LEWIS: So that was the first time you actually went out?

LEWIS CARTER: [00:10:29] Right. And I would go with him on Saturdays or days we didn't have school, teacher's meeting. And, and I did that until 1961. I just dropped outta school and went full time with him.

BRENT LEWIS: Right.

LEWIS CARTER: [00:10:42] And...

BRENT LEWIS: Oystering mostly?

LEWIS CARTER: [00:10:45] Oystering. And, he would eat his lunch and I would take his tongs and get up there and catch a few. And he found out I could catch a few. And he got his father to make me a pair. He did. And I worked with him full time then.

BRENT LEWIS: You stayed with him for a while?

LEWIS CARTER: [00:11:00] I stayed with him probably until I went in the Army. I did.

BRENT LEWIS: How old were you when you were in the Army?

LEWIS CARTER: [00:11:06] I went in the Army, I had just turned 18.

BRENT LEWIS: Were you drafted or did you...

LEWIS CARTER: [00:11:10] I was drafted.

BRENT LEWIS: Vietnam era.

LEWIS CARTER: [00:11:12] No, I lucked out of Vietnam. I went to Germany to serve on NATO's forces, when they had the Cold War with Russia.

BRENT LEWIS: Had you ever been anywhere off of, out of the area like that? That had to have been...

LEWIS CARTER: [00:11:25] No more than... Back home we used to go up to Jersey and work on the drudge boats. I went up there when I was 14 and worked on those old spat boats and come back home on a Sunday. Sixty-five dollars a week down on your knees, picking those oysters.

BRENT LEWIS: Is that hard work?

LEWIS CARTER: [00:11:43] It's very hard.

BRENT LEWIS: Yeah. Sounds like you were a hard worker all your life though.

LEWIS CARTER: [00:11:49] Oh, I have been. Yeah. Yeah, yeah. Yeah.

BRENT LEWIS: That money you made as a young man, as a kid particularly, did that go, was that your money or did you help the family?

LEWIS CARTER: [00:12:00] No, mom had her hands open. [laugh]

Sometimes she would call me, pat me down see if I got sticky fingers. [laugh]

BRENT LEWIS: Yeah. You were expected to contribute.

LEWIS CARTER: [00:12:13] Yeah. Oh yeah. And those old people, you couldn't fool them. One day she said, "Lewis, is this all you made?" I said, "Yeah." She said, "Take your shoe off." I said, "Mom, ain't nothing in my shoe." [laugh] I take it off. And sure enough, Abraham Lincoln laying in there, arms folded. She [laugh] take care of him too she did. [laugh]

BRENT LEWIS: Oh, that's too much, man.

LEWIS CARTER: [00:12:36] Yeah.

BRENT LEWIS: How long did you stay live with your mom and dad?

LEWIS CARTER: [00:12:40] Let me see. I guess up until I got in my teenage years, I went up to Queenstown, stayed with my uncle. He was her brother and he had more room up there, you know, and I stayed with him till pretty much till I went in the Army.

BRENT LEWIS: You know some of the other people we've interviewed who grew up down Kent Narrows have told us that there was a almost a bias against people who, even from the Black people in Grasonville didn't like the Black people who Kent Narrows.

LEWIS CARTER: [00:13:12] Right, right. Because you lived in conditions I guess, that they didn't live in and, you know, but it was, it was all we had and we could, we couldn't do no better, you know?

BRENT LEWIS: Yeah. Did your parents live there all their rest of their lives or did they move on.

LEWIS CARTER: [00:13:28] No, they moved on. My father was there until he passed when I was 18, he did. And mom, mom lived up in Grasonville with, beside her daughter, my sister, and we put her in a nursing home over Denton and she stayed over there and she lived about 86, 87, somewhere around there.

BRENT LEWIS: How long were you in Germany?

LEWIS CARTER: [00:13:54] I was in Germany about two years, mostly two years on.

BRENT LEWIS: When you mustered out, did you just come home and go back to work?

LEWIS CARTER: [00:14:03] When I come back home, I gradually went back out on the water and I had a boat before I left. I bought a boat when I was 17 and my brother, I left it down here, and he sold my boat. And I would guess I was waiting all that 10 years getting a boat. Money was hard to come by, and especially if you ain't had no collateral,

you couldn't borrow no money from no banks or nothing. So gradually I got back in another boat.

BRENT LEWIS: That first boat, where did it come from?

LEWIS CARTER: [00:14:30] I bought it from Mills Millington.

Mills Middleton. That was his name.

BRENT LEWIS: Was he a local guy?

LEWIS CARTER: [00:14:36] He was a local guy. He... I believe he worked for RB Becker, mostly he did. And he was waterman, his little boat. He had it tied right there to the jetty. Right to the pier there and I bought it from there.

BRENT LEWIS: And your brother sold it while

LEWIS CARTER: [00:14:54] Yes, he did. And sold it. He did.

BRENT LEWIS: So, [laugh] so when you came back, did you go hand tonging?

LEWIS CARTER: [00:15:01] I did. I got in a boat with different ones and Captain John Soule [?] in Grasonville. I knew you knew him and different ones. Of course, I knew all those guys when I grew up. I knew every one of them out there, Black and white. I knew them all and they were out. They would carry me, I was getting booked with either one of them until I...

BRENT LEWIS: Would you say that Charles Bryan was your main mentor, though? The person who taught you most?

LEWIS CARTER: [00:15:23] Yeah. So he was, uh-huh.

BRENT LEWIS: What kind of lessons did you learn from him?

LEWIS CARTER: [00:15:28] I learned a lot from him. A whole lot. A waterman and, and how to be a good person and all. Because he was always telling me, "Lewis, you behaving yourself? Yeah. [laugh] Behaving myself.

BRENT LEWIS: It sounds like he thought a lot of you.

LEWIS CARTER: [00:15:45] Yeah, he did. Yeah, he did. Yeah.

And his Uncle Coursey he come here from Boston and my brother, taking a liking to him. He used to rent rowboats out for him and run charter boat parties for him. He wasn't but 12 years old.

BRENT LEWIS: For of Coursey Bryan?

LEWIS CARTER: [00:16:00] Yeah. And I would go out with Coursey sometimes. Went out the Potomac River with him when I was 18. I did.

BRENT LEWIS: Yeah. And then of course, his brother, Kirby was...

LEWIS CARTER: [00:16:12] Charles's father.

BRENT LEWIS: Charles's father.

LEWIS CARTER: [00:16:14] Right.

BRENT LEWIS: And he made tongs, so was that the kind of person that you got your equipment from?

LEWIS CARTER: [00:16:21] Right, right. He made, he made equipment for most of the watermen around here. And back then he did, you know.

BRENT LEWIS: What kind of equipment did he make?

LEWIS CARTER: [00:16:32] He made hand tongs and I guess any kind of metal that you needed, you know, he was something like a blacksmith, and a woodworker. He did all that.

BRENT LEWIS: Yeah. Kind of that tradition that maybe it's hard to find people who know how to do those things now, right.

LEWIS CARTER: [00:16:47] Right.

BRENT LEWIS: There aren't a lot of people who make hand tongs or...

LEWIS CARTER: [00:16:52] They only got maybe a couple left, you know. A fellow down to [unclear], he makes them. And I think there's a fellow down at Bivalve used to make them. Messick's.

BRENT LEWIS: Okay. But it's harder to find people to, to that do that kind of stuff, right?

LEWIS CARTER: [00:17:09] Right, right.

BRENT LEWIS: Plus as a waterman, you have to be good at some different things, right?

LEWIS CARTER: [00:17:16] Right, right. I had to learn to work on your own equipment, you know, so you don't have to carry it here and carry it there, you know.

BRENT LEWIS: You kind of gotta be a carpenter.

LEWIS CARTER: [00:17:25] Right. Carpenter.

BRENT LEWIS: Welder.

LEWIS CARTER: [00:17:27] Right.

BRENT LEWIS: An astronomer.

LEWIS CARTER: [00:17:27] Right.

BRENT LEWIS: All that, right?

LEWIS CARTER: [00:17:28] Right.

BRENT LEWIS: Do you think that those skills that you have, you've kind of learned over your whole life.

LEWIS CARTER: [00:17:36] Right. Right. Yes sir.

BRENT LEWIS: Is there anything now that surprises you or have you pretty much dealt with it? No,

LEWIS CARTER: [00:17:44] No, I've been doing it so long. I've been through just about all of it, I guess. I've been out there 63 years. I'm still there so.

BRENT LEWIS: You're still working?

LEWIS CARTER: [00:17:52] Still working.

BRENT LEWIS: Are you oystering?

LEWIS CARTER: [00:17:55] I oystered this spring, I did. I oystered until March 29th.

BRENT LEWIS: Still hand tonging?

LEWIS CARTER: [00:18:01] By myself in a boat, by myself.

BRENT LEWIS: That's crazy. That's wild, man.

LEWIS CARTER: [00:18:05] Yeah.

BRENT LEWIS: So you go out on your own?

LEWIS CARTER: [00:18:09] I, I go out days I feel like going. I
can do three days a week, four days,

BRENT LEWIS: Whatever you want.

LEWIS CARTER: [00:18:15] Sometimes five, if you don't watch me.

BRENT LEWIS: Where do you keep your boat?

LEWIS CARTER: [00:18:18] Well, this, this oyster season I kept
it down at there to Bozman, down there to PT Hamilton.

BRENT LEWIS: So you drive down to Bozman the days you want to
work?

LEWIS CARTER: [00:18:26] Mm-Hmm.

BRENT LEWIS: Will you be bringing it back up for crab season?

LEWIS CARTER: [00:18:29] Well, I already brought it back up.

BRENT LEWIS: You already brought it back up?

LEWIS CARTER: [00:18:32] Yeah, I brought it back the next day
after we quit. I brought it back.

BRENT LEWIS: Where do you keep it up here?

LEWIS CARTER: [00:18:38] Right in the Narrows at the marina
there.

BRENT LEWIS: You never, kind of followed the path of the head boat captains though?

LEWIS CARTER: [00:18:47] No. No. I never did like it.

BRENT LEWIS: That didn't appeal to you?

LEWIS CARTER: [00:18:51] No, my brother did. I didn't do it.

BRENT LEWIS: Why is that? What do you...

LEWIS CARTER: [00:18:56] Well, I'd rather go catch my own crab, my oyster. I don't, one thing I don't like to deal with people, you know, carry me here, carry me there and, and when you ain't catching them no fish, you know, you gotta ride them around, look for some fish, you know, you can't just take their money, you gotta ride them for some fish and all that.

BRENT LEWIS: Sounds like you like the independence of what you do.

LEWIS CARTER: [00:19:16] Right.

BRENT LEWIS: Is that one of the best parts of your job?

LEWIS CARTER: [00:19:19] Yes, it is. Yes, it is.

BRENT LEWIS: What else do you love about working on the water?

LEWIS CARTER: [00:19:24] Well, just working there in general.

And you know, you your own boss and it's nice and peaceful out there. And if you don't catch nothing, you ain't got nobody to blame but yourself, [laugh] you know? And all.

BRENT LEWIS: You oyster and crab in the summer?

LEWIS CARTER: [00:19:43] I do. Yes, I do.

BRENT LEWIS: Are those the two fisheries that you've mostly worked or have you done other things?

LEWIS CARTER: [00:19:49] Right. I, I've done other things. I, I've worked land jobs, you know.

BRENT LEWIS: What land jobs have you had?

LEWIS CARTER: [00:19:55] I worked through, let me see, I worked Silver Springs back in 1962 over at the [unclear] Nursery on Colesville Road for a dollar sixty cent an hour. That was the top wages back then.

BRENT LEWIS: So how long did you do that?

LEWIS CARTER: [00:20:11] I did it back, I just did three or four summers when I wasn't oystering. I need something to fill in, you know, and Friels. I worked a couple years.

BRENT LEWIS: Friels?

LEWIS CARTER: [00:20:20] Cannery.

BRENT LEWIS: The cannery.

LEWIS CARTER: [00:20:23] Right. Yeah.

BRENT LEWIS: What did you do at the cannery?

LEWIS CARTER: [00:20:25] Well, I worked in the warehouse most time up and did.

BRENT LEWIS: Because that was big business here locally, right?

LEWIS CARTER: [00:20:32] It was, yeah. Spring of the year.

Times was hard in the spring of the year. It was harder than wintertime, really. You know, you didn't have much to do. You had to...

BRENT LEWIS: Between oyster season and whatever you did during the summer, that was the toughest time of year.

LEWIS CARTER: [00:20:47] Right, right, right.

BRENT LEWIS: How many kids do you have?

LEWIS CARTER: [00:20:51] I have five now. My son passed 2021.

BRENT LEWIS: Condolences.

LEWIS CARTER: [00:20:58] Yeah, he was 41.

BRENT LEWIS: So you had children that you had to take care of.

LEWIS CARTER: [00:21:05] Right. I'm am still taking care of them. [laugh] I don't think you ever stop taking care of them, you know. [laugh]

BRENT LEWIS: Did you, when did you get married?

LEWIS CARTER: [00:21:16] Got married about in 1969, 1970, somewhere around there.

BRENT LEWIS: Is your wife still with us?

LEWIS CARTER: [00:21:23] Yeah, she is.

BRENT LEWIS: That's great.

LEWIS CARTER: [00:21:26] Yeah.

BRENT LEWIS: But you guys had a challenge, you had children to raise.

LEWIS CARTER: [00:21:31] Right.

BRENT LEWIS: Did she work as well?

LEWIS CARTER: [00:21:32] Yes, she did. She worked in the seafood processing plants, you know, she shucked clams and different things. She worked in restaurants and she don't do nothing now. She is... she's paralyzed on one side from a stroke she had. And she's 72. You know, she's elderly, you know.

BRENT LEWIS: Sure. Still at home with you though?

LEWIS CARTER: [00:21:54] Right. I takes care of her, I do.

BRENT LEWIS: That's awesome, man. When she worked at the packing houses, not a lot of people realize that that is skilled labor. That you have to know what you're doing to do that.

LEWIS CARTER: [00:22:08] Right. Right, right, right.

BRENT LEWIS: Yeah. Can she shuck a oyster pretty quickly, clean a crab pretty quickly?

LEWIS CARTER: [00:22:17] Back then she could, yes. She could. Yeah.

BRENT LEWIS: Back then, right?

LEWIS CARTER: [00:22:19] Yeah. She only has use of one hand now, so she couldn't do it now.

BRENT LEWIS: Couldn't do it now. But back then she was pretty quick.

LEWIS CARTER: [00:22:26] Oh yeah. Yeah.

BRENT LEWIS: When you mentioned your first boat, how many boats have you owned?

LEWIS CARTER: [00:22:35] I've owned six.

BRENT LEWIS: What's your current, what do you have now?

LEWIS CARTER: [00:22:40] I have just 38 foot boxed iron. It's Captain Warren Butler's last boat he bought. I own it.

BRENT LEWIS: And Captain Warren was a very well-known local.

LEWIS CARTER: [00:22:53] He was.

BRENT LEWIS: Waterman. African American Waterman.

LEWIS CARTER: [00:22:55] Yes, he was, yeah.

BRENT LEWIS: Passed recently, right. In the last few years.

LEWIS CARTER: [00:22:59] Right. He was a good waterman.

BRENT LEWIS: What makes a good waterman?

LEWIS CARTER: [00:23:03] Well, he was a good skilled waterman.

He, he knowed the water fluently and he was charter boat captain. And he did, he did it all on the water. He did. And he, he was an excellent, good waterman. I remember when I was about 13, I was culling oysters for a fella and a fella fell overboard off one of those boats and different ones would reach for him and in the Narrows that tide run right hard. He went around some boats. He went under some, when he come past Captain Warren's boat he turned his tong loose and jumped right on his back and steered him

into another fella's boat. And they pulled him out the water.

BRENT LEWIS: Have you ever had a close call like that yourself?

LEWIS CARTER: [00:23:47] Well, I fell overboard, you know, and everybody help, but the closest call I've had was working on the ice and stepped in a little small hole and lost everything. And I was in there about, I guess about seven or eight minutes, you know, before they got me outta there.

BRENT LEWIS: Were other boats around you, is there?

LEWIS CARTER: [00:24:06] No, no.

BRENT LEWIS: People on your boat?

LEWIS CARTER: [00:24:09] We were pulling a skiff across the ice. We had been oystering and it got dark and we decided to go in and I stepped in that small hole.

BRENT LEWIS: Wow.

LEWIS CARTER: [00:24:20] Yeah. And ice, ice is real scary, you know. And every time I'd go to get up, it was breaking in and the hole was getting bigger. And I reached way out there where it was hard and pushed down and laid forward real easy and got out of the... I did. It's very dangerous, ice is.

BRENT LEWIS: That sounds like a real close call, man. How'd you get in? Did you? [laugh]

LEWIS CARTER: [00:24:44] Well, the rest of the ice was solid.

Left the hard, but just stepped in that particular little hole. I don't know if it was air pocket or what, but it just gave it in. It did.

BRENT LEWIS: Now in like in 1976, 1977, there was a big freeze up.

LEWIS CARTER: [00:24:58] 1977, it was.

BRENT LEWIS: How did you guys work around that?

LEWIS CARTER: [00:25:02] Well the ice breaker come through and broke the Narrows out. And we got behind him and went round the channel there. And we worked all that day. We did. And that spring I went to Louisiana. My oldest brother was down there. I worked on a fish boat down there.

BRENT LEWIS: What did they fish for down there?

LEWIS CARTER: [00:25:24] Menhaden.

BRENT LEWIS: Menhaden.

LEWIS CARTER: [00:25:26] Menhaden and anything that's in there with them that presses the oil out of them and make women's cosmetics and things of it.

BRENT LEWIS: Netting? They do that with netting?

LEWIS CARTER: [00:25:37] Netting. Yeah.

BRENT LEWIS: Did you ever fish nets up here?

LEWIS CARTER: [00:25:40] No. My father did in Lewes, Delaware.

The same factory down there was in Lewes, Delaware at one time. And they had old wooden boats and they had 32 men on each boat. When I worked down there, they had a... they had a big power block that got most of that net back. And they only had 16 men on a boat. Sixteen men and a crew.

BRENT LEWIS: How long would they go out for?

LEWIS CARTER: [00:26:06] Until they got loaded, really.

Sometime it would take us a day to load and first of the season you do more riding than anything looking for fish. And they would bunch up after that water got warm and they had spotter planes to spot them, you know, and you would go around them, go around them, and they would drop [unclear] on them and pump them back in and [unclear] them. Or sometime it took about three, four hours to pump them in. And you would go to the factory and all and get unloaded and go right back. Like that. Yeah.

BRENT LEWIS: Now I guess people don't realize that being a waterman means sometimes you have to travel.

LEWIS CARTER: [00:26:47] Sometimes you do, right.

BRENT LEWIS: You gotta go where they're...

LEWIS CARTER: [00:26:51] Right.

BRENT LEWIS: Where they're at, right.

LEWIS CARTER: [00:26:53] Right, right.

BRENT LEWIS: And you have to adapt to the market.

LEWIS CARTER: [00:26:56] Well, yeah. Yes. Yes. You have.

BRENT LEWIS: So when you were growing up, for instance
softshell clams, they... a lot of people didn't eat fish
clams, right. They're mostly bait.

LEWIS CARTER: [00:27:09] Bait. Right. Right.

BRENT LEWIS: But that's changed.

LEWIS CARTER: [00:27:14] That's changed now, right? Well,
softshell clams is, is beginning to get just about extinct,
you know. You know, they catch them a certain time of
year, but back then they was big booming business.
Clamming was, just like oyster was.

BRENT LEWIS: What? Why do you think they're going extinct?

LEWIS CARTER: [00:27:29] I don't know. Can't nobody predict
nature. You don't know. Just like oysters. They were
plentiful years back. Now they dying off. I guess it's a
cycle they go through. And all, you know. And.

BRENT LEWIS: Do, have you seen them coming back though? I've
heard the last couple years have been pretty good.

LEWIS CARTER: [00:27:47] What, clams?

BRENT LEWIS: Oysters.

LEWIS CARTER: [00:27:47] Oysters. Certain places they did.
They died off pretty much last oyster season they did, you

know. But like I say, it goes through a cycle like that where they die off and come back and all.

BRENT LEWIS: And you saw the seventies when the diseases, right?

LEWIS CARTER: [00:28:06] Right. MSX disease, they call it, got into them, some kind of Dermo and all. But I've seen it before. You know, they never knew the name of it. Parasite, nothing like that, you know. All you knew that they were dying, you know?

BRENT LEWIS: So you've seen cycles.

LEWIS CARTER: [00:28:24] Right.

BRENT LEWIS: For your whole career?

LEWIS CARTER: [00:28:26] I have.

BRENT LEWIS: Do you think that those are natural cycles?

LEWIS CARTER: [00:28:30] Well, they got more against them coming back now because the water's a lot dirtier than it was back then. You know, the water was pretty much clean back then. We used to swim in that water and it was clean. I wouldn't dare I get in there now, you know?

BRENT LEWIS: I agree. Do you eat seafood? Do you eat?

LEWIS CARTER: [00:28:46] Yes, I eat them. Yes I do. Oysters, fish, clam. I don't eat crabs.

BRENT LEWIS: You don't eat crabs?

LEWIS CARTER: [00:28:53] No. Crabs.

BRENT LEWIS: Why?

LEWIS CARTER: [00:28:55] Crabs. Crabs. I got hold something bad into them and they gave me the hives and all. And I don't eat them no more. Not good.

BRENT LEWIS: Used to though.

LEWIS CARTER: [00:29:04] Yeah. Used to eat them. Yeah.

BRENT LEWIS: But got sick from them?

LEWIS CARTER: [00:29:06] Right. Right.

BRENT LEWIS: That the only seafood you don't eat?

LEWIS CARTER: [00:29:09] Well, pretty much, yes. Pretty much.

BRENT LEWIS: What were the best times in your career? What do you look back on and, and think those were the days.

LEWIS CARTER: [00:29:22] The best time was growing up, working as a... working the water and early. That was, I consider that good times. It was.

BRENT LEWIS: Even though it was hard.

LEWIS CARTER: [00:29:30] It was hard, but you got used to the hardest. And you think nothing about the hard just like me now, I'm 77 now and can catch oysters with the average young man, you know? Because I knows how to do it and do it easy, you know? So it don't take effect on you.

BRENT LEWIS: And one thing that has changed too, I imagine is your... the amount you could catch, right?

LEWIS CARTER: [00:29:54] Right.

BRENT LEWIS: What was it in the old days, how much could you guys...

LEWIS CARTER: [00:29:57] Well, in the old days, you didn't get much for oysters and you could catch a boat load. Me and my brother and another fellow, we used to catch 75, 77 bushels. And now you can only catch 12 per license.

BRENT LEWIS: Per license on the boat.

LEWIS CARTER: [00:30:14] Right.

BRENT LEWIS: And with you, you're the only one you do your own culling and everything.

LEWIS CARTER: [00:30:18] Right. Right, right. We threw them right on the floor. Now you have to put them in a basket.

BRENT LEWIS: When they come up.

LEWIS CARTER: [00:30:25] When they come up, you have to put them in a basket, put tags on them, where they was caught, the date.

BRENT LEWIS: I didn't know that.

LEWIS CARTER: [00:30:32] Oh yeah. Before you leave the rock, they got to be on there. But back in the day we just threw them over the [calling?] board, right on the floor.

BRENT LEWIS: And then at dockside they would bushel them up, right?

LEWIS CARTER: [00:30:44] Right. They would shovel them out. But now they take the basket and just set it in a metal tub

and dump them like that. But it's... the tag's gotta be on there before you leave the oyster rock.

BRENT LEWIS: Where do you sell to?

LEWIS CARTER: [00:30:56] Well, the... I sell to mostly where I oyster at when I'm up here in Oyster, I sell them to Jason Ruth's down there. I sell them to PT Hamilton and, and all.

BRENT LEWIS: Yeah. PT Hambleton. Is he... they're one of the bigger buyers down in Talbot County?

LEWIS CARTER: [00:31:13] I imagine right now he is, yes. But back then you had plenty buyers. You know, Higgins bought back in the day. Ed Higgins and different ones, you know, then you had buyers in Tilghman's Island and all. But I guess the buyers is getting the stink just like the oysters is. Yeah.

BRENT LEWIS: And up here, the buyers sometimes were characters. They were like, I, I think I've heard a lot of stories about like Jean Stelmach's, right?

LEWIS CARTER: [00:31:41] Right, right, right. She was a big oyster buyer back then.

BRENT LEWIS: Right there in Kent Narrows.

LEWIS CARTER: [00:31:46] Right. That was right there. Where the... where the Bridges Restaurant is now.

BRENT LEWIS: She was quite a character too, I understand.

LEWIS CARTER: [00:31:54] She was. Yeah. She was. Until you got to know and understand her. She was a good person. She was. Yeah.

BRENT LEWIS: Do you think that for the most part, everybody in the industry, both buyers and the waterman themselves, everybody was pretty good intentioned?

LEWIS CARTER: [00:32:11] Right, yeah, they were. Yeah. They were, they all knew one another, you know, personally and all.

BRENT LEWIS: Yeah. Did Black and white watermen get along pretty well?

LEWIS CARTER: [00:32:20] Yeah, they did back then, you know. Yeah, they did. Yeah. Yeah. Because I, I worked with a lot of white watermen back then. A lot of them. Not just Charles Barnes, but quite a few, I did. They all treated me good, they did.

BRENT LEWIS: Did. Who comes to mind? Anybody?

LEWIS CARTER: [00:32:36] Well, the Barnes I worked with those, they was brothers in Grasonville. I worked with two or three of them. I did. And one of them used to one, one I worked with Mr. [unclear] and he encouraged me to save some money, you know, because I used to smoke his cigarettes. [laugh] He said, "Lewis," he said, "I paid you good yesterday and you smoke." He said, "You go to the bank and

get you a savings account. Don't mess with no checking account because it gets you in trouble." I didn't understand what he was meant by that, but I did. This was about 1962 and I had my own savings account and, and all. And he encouraged me to save money, you know.

BRENT LEWIS: Did that help you when you were ready to buy another boat?

LEWIS CARTER: [00:33:18] Yes, it did. Yeah, it did. Because I learned, I learned from each one of those watermen. I learned something different from each one of them, you know.

BRENT LEWIS: Like what?

LEWIS CARTER: [00:33:26] Well, they knowed how to provide... survive in hard times. That was the main thing I learned from them, you know? Yeah. And to put away some money for hard time. I learned that from them.

BRENT LEWIS: What were some of the hardest times?

LEWIS CARTER: [00:33:38] Well, with hard times when, when that river would freeze over, it was nothing doing. I seen it freeze over and didn't open up until that spring. That's a long time.

BRENT LEWIS: How'd you survive in a time like that?

LEWIS CARTER: [00:33:50] Different ways. I would, I would go down and, and, and unload trucks. Like when he got oysters

coming in on trucks from other places and that, and, and I'd catch a day, go oyster with somebody. Or back then a lot of them would go and cut holes in the ice and oyster and...

BRENT LEWIS: Drop their tongs through the holes?

LEWIS CARTER: [00:34:09] Right. Cut a big plug out and shove it back up underneath the ice and oystering like that.

BRENT LEWIS: Could you catch many oysters that way?

LEWIS CARTER: [00:34:17] You caught enough to survive.

BRENT LEWIS: Get through the day, right?

LEWIS CARTER: [00:34:20] Like you caught enough to...

BRENT LEWIS: Where would they do that? Like out on eastern Bay, out on Prospect?

LEWIS CARTER: [00:34:24] Different places up there in Marshall Creek and right there, the Prospect there, where that country club at? We used to go there and walk about half a mile right in that middle to find our hill and cut a place out and carry old tar with us and set it afire so you could keep warm and all.

BRENT LEWIS: Wow. Yeah. How would you get them back? How would you get the oysters back to the shore?

LEWIS CARTER: [00:34:47] We would pull them back on a sled across the ice and load them on truck carry them to the oyster house. Yeah.

BRENT LEWIS: Did you ever dive or run divers?

LEWIS CARTER: [00:34:57] No, I never dove for oysters and I didn't think much of diving for oysters.

BRENT LEWIS: Why not?

LEWIS CARTER: [00:35:02] Well, one thing, diving, you take from, you go there and pick, pick, you don't disturb nothing else. And like a hand tong, it keeps the bottom worked up and all. And I never thought much of diving. And when they started doing it, it was unregulated. They dove everywhere, up in creeks and here and there, you know. I think it's the worst thing that, that that's been started.

BRENT LEWIS: Is that right?

LEWIS CARTER: [00:35:26] That's what I think.

BRENT LEWIS: Because they could do what they wanted.

LEWIS CARTER: [00:35:28] Right. It was... it was unregulated for a while, then they started adding a few regulations to it. And I don't still today, I don't think much of it.

BRENT LEWIS: Do people still dive or are there still divers out there?

LEWIS CARTER: [00:35:40] Oh yes, yes they do. Yeah, they do.

BRENT LEWIS: But it was really, when it first came on, a lot of people diving.

LEWIS CARTER: [00:35:46] It was a lot of people diving and they didn't realize... some of them realized what they was doing and stopped doing it, you know. And some just didn't or don't care, you know, or this or that or for other reason. Then some don't know how to hand tong and they just dive, you know. You know. But they got, like I said, they gotta make a living too also. But I never thought much of it, I did.

BRENT LEWIS: It sounds like, you know, for the most part that that's always been one of the challenges is, you know, to feed your family...

LEWIS CARTER: [00:36:16] Right.

BRENT LEWIS: But also to conserve.

LEWIS CARTER: [00:36:17] Right. Right, right,

BRENT LEWIS: Right. And there's always been watermen who are willing to go out and catch everything today and leave nothing for tomorrow.

LEWIS CARTER: [00:36:27] Right?

BRENT LEWIS: Correct?

LEWIS CARTER: [00:36:28] Right.

BRENT LEWIS: Do you also see that... it seems like in recent years the watermen have kind of come together more, but in the past it would, it seems like it was hard to get everybody on the same page sometimes.

LEWIS CARTER: [00:36:45] Right. Right. That's right.

BRENT LEWIS: Independence.

LEWIS CARTER: [00:36:48] Independence, right. And back in the day you had... you had county lines. In other words, you couldn't oyster on Talbot County side, you had to stay within your jurisdiction until about 1970 and they opened it up statewide. But prior to that you could, you had to work right in the county where you lived in.

BRENT LEWIS: Did that cause problems?

LEWIS CARTER: [00:37:11] Not really. Not really, it didn't.

Because it was competitive. We had just as many oysters as Talbot County had, and they had as many as we had and, you know.

BRENT LEWIS: So you were very careful not to cross those lines.

LEWIS CARTER: [00:37:24] Well, it was a... everybody knew where the alarms was at and you would get a ticket if you was caught across the line, you know?

BRENT LEWIS: Plus you got along with those watermen down there.

LEWIS CARTER: [00:37:35] Right. Yeah. You did. Right, right. Yeah. You do. And as you always went by, I got to know watermen from other counties by working among them, you know? Yeah.

BRENT LEWIS: Is there a camaraderie with waterman in general?

Like when you go to those places, you got to know them...

those friendships were built?

LEWIS CARTER: [00:37:56] Oh, yes. Yes, it was. Yes. Yes.

Quite a few of them know me from down that Bay and this and

that. Up the river there. Yeah.

BRENT LEWIS: You've really built a reputation here over the years.

LEWIS CARTER: [00:38:10] Right, right.

BRENT LEWIS: Do you have any superstitions about working on the water? Do you one of those guys who don't paint your bottom blue or take bananas or...

LEWIS CARTER: [00:38:21] I've only heard all of that, but I don't believe that.

BRENT LEWIS: You don't believe?

LEWIS CARTER: [00:38:24] I don't believe, no.

BRENT LEWIS: Have you ever...

LEWIS CARTER: [00:38:26] I cut bananas myself, but... [laugh]

BRENT LEWIS: Have you ever seen anything strange or unexplainable out there?

LEWIS CARTER: [00:38:34] Strange or unexplainable? I don't know. Things got, things happened, you know, there. And I remember once I was crabbing, it was in May. I was laying my line out and I seen some people in the water waving. I

thought they was swimming, you know. And I waved back and I went, kept laying my line. They was waved again. And I said, "Darn what they swimming? This water's cold. It's in May." They had turned the boat over and I seen stuff floating and, and all, and I stopped laying the line, just throwed the rest in the water and went to them. And one fella was laid up on top of the water. I thought he had drowned, but he had a heart attack. And that little fella, he was holding to the keel of the boat. The boat was turned upside down. They were Amish people from Lancaster, Pennsylvania. And one of them, the older fellas stood up and the old aluminum boat, lost his balance and turned it over, he did, yes.

BRENT LEWIS: What you do, get him in your boat.

LEWIS CARTER: [00:39:36] I pulled up the, the young fella in, then we got the other fella in and he was all blue and he, he had suffocated, he had had an heart attack.

BRENT LEWIS: He die?

LEWIS CARTER: [00:39:44] He died. Yeah. Yeah. But other than that, you don't see, I haven't seen too much, you know? Extraordinary, you know.

BRENT LEWIS: Have you ever found anything? I know sometimes these guys pull up, you know, artifacts and stuff from colonial times and all that.

LEWIS CARTER: [00:40:06] I've caught old, couple old soda bottles or something like that. They come from that old bottling company used to be up there originally at Marlboro. I don't know if you remember it not, but, used to be a bottling company up in, originally at Marlboro. I've caught a couple of bottles and old Coke bottles and different things like that.

BRENT LEWIS: But like you mentioned before, it's also part of the idea of turning that bottom over a lot, right?

LEWIS CARTER: [00:40:31] Right, right. It produces more.

BRENT LEWIS: It makes it a healthier bay.

LEWIS CARTER: [00:40:35] Right, right. It produces more when you turn it over and all the catches spat better and all. Just like I say, well a diver will go there and just pick, pick it, don't turn over, don't disturb nothing around it. You know, and it'll lay there and silt over. Most of it will.

BRENT LEWIS: So it's important you think, to keep that bottom turned.

LEWIS CARTER: [00:40:54] Keep that bottom turned over so to produce. Right.

BRENT LEWIS: So is dredging...

LEWIS CARTER: [00:41:00] Dredging is good for it, yeah, it is. All that old dead stuff been laying there for years and

years. It turns it over, you know? So to produce, so to catch spat and all.

BRENT LEWIS: Has that always been understood that that's important?

LEWIS CARTER: [00:41:14] Well, the watermen understand it, but I don't know the, the regulations restrictions they got now. They either don't care or, or they see things different I guess, you know?

BRENT LEWIS: Well that brings me to this question. What do you think that people don't understand about your job? About what you do? Like the general community?

LEWIS CARTER: [00:41:32] Well, time is changing really. And, you know, they got all the things and, and they just push watermen, I guess. Feel like you just being pushed aside or back in the corner somewhere, you know, and, and all.

BRENT LEWIS: Do you think that there's less understanding and respect for what you do?

LEWIS CARTER: [00:41:52] I wouldn't say that, but I guess it's, everything is controlled now by money. I guess they got other ways to make it can make more and faster so you just don't matter, you know? Back in the day, but back then oyster was big booming business back then, you know, and it was, it, it, a lot of people, you know, was employed doing it and all.

BRENT LEWIS: All. So financially it less impact than it used to be.

LEWIS CARTER: [00:42:16] Right. Right.

BRENT LEWIS: So it's not as important to the economy.

LEWIS CARTER: [00:42:20] Right. Right, right.

BRENT LEWIS: You've seen a lot of changes, like even down in Kent Narrows.

LEWIS CARTER: [00:42:24] Yes, I have. Yes, I have.

BRENT LEWIS: What are some of the biggest changes you've seen in the business?

LEWIS CARTER: [00:42:32] Nothing but it's just depleting, you know, it's, it's, it's getting smaller. I'll put that that way. Yeah. It's getting smaller.

BRENT LEWIS: Fewer and fewer of you.

LEWIS CARTER: [00:42:41] Right.

BRENT LEWIS: Did anybody in your family follow in your footsteps?

LEWIS CARTER: [00:42:47] In my, younger than me?

BRENT LEWIS: Yeah, the younger...

LEWIS CARTER: [00:42:50] I got a brother, my brother, Dennis. He, he, he was a waterman until he started having little health issues and things. But younger than him, no.

BRENT LEWIS: None of the kids

LEWIS CARTER: [00:43:00] No.

BRENT LEWIS: Have really followed in your footsteps?

LEWIS CARTER: [00:43:02] No.

BRENT LEWIS: Are you happy about that? How do you feel about that?

LEWIS CARTER: [00:43:06] Well, one thing about it, a lot of them not able to do the work that, that I do or have done. You know, kids see it, each generation is getting weaker and wiser or, you know, they can take a little phone and do this and do that when I can't, you know? They didn't have it my day.

BRENT LEWIS: But your business has changed too over time.

LEWIS CARTER: [00:43:25] It, it has.

BRENT LEWIS: The way you do it, right.

LEWIS CARTER: [00:43:27] Right, right. It has, yes. It has.

BRENT LEWIS: You fished and worked on the water before, you know, GPS and depth finder.

LEWIS CARTER: [00:43:39] Right.

BRENT LEWIS: And all, you had to have some skills.

LEWIS CARTER: [00:43:41] Right.

BRENT LEWIS: What kind of, what skills did you have to build to be a good waterman?

LEWIS CARTER: [00:43:46] Well, you have to really know the bottoms and, and know where you was at. I, I oystered with a fella and he told me, he said he, "Had to come in and go

to a funeral at two o'clock." And he said, "I don't have no compass." They were so foggy you barely could see him in the boat. And he... we rode round and round in circles and all of a sudden it went, went round nor'easter and it would blow off nor'easter Kent Narrows in your face. And he smelled those oyster shells from Kent Narrows. And he said, "You smell those shells?" And I said, "No." He said, "Turn around in the wind." And I turned around. He said, "That's home that away." And it was.

BRENT LEWIS: Through smell.

LEWIS CARTER: [00:44:23] It was, that was Captain Coursey Brown. Yeah, it was.

BRENT LEWIS: No kidding.

LEWIS CARTER: [00:44:28] Yeah, it did. And it was foggy. I mean, foggy, foggy. But that smell from that shell pile. Yeah. He run into the wind, he did. And all of a sudden one of the more red can bouys popped right up. Went right on in to Kent Narrows. They did. Yeah. Yeah.

BRENT LEWIS: Most people wouldn't know that now. And of course the shells aren't big piles of shells aren't there like they used to.

LEWIS CARTER: [00:44:52] They're not. No. They done silted over and all. Yeah.

BRENT LEWIS: Do you think the environment changes in the environment have had an impact on your business?

LEWIS CARTER: [00:45:04] Oh, quite natural. Yeah. It is. Yeah, it is. Yeah.

BRENT LEWIS: How so?

LEWIS CARTER: [00:45:09] Well, one thing, they got sewage and all, they didn't have that back then, you know, and then they got a big, they, they opened that dam up there to Conowingo and all let all that stuff down and all this gotta do with it.

BRENT LEWIS: So there's a lot more pollution.

LEWIS CARTER: [00:45:26] A lot more. And they blame us waterman for it, over harvesting. That's the first thing they'll say. How you gonna over harvest something that ain't there, you know?

BRENT LEWIS: So you feel like watermen often get the blame for stuff like that.

LEWIS CARTER: [00:45:38] They get the blame. They get the blame when they come right down to oystering or, or something like that. They'll blame the watermen. They'll say that they're over harvesting and they, they don't look nowhere else for the blame just us waterman.

BRENT LEWIS: Yeah. So do they try to legislate you guys out of business almost?

LEWIS CARTER: [00:45:57] Well, years ago it went through a legislature, but now they, the DNR, they call all the shots now. Yeah.

BRENT LEWIS: Do you feel support though, in any part of the government? Like is the local, the local county commissioners for instance, are they supportive of the local watermen, that kind of thing?

LEWIS CARTER: [00:46:17] They did back in the day, more so than they do now.

BRENT LEWIS: Than they do now.

LEWIS CARTER: [00:46:20] Right.

BRENT LEWIS: Because you guys are less economically important...

LEWIS CARTER: [00:46:24] Right.

BRENT LEWIS: ... to that.

LEWIS CARTER: [00:46:25] And it's less... and it's less of us.

BRENT LEWIS: Well as you mentioned before, there were, you know, a dozen or more packing houses in Kent Narrows, and one restaurant. Now there's, you know, a dozen restaurants and one packing house, right?

LEWIS CARTER: [00:46:41] Right, right.

BRENT LEWIS: So the competition isn't as much out there. Like for buyers in the past you could work with different buyers. But now, like there's only one or two...

LEWIS CARTER: [00:46:53] One or two...

BRENT LEWIS: ... in town.

LEWIS CARTER: [00:46:54] Right, right, right. And then again,
if you had a lot of oyster, they would come back. You
don't have the shuckers to shuck them, you know?

BRENT LEWIS: Right.

LEWIS CARTER: [00:47:02] So everything's working out just about
right, you know.

BRENT LEWIS: Were you happy to kind of see those shanties go?

LEWIS CARTER: [00:47:08] Was I happy to see them go?

BRENT LEWIS: Or did you think that maybe the industry would be
better if we still had those kind of workers?

LEWIS CARTER: [00:47:17] Well, I did then, you know, but now I
can see that if, like I said, if you have them, you
wouldn't have the people to shuck them, you know? So
what's the... I ain't gonna say what's the use of having
them, but.

BRENT LEWIS: I understand.

LEWIS CARTER: [00:47:29] Yeah.

BRENT LEWIS: What do you see as the future of the business?

LEWIS CARTER: [00:47:35] It don't look too good really. It
don't, it don't. Because if they, well, one thing about
it, if they keep dying, they're gonna stop us from catching
them. Really, you know, so that'll, that'll shut it down I

guess, until they come back or they see where they let you back in.

BRENT LEWIS: And there's a move toward aquaculture.

LEWIS CARTER: [00:47:53] Right.

BRENT LEWIS: Toward growing...

LEWIS CARTER: [00:47:56] Growing, growing. They're trying to get people to get into aquaculture and grow your own. And that's something I wouldn't want to get in myself, you know?

BRENT LEWIS: You wouldn't.

LEWIS CARTER: [00:48:03] No.

BRENT LEWIS: Have you ever helped been part of any of those efforts? I know you know, some of these guys have worked for the state putting spat down and that kind of stuff. Have you ever been involved in any of that effort, those efforts?

LEWIS CARTER: [00:48:18] No, I have not.

BRENT LEWIS: And you want to stay away from it, right?

LEWIS CARTER: [00:48:19] Right. Right.

BRENT LEWIS: Sounds like you like what you do.

LEWIS CARTER: [00:48:23] Right. And it's not so much longer I can do it. I know that, you know, so.

BRENT LEWIS: You gonna do it as long as you can.

LEWIS CARTER: [00:48:30] I'll go as long as the Lord give me power to go.

BRENT LEWIS: What do you like best about what you do?

LEWIS CARTER: [00:48:37] Well going, I don't like driving where the St. Michael's every morning, ever the hardest part, you know, you know, and all. But I had to because it wasn't much up here, you know, to work for. So I just put up with it and all.

BRENT LEWIS: Has it been a good job? Has it been and provided you a good life?

LEWIS CARTER: [00:48:55] Well, it has been. Yes it has. Yes it has.

BRENT LEWIS: How so?

LEWIS CARTER: [00:48:59] Well, for one thing, I, I never done nothing else but that so I didn't have many choices really. You know?

BRENT LEWIS: You know. And at a certain age it would've been hard for you to go work for someone.

LEWIS CARTER: [00:49:13] Oh, definitely. Yeah. Right,

BRENT LEWIS: Right. Because you're independent minded.

LEWIS CARTER: [00:49:16] Right. And ain't nobody gonna argue at 77 to do nothing. [laugh]

BRENT LEWIS: What have you learned about life in general from having worked on the water?

LEWIS CARTER: [00:49:31] It, it, well, working on the water and providing for myself, it taught me how to survive. Really, to survive for myself. That's what it taught me. It taught me to survive and how to survive and how to prepare myself for hard times. Yeah. It taught me all that, it did.

BRENT LEWIS: Has it made a positive difference in your family life? Have, has your, has your wife and your kids been supportive of your work?

LEWIS CARTER: [00:50:07] Well, yes they have until now I'm getting a little older and my kids are, some of them don't want me out there... [laugh]

BRENT LEWIS: They worry about you.

LEWIS CARTER: [00:50:16] Yeah, they do. Well right there. And I tell them Lord to take care of me. You know, he always have. You know.

BRENT LEWIS: You don't worry.

LEWIS CARTER: [00:50:22] No. Well, that no.

BRENT LEWIS: Why not?

LEWIS CARTER: [00:50:28] Well I figured I know my way around pretty good out there and, and most things that happen, I know how to get on top of it, you know, before it escalate, you know? Like that and all.

BRENT LEWIS: You faced most of the challenges that you probably would face, right?

LEWIS CARTER: [00:50:46] Right. I've seen watermen come to get off the water and most of them, when they lose the, you know, their, their will to go to go on and, and some of them you can tell when they get on a boat where they afraid of the footsteps, you know, you can tell. You know, it's time for you stop then. You lose confidence less certain when you lose confidence, you know?

BRENT LEWIS: Yeah. Do you still have your confidence?

LEWIS CARTER: [00:51:11] I do. Yes I do. So far I do. And I've fell and I've fallen off the washboard back in the floor, you know, but I get back up there, you know.

BRENT LEWIS: Have you ever hurt yourself badly?

LEWIS CARTER: [00:51:22] Not badly where it would stop me from going. No. No.

BRENT LEWIS: What do you think that the...how can the community support you guys? What can we do to ensure that there's going to be watermen among us? Is there anything that the community at large can do to help you guys?

LEWIS CARTER: [00:51:45] I don't think it is, like I said, because it's, it's, it's, the DNR mostly controls everything now. So, you know. You have to, you have to dance to their music, you know what I mean?

BRENT LEWIS: So what restrict, what kind of restrictions do they put on you now?

LEWIS CARTER: [00:52:01] Well, for the time limit, of course three o'clock you have to stop and, and really three o'clock is time for anybody to stop, you know, really.

BRENT LEWIS: What time do you go out?

LEWIS CARTER: [00:52:12] Me, myself, I go out at daybreak.

There's some of them goes there earlier, you know, but you still have to sit and wait until summer. Sometime it's an hour or so. One that goes early. But I, I leave about so I don't have to sit there and wait, you know?

BRENT LEWIS: Sure. Well, and if you're working down the bay, you have to still, you've got a 45 minute drive, right?

LEWIS CARTER: [00:52:37] Right. Right.

BRENT LEWIS: What time do you finish your day? Like

LEWIS CARTER: [00:52:41] I generally stop oystering about one o'clock. And most time I can go. When you're working by yourself, you have to do it all the time. I put the tickets on them and clean the boat up. Shells and all that. I done lost about 45 minutes. Another 45 minutes doing all that. But it all works so good, you know.

BRENT LEWIS: So in some ways it's harder than it used to be. In some ways it's easier than it used to be.

LEWIS CARTER: [00:53:06] Right. Right. It's easier as far as catching oysters because you got a hand, you got a tong puller to pull them off bottom. You don't have pull them no more and all. You just still have to catch them, you know? And all but it's, it's not as hard as it was back then. And you don't use those old long tongs they used to use back then.

BRENT LEWIS: What size tongs do you use now?

LEWIS CARTER: [00:53:27] Well, it all varies. This season I ain't use nothing no longer than 16s. Last year I used 24s.

BRENT LEWIS: Alright. What's the longest tongs you've ever worked?

LEWIS CARTER: [00:53:38] Twenty-nine, thirty feet, something like that.

BRENT LEWIS: And for the sake of, people might not be familiar with tonging for oysters, can you describe what the tongs look like?

LEWIS CARTER: [00:53:53] Well, they got heads on the, in the shafts. They got teeth and all basically you're doing is raking them. Raking them together up in a pile and then you get them closed in so they don't get out, pull them on top of water, you know.

BRENT LEWIS: What are those heads made out of?

LEWIS CARTER: [00:54:11] They're made outta regular iron, you know.

BRENT LEWIS: Iron. And then the shafts are wood.

LEWIS CARTER: [00:54:18] Shafts are wood or good shafts are made of pine. And some of them use, fir shafts. I don't like fir because they, they feel light, they float and they got so much wood in them and all.

BRENT LEWIS: Why does Pine make a good oyster tong shaft?

LEWIS CARTER: [00:54:35] Pine is, is, is more flexible for one thing. They, they're good and flexible and back in the day that's all they ever used. It was Georgia pine. And, and it's hard to get now. So they use fir. A lot of this fellow down Nevitt he built, well, he uses fir and pine, but like I said, I don't prefer fir shafts because they feel like they floating. They like... the ones I bought, I had to put weights on them, put lead weights on them to keep them on the bottom, you know.

BRENT LEWIS: So they would float up a little bit?

LEWIS CARTER: [00:55:02] Put lead on them to keep them down a little bit.

BRENT LEWIS: So people wouldn't understand that the type of wood is an important part of that.

LEWIS CARTER: [00:55:10] It is.

BRENT LEWIS: Some wood holds water, I would guess.

LEWIS CARTER: [00:55:13] Right, right, right. Right. Pine shares, good pine shares is, is, is good shares. And in the spring of the year when you're done using them, if you got a garage or something, you would oil them with linseed oil after they dry and put them up in the loft and that would preserve them for the next year.

BRENT LEWIS: Could you make a set of, of shafts?

LEWIS CARTER: [00:55:32] No.

BRENT LEWIS: No.

LEWIS CARTER: [00:55:33] No. I couldn't. No.

BRENT LEWIS: Now you'll be switching to crabbing soon?

LEWIS CARTER: [00:55:38] Right.

BRENT LEWIS: You run a trotline.

LEWIS CARTER: [00:55:40] I run a trotline, I do.

BRENT LEWIS: How does that work? How much line do you run?

LEWIS CARTER: [00:55:44] Well, I don't use no more than I can bait up. I use about, I guess four to 800 feet. And a lot of them use a whole lot more than that. But they have to hire somebody to bait it or some of them got a family at home that will bait it and all, you know.

BRENT LEWIS: What do you use for bait?

LEWIS CARTER: [00:56:01] I use clams or fowl necks. You know, chicken necks and all and used to use eels back in the day.

BRENT LEWIS: You don't use eel anymore?

LEWIS CARTER: [00:56:09] No.

BRENT LEWIS: Why is that?

LEWIS CARTER: [00:56:11] Well, there, there's more to keep.

You know, you have to keep them salted down and all and regular clams you can buy them and just put them right in a bag and put them on it. You know.

BRENT LEWIS: The bag is kind of a new innovation, right?

LEWIS CARTER: [00:56:26] Right, right. Yeah, it is.

BRENT LEWIS: What's the benefit of using those bags versus the old way of running?

LEWIS CARTER: [00:56:32] Well, well the bags are, are, you put the clams in a, in, in a bag and then you can't, you don't tie the clams right to a line. You put them in a bag and all, about four, five, six, like that. And they will catch crabs better than anything that you get so far.

BRENT LEWIS: Why?

LEWIS CARTER: [00:56:48] I don't know. I guess because it's his own habitat really, you know, and, and, and all. But they will, they will catch a crab a whole lot better than anything can.

BRENT LEWIS: What's a good day these days crabbing? Bushel-wise? How many crabs catch is a good day?

LEWIS CARTER: [00:57:04] I don't know. Because it, I don't... I takes care of my wife and I'm late getting outta there

really? And I can catch I guess three, four bushel of good crabs, you know? And I'm satisfied with that. Some of them, it takes more. Takes them more, you know.

BRENT LEWIS: What's the market price generally for bushel crabs at the dock? Like what do you guys get?

LEWIS CARTER: [00:57:23] I don't know what they're getting now, but in its mid-summer they'll be bagged \$120, \$125, somewhere around there, I guess.

BRENT LEWIS: So you can take three or four bushels and have a decent day?

LEWIS CARTER: [00:57:34] You can, yes you can. Yes. Yes, you can.

BRENT LEWIS: Is there, anything that you think you'd like to talk about that I haven't asked you?

LEWIS CARTER: [00:57:46] At this moment, no. Because I done said I guess about all of it and after I leave [laugh] I'll think a whole lot more. Yeah.

BRENT LEWIS: Yeah. Do you still love the job?

LEWIS CARTER: [00:58:00] Do I still love what?

BRENT LEWIS: Your job?

LEWIS CARTER: [00:58:02] Yes, I do. Especially at my age, you know, I do. Because like I say, I knows how to do it where it don't hurt me. And no way up home, you know?

BRENT LEWIS: You like being out there.

LEWIS CARTER: [00:58:13] I love, I love being out there.

BRENT LEWIS: Right. Is that where you would rather be than just about anywhere?

LEWIS CARTER: [00:58:19] It is. Yes it is.

BRENT LEWIS: What's the appeal? Why do you love it so much?

LEWIS CARTER: [00:58:23] I love it so much because I've been there so long, I guess. Right. And something you done spent most of your life doing, you know, it's, it's hard to get away from it. I see a lot of watermen get off the water and they'll ride down the shore back some of them ten times a day. So I know they miss doing it, you know, and I know one day my time's coming so.

BRENT LEWIS: That you'll be the one riding down, riding down, see how everybody's doing.

LEWIS CARTER: [00:58:47] Right.

BRENT LEWIS: That's interesting that you say that because if you hang around like the county slips long enough, you do see those guys...

LEWIS CARTER: [00:58:52] Right. They're not able to do it no more, but they ride back and forth down there.

BRENT LEWIS: They're drawn to it.

LEWIS CARTER: [00:58:59] Yes. I used say, oh, Wes Thompson. Oh man, you don't ever go home do you. [laugh] He was a character, he was.

BRENT LEWIS: Who was that?

LEWIS CARTER: [00:59:07] Oh, Wes Thompson. He was.

BRENT LEWIS: He was one of the local characters.

LEWIS CARTER: [00:59:10] Yeah. He would come down there so long I said, "Why don't you just move down here." [laugh]

BRENT LEWIS: He had a lot of stuff with him.

LEWIS CARTER: [00:59:16] He did. Yeah. He did. Old Wes did.

BRENT LEWIS: You grew up around a lot of characters.

LEWIS CARTER: [00:59:21] I did. Yeah I did. Wes and old Joe [Louis?] and all that.

BRENT LEWIS: I know him. Are we good time wise? Captain Carter, thank you man. We really appreciate you taking the time to join us today.

LEWIS CARTER: [00:59:36] Yes, yes, it was good talking to you.

END OF AUDIO FILE